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SENTIMENT WITHOUT SYSTEM: AN HEGELIAN RECONSIDERATION OF
THE COMMUNITARIAN CRITIQUE OF LIBERALISM

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by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents an Hegelian reconsideration of the communitarian critique of liberalism. It is motivated by two related concerns. The first is a concern about the ideal of individualism, which seems to be an ideal that is of importance to many Americans, and the variety of liberalism that appeals to this ideal, which, I argue, finds one of its best representatives in John Rawls' liberalism as it is developed in his *A Theory of Justice*. For this ideal and this variety of liberalism would seem to have the potential to give rise to unhappy social consequences—in particular, the inability of many in our age to experience their lives as meaningful. The second is a concern about even the most promising contemporary attempts to confront the ideal of individualism and the variety of liberalism that appeals to this ideal in their potential to give rise to unhappy social consequences, which, I argue, find one of their best representatives in the communitarian critique of liberalism in general and in Charles Taylor's critique as it is developed in his *The Ethics of Authenticity* in specific. For even these attempts would seem not to propose solutions that could prevent these consequences from arising—in particular, the inability of many in our age to experience their lives as meaningful. Now, if Taylor's critique is problematic in this way, I suggest that it might be because his critique has strayed from its philosophical roots in G.W.F. Hegel's thought—in particular, Hegel's method of immanent critique and concept of recognition as they are developed in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Thus, in the first half of the present work, I attempt to thematize the first concern through a reconsideration especially of Taylor's critique as it is developed in *The Ethics of Authenticity* and especially in relation to Rawls' liberalism as it is developed in *A Theory of Justice* (although Michael Sandel's critique as it is developed in *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, Rawls' liberalism as it is developed in *Political Liberalism*, and Will Kymlicka's liberalism as it is developed in *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* are also discussed at length). And, in the second half of the present work, I attempt to thematize the second concern through a reconsideration of Taylor's critique as it is developed in *The Ethics of Authenticity* with reference to Hegel's thought as it is developed in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Ultimately, I suggest that Taylor's critique might be able to propose solutions that could prevent what he calls “a loss of meaning” from arising if his method of critique and concept of recognition were more strictly Hegelian and I suggest what one such solution might be.

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Introduction

In 1958, Isaiah Berlin remarked in the inaugural lecture that provided the basis for “Two Concepts of Liberty” that, in his ideal society, basic human rights will have been “so long and widely accepted that their observance [will have] entered into the very conception of what it is to be a normal human being” (Berlin 2002, 211). In the decades since his famous lecture, American society would seem to have made some significant strides in this direction. In fact, over the past half century, it would seem to have experienced a virtual revolution in the domain of civil rights. Indeed, through the civil rights movement of the 1950s, the women’s rights struggles of the 1960s and 70s, the gay rights movement of the 1980s and 90s, and other social crusades of this sort as well as through landmark court decisions regarding freedom of speech and freedom of the press, American civil rights have been dramatically extended in reach and expanded in scope. Of course, all of these struggles are ongoing. But the overall trend seems quite clear. And it is perhaps because of their victories that the observance of these rights seems increasingly to have “entered into the very conception of what it is to be a normal human being.” Indeed, few Americans today—or, in any case, many fewer than before—will seriously argue, say, that segregation should be reinstated. Or that women and gays should not be afforded basic legal protections against acts of violence. Or that artists and journalists should be censored by the state. To be sure, racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other forms of discrimination are still with us. But they seem to have been in retreat for some time now.

Now, if American society has in fact experienced such a revolution, this cannot but reveal some of the ideals that are of importance to many Americans. And, if it has in fact been a revolution in the domain of civil rights, these ideals will be, in the broadest sense, liberal ideals. For, indeed, the defense of rights is their hallmark. In this way, it seems American society may

be marked by the prevalence of liberal ideals. But, even if this is correct, it is perhaps misleading. For liberal ideals admit of a wide diversity. Indeed, even if all varieties of liberalism argue that rights must be defended, the ideals to which they appeal in order to explain why this is so vary greatly. For the Hobbsean liberal, rights must be defended in order to preserve human life. In Kant's liberalism, it is because rights express and enable autonomy that they must be protected. For the Millian liberal, rights must be defended in order to promote human progress. And, of course, these varieties do not exhaust the diversity. Thus to say it seems American society may be marked by the prevalence of liberal ideals is, in fact, not to say very much. For it is not to say which ideals they are. Indeed, is it possible to say which ones are the most common?

In fact, Robert Bellah and his team of sociologists set out to answer this question in their now classic study of American society, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. And, in their study, they report that perhaps the most common liberal ideal in American society is the one they call "individualism." As they explain,

Individualism lies at the very core of American culture... We believe in the dignity, indeed the sacredness, of the individual. Anything that would violate our right to think for ourselves, judge for ourselves, make our own decisions, live our lives as we see fit, is not only morally wrong, it is sacrilegious. Our highest and noblest aspirations, not only for ourselves, but for those we care about, for our society and for our world, are closely linked to our individualism. (Bellah 1996, 142)

Thus, if Bellah and his team of sociologists are correct, it seems American society may be marked by the prevalence of the ideal of individualism as well as the variety of liberalism that appeals to this ideal. Indeed, in this variety of liberalism, it is because rights allow us "to think for ourselves, judge for ourselves, make our own decisions, live our lives as we see fit" that they must be protected. And this way of thinking and speaking about why rights must be defended seems very familiar in American society today.

The present work is motivated by two related concerns. The first is a concern about the ideal of individualism and the variety of liberalism that appeals to this ideal. For this ideal and this variety of liberalism would seem to have the potential to give rise to unhappy social consequences. And, if American society is in fact marked by the prevalence of the ideal of individualism and the variety of liberalism that appeals to this ideal, it may come to experience—indeed, may already be experiencing—these consequences. The second is a concern about even the most promising contemporary attempts to confront the ideal of individualism and the variety of liberalism that appeals to this ideal in their potential to give rise to unhappy social consequences. For even these attempts would seem not to propose solutions that could prevent these consequences from arising. It is these concerns that motivate my project.

In what follows, I want to thematize these concerns through a reconsideration of what has come to be called “the communitarian critique of liberalism.” This critique became prominent in the 1980s and early 90s with the publication of four works: Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* (1981), Michael Sandel’s *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (1982), Michael Walzer’s *Spheres of Justice* (1983), and Charles Taylor’s *Philosophical Papers* (1985). In fact, these works are quite diverse in terms of their specific projects. MacIntyre’s book is concerned to diagnose the disarray of moral discourse in the modern age. Sandel’s is a focused and sustained critique of John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*. Walzer’s is concerned to outline a new vision of distributive justice. And Taylor’s book is a collection of essays that range from critiques of behaviorism and social science, to reflections on agency and language, to exegeses of Kant, Hegel, and Foucault, to contributions to the critique of liberalism. But, despite the diversity of their projects, these works have philosophical roots in common. As Amy Gutmann observes, “the new wave of criticism is not a mere repetition of the old. Whereas the earlier critics were inspired by Marx,

the recent critics are inspired by Aristotle and Hegel” (Gutmann 2003, 182). Now, insofar as they have these philosophical roots in common, these works also have a commitment in common to the idea that human beings are essentially constituted by shared ideals. And, insofar as they have this commitment in common, these works are all critical of the ideal of individualism and the variety of liberalism that appeals to this ideal. And, indeed, they may be critical of them for at least three different reasons. First, it may be because this ideal and this variety of liberalism tend to deny that human beings are essentially constituted in this way. Second, it may be because they tend to deny that the ideal of individualism is an ideal at all, let alone a shared ideal. Third, it may be because this ideal and this variety of liberalism tend to deny their potential to give rise to unhappy social consequences. Now, of the four works mentioned above, Taylor’s is the only one that is explicitly critical of the ideal of individualism and the variety of liberalism that appeals to this ideal for all three of these reasons. In this way, it seems that a reconsideration of the communitarian critique of liberalism, especially of Taylor’s critique, would be a good way to thematize at least my first concern about this ideal and this variety of liberalism.

But a reconsideration of the communitarian critique of liberalism will require reference not only to the works mentioned above and their commentators. It will require reference also to at least one text in liberal political philosophy—a text that is representative of the variety of liberalism that appeals to the ideal of individualism. And, in the view of most of the works mentioned above, the choice is obvious: John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*. Indeed, if these works see any text as representative in this way, it is this one. And this choice is not without basis. For, in the first place, Rawls’ text itself provides substantial support for it. And, in the second place, his text’s influence provides circumstantial support for it. Indeed, no other text in contemporary political philosophy has had the impact that *A Theory of Justice* has. As Samuel Freeman

observes, “Only ten years after *Theory* was published, a bibliography of articles on Rawls listed more than 2,500 entries” (Freeman 1, 2003). And today, almost forty years after it was published, the bibliography continues to grow as articles and books on *A Theory of Justice* continue to proliferate. In fact, its basic contractarian framework has so permeated contemporary political philosophy that, as Charles Mills observes, “Contract talk is... the political lingua franca of our times” (Mills 1997, 2-3). Clearly, *A Theory of Justice* has touched a chord. And, if American society is in fact marked by the prevalence of the ideal of individualism and the variety of liberalism that appeals to this ideal and if Rawls’ text is in fact representative of this variety of liberalism, this would not be too surprising. In any case, it seems that a reconsideration of the communitarian critique of liberalism, especially of Taylor’s critique and especially in relation to Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*, would be a good way to thematize at least my first concern about this ideal and this variety of liberalism.

Now, in my judgment, the communitarian critique of liberalism in general represents a promising contemporary attempt to confront the ideal of individualism and the variety of liberalism that appeals to this ideal in their potential to give rise to unhappy social consequences. And, in my view, Taylor’s critique in particular is the most promising in this tradition. For it seems to provide a very good explanation for why this ideal and this variety of liberalism have the potential to give rise to these consequences. But, in my view, Taylor’s critique is also problematic. For it seems not to propose solutions that could prevent these consequences from arising. Now, if Taylor’s critique is problematic in this way, I want to suggest that it might be because his critique has strayed from its philosophical roots in Hegel. Indeed, Taylor’s work in general is greatly indebted to Hegel’s thought. In fact, two of his earliest books were *Hegel* (1975) and *Hegel and Modern Society* (1979). Thus it seems that a reconsideration of Taylor’s

critique with reference to Hegel's thought would be a good way to thematize my second concern about even the most promising attempts to confront this ideal and this variety of liberalism in their potential to give rise to unhappy social consequences.

The present work will proceed in four chapters. In the first chapter, my primary task will be to present a strategic summary of Rawls' project in *A Theory of Justice* whose purpose will be to anticipate the communitarian critique of liberalism, which, from its inception, has taken this project as one of its main targets. More specifically, its purpose will be to anticipate some of the ways this critique has misunderstood Rawls' project in *A Theory of Justice* and so to render it less vulnerable to the specious arguments the former has advanced against the latter and, in so doing, allow us better to assess the more promising ones.

In the second chapter, my primary task will be to assess the communitarian critique of liberalism as it is developed in Michael Sandel's *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* and Charles Taylor's *The Ethics of Authenticity*. I will proceed in three stages. In the first, I will assess the communitarian critique as it is developed in Sandel's *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* and, in the end, argue that none of his arguments succeeds as a critique of Rawls' theory. In the second, I will assess the communitarian critique as it is developed in Taylor's *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Ultimately, I will argue that his critique is promising as a critique of Rawls' liberalism as it is developed in *A Theory of Justice* in the sense that it seems to provide a very good explanation for why the ideal of individualism and the variety of liberalism that appeals to this ideal have the potential to give rise to socially unhappy consequences. But I will also argue that his critique is problematic in the sense that it seems not to propose solutions that could prevent these consequences from arising. The third stage will consist in an attempt to determine whether or not Taylor's critique is also promising as a critique of Rawls' liberalism as it is

developed in *Political Liberalism* and as a critique of liberal perfectionism as it is developed in Will Kymlicka's *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*—and, in the end, I will argue that it is promising here as well.

In the third chapter, my primary task will be to explain the method of immanent critique as it is developed in the introduction to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and bring it into relation with Taylor's method in *The Ethics of Authenticity*. For Taylor's method would seem to have its roots in Hegel's method. And the effort to bring Hegel's method into relation with Taylor's will be helpful within the context of the present work in at least two ways. First, insofar as Taylor's method has its roots in Hegel's, it will be helpful in bringing into focus exactly what Taylor's method is. Second, insofar as Taylor's method strays from its roots in Hegel's, it will be helpful in bringing into relief the reasons why Taylor's critique seems not to propose any solutions that could prevent unhappy social consequences from arising. I will proceed in two stages. In the first, I will attempt to explain the method of immanent critique as it is developed in the introduction to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. And, in doing so, I hope to provide an interpretation that is somewhat more thorough and integrated than can be found in many of the standard commentaries. In the second, I will attempt to bring Hegel's method into relation with Taylor's. And, in doing so, I hope to show not only how they are similar and different but also to suggest what the consequences for Taylor's critique might be if Taylor's method were more strictly Hegelian.

In the fourth chapter, my primary task will be to explain the concept of recognition as it is developed in the opening sections of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and bring it into relation with Taylor's concept in *The Ethics of Authenticity*. For Taylor's concept of recognition would seem to have its roots in Hegel's concept. And the effort to bring Hegel's concept into relation

with Taylor's will be helpful within the context of the present work in at least two ways. First, insofar as Taylor's concept has its roots in Hegel's, it will be helpful in bringing into focus exactly what Taylor's concept is. Second, insofar as Taylor's concept strays from its roots in Hegel's, it will be helpful in bringing into relief the reasons why, if Taylor's critique seems not to propose any solutions that could prevent unhappy social consequences from arising, the stakes might be higher than he thinks. I will proceed in two stages. In the first, I will attempt to explain the concept of recognition as it is developed in the opening sections of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. And, in doing so, I hope to provide an interpretation that is somewhat more thorough and integrated than can be found in many of the standard commentaries. In the second, I will attempt to bring Hegel's concept of recognition into relation with Taylor's. And, in so doing, I hope to show not only how they are similar and different but also to suggest what the consequences for Taylor's critique might be if Taylor's concept were more strictly Hegelian.

Chapter 1: Rawls' Project in *A Theory of Justice*

In this chapter, my primary task is to present a strategic summary of Rawls' project in *A Theory of Justice*. Now, as a *strategic* summary, its purpose is neither to provide an entirely comprehensive interpretation nor to provide an entirely objective interpretation. Rather, its purpose is to anticipate the communitarian critique of liberalism, which, from its inception, has taken this project as one of its main targets. Now such a summary is necessary because the communitarian critique of liberalism has often misunderstood Rawls' project in *A Theory of Justice* on a number of important counts. As a result, the former has advanced a number of specious arguments against the latter. In what follows, I will present a summary of this project that will anticipate some of the ways this critique has misunderstood this project. In this way, it will render Rawls' project in *A Theory of Justice* less vulnerable to the specious arguments and, in so doing, allow us better to assess the more promising ones.

§1. The Sense of Justice

Rawls characterizes his project in *A Theory of Justice* as being to describe what he calls "our sense of justice." As he explains, "one may regard a theory of justice as describing our sense of justice" (Rawls 1971, 46). And again, "it is a theory of the moral sentiments... setting out the principles governing our moral powers, or, more specifically, our sense of justice" (Rawls 1971, 51). In such passages, Rawls characterizes his project as being not to invent or innovate new conceptions but to discover and delineate the "principles governing our moral powers" or the conceptions underlying our sense of justice. Now the descriptive character of his project has often been recognized. But what has not often been recognized is the descriptive *range* of his project—which extends well beyond just our conception of justice—or the surprisingly radical implications that it carries in train. In order to see this, we must attend to the

meaning of “our sense of justice” as well as the method by which its underlying conceptions are discovered and delineated.

Rawls understands the sense of justice in general as a moral power or capacity that is at work in various aspects of our moral lives (Rawls 1971, 46). He writes,

Let us assume that each person beyond a certain age possessed of the requisite intellectual capacity develops a sense of justice under normal circumstances. We acquire skill in judging things to be just and unjust, and in supporting these judgments by reasons. Moreover, we ordinarily have some desire to act in accord with these pronouncements and expect a similar desire on the part of others. (Rawls 1971, 46)

So the sense of justice is the moral capacity that is at work whenever we: 1) make judgments about the justness or unjustness of things, 2) give reasons for such judgments, or 3) desire to act justly. Thus these three aspects of our moral lives are all very closely related. Indeed, for Rawls, our judging, reasoning, and desiring with respect to justice are all expressions of the sense of justice, a single moral capacity that he calls “the moral basis of civic life” (Rawls 1971, 385).

Rawls further understands the sense of justice in general as a moral capacity that is governed by various principles or conceptions (Rawls 1971, 51). And this means that, insofar as our judging, reasoning, and desiring with respect to justice are all expressions of the sense of justice, these three aspects of our moral lives must be governed by these conceptions as well. Let us consider each of these aspects in turn. First, whenever we make judgments about the justness or unjustness of things, we can only do so on the basis of a conception of justice that we already have in mind and that functions as a standard against which things are measured. For example, when we say that the Sedition Acts of 1798 were unjust, we necessarily appeal to some standard of justice that they failed to measure up to, such as the one provided by the First Amendment. And this is true for all statements of this kind. Only on the basis of a conception of justice can we make judgments about the justness or unjustness of things.

Second, and in a similar way, whenever we give reasons for such judgments, we can only do so on the basis of other conceptions that we already have in mind and that provide the grounds for our conception of justice. To illustrate, suppose we were asked *why* we have said that the Sedition Acts of 1798 were unjust. Depending on how we took the question, we could answer in at least two different ways. On the one hand, if we took the question to be asking why we have said that the Sedition Acts were unjust *qua* particular statutes, we might reply that we have done so because they violated the First Amendment. This is a question about what these statutes were, what our standard of justice is, or how the former failed to measure up to the latter, and the answer requires us to make reference only to the statutes and/or our standard. In any case, the answer does not require us to make reference to any additional conceptions.¹ On the other hand, if we took the question to be asking why we have said that the Sedition Acts were unjust *qua* particular statutes in the class of all statutes that violate the First Amendment, we might reply that we have done so because they were, as all such statutes must be, unnecessarily restrictive of the liberty of human beings. This is a question about how our standard of justice is itself justified, and the answer requires us to make reference to some additional conceptions, such as that of the liberty of human beings. Such justifying conceptions serve as the first links in a chain of reasoning leading up to our conception of justice; the former function as premises in an argument leading up to the latter, which functions as a conclusion. And this is true for all justifications of this kind. Only on the basis of these other conceptions can we give reasons for our judgments about the justness or unjustness of things.

Third, whenever we desire to act justly, we can only do so on the basis of a conception of justice that we already have in mind and that functions as a standard on the basis of which our

¹ In this connection, Rawls notes, “A conception of justice characterizes our moral sensibility when the everyday judgments we do make are in accordance with its principles. *These principles can serve as part of the premises of an argument which arrives at the matching judgments* [emphasis added]” (Rawls 1971, 46).

wills are guided to action. In the absence of such a standard, our desire would be empty and our wills would be utterly without direction. Only on the basis of a conception of justice can we desire to act justly in any determinate way. For Rawls, our judging, reasoning, and desiring with respect to justice are all expressions of the sense of justice, which means that these three aspects of our moral lives must be governed by various conceptions. In the cases of judging and desiring, by a conception of justice, and in the case of reasoning, by other conceptions that provide the grounds for our conception of justice. Indeed, for Rawls, the sense of justice in general is governed by *a set of* conceptions, which includes not only a conception of justice but also its justifying conceptions. As he writes, “We may suppose that everyone has in himself the whole form of a moral conception” (Rawls 1971, 50). For Rawls, everyone has in himself a sense of justice, and this means that everyone has in himself a set of conceptions, which includes not only a conception of justice but also its justifying conceptions, which together form an argument. And Rawls’ project in *A Theory of Justice* is precisely to describe one such set of conceptions, to discover and delineate one such argument, both its conclusion and its premises.

However, Rawls’ project in *A Theory of Justice* is to describe the set of conceptions governing not just *any* sense of justice but *our* sense of justice—the set of conceptions governing the ways in which *we* judge, reason, and desire with respect to justice. But this invites the question of who this “we” is supposed to include. Indeed, what is the extension of “we” who share the same sense of justice such that it can properly be called “ours?” Now Rawls never provides a clear answer to this. But I want to suggest that he would seem to be committed to saying that this “we” is supposed to include none other than himself and his fellow citizens.² This

² One might wonder here whether the idea that a “we” who includes Rawls his fellow citizens and shares the same sense of justice is really plausible. Indeed, is there a set of conceptions governing the ways in which *we* judge, reason, and desire with respect to justice? R.M. Hare expresses strong doubts about this in his article “Rawls’ Theory of Justice” when he writes, “It does not make much practical difference which way he puts it; for if (as will

suggestion will find some textual support in what follows and, if it is correct, then Rawls' project is to describe neither the set of conceptions governing the sense of justice belonging to human beings as such nor even the one governing the sense of justice belonging to human beings living in the modern West. Rather, it is to describe the set of conceptions governing the sense of justice belonging to human beings living in his particular time and in his particular place, in the latter half of the twentieth century and in the United States of America.³

Moreover, Rawls' project in *A Theory of Justice* is to describe the set of conceptions governing our sense of justice not as it relates to just *any* subject but as it relates to *one* subject.

He writes,

Many different kinds of things are said to be just and unjust... Our topic, however, is that of social justice. For us the primary subject of justice is the basic structure of society, or more exactly, the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation. By major institutions I understand the political constitution and the principle economic and social arrangements. (Rawls 1971, 7)

Rawls' project is to describe the set of conceptions governing our sense of justice as it relates to what he calls "the basic structure of society." But what kind of society is it the basic structure of?

For Rawls, it is the basic structure of *a national* society. As he explains, "I assume that the boundaries of these schemes are given by the notion of a self-contained national community" (Rawls 1971, 457). And what kinds of things is the basic structure of society made up of? For

certainly be the case) he finds a large number of readers who can share with him a cosy unanimity in their considered judgments, he and they will think that they adequately represent 'people generally', and congratulate themselves on having attained the truth. This is how phrases like 'reasonable and generally acceptable' (p. 45) are often used by philosophers in lieu of argument" (Hare 1976, 82). And he continues, "the fact that Rawls is a fairly typical man of his times and society, and will therefore have many adherents, does not make this a good way of doing philosophy" (Hare 1976, 82). In any case, the question is fair. In response, I would say two things. First, I would say that the fact that certain judgments with respect to justice seem to be almost universally shared within our culture (for example, against slavery or theocracy) suggests that a sense of justice *might* be shared as well—the idea is perhaps not wholly implausible. Second, I would say that, even if one finds the idea wholly implausible, Rawls certainly does not. And, in my attempt to summarize his project in *A Theory of Justice*, I am not concerned to take up this question in depth here.

³ Joseph Raz picks up on this in his *The Morality of Freedom* when he writes, "Rawls' theory claims validity only within our culture" (Raz 1986, 128).

Rawls, it is made up of certain national institutions, such as a political constitution. In general, these institutions determine what the members of the society must, may, and may not do, what rewards they will, may, and may not receive for doing what they may do, and what penalties they will, may, and may not receive for doing what they may not do.⁴ As he explains, these institutions establish public systems of rules that “specify certain forms of action as permissible, others as forbidden” as well as “determine the division of advantages from social cooperation” and “provide for certain penalties and defenses, and so on, when violations occur” (Rawls 1971, 55). Thus Rawls’ project is to describe the set of conceptions governing the ways in which we judge, reason, and desire not with respect to the justice of private associations or international relations but with respect to the justice of the basic structure of a national society, which is made of up certain national institutions that establish its basic rules.

But an obvious question arises here. Why should we share the same sense of justice as it relates to the basic structure of society? Now the simplest answer would be that we share the same sense of justice because we are all human beings and all human beings have a certain innate sense of justice. But Rawls does not argue this. Indeed, he argues that the sense of justice is not innate but acquired (Rawls 1971, 462). Thus if we share the same sense of justice, we must do so because we have all been subject to the same conditions, at least with regard to the conditions that determine the sense of justice we come to have. But how exactly do we acquire our sense of justice? And what exactly are these conditions? Rawls argues that we acquire our sense of justice through a three-stage sequence of moral development. We need not examine all of the details of this development here. Let it suffice to say that, at each stage, we are confronted with certain people who exemplify and impart or certain institutions that embody and express

⁴ Rawls notes that these institutions also determine certain offices and positions along with their corresponding duties and obligations (Rawls 1971, 492).

various moral precepts, standards, or principles, which we come to accept and internalize insofar as these people or institutions succeed in promoting our good (Rawls 1971, 494). In the first stage, we are confronted with our parents, who exemplify and impart certain moral precepts, which we come to accept and internalize insofar as our parents benefit us through certain loving behaviors and we know that they do (Rawls 1971, 464). In the second stage, we are confronted with the members of the different associations to which we belong, who exemplify the moral standards appropriate to their specific roles in the associations and impart the standards appropriate to ours, which we come to accept and internalize insofar as our associates benefit us through certain friendly behaviors and we know that they do (Rawls 1971, 470-1). With regard to the third stage, Rawls writes,

the recognition that we and those for whom we care are the beneficiaries of an established and enduring just institution tends to engender in us the corresponding sense of justice. We develop a desire to apply and to act upon the principles of justice once we realize how social arrangements answering to them have promoted our good and that of those with whom we are affiliated. (Rawls 1971, 473-4)

In the third stage, we are confronted with institutions that embody and express certain principles of justice. These institutions are precisely the ones that make up the basic structure of society. And we come to accept and internalize these principles insofar as these institutions succeed in promoting our good, broadly construed. These principles are precisely the ones that make up the conception of justice governing our sense of justice. Thus if we share the same sense of justice, we must do so because we have all been subject to the same institutions, at least with regard to the institutions that make up the basic structure of society.

But this account of the third stage is incomplete. For it does not fully explain how we acquire our sense of justice. More specifically, it does not fully explain how we acquire the *entire* set of conceptions governing our sense of justice. To be sure, it does explain how we

acquire our conception of justice. But it does not explain how we acquire its justifying conceptions. And Rawls never provides a clear account of this. But I want to suggest that he would seem to be committed to saying that, since we acquire our sense of justice from the institutions that make up the basic structure of society, and since our sense of justice is governed not only by a conception of justice but also by its justifying conceptions, we acquire both from these institutions. And, if this is correct, then these institutions embody and express not only our conception of justice but also its justifying conceptions.

This suggestion finds some textual support in Rawls' discussion of the first two stages of moral development. Referring to the first stage, Rawls writes,

In any event, it is characteristic of the child's situation that he is not in a position to assess the validity of the precepts and injunctions addressed to him by those in authority, in this case his parents. He lacks both the knowledge and the understanding on the basis of which their guidance can be challenged. Indeed, the child lacks the concept of justification altogether, *this being acquired much later* [emphasis added]. (Rawls 1971, 463)

Rawls indicates here that, just as these moral precepts are not innate but acquired, the concept of justification in general is not innate but acquired. And this would seem to imply that the precepts' justifying conceptions are acquired as well. For, if the concept of justification in general is not innate but acquired, does it not seem likely that what gives this concept specific content, namely, specific justifying conceptions, are acquired too? And Rawls indicates again that the precepts' justifying conceptions are acquired when he writes that "[parents] should set out the reasons for these injunctions so far as these can be understood" (Rawls 1971, 466). Now if this is true of the precepts' justifying conceptions in the first stage of moral development, why should it not also be true of the principles' justifying conceptions in the final stage? But this is not all. Referring to the second stage, Rawls writes,

Now each particular ideal is presumably explained in the context of the aims and purposes of the association to which the role or position in question belongs. In due course a person works out a conception of the whole system of cooperation that defines the association and the ends which it serves. (Rawls 1971, 468)

Rawls seems to indicate here that, just as these moral standards are not innate but acquired, the standards' justifying conceptions are acquired as well—as he says, the ends are “worked out.” Now if this is true of the standards' justifying conceptions in the second stage of moral development, why should it not also be true of the principles' justifying conceptions in the final stage? Rawls also seems to indicate here that the different associations to which we belong embody and express the standards' justifying conceptions—as he says, the ideals are “explained in the context of the aims and purposes of the association.” Now if these associations embody and express the standards' justifying conceptions in the second stage of moral development, why should the institutions that make up the basic structure of society not embody and express the principles' justifying conceptions in the final stage?⁵ Admittedly, none of this is entirely conclusive. However, it is highly suggestive of two things: first, that, just as moral precepts, standards, and principles are not innate but acquired, their justifying conceptions are acquired as well, and second, that the different associations and institutions to which we belong embody and express these conceptions.

Now I wanted to suggest above that Rawls would seem to be committed to saying that the “we” who share the same sense of justice such that it can properly be called “ours” is supposed to include none other than himself and his fellow citizens. This suggestion finds some textual

⁵ We should note here that at least one of the institutions that make up the basic structure of our particular society certainly does embody and express such justifying conceptions. This institution is none other than our Federal Constitution. Our Constitution certainly embodies and expresses a conception of justice—it does so in its various articles and amendments. But it just as certainly embodies and expresses its justifying conceptions—it does so in its preamble. Indeed, its various articles and amendments are themselves justified only insofar as they work to “form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.” Now if our Federal Constitution embodies and expresses both a conception of justice and its justifying conceptions, why should other institutions that make up the basic structure of our particular society not do so as well?

support in Rawls' discussion of how we acquire our sense of justice. As we have seen, if we share the same sense of justice, we must do so because we have all been subject to the same institutions, at least with regard to the institutions that make up the basic structure of society. But these institutions are national institutions, which obviously vary greatly from epoch to epoch and nation to nation. Indeed, the institutions of the classical age were very different from those of modern age. And the institutions of contemporary China are very different from those of the contemporary United States of America. But this means that the sense of justice we come to have depends on the epoch and nation in which we find ourselves. Thus, if Rawls' project is to describe the set of conceptions governing not just *any* sense of justice but *our* sense of justice, then it is to describe the set of conceptions governing the sense of justice belonging to human beings living in his particular time and in his particular place, in the latter half of the twentieth century and in the United States of America.

A final point. Although Rawls understands the sense of justice in general as a moral capacity that is governed by a set of conceptions, he does not suppose that these conceptions are always fully explicit. As he writes, "the sense of justice affects, *in ways we are often unaware of*, our interpretation of political life, our perception of the possible courses of action, our will to resist the justified protests of others, and so on [emphasis added]" (Rawls 1971, 387). Although we all make judgments about the justness or unjustness of things and we all desire to act justly, we may have a hard time articulating the conception of justice governing our judging and desiring. And if we attempt to give reasons for such judgments, we may have an even harder time articulating the justifying conceptions governing our reasoning—we may find ourselves struggling to formulate a coherent argument. Now this suggestion that our judging, reasoning, and desiring with respect to justice are governed by a set of conceptions that we may have a hard

time articulating might initially seem rather strange. But it might ultimately seem less so if we say, in an Aristotelian vein, that this set of conceptions is the *arche* or ordering origin of the sense of justice, or, pushing even farther in this direction, that it is a *hexis* or active condition governing our sense of justice, understood as an *ethos* or habit of both thought and action. Rawls himself seems to push in this direction when he writes that, “the sense of justice is a *settled disposition* to adopt and to want to act from the moral point of view insofar as the principles of justice define it [emphasis added]” (Rawls 1971, 491). This is helpful because, if we should have a hard time articulating the causes behind our habits, this would not seem strange at all. In fact, it would seem quite normal. And yet, despite this fact, we can always come to articulate these causes at least to some extent. And this is true of the set of conceptions governing our sense of justice as well. Indeed, Rawls’ project in *A Theory of Justice* is precisely to render explicit this set of implicit conceptions, to make manifest this argument, both its implicit conclusion and its implicit premises.

To summarize, Rawls’ project in *A Theory of Justice* is to describe our sense of justice, the moral capacity that is at work whenever we make judgments about the justness or unjustness of things, give reasons for such judgments, or desire to act justly. But our sense of justice is governed by a set of conceptions, which includes both a conception of justice and its justifying conceptions. Thus to describe our sense of justice is to describe this set of conceptions. Put differently, it is to discover and delineate an argument wherein the justifying conceptions function as premises and the conception of justice functions as a conclusion. But Rawls’ project in *A Theory of Justice* is limited in two ways. First, it is limited to the set of conceptions governing *our* sense of justice—the one that is shared by Rawls and his fellow citizens. Second, it is limited to our sense of justice as it relates to the basic structure of society, a sense we share

because we have all been subject to the same national institutions and whose underlying conceptions Rawls does not suppose are always fully explicit. Thus Rawls' project in *A Theory of Justice* is to render explicit this set of implicit conceptions, to make manifest this argument, both its implicit premises and its implicit conclusion.⁶

Now that we have attended to the meaning of "our sense of justice" we must attend to the method by which its underlying conceptions are discovered and delineated. How does Rawls carry out his project to describe these conceptions? Perhaps his most obvious option would be to look to the institutions that make up the basic structure of society. After all, if these institutions, from which we acquire our sense of justice, embody and express its underlying conceptions, then we should be able to look to the former in order to discover and delineate the latter. But Rawls does not carry out his project in this way. Instead, he opts to look to our judgments and our reasons with respect to justice. Indeed, if these aspects of our moral lives, which express our sense of justice, are all governed by its underlying conceptions, then we should be able to look to the former in order to discover and delineate the latter. More specifically, we should be able to look to our judgments in order to discover our conception of justice and to our reasons in order to discover our justifying conceptions.

But Rawls does not look to *all* of our judgments and our reasons with respect to justice in order to discover these underlying conceptions. Instead, he looks only to a certain subset of them.

⁶ Interestingly, Rawls suggests, "A useful comparison here is with the problem of describing the sense of grammaticalness that we have for the sentences of our native language" (Rawls 1971, 47). Indeed, this comparison may be quite apt. For our sense of grammaticalness may be understood as a linguistic capacity that is at work whenever we make judgments about the grammaticalness or ungrammaticalness of what is said or written, give reasons for such judgments, or desire to speak or write grammatically. And we might push the comparison even farther. For our sense of grammaticalness may also be understood as a capacity that is governed by a set of conceptions and, moreover, as a sense that is shared by us and our fellow native speakers because we have all been subject to the same linguistic practices and whose underlying conceptions we must not suppose are always fully explicit. Indeed, this comparison may even be suggestive of a more fundamental connection between our sense of justice and language in general. Unfortunately, if such a connection exists, it remains completely undeveloped in the text.

In the case of our judgments, Rawls looks only to what he calls our “considered judgments” (or our “considered convictions” about justice). What are considered judgments? They are judgments “rendered under conditions favorable to the exercise of the sense of justice, and therefore in circumstances where the more common excuses and explanations for making a mistake do not obtain” (Rawls 1971, 47-8). That is, they are judgments made under optimal conditions—conditions unlikely to foster in us ignorance, emotion, or interest sufficient to cause us to make mistaken judgments about the justness or unjustness of things. Why does Rawls look only to our considered judgments? He does so because they are “judgments in which our moral capacities are most likely to be displayed without distortion” (Rawls 1971, 47). Indeed, since Rawls opts to look to our judgments in order to discover our conception of justice, he must look only to judgments made under optimal conditions, for only such judgments may express our conception of justice in an undistorted way. In the case of our reasons, Rawls never clearly identifies which ones he looks to. But I want to suggest that he would seem to be committed to saying that he looks only to what he might have called our “considered reasons.” This suggestion will find some textual support in what follows and, if it is correct, then these are reasons rendered under conditions favorable to the exercise of the sense of justice and he looks to them because they are reasons in which our moral capacities are most likely to be displayed without distortion. Indeed, since Rawls opts to look to our reasons in order to discover our justifying conceptions, he must look only to reasons given under optimal conditions, for only such reasons may express our justifying conceptions in an undistorted way.

When Rawls looks to our considered judgments and our considered reasons, what does he discover our conception of justice and our justifying conceptions to be? Although we cannot give

a complete answer to this question here, we can at least establish that he discovers them to be located within the structure of a certain argument. Rawls writes,

My aim is to present a conception of justice which generalizes and carries to a higher level of abstraction the familiar theory of the social contract as found, say, in Locke, Rousseau, and Kant. In order to do this we are not to think of the original contract as one to enter a particular society or to set up a particular form of government. Rather, the guiding idea is that the principles of justice for the basic structure of society are the object of an original agreement. (Rawls 1971, 11)

Rawls discovers these conceptions to be located within the structure of a social contract argument. The structure of this argument is as follows: our conception of justice is itself justified if it would be agreed to by persons in a situation where they are attending only to their essential nature and to the essential nature of their world. Rawls calls this situation in general “the initial situation.” And he writes, “I want to say that one conception of justice is more reasonable than another, or justifiable with respect to it, if rational persons in the initial situation would choose its principles over those of the other for the role of justice” (Rawls 1971, 17).⁷

But the structure of this argument is incomplete. For it simply does not go through in its present form. To illustrate, suppose that the persons in question were alien creatures living on an alien planet. Now suppose that our conception of justice would be agreed to by these persons in a situation where they were attending only to their essential nature and to the essential nature of their world. Would our conception of justice be itself justified by this fact? In one way it would be. For our conception would be justified *for them*. In another way it would not be. For our conception would not be justified *for us*. Indeed, our conception of justice would appear to be

⁷ Ronald Dworkin argues in his “The Original Position” that Rawls cannot have discovered this structure in our considered convictions. For “It is certainly not part of our established political traditions or ordinary moral understanding that principles are acceptable only if they would be chosen by men in the particular predicament of the original position”(Dworkin, 1975, 24). Thus he suggests that Rawls must have discovered it in our moral capacity—that is, in our sense of justice—in general, which “may mean, at its least profound, that the principles that support the original position as a device for reasoning about justice are so widely shared and so little questioned within a particular community, for whom the book is meant, that the community could not abandon these principles without fundamentally changing its patterns of reasoning and arguing about political morality” (Dworkin 1975, 26). In my view, this suggestion seems quite plausible.

rather inappropriate for human creatures living on the planet earth. Thus the structure of this argument must be revised as follows: our conception of justice is itself justified if *we* would agree to it in a situation where we are attending only to *our* essential nature and to the essential nature of *our* world. Rawls calls this initial situation in particular “the original position.” And this structure means that that our justifying conceptions must at least include a conception of our essential nature and a conception of the essential nature of our world. Put differently, they must include our self-conceptions, broadly construed. These justifying conceptions provide the grounds for our conception of justice. That is, these justifying conceptions serve as the first links in a chain of reasoning leading up to our conception of justice; the former function as premises in an argument leading up to the latter, which functions as a conclusion.⁸

So when Rawls looks to our considered judgments and our considered reasons, he discovers our conception of justice and our justifying conceptions to be located within the structure of a social contract argument. And this means that our justifying conceptions must at least include a conception of our essential nature and a conception of the essential nature of our world—they must at least include our self-conceptions, broadly construed. But what *exactly* does he discover our self-conceptions to be? Before we can give a complete answer to this question, we must note that Rawls acknowledges a certain difficulty with his method. He explains, “In describing our sense of justice an allowance must be made for the likelihood that considered judgments are no doubt subject to certain irregularities and distortions despite the fact that they are rendered under favorable circumstances” (Rawls 1971, 48). Presumably, this is because even

⁸ Importantly, Rawls understands the social contract not as an agreement that has actually taken place (as Hobbes, Locke, or Rousseau might have understood it) but as an agreement that *would* take place under the conditions specified by the structure of the argument. Thus he notes that we can confirm the agreement at any time. As he explains, “At any time we can enter the original position, so to speak, simply by following a certain procedure, namely, by arguing for principles of justice in accordance with these restrictions” (Rawls 1971, 19). And again, “The perspective of eternity is not a perspective from a certain place beyond the world, nor the point of view of a transcendent being; rather it is a certain form of thought and feeling that rational persons can adopt within the world” (Rawls 1971, 587).

optimal conditions may foster in us ignorance, emotion, or interest sufficient to cause us to make mistaken judgments about the justness or unjustness of things. In any case, this means that even our considered judgments may lead us astray. Thus Rawls acknowledges that even our considered judgments are only “*provisional* fixed points which we presume any conception of justice must fit [emphasis added]” (Rawls 1971, 20). And this is true of our considered reasons as well.

Now does this difficulty mean that Rawls cannot discover our conception of justice or our justifying conceptions? It might indeed mean this if there were no way to distinguish those of our considered judgments and our considered reasons that are distorted from those that are not. But Rawls suggests a way to do precisely this. He writes,

In searching for the most favored description of this situation we work from both ends. We begin by describing it so that it represents generally shared and preferably weak conditions. We then see if these conditions are strong enough to yield a significant set of principles. If not, we look for further premises equally reasonable. But if so, and these principles match our considered convictions of justice, then so far well and good. But presumably there will be discrepancies. In this case we have a choice. We can either modify the account of the initial situation or we can revise our existing judgments, for even the judgments we take provisionally as fixed points are liable to revision. By going back and forth, sometimes altering the conditions of the contractual circumstances, at others withdrawing our judgments and conforming them to principle, I assume that eventually we shall find a description of the initial situation that both expresses reasonable conditions and yields principles which match our considered judgments duly pruned and adjusted. This state of affairs I refer to as reflective equilibrium. (Rawls 1971, 20)

Rawls suggests that we begin by looking to our considered reasons in order to discover some justifying conceptions that can accommodate all of them. That is, we begin by looking to our considered convictions about our essential nature and the essential nature of our world—convictions that are generally shared, weak, and reasonable—in order to discover some fitting self-conceptions. He suggests that we continue by looking to these justifying conceptions in order to determine the conception of justice that accords with them and then by looking to this

conception in order to determine whether or not it can accommodate all of our considered judgments. If it can, we may simply stop there. If it cannot, we must either abandon some of our considered judgments or revise the conception of justice. In the latter case, we must also revise the justifying conceptions and abandon some of our considered reasons (or add some new ones).⁹

In this way, Rawls suggests a way to distinguish those of our considered judgments and our considered reasons that are distorted from those that are not. As he explains,

When a person is presented with an intuitively appealing account of his sense of justice (one, say, which embodies various reasonable and natural presumptions), he may well revise his judgments to conform to its principles even though the theory does not fit his existing judgments exactly. He is especially likely to do this if he can find an explanation for the deviations which undermines his confidence in his original judgments and if the conception presented yields a judgment which he finds he can now accept. (Rawls 1971, 48)

Indeed, when we are compelled to abandon some of our considered judgments or some of our considered reasons, we will be driven to scrutinize the conditions under which they were rendered in order to distinguish those that could be distorted from that that could not. Of course, this cannot guarantee that we will abandon only those judgments and reasons that are distorted but it can perhaps take us a long way toward that goal.

Now Rawls suggests that we end by reaching a state wherein our justifying conceptions and our conception of justice not only accord with one another but also can accommodate all of our considered reasons and all of our considered judgments “duly pruned and adjusted.” He calls this state “reflective equilibrium.” As he explains,

⁹ Curiously, very few commentators seem to recognize that the method of reflective equilibrium involves the movement between considered reasons and a conception of our essential nature as well as a conception of the essential nature of our world, on the one hand, and considered judgments and a conception of justice on the other. However, Michael Sandel, one of the few, picks up on this in his *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* when he writes, “For what issues at one end in a theory of justice must issue at the other in a theory of the person, or more precisely, a theory of the moral subject. Looking from one direction through the lens of the original position we see the two principles of justice; looking from the other direction we see a reflection of ourselves. If the method of reflective equilibrium operates with the symmetry Rawls ascribes to it, then the original position must produce not only a moral theory but also a philosophical anthropology” (Sandel 1998, 48).

From the standpoint of moral philosophy, the best account of a person's sense of justice is not the one which fits his judgments prior to his examining any conception of justice, but rather the one which matches his judgments in reflective equilibrium. As we have seen, this state is one reached after a person has weighed various proposed conceptions and he has either revised his judgments to accord with one of them or held fast to his initial convictions (and the corresponding conception). (Rawls 1971, 48)

Rawls suggests that we end by reaching a state of reflective equilibrium. Indeed, when we have reached this state, we will have carried out our project to render explicit this set of implicit conceptions, to make manifest this argument, both its implicit conclusion and its implicit premises. In this way, we will have reached at least a provisional conclusion to our inquiry.¹⁰

To summarize, Rawls carries out his project to describe our sense of justice—to discover and delineate its underlying conceptions—by looking to our judgments and our reasons with respect to justice. More specifically, he looks only to our considered judgments and our considered reasons, which are judgments and reasons rendered under optimal conditions, for only they may express our conception of justice and our justifying conceptions in an undistorted way. When Rawls looks to our considered judgments and our considered reasons, he discovers our conception of justice and our justifying conceptions to be located within the structure of a social contract argument. And this means that our justifying conceptions must at least include a conception of our essential nature and a conception of the essential nature of our world—they must at least include our self-conceptions, broadly construed. However, Rawls acknowledges that even our considered judgments and our considered reasons may lead us astray and so suggests a way to distinguish those that are distorted from those that are not. He suggests that we proceed by adjusting our conceptions to one another and our judgments and reasons to our conceptions until we reach a state of reflective equilibrium wherein our justifying conceptions and our conception of justice not only accord with one another but also can accommodate all of

¹⁰ For a good discussion of reflective equilibrium, see T.M. Scanlon's "Rawls on Justification."

our considered reasons and all of our considered judgments “duly pruned and adjusted.” When we have reached this state, we will have reached at least a provisional conclusion to our inquiry.

§2. The Original Position

When Rawls looks to our considered judgments and our considered reasons, he discovers our conception of justice and our justifying conceptions to be located within the structure of a social contract argument, which is as follows: our conception of justice is itself justified if we would agree to it in a situation where we are attending only to our essential nature and to the essential nature of our world. And this means that our justifying conceptions must at least include a conception of our essential nature and a conception of the essential nature of our world—they must at least include our self-conceptions, broadly construed. But what exactly does he discover our self-conceptions in reflective equilibrium to be? Let us consider each of these conceptions in turn.

Rawls suggests that our conception of our essential nature in reflective equilibrium is a conception of what he calls “moral personality.” And this is defined by two moral powers or capacities. He writes,

Moral persons are distinguished by two features: first they are capable of having (and are assumed to have) a conception of their good (as expressed by a rational plan of life); and second they are capable of having (and are assumed to acquire) a sense of justice, a normally effective desire to apply and to act upon the principles of justice, at least to a certain minimum degree. (Rawls 1971, 505)

So our essential nature is defined by 1) our capacity to have a conception of our good and 2) our capacity to have a sense of justice. That is, it is defined by our ability to have a notion of what we value in life and our abilities to make judgments about the justness or unjustness of things, give reasons for such judgments, and desire to act justly.

Rawls further suggests that our conception of our essential nature in reflective equilibrium is a conception not only of moral personality but also of rationality. He writes, “One feature of [this theory of justice] is to think of the parties in the initial situation as rational” (Rawls 1971, 13). And he adds, “the concept of rationality must be interpreted as far as possible in the narrow sense... of taking the most effective means to given ends” (Rawls 1971, 14). So our essential nature is defined not only by our capacity to have a conception of our good and our capacity to have a sense of justice but also by our capacity to reason about which means best enable us to attain our ends. That is, it is also defined by our ability to determine the best way for us to achieve our good.

Rawls observes that our conception of our essential nature in reflective equilibrium is the basis for our conception of our equality. He writes, “Obviously the purpose of these conditions is to represent equality between human beings as moral persons, as creatures having a conception of their good and capable of a sense of justice. The basis of equality is taken to be similarity in these two respects” (Rawls 1971, 19). Rawls’ point here is that our conception of our *essential* nature is a conception of our *common* nature—it is a conception of factors that we have in common and thus of factors that make us equal. Of course, the *essential* factors of our moral personality and our rationality do not make us equal in all respects. For we are obviously unequal in many ways: in the perspicacity and creativity of our minds, in the internal coordination and external appearance of our bodies, in our innate talents and acquired skills, in the composition and extent of our material resources, in the special features of our physical and social environments, and in the specific details of our characters and histories. Indeed, these *unessential* factors make us unequal in many respects. But we are nevertheless equal in two ways: in our moral personality and in our rationality. Thus our essential nature is the basis for our equality.

Rawls suggests that our conception of the essential nature of our world in reflective equilibrium is a conception of a world characterized by what he calls “the circumstances of justice.” And these are of two kinds: subjective and objective. With regard to the subjective circumstances of justice, Rawls writes,

I also suppose that men suffer from various shortcomings of knowledge, thought, and judgment. Their knowledge is necessarily incomplete, their powers of reasoning, memory, and attention are always limited, and their judgment is likely to be distorted by anxiety, bias, and a preoccupation with their own affairs. Some of these defects spring from moral faults, from selfishness and negligence; but to a large degree, they are simply part of men’s natural situation. As a consequence individuals not only have different plans of life but there exists a diversity of philosophical and religious belief, and of political and social doctrines. (Rawls 1971, 127)

So the essential nature of our world is defined by differences in our conceptions of our good. And these differences arise because of certain of our subjective limitations and specificities. That is, they arise because none of us can know or attend to all things and also because each of us will know and attend to different things and/or the same things in different ways. Importantly, these differences in our conceptions of our good mean that these conceptions are among the unessential factors that make us unequal in many respects. Indeed, these conceptions differ not only between us at any given time but also for each of us over time. Thus our notions of what we value in life do not belong to our essential nature.

With regard to the objective circumstances of justice, Rawls writes,

Thus, many individuals coexist together at the same time on a definite geographical territory. These individuals are roughly similar in physical and mental powers; or at any rate, their capacities are comparable in that no one among them can dominate the rest. They are vulnerable to attack, and all are subject to having their plans blocked by the united force of others. Finally, there is the condition of moderate scarcity understood to cover a wide range of situations. (Rawls 1971, 126-7)

So the essential nature of our world is also defined by conflicts over natural and social resources. And these conflicts arise because of certain objective limitations of our world and ourselves.

That is, they arise because each of us will share with others a “definite geographical territory” with moderately scarce resources and also because none of us can dominate all of the others. Importantly, these conflicts over natural and social resources mean that we must agree to principles by which these conflicts can be resolved and these resources can be distributed. Indeed, we must agree to them because otherwise some risk “having their plans blocked by the united force of others.” Thus we must agree to a conception of justice. Now Rawls calls these “the circumstances of justice” because only under these circumstances does the occasion for justice arise. As he says, “Unless these circumstances existed there would be no occasion for the virtue of justice, just as in the absence of threats of injury to life and limb there would be no occasion for physical courage” (Rawls 1971, 128).

Rawls further suggests that our conception of the essential nature of our world in reflective equilibrium is a conception not only of a world characterized by the circumstances of justice but also of a world characterized by certain basic physical, biological, psychological, sociological, economic, and political laws and principles. He writes,

It is taken for granted, however, that [the parties] know the general facts about human society. They understand political affairs and the principles of economic theory; they know the basis of social organization and the laws of human psychology. Indeed, the parties are presumed to know whatever general facts affect the choice of the principles of justice. (Rawls 1971, 137-8)

So the essential nature of our world is defined not only by differences in our conceptions of our good and conflicts over various natural and social resources but also by certain basic laws and principles. That is, it is also defined by the general rules governing how people and things act and interact.

Importantly, I want to argue that Rawls is *not* saying that our conception of our essential nature and our conception of the essential nature of our world *had to be* conceptions involving

moral personality, rationality, the circumstances of justice, or certain basic physical, biological, psychological, sociological, economic, and political laws and principles. Indeed, he ultimately seems to indicate that these conceptions could have been entirely otherwise. Instead, I want to argue that Rawls is saying that our conception of our essential nature and our conception of the essential nature of our world *happen to be* conceptions of these kinds, which we have come to accept and internalize because we have all been subject to the same institutions, at least with regard to the institutions that make up the basic structure of society. And this means that these conceptions may or may not reflect how things *really* are. Admittedly, Rawls is not entirely clear on this point. For, in some places, his language seems to suggest that these conceptions do reflect how things really are. For example, with regard to our essential nature, he writes, “Human beings have a desire to express their nature as free and equal moral persons” (Rawls 1971, 528). And again, “The nature of the self as a free and equal moral person is the same for all” (Rawls 1971, 565). And, with regard to our essential nature as the basis for our equality, he writes, “Equality is supported by the general facts of nature” (Rawls 1971, 510). And, with regard to the essential nature of our world, he writes, “a human society is characterized by the circumstances of justice” (Rawls 1971, 129-130). And again, “one cannot avoid assumptions about general facts... If these assumptions are true and suitably general, everything is in order” (Rawls 1971, 158-60). In such passages, Rawls’ language seems to suggest that our conception of our essential nature and our conception of the essential nature of our world reflect what our essential nature and the essential nature of our world really are—that the latter are perhaps even eternal verities.

But, in other places, his language seems to suggest that these conceptions may or may not reflect how things really are. For example, with regard to our essential nature, he writes,

The parties *regard* moral personality and not the capacity for pleasure and pain as the fundamental aspect of the self... They *think of themselves as* beings who can and do

choose their final ends (always plural in number)... Their fundamental interest in liberty and in the means to make fair use of it is the expression of their *seeing themselves as* primarily moral persons with an equal right to choose their mode of life [emphasis added]. (Rawls 1971, 563)

And, with regard to our essential nature as the basis for our equality, he writes, “The basis of equality is *taken to be* similarity in these two respects [emphasis added]” (Rawls 1971, 19). And, with regard to the essential nature of our world, he writes, “Conceptions of justice must be justified by the conditions of our life *as we know it* or not at all [emphasis added]” (Rawls 1971, 454). In such passages, Rawls’ language seems to suggest that our conception of our essential nature and our conception of the essential nature of our world may or may not reflect what our essential nature and the essential nature of our world really are—that the former are perhaps only historical contingencies. And indeed, this would make perfect sense if the sense of justice we come to have—along with its underlying conceptions—depends on the epoch and nation in which we find ourselves.¹¹

Again, Rawls suggests that our conception of justice and our justifying conceptions are located within the structure of a social contract argument in which our conception of justice is itself justified if we would agree to it in a situation where we are attending only to our essential nature and to the essential nature of our world. That is, it is itself justified if we would agree to it behind what Rawls calls “the veil of ignorance.” He writes,

Among the essential features of this situation is that no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does any one know his fortune in the distribution of

¹¹ T.M. Scanlon picks up on this in his “Rawls’ Theory of Justification” when he writes, “The conception of the person described by Rawls is of course not an Archimedean point in the sense of being itself a notion formed outside of or independent of particular social and historical circumstances. It may well be that this conception of the person and the ideal of social cooperation founded on it are typical of particular historical eras and civilizations. But this is not in itself an objection to Rawls’ theory, particularly if, as it seems to me, the conception of the person in question is one that has a particularly deep hold on us and is not a matter of great controversy or of significant variation across the range of societies to which the theory should be expected to apply. The question is not whether this conception of the person is in some sense absolute, but whether the particular features of this conception that are appealed to in Rawls’ argument are more controversial than the conclusions they are used to support” (Scanlon 1976, 178).

natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strength, and the like. I shall even assume that the parties do not know their conceptions of the good or their special psychological propensities. The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance. (Rawls 1971, 12)

Now the veil of ignorance is not a veil of *complete* ignorance. For, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, we still know that our essential nature is defined by moral personality and rationality and that the essential nature of our world is defined by the circumstances of justice and certain basic laws and principles. Moreover, we still know that our essential nature is the basis for our equality but that the essential factors of our moral personality and our rationality do not make us equal in all respects. That is, we still know that we are unequal in our minds and bodies, our talents and skills, our resources and environments, our characters and histories, and, most importantly, our conceptions of our good. But, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, we do not know *how* we are unequal in any of these ways because we do not know any of the specific features of these unessential factors. For example, we do not know how we are unequal in our conceptions of our good because we do not know any of the specific features of what we value in life. In this way, the veil of ignorance ensures that we are attending only to our essential nature and to the essential nature of our world.

Importantly, and as before, I want to argue that Rawls is *not* saying that our conception of justice and our justifying conceptions *had to be* located within the structure of a social contract argument in general or one involving the veil of ignorance in particular. Indeed, he ultimately seems to indicate that this argument structure could have been entirely otherwise. Instead, I want to argue that Rawls is saying that our conception of justice and our justifying conceptions *happen to be* located within a structure of this kind, which we have come to accept and internalize because we have all been subject to the same institutions, at least with regard to the institutions that make up the basic structure of society. And this means that this argument

structure may or may not have any special validity. Rawls is quite clear on this point. For example, he writes,

I assume, for one thing, that there is *a broad measure of agreement* that the principles of justice should be chosen under certain conditions. To justify a particular description of the initial situation one shows that it incorporates these *commonly shared presumptions*. One argues from *widely accepted* but weak premises to more specific conclusions [emphasis added]. (Rawls 1971, 18)

And again,

One should not be misled, then, by the somewhat unusual conditions which characterize the original position. The idea here is simply to make vivid to ourselves the restrictions *that it seems reasonable* to impose on arguments for principles of justice, and therefore on these principles themselves. Thus *it seems reasonable and generally acceptable* that no one should be advantaged or disadvantaged by natural fortune or social circumstances in the choice of principles. It also *seems widely agreed* that it should be impossible to tailor principles to the circumstances of one's own case [emphasis added]. (Rawls 1971, 18)

And once again,

Finally, we may remind ourselves that the hypothetical nature the conditions embodied in the description of this situation are *ones that we do in fact accept...* Thus what we are doing is to combine into one conception the totality of conditions that we are ready upon due reflection *to recognize as reasonable* in our conduct with regard to one another [emphasis added]. (Rawls 1971, 587)

In such passages, Rawls indicates that this argument structure is grounded in nothing other than our agreement, commonly shared presumptions, and widely accepted premises—in nothing other than what seems reasonable, generally acceptable, and widely agreed upon. Thus he indicates that it may or may not have any special validity. And indeed, this makes perfect sense if the sense of justice we come to have—along with its specific argument structure—depends on the epoch and nation in which we happen to find ourselves.

To summarize, Rawls suggests that our conception of our essential nature in reflective equilibrium is a conception not only of moral personality but also of rationality—the basis for our conception of our equality—and that our conception of the essential nature of our world in

reflective equilibrium is a conception not only of a world characterized by the circumstances of justice but also of a world characterized by certain basic physical, biological, psychological, sociological, economic, and political laws and principles. And he suggests that our conception of justice and our justifying conceptions are located within the structure of a social contract argument in which our conception of justice is itself justified if we would agree to it behind the veil of ignorance, which ensures that we are attending only to our essential nature and to the essential nature of our world. Importantly, I want to argue that Rawls is *not* saying that our conception of our essential nature and our conception of the essential nature of our world or that our conception of justice and our justifying conceptions *had to be* conceptions of these kinds or located within a structure of this kind. Instead, I want to argue that Rawls is saying that they *happen to be* conceptions of these kinds and located within a structure of this kind, which we have come to accept and internalize because we have all been subject to the same institutions, at least with regard to the institutions that make up the basic structure of society. And this means that these conceptions may or may not reflect how things *really* are and that this argument structure may or may not have any special validity. As Rawls explains,

More likely candidates for necessary moral truths are the conditions imposed on the adoption of principles; but actually it seems best to regard these conditions simply *as reasonable stipulations* to be assessed eventually by the whole theory to which they belong. *There is no set of conditions or first principles that can be plausibly claimed to be necessary or definitive of morality and thereby especially suited to carry the burden of justification* [emphasis added]. (Rawls 1971, 578)

And indeed, this makes perfect sense if the sense of justice we come to have—along with its underlying conceptions and its specific argument structure—depends on the epoch and nation in which we happen to find ourselves.

§3. The Conception of Justice

When Rawls looks to our considered judgments and our considered reasons, he discovers our conception of justice and our justifying conceptions to be located within the structure of a social contract argument, which is as follows: our conception of justice is itself justified if we would agree to it in a situation where we are attending only to our essential nature and to the essential nature of our world—if we would agree to it behind the veil of ignorance. But, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, why exactly would we agree to our conception of justice and not some other conception? And what exactly is our conception of justice? Let us consider each of these questions in turn.

Rawls argues that, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would agree to our conception of justice and not some other conception because each of us would reason that our conception advances his interests better than any other. As he explains, “I have assumed throughout that the persons in the original position are rational. In choosing between principles each tries as best he can to advance his interests” (Rawls 1971, 142). But which interests? Rawls argues that the primary interest here is the interest that each of us has in expressing his essential nature. As he explains, “Human beings have a desire to express their nature as free and equal moral persons” (Rawls 1971, 528). Thus each of us has an interest in expressing his ability to have a conception of his good. But, insofar as we conceive of something as good, we also conceive of it as desirable—as something to strive for in life. Thus each of us has an interest in expressing his ability to pursue a conception of his good as well. And Rawls argues that, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would agree to our conception of justice and not some other conception because each of us would reason that our conception advances his interest in securing his ability to pursue what he values in life better than any other. As he explains, “a moral person is a subject with ends he has chosen, and his fundamental preference is for

conditions that enable him to frame a mode of life that expresses his nature as a free and equal rational being as fully as circumstances permit” (Rawls 1971, 561).

But an obvious problem arises here. For, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, none of us knows any of the specific features of what he values in life. As Rawls explains,

But I have also assumed that the parties do not know their conception of the good. This means that while they know that they have some rational plan of life, they do not know the details of this plan, the particular ends and interests which it is calculated to promote. How, then, can they decide which conceptions of justice are most to their advantage? (Rawls 1971, 142).

Indeed, how, if none of us knows any of the specific features of what he values in life, can each of us advance his interest in securing his ability to pursue what he values in life? Rawls suggests that each of us can do so by securing his ability to pursue what he values in life *irrespective of its specific features*. That is, each of us can do so by proceeding in terms of what he calls “the thin theory of the good.” As he explains, “Indeed, one cannot avoid assumptions about general facts any more than one can do without a conception of the good on the basis of which the parties rank alternatives” (Rawls 1971, 161). But how *exactly* can each of us advance his interest in securing his ability to pursue what he values in life? Rawls suggests that each of us can do so by securing for himself what he calls “primary goods.” As he explains,

Now the assumption is that though men’s rational plans do have different final ends, they nevertheless all require for their execution certain primary goods, natural and social. Plans differ since individual abilities, circumstances and wants differ; rational plans are adjusted to these contingencies. But whatever one’s system of ends primary goods are the necessary means. (Rawls 1971, 93)

So each of us can advance his interest in securing his ability to pursue what he values in life by securing for himself primary goods or “things which it is supposed a rational man wants whatever else he wants” (Rawls 1971, 92). For these goods support one’s ability to pursue what one values in life irrespective of its specific features. And these goods include rights, liberties,

opportunities, powers, income, wealth, and self-respect. Indeed, in order to pursue what one values in life, whatever it is, one needs at least some degree of noninterference from others—at least some liberty.¹² Moreover, one needs at least some access to careers and their prerogatives as well as at least some access to economic resources—at least some opportunities, powers, income, and wealth. Furthermore, one needs at least some degree of confidence that what one values in life is worthwhile—at least some self-respect. Finally, one needs at least some rights that guarantee all of the preceding. Thus each of us can advance his interest in securing his ability to pursue what he values in life by securing for himself primary goods. Or, more precisely, each of us can do so by securing for himself primary goods to the greatest extent or in the most optimal way possible. As Rawls explains, “While the persons in the original position do not know their conception of the good, they do know, I assume, that they prefer more rather than less primary goods” (Rawls 1971, 93).¹³

Rawls argues that, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would agree to our conception of justice and not some other conception because each of us would reason that our conception secures his primary goods to a greater extent or in a more optimal way than any other. Now the reasoning that would lead each of us to agree to our conception of justice and not some other conception need not involve comparing our conception with every other in terms of

¹² Importantly, for Rawls, “liberty” always means noninterference from others or what Isaiah Berlin famously called “negative liberty.” As Rawls explains, “persons are at liberty to do something when they are free from certain constraints either to do it or not to do it and when their doing it or not doing it is protected from interference by other people” (Rawls 1971, 202).

¹³ Importantly, Rawls stresses that, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us is interested in securing *for himself* primary goods to the greatest extent or in the most optimal way possible. That is, he stresses that we are mutually disinterested. As he explains, “One feature of justice as fairness is to think of the parties in the initial situation as rational and mutually disinterested. This does not mean that the parties are egoists, that is, individuals with only certain kinds of interests, say in wealth, prestige, and domination. But they are conceived as not taking an interest in one another’s interests” (Rawls 1971, 13). Indeed, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, none of us knows any of the specific features of what he values in life. Moreover, none of us knows any of the specific features of the unessential factors of others—of their characters and histories, of what they value in life, or of their friend and family relationships. Thus, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, none of us has any motivation to attempt either to help or to harm others. In this way, we are mutually disinterested.

how well each secures primary goods—it need only involve comparing our conception with an alternative that differs from it only marginally. Moreover, it need not involve comparing our conception with such an alternative in terms of how well each secures primary goods in every possible case—it need only involve comparing our conception with such an alternative in the worst possible case. That is, it need only involve following what Rawls calls “the maximin rule.” As he explains, “The maximin rule tells us to rank alternatives by their worst possible outcomes: we are to adopt the alternative the worst outcome of which is superior to the worst outcomes of the others” (Rawls 1971, 152-3). In this way, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would reason that, in the worst possible case, our conception of justice secures his primary goods to a greater extent or in a more optimal way than an alternative that differs from it only marginally, which means that each of us would not only agree to our conception over such an alternative but also agree to our conception over any alternative that differs from it more significantly.

Rawls suggests that our conception of justice consists of two principles. The first principle secures the primary good of liberty and is as follows: “each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others” (Rawls 1971, 60). Rawls calls this “the principle of greatest equal liberty.” Now the basic liberties include freedom of thought and conscience, freedom of the person and the freedom to hold property, the freedom from arbitrary arrest and arbitrary seizure, and also the political liberties, which include freedom of speech and the freedoms to vote in elections, to run for public office, and to assemble (Rawls 1971, 61). And Rawls argues that, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would agree to this principle for each of these liberties. However, he does not present the reasoning that would lead each of us to agree to it for each of them. Instead, he

does so for only one of them: freedom of conscience. For, as Rawls explains, “The reasoning in this case can be generalized to apply to other freedoms, although not always with the same force” (Rawls 1971, 206).

The reasoning in this case begins with the fact that what we value in life is often framed in moral, religious, or philosophical terms. And this means that, in order to pursue what one values in life, whatever it is, one needs at least some degree of noninterference from others specifically to pursue one’s moral, religious, or philosophical ends—at least some freedom of conscience. Now the principle of greatest equal liberty secures *equal* freedom of conscience. And Rawls argues that, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would agree to this principle. Now the reasoning that would lead each of us to agree to the principle of greatest equal liberty in the case of freedom of conscience involves comparing this principle with an alternative that differs from it only marginally—one that secures slightly less freedom of conscience for some than for others on the basis of, say, their sex, sexual orientation, age, racial identification, or class or on the basis of their moral, religious, or philosophical ends themselves. Of course, under such an alternative, one would discover in the worst possible case that, once the veil of ignorance is lifted, one is slightly less able to pursue one’s moral, religious, or philosophical ends than others because one is a member of one of the disadvantaged groups or a proponent of one of the disadvantaged ends. And this is clearly worse than the worst possible case under the principle of greatest equal liberty, in which one would simply discover that, once the veil of ignorance is lifted, one is no more able to pursue one’s moral, religious, or philosophical ends than another. In this way, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would reason that, in the worst possible case, the principle of greatest equal liberty secures his freedom of conscience to a greater extent than an alternative that differs from it only marginally, which means that each of

us would not only agree to this principle over such an alternative but also agree to this principle over any alternative that differs from it more significantly. As Rawls explains, “Now it seems that equal liberty of conscience is the only principle that the persons in the original position can acknowledge. They cannot take chances with their liberty by permitting the dominant religious or moral doctrine to persecute or to suppress others if it wishes” (Rawls 1971, 207). And Rawls suggests that the reasoning that would lead each of us to agree to the principle of greatest equal liberty in the case of freedom of conscience is similar to the reasoning that would lead us to agree to this principle in the case of the other basic liberties as well.

Now the principle of greatest equal liberty secures equal liberty but not *unlimited* equal liberty. For, as Rawls explains, “Clearly when liberties are unrestricted they collide with one another” (Rawls 1971, 203). Thus the principle of greatest equal liberty secures *limited* equal liberty but limited only so much as is necessary to avoid conflicts. For, as Rawls explains, “The only reason for circumscribing the rights defining liberty and making men’s freedom less extensive than it might otherwise be is that these equal rights as institutionally defined would interfere with one another” (Rawls 1971, 64). Or, put simply, “liberty can be restricted only for the sake of liberty itself” (Rawls 1971, 244). And Rawls argues that, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would agree to this principle. Of course, under an alternative that secures limited equal liberty but limited slightly less than is necessary to avoid conflicts, one would discover in the worst possible case that, once the veil of ignorance is lifted, one is unable to pursue what one values in life because others prevent one from doing so. And this is clearly worse than the worst possible case under the principle of greatest equal liberty, in which one would simply discover that, once the veil of ignorance is lifted, one is only able to pursue what one values in life so long as it does not prevent others from doing so. In this way, when we are

behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would agree to the principle of greatest equal liberty because this principle secures his primary good of liberty to a greater extent than any other. Put differently, each of us would affirm his *right* to the liberty specified by this principle.

Rawls suggests that our conception of justice consists of two principles. And the second principle itself consists of two parts, which we will consider in reverse order. The second part of the second principle secures the primary goods of opportunities and powers, and is as follows: “social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are... attached to positions and offices open to all” (Rawls 1971, 60). Rawls calls this “the principle of fair opportunity.” The reasoning here begins with the fact that, in order to pursue what one values in life, whatever it is, one needs at least some access to careers and their prerogatives—at least some opportunities and powers. Now the principle of fair opportunity secures *equal* access to careers and their prerogatives *except* when unequal access is based on unequal qualifications caused by natural inequalities. And Rawls argues that, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would agree to this principle. The reasoning here involves comparing this principle with three alternatives that differ from it only marginally—one that secures slightly less access for some than for others even in the case of equal qualifications, one that secures equal access even in the case of slightly unequal qualifications in general, and one that secures equal access even in the case of slightly unequal qualifications caused by social inequalities in particular. Of course, under these alternatives, one would discover in the worst possible case that, once the veil of ignorance is lifted, one is unable to enter into careers and exercise their prerogatives even though one is qualified to do so, is the most qualified to do so, or could have been the most qualified to do so if social inequalities in, say, the quality of public education were eliminated. And these are clearly worse than the worst possible case under the principle of fair opportunity, in which one

would simply discover that, once the veil of ignorance is lifted, one is only able to enter into careers and exercise their prerogatives so long as one is the most qualified to do so and, if one is not, it is not because of social inequalities. Of course, this last point means that social inequalities in, say, the quality of public education must in fact be eliminated. As Rawls explains, “those who are at the same level of talent and ability, and have the same willingness to use them, should have the same prospects of success regardless of their initial place in the social system, that is, irrespective of the income class into which they are born” (Rawls 1971, 73).¹⁴ In this way, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would agree to the principle of open positions because this principle secures his primary goods of opportunities and powers in a more optimal way than any other. Put differently, each of us would affirm his *right* to the opportunities and powers specified by this principle.

The first part of the second principle secures the primary goods of income and wealth, and is as follows: “social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are... reasonably expected to be to everyone’s advantage” (Rawls 1971, 60). Rawls calls this “the difference principle.” The reasoning here begins with the fact that, in order to pursue what one values in life, whatever it is, one needs at least some access to material resources—at least some income and wealth. Now the difference principle secures *equal* access to material resources *except* when unequal access is to the benefit of the least advantaged. And Rawls argues that, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would agree to this principle. The reasoning here involves comparing this principle with two alternatives that differ from it only marginally—one that secures slightly less access for some than for others even when equal access is to the benefit of the least advantaged and one that secures equal access even when slightly less access

¹⁴ Importantly, Rawls admits that social inequalities can never be *completely* eliminated. As he explains, “the principle of fair opportunity can be only imperfectly carried out, at least as long as the institution of the family exists” (Rawls 1971, 74). Nevertheless, he suggests that they should be eliminated to the greatest extent possible.

for some than for others is to the benefit of the least advantaged. Of course, under these alternatives, one would discover in the worst possible case that, once the veil of ignorance is lifted, one is among the least advantaged and is unable to enjoy certain essential goods and services such as, say, medical care either because one lacks the economic resources to do so or because those who could provide these essential goods and services lack the economic resources to do so. And this is clearly worse than the worst possible case under the difference principle, in which one would simply discover that, once the veil of ignorance is lifted, one is among the most advantaged and only has more economic resources than others so long as it benefits the least advantaged. As Rawls explains,

Those who have been favored by nature, whoever they are, may gain from their good fortune only on terms that improve the situation of those who have lost out. The naturally advantaged are not to gain merely because they are more gifted, but only to cover the costs of training and education and for using their endowments in ways that help the less fortunate as well. (Rawls 1971, 101-2)

In this way, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would agree to the difference principle because this principle secures his primary goods of income and wealth in a more optimal way than any other. Put differently, each of us would affirm his *right* to the income and wealth specified by this principle.¹⁵

Rawls suggests not only that our conception of justice consists of two principles but also that these principles are ranked in “lexical order,” which means that the first principle must be satisfied before the second, and that the second part of the second principle (the principle of fair opportunity) must be satisfied before the first (the difference principle) (Rawls 1971, 302-3). In this way, equal liberty may not be sacrificed for greater access to careers and their prerogatives or greater access to economic resources, and equal access to careers and their prerogatives may

¹⁵ Interestingly, Rawls suggests that all of the principles of justice are ultimately variations on the difference principle. As he explains, “An inequality in the basic structure must always be justified to those in the least advantaged position” (Rawls 1971, 231).

not be sacrificed for greater access to economic resources. Now Rawls does not present the reasoning that would lead each of us to agree to this lexical order in any clear way. But he does argue that this lexical order matches our considered judgments in reflective equilibrium. As he explains, “I have checked it out in a number of important cases. It appears to fit our considered convictions fairly well” (Rawls 1971, 250).¹⁶

Rawls argues that, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would finally agree to our conception of justice only after considering whether it is stable in the sense of being compatible with basic psychological laws and principles. That is, each of us would finally agree to it only after considering what Rawls calls “the question of stability.” As he explains,

It is evident that stability is a desirable feature of moral conceptions. Other things equal, the persons in the original position will adopt the more stable scheme of principles. However attractive a conception of justice might be on other grounds, it is seriously defective if the principles of moral psychology are such that it fails to engender in human beings the requisite desire to act upon it. (Rawls 1971, 455)

Indeed, none of us would finally agree to our conception of justice if it were not stable in the sense of being compatible with basic psychological laws and principles. For, in that case, it would be a conception that we could never come to accept and internalize or desire to act upon.

But Rawls suggests that, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would finally agree to our conception of justice because “it is likely to have greater stability than the traditional alternatives, since it is more in line with the principles of moral psychology” (Rawls 1971, 456).

Thus, in this case, it is a conception that we can come to accept and internalize and desire to act upon and so is a conception that is stable.¹⁷

¹⁶ Rawls notes that, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would agree not only to these principle of justice, which are principles for institutions, but also to certain principles of duty and obligation, which are principles for individuals (specifying such duties as the duty to uphold and further just institutions and such obligations as the obligation to honor voluntary and just agreements).

¹⁷ Importantly, insofar as our conception of the essential nature of our world may or may not reflect how things *really* are, and insofar as it is a conception of a world characterized, in part, by these basic psychological laws and

Importantly, I want to argue that Rawls is *not* saying that our conception of justice *had to be* a conception involving these two principles. Indeed, he ultimately seems to indicate that this conception could have been entirely otherwise. Instead, I want to argue that Rawls is saying that our conception of justice *happens to be* a conception of this kind, which we have come to accept and internalize because we have all been subject to the same institutions, at least with regard to the institutions that make up the basic structure of society. Rawls is quite clear on this point. For example, he writes, “I do not argue that these arrangements are the only ones that are just. Rather my intention is to show that the principles of justice... define a workable political conception, and are a reasonable approximation to and extension of our considered judgments” (Rawls 1971, 195). And again, “We have to concede that as established beliefs change, it is possible that the principles of justice which it seems rational to choose may likewise change” (Rawls 1971, 548). In such passages, Rawls indicates that our conception of justice is only a historical contingency. And indeed, this makes perfect sense if the sense of justice we come to have—along with its underlying conceptions—depends on the epoch and nation in which we happen to find ourselves.

Now Rawls carries out his project to describe our sense of justice by adjusting our conceptions to one another and our judgments and reasons to our conceptions until we reach a state of reflective equilibrium wherein our justifying conceptions and our conception of justice not only accord with one another but also can accommodate all of our considered reasons and all of our considered judgments “duly pruned and adjusted.” And this means that, when we have reached this state, we not only will have reached at least a provisional conclusion to our inquiry

principles, these laws and principles also may or may not reflect how things *really* are. In fact, Rawls ultimately seems to indicate that they depend entirely on the sense of justice we come to have. As he explains, “The principles of moral psychology have a place for a conception of justice; and different formulations of these principles result when different conceptions are used” (Rawls 1971, 491). Interestingly, this is true for the above account of moral development as well. As Rawls explains, “These remarks assume, however a particular theory of justice. Those who espouse a different one will favor another account of these matters” (Rawls 1971, 496).

but also will have discovered and delineated a valid argument—an argument wherein the conclusion follows from the premises. Rawls writes,

One should note also that the acceptance of these principles is not conjectured as a psychological law or probability. Ideally anyway, I should like to show that their acknowledgement is the only choice consistent with the full description of the original position. The argument aims eventually to be strictly deductive... We should strive for a kind of moral geometry with all the rigor which this name connotes. (Rawls 1971, 121)

Indeed, Rawls carries out his project by adjusting our conceptions to one another until we reach as state of reflective equilibrium and so ensures that our conception of justice follows from our justifying conceptions. That is, he ensures that, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would agree to our conception of justice and only to our conception of justice. As he explains, “We want to define the original position so that we get the desired solution” (Rawls 1971, 141). In this way, when we have reached this state, we not only will have reached at least a provisional conclusion to our inquiry but also will have made manifest a valid argument—an argument wherein our conception of justice follows from our justifying conceptions.¹⁸

To summarize, Rawls argues that, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us has an interest in securing his ability to pursue what he values in life and can advance it by securing for himself the primary goods of rights, liberties, opportunities, powers, income, wealth, and self-respect. For these goods support one’s ability to pursue what one values in life irrespective of its specific features. Rawls further argues that, when we are behind the veil of

¹⁸ Curiously, Rawls suggests in several places that he has not discovered and delineated a strictly valid argument—that a rigorous moral geometry has not been achieved. He writes, “Unhappily the reasoning I shall give will fall far short of this, since it is highly intuitive throughout” (Rawls 1971, 121). Thus he concludes, “The ideal outcome would be that these conditions determine a unique set of principles; but I shall be satisfied if they suffice to rank the main traditional conceptions of justice” (Rawls 1971, 18). But Rawls seems too modest here. For, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would reason that, in the worst possible case, our conception of justice secures his primary goods to a greater extent or in a more optimal way than an alternative that differs from it only marginally, which means that each of us would not only agree to our conception over such an alternative but also agree to our conception over any alternative that differs from it more significantly. In this way, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, it would seem that each of us *would* agree to our conception of justice and only to our conception of justice. Thus I would argue that a rigorous moral geometry *has* been achieved or, at least, closely approximated.

ignorance, each of us would agree to our conception of justice and not some other because each of us would reason that our conception secures his primary goods better than any other and would do so by comparing it with an alternative that differs from it only marginally and in the worst possible case. Now Rawls suggests that our conception of justice consists of two principles, which are ranked in lexical order. The first principle, the principle of greatest equal liberty, secures equal limited liberty but limited only so much as is necessary to avoid conflicts. The second principle itself consists of two parts: the second part, the principle of fair equality of opportunity, secures equal access to careers and their prerogatives except when unequal access is based on unequal qualifications caused by natural inequalities and the first part, the difference principle, secures equal access to material resources except when unequal access is to the benefit of the least advantaged. And Rawls argues that, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would agree to our conception of justice—or would affirm his *right* to the primary goods specified by its principles—both because it secures his primary goods better than any other and because it is stable in the sense of being compatible with basic psychological laws and principles. Importantly, I want to argue that Rawls is *not* saying that our conception of justice *had to be* a conception of this kind but that it *happens to be* a conception of this kind, which we have come to accept and internalize because we have all been subject to the same institutions, at least with regard to the institutions that make up the basic structure of society. And this means that this conception is only a historical contingency, which makes perfect sense if the sense of justice we come to have—along with its underlying conceptions—depends on the epoch and nation in which we happen to find ourselves. Finally, Rawls carries out his project to describe our sense of justice by adjusting our conceptions to one another until we reach a state of reflective equilibrium and so ensures that our conception of justice follows from our justifying

conceptions. In this way, when we have reached this state, we not only will have reached at least a provisional conclusion to our inquiry but also will have made manifest a valid argument.

To this point, we have been discussing the conceptions underlying our sense of justice. Let us now briefly consider what a society whose institutions embody and express these conceptions would be like. To begin with, such a society would be what Rawls calls “a well-ordered society.” That is, it would be “one designed to advance the good of its members and effectively regulated by a public conception of justice... a society in which everyone accepts and knows that the others accept the same principles of justice, and the basic social institutions satisfy and are known to satisfy these principles” (Rawls 1971, 453-4). Thus such a society would be one whose institutions embody and express and are known to embody and express a conception of justice, which its citizens come to accept and internalize and know that others come to accept and internalize insofar as these institutions succeed in promoting their good. In this way, it would be one whose citizens desire to act justly and work to maintain these institutions—one characterized by stability and a tendency to endure (Rawls 1971, 454).

Now a well-ordered society may take many possible forms. That is, its institutions may embody and express many possible conceptions of justice. But a well-ordered society whose institutions embody and express *our* conception of justice would secure for each of its citizens the primary goods of rights, liberties, opportunities, powers, income, wealth, and self-respect to the greatest extent or in the most optimal way possible. That is, it would be one in which the *right* to these goods is secured for each. In this way, such a society would secure for each of its citizens his ability to pursue what he values life *irrespective of its specific features*. That is, it would be one in which, as Rawls famously says, the right is prior to the good. As he explains, “The principles of right, and so of justice, put limits on which satisfactions have value; they

impose restrictions on what are reasonable conceptions of one's good... We can express this by saying that in justice as fairness the concept of right is prior to that of the good" (Rawls 1971, 31). Indeed, a well-ordered society whose institutions embody and express *our* conception of justice would be one in which each citizen must stay within the limits set by the principles of justice but may otherwise pursue what he values in life, whatever it is, in whichever way he wants. That is, it would be one in which, "Everyone is assured an equal liberty to pursue whatever plan of life he pleases so long as it does not violate what justice demands" (Rawls 1971, 94).

Now a well-ordered society whose institutions embody and express our conception of justice would be one whose citizens pursue a great variety of different ends and join together with others who pursue the same, similar, or complimentary ends. That is, it would be what Rawls calls "a union of social unions." He writes, "The main idea is simply that a well-ordered society (corresponding to justice as fairness) is itself a form of social union. Indeed, it is a union of social unions" (Rawls 1971, 527). In fact, such a society would be one whose citizens not only pursue a great variety of different ends but also view it as good that they do so. As Rawls explains,

Now this variety in conceptions of the good is itself a good thing, that it, it is rational for members of a well-ordered society to want their plans to be different. The reasons for this are obvious. Human beings have various talents and abilities the totality of which is unrealizable by any one person or group of persons. Thus we not only benefit from the complementary nature of our developed inclinations but we take pleasure in one another's activities. It is as if others were bringing forth a part of ourselves that we have not been able to cultivate. We have had to devote ourselves to other things, to only a small part of what we might have done. (Rawls 1971, 448)

Indeed, insofar as a well-ordered society is one in which the right is prior to the good, it is one whose citizens will not only pursue different ends and form social unions but also view it as

good that they do so. In other words, it is a society in which citizens view the variation in their ends and the formation of their unions as being to their advantage.

Importantly, Rawls' intention here is not to provide a blueprint for the ideal society in any strong sense but to provide a sketch of a society whose institutions fully embody and express our conception of justice. And, indeed, since our society already does so to a large degree, this sketch is bound to seem familiar. However, they are not in all ways identical. And this is where the projects of social critique and reform become possible. And Rawls would surely argue that such projects should be undertaken. However, he would also insist that they could not be understood as attempts to bring about an ideal society in some strong sense. Rather, they could only be understood as attempts to bring our society more into line with our sense of justice, which is not only contingent but also specific to our time and place. That is, he would reiterate his claim that "We have to concede that as established beliefs change, it is possible that the principles of justice which it seems rational to choose may likewise change" (548). As we have seen, this claim and others like it have radical implications for the entire project *A Theory of Justice*. And these implications are relevant not just for its advocates, but also—and perhaps more importantly—for its critics, to whom we may now turn.

Chapter 2: The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism

In this chapter, my primary task is to assess the communitarian critique of liberalism as it is developed in Michael Sandel's *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* and Charles Taylor's *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Now Sandel's text is an obvious choice for at least two reasons. First, it is an obvious choice because of its status in the communitarian canon. Indeed, Sandel's *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* is not only widely credited with having inaugurated the communitarian critique as such (even though Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* was published a year earlier) but also widely regarded as being its truest representative (Mulhall 1996, 40). Second, it is an obvious choice because of its specific project. For Sandel's book is a focused and sustained critique of John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*. And, if Rawls's text is in fact representative of the variety of liberalism that appeals to the ideal of individualism, Sandel's critique warrants close attention.

But Taylor's text is a less obvious choice. For *The Ethics of Authenticity* is not widely considered to be one of his major contributions to the communitarian critique, especially in comparison with his influential article "Atomism" and his magnum opus *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. But, in my judgment, this is a mistake. For, I would argue, *The Ethics of Authenticity* goes far beyond "Atomism" in the sense that it not only argues that the ideal of individualism is a shared ideal that must be actively sustained but also explains what the ideal of individualism is and why this ideal and the variety of liberalism that appeals to this ideal have the potential to give rise to socially unhappy consequences in much greater depth. And, I would argue, it even surpasses *Sources of the Self* in the sense that it explains these things with much greater focus and precision. Thus, in my judgment, *The Ethics of Authenticity* should be considered to be one of Taylor's major contributions to the communitarian critique. And, if

Taylor's critique in general is the most promising in this tradition, this work warrants close attention as well.

In this chapter, I will proceed in three stages. In the first, I will assess the communitarian critique as it is developed in Sandel's *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. And, in the end, I will argue that none of his arguments succeeds as a critique of Rawls' theory. In the second, I will assess the communitarian critique as it is developed in Taylor's *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Ultimately, I will argue that his critique is promising as a critique of Rawls' liberalism as it is developed in *A Theory of Justice* in the sense that it seems to provide a very good explanation for why the ideal of individualism and the variety of liberalism that appeals to this ideal have the potential to give rise to socially unhappy consequences. But I will also argue that his critique is problematic in the sense that it seems not to propose solutions that could prevent these consequences from arising. The third stage will consist in an attempt to determine whether or not Taylor's critique is also promising as a critique of Rawls' liberalism as it is developed in *Political Liberalism* and as a critique of liberal perfectionism as it is developed in Will Kymlicka's *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*. And, in the end, I will argue that it is promising here as well. Let us begin with the first stage and Sandel's critique.

§1: Sandel's Critique and its Limitations

Sandel characterizes his project in *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* as being to critique what he calls "deontological liberalism," the variety of liberalism first advanced by Immanuel Kant in his practical writings and, in Sandel's view, later advanced by John Rawls in his *A Theory of Justice*. What is deontological liberalism? Sandel defines it as the variety of liberalism in which there is an *absolute* priority of the right over the good. That is, he defines it as the variety in which the right cannot be violated under any circumstances for the sake of any

good. In this way, Sandel distinguishes deontological liberalism from other varieties of liberalism, such as the variety advanced by John Stuart Mill in his *On Liberty*, in which the right can—at least in principle—be violated under some circumstances for the sake of some good, such as utility.

Now Sandel observes that if, in deontological liberalism, there is an absolute priority of the right over the good, then the right cannot be grounded in any good. For if it were, then the right could—at least in principle—be violated under some circumstances for the sake of that good. Thus Sandel observes that if, in this variety of liberalism, there is an absolute priority of the right over the good, then the right must be grounded elsewhere. As he explains,

On the full deontological view, the primacy of justice describes not only a moral priority but also a privileged form of justification; the right is prior to the good not only in that its claims take precedence, but also in that that its principles are independently derived... From the standpoint of moral foundations, then, the primacy of justice amounts to this: the virtue of the moral law does not consist in the fact that it promotes some goal or end presumed to be good. It is instead an end in itself, given prior to all other ends, and regulative with respect to them. (Sandel 1998, 2-3)

Thus Sandel observes that if, in deontological liberalism, there is an absolute priority of the right over the good, then the right cannot be grounded in any good and must be grounded elsewhere. Or, put differently, the right must have “a privileged form of justification” and its principles must be “independently derived.” And Sandel argues that, in this variety of liberalism, the right is, in fact, grounded not in any good but in the essential nature of the human subject (Sandel 1998, 6-7).

But Sandel observes that if, in deontological liberalism, the right is grounded not in any good but in the essential nature of the human subject, then the subject itself cannot be constituted by any good. For, if it were, then the right would—at least indirectly—be grounded in and could—at least in principle—be violated under some circumstances for the sake of that good.

And Sandel argues that, in this variety of liberalism, the subject itself is, in fact, not constituted in this way. As he explains,

On the deontological view, what matters above all is not the ends we choose but our capacity to choose them. And this capacity, being prior to any particular end it may affirm, resides in the subject... As the right is prior to the good, so the subject is prior to its ends. (Sandel 1998, 6-7)

Thus Sandel argues that, in deontological liberalism, the subject itself is, in fact, not constituted by any good. Or, more precisely, it is “prior to” any good in the sense that it has the “capacity to choose” its good. And Sandel calls this subject “the unencumbered self.”

Now Sandel carries out his project in *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* by critiquing deontological liberalism not as such but as it is, in his view, advanced in Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*. And, in doing so, he presents arguments of two different kinds. In the first, Sandel attempts to demonstrate that certain elements of Rawls’ theory are incompatible with one another. Thus they may be called “coherence arguments.” And he ultimately presents three major arguments of this kind. In the second, Sandel attempts to demonstrate that certain elements of Rawls’ theory are incompatible with certain essential aspects of our experience. Thus they may be called “experience arguments.” And he ultimately presents two major arguments of this kind. Furthermore, in both kinds of arguments, Sandel also tries to show, in some cases, either that one of these elements of Rawls’ theory or that one of these essential aspects of our experience implies not an unencumbered self but a subject of an entirely different sort. As he explains,

Justice cannot be primary in the deontological sense, because we cannot coherently regard ourselves as the kind of beings the deontological ethic—whether Kantian or Rawlsian—requires us to be. But attending to this liberalism is of more than critical interest alone. For Rawls’ attempt to situate the deontological self, properly reconstructed, carries us beyond deontology to a conception of community that marks the limits of justice and locates the incompleteness of the liberal ideal. (Sandel 1998, 14)

Indeed, in both kinds of arguments, Sandel also tries to show, in some cases, either that one of these elements of Rawls' theory or that one of these essential aspects of our experience implies not an unencumbered self but a subject that may be called "the encumbered self."

What is the encumbered self? Sandel never defines it clearly but it would seem to have at least the following three features: First, unlike the unencumbered self, which is not constituted by any good, the encumbered self is instead constituted by some good or goods. In this way, it is a subject of an entirely different sort—a subject that is not prior to but inseparable from its moral ends. Second, the encumbered self is constituted specifically by some *intersubjective* good or goods—it is a subject that is not prior to but inseparable from its *shared* moral ends. And this has an important consequence. For, insofar as the encumbered self is constituted specifically by its shared moral ends, it is constitutively connected to the other subjects with whom its moral ends are shared. Third, unlike the unencumbered self, which has the capacity to choose its good, the encumbered self has instead the capacity to discover its good or goods. In this way, it is a subject of an entirely different sort—a subject that does not decide on but assents to its moral ends. The encumbered self, in these three features, will be developed in more detail as we proceed.

Let us consider each of Sandel's arguments in turn, beginning with his three major coherence arguments.

Sandel's first major coherence argument is that, in Rawls' theory, our justifying conceptions have a basis that makes them incompatible with the absolute priority of the right over the good.¹ What is this basis? Sandel writes,

For what keeps the method of reflective equilibrium from being circular is the availability of independent criteria of judgment at each end, however provisional, in the light of which we adjust and correct the other. In the case of justice, this means that we must have some (independent if provisional) way of judging *both* the desirability of the principles of

¹ Curiously, Mulhall and Swift, in their *Liberals and Communitarians*, neglect to address this important argument in their summary of *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*.

justice a particular description may yield *and* the plausibility or reasonableness of the motivational assumptions that generate them... The independent yet provisional criteria on the side of the desirability of the principles are given by our intuitions about what is just. But what is the corresponding ground on the descriptive side? What we are looking for is that *with reference to which* the plausibility of the premises of the original position might be assessed. (Sandel 1998, 43)

Now Sandel correctly indicates that all of the conceptions underlying our sense of justice, both our conception of justice and our justifying conceptions, have their basis in “independent criteria of judgment.” And he correctly indicates that our conception of justice has its basis in our considered judgments—or, as he puts it, in “our intuitions about what is just.” But, he asks, what do our justifying conceptions have their basis in? And he ultimately answers that our justifying conceptions, both our conception of our essential nature and our conception of the essential nature of our world, have their basis in empirical facts, though of two different kinds.

On the one hand, Sandel suggests that our conception of our essential nature has its basis in empirical facts of a rather strange kind. As he explains,

We must be prepared to live with the vision contained in the original position... in the sense of accepting its description as an accurate reflection of human moral circumstance, consistent with our understanding of ourselves... Now the description of this subject will have a distinctive logical status... It will in some sense be empirical, but not ‘merely’ empirical. Given the reflexive character of such descriptions, they are not merely descriptive but also partly constitutive of the kind of beings we are. Our knowing them is part of what makes them true, and makes us the reflexive, self-interpreting creatures that we are. (Sandel 1998, 48-50)

Now Sandel correctly indicates that our conception of our essential nature has its basis in our considered reasons—or, as he puts it, in “our understanding of ourselves.” But he departs from Rawls here in an interesting way. For, in Rawls’ view, insofar as our conception of our essential nature has its basis in our understanding of ourselves, it may or may not reflect what we *really* are. But, in Sandel’s view, our understanding of ourselves partly *constitutes* what we are. Thus, insofar as our conception of our essential nature has its basis in our understanding of ourselves, it

does reflect what we *really* are.² In this way, it has its basis in an understanding that not only reflects but also constitutes reality. That is, it has its basis in a fact that is not only discovered in but also shaped by experience—in a fact that is “empirical, but not ‘merely’ empirical.”

On the other hand, Sandel suggests that our conception of the essential nature of our world has its basis in empirical facts of a quite normal kind. As he explains, “The conditions that occasion the virtue of justice are empirical conditions. About this Rawls is clear and unabashed” (Sandel 1998, 29). Thus Sandel asserts that our conception of the essential nature of our world has its basis in and does reflect what the world *really* is. That is, it has its basis in a fact that is simply discovered in experience—in a fact that is ‘merely’ empirical. And Sandel claims that Rawls is entirely clear on this point. But, as we have seen, he is not. To be sure, in some places, his language seems to suggest that this conception does reflect how things really are, as when he writes, for example, “a human society is characterized by the circumstances of justice” (Rawls 1971, 129-30). However, in other places, his language seems to suggest that this conception may or may not reflect how things really are, as when he writes, for example, “Conceptions of justice must be justified by the conditions of our life *as we know it* or not at all [emphasis added]” (Rawls 1971, 454). Thus Rawls is not entirely clear on this point. And, again, I want to argue that, in Rawls’ view, our conception of the essential nature of our world has its basis in our considered reasons—or, as one might put it, in our understanding of our world—and, insofar as it does, it may or may not reflect what the world *really* is.³

² Sandel never explains what he means here in any detail but he is clearly relying on the work of Charles Taylor and, specifically, on his essay “Self-Interpreting Animals.” As Taylor writes in his essay, “our interpretation of ourselves and our experience is constitutive of what we are, and therefore cannot be considered as merely a view on reality, separable from reality, nor as an epiphenomenon, which can be by-passed in our understanding of reality” (Taylor 1985, 47).

³ Interestingly, Sandel comes close to reaching this position. For he correctly indicates that Rawls, in his discussion of his method, suggests that we begin by looking to our considered convictions about our essential nature and the essential nature of our world—convictions that are generally shared, weak, and reasonable—in order to discover some fitting self-conceptions. But, he asks, what is Rawls’ definition of “weak” in this context? Now Sandel

Now Sandel's argument here is that if our justifying conceptions have their basis in empirical facts of any kind, then they have a basis that makes them incompatible with the absolute priority of the right over the good. As he explains, "an empiricist understanding of the original position seems deeply at odds with deontological claims. For if justice depends for its virtue on certain empirical preconditions, it is unclear how its priority could be unconditionally affirmed" (Sandel 1998, 30). Sandel's point here is that if our justifying conceptions have their basis in empirical facts of any kind, then they are ultimately contingent because they have their basis in factors that are ultimately contingent. Indeed, our conception of our essential nature would change if our understanding of ourselves, and hence, in Sandel's view, what we *really* are, were to change. And our conception of the essential nature of our world would change if what the world *really* is were to change. And, in either case, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, we could very well agree to an entirely different conception of justice. To illustrate, suppose that our conception of our essential nature were to change because our understanding of ourselves had changed from one involving moral personality and rationality to one involving filial responsibility to God. In that case, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us could very well agree not to a conception of justice that secures his primary goods but to a conception of justice that secures his spiritual salvation. In this way, the absolute priority of the right over the good would be undermined. Thus, if our justifying conceptions have their basis in

immediately rejects the possibility that it could mean "uncontroversial" or "unproblematic," for the convictions that Rawls looks to would seem to be no less controversial or problematic than any number of potential alternatives. But he lingers on the possibility that it could mean "accepted by a statistical majority of people," which would be the same as "generally shared." As Sandel explains, "If neither [of two convictions] is more or less conceptually demanding than the other, the alternative sense would seem to refer to statistical probabilities... Much of Rawls' language seems to suggest this general probabilistic usage" (Sandel 1998, 46). In this way, Sandel comes close to reaching the position that, in Rawls' view, our conception of the essential nature of our world has its basis in our considered reasons—or, as one might put it, in our understanding of our world—and, insofar as it does, it may or may not reflect what the world *really* is. As Sandel writes, "One is tempted to say, in line with the normative side [involving our conception of justice], that the criteria of plausibility [for the descriptive side involving our justifying conceptions] are given by our 'intuitions' about what is empirically true" (Sandel 1998, 43). However, Sandel ultimately—and mysteriously—rejects this possibility as well.

empirical facts of any kind, then they have a basis that makes them incompatible with absolute priority of the right over the good.

Sandel's first major coherence argument succeeds in its attempt to demonstrate that, in Rawls' theory, our justifying conceptions have a basis that makes them incompatible with the absolute priority of the right over the good. But does it succeed as a critique? I want to argue it does not. For it seems that Sandel's argument could only succeed as a critique if Rawls were an unqualified proponent of deontological liberalism and, therefore, an unqualified proponent of the absolute priority of the right over the good. Now Sandel argues that Rawls is precisely this. Thus he writes, "Like Kant, Rawls is a deontological liberal. His book takes the main thesis of the deontological ethic as its central claim" (Sandel 1998, 15). And he cites the following passage in particular as evidence:

Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought. A theory however elegant and economical must be rejected or revised if it is untrue; likewise laws and institutions no matter efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust. Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. For this reason justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others. It does not allow that the sacrifices imposed on a few are outweighed by the larger sum of advantages enjoyed by many. Therefore in a just society the liberties of equal citizenship are taken as settled; the rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests. The only thing that permits us to acquiesce in an erroneous theory is the lack of a better one; analogously, an injustice is tolerable only when it is necessary to avoid an even greater injustice. Being first virtues of human activities, truth and justice are uncompromising. (Rawls 1971, 4)

Indeed, this passage would seem to provide strong evidence that Rawls is an unqualified proponent of deontological liberalism and, therefore, an unqualified proponent of the absolute priority of the right over the good—or so one might think if one were not to read any further. However, if one were to do so, one would find that the passage continues with the following caveat: "These propositions seem to express our *intuitive conviction* of the primacy of justice. No

doubt they are expressed too strongly [emphasis added]” (Rawls 1971, 4). As we have seen, such caveats are entirely typical. And they would seem to provide strong evidence that Rawls is only a *qualified* proponent of deontological liberalism and, therefore, only a *qualified* proponent of the absolute priority of the right over the good. And I want to argue that Rawls is precisely this.

To clarify, I want to argue that Rawls is a proponent of both deontological liberalism and the absolute priority of the right over the good *insofar as he is a fellow citizen who shares our sense of justice*. Indeed, *qua* citizen, he will share our convictions about these things. However, *qua* philosopher, he will recognize that our convictions are ultimately contingent. In this way, I want to argue that Rawls is a proponent of neither deontological liberalism nor the absolute priority of the right over the good *insofar as he is a political philosopher whose project is to describe our sense of justice*. Thus he writes, “I do not argue that these arrangements are the only ones that are just. Rather my intention is to show that the principles of justice... define a workable political conception, and are a reasonable approximation to and extension of our considered judgments” (Rawls 1971, 195). And again, “We have to concede that as established beliefs change, it is possible that the principles of justice which it seems rational to choose may likewise change” (Rawls 1971, 548). And, insofar as Rawls is only a qualified proponent of deontological liberalism and, therefore, only a qualified proponent of the absolute priority of the right over the good, I want to suggest that he would respond to Sandel’s argument that he is “entitled to conclude only that justice is the first virtue of certain kinds of societies” by granting it entirely (Sandel 1998, 30).

Sandel’s second major coherence argument is that, in Rawls’ theory, our conception of our essential nature is incompatible with the structure of a social contract argument. What is this structure? Sandel suggests that it is as follows: our conception of justice is itself justified if we,

who are plural in number, would *choose* it in a situation where we are attending only to our essential nature and to the essential nature of our world (Sandel 1998, 122). Thus it requires that it is possible for us, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, 1) to be plural in number and 2) to choose a conception of justice. As Sandel explains, “In basing the principles of justice on agreement among parties, Rawls emphasizes two characteristics that the hypothetical contract shares with actual ones, namely, choice and plurality” (Sandel 1998). However, Sandel argues that our conception of our essential nature makes it impossible for us, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, either to be plural in number or to choose a conception of justice, which means that it is incompatible with the structure of a social contract argument.

First, Sandel argues that our conception of our essential nature makes it impossible for us, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, to be plural in number. As he explains,

Rawls speaks throughout of the *parties* to the original position and in the Kantian interpretation even speaks of noumenal *selves*. But since the veil of ignorance has the effect of depriving the parties, *qua* parties to the original position, of all distinguishing characteristics, it becomes difficult to see what their plurality could possibly consist in. (Sandel 1998, 131)

Sandel’s point is that, insofar as our essential nature is defined so as to include only our moral personality and our rationality, it is impossible for us to be plural in number when we are behind the veil of ignorance in the sense that it is impossible for *our perspectives* to be plural in number when we are there. For the veil of ignorance ensures that we are attending to none of the factors that could cause us to differ from one another and that could, therefore, cause our perspectives to differ from one another. Of course, if our essential nature were defined in some other way, this would not be the case. For example, if it were defined so as to include, say, our conceptions of our good, at least some of these factors would be attended to when we were behind the veil of ignorance. In this way, it would be possible for us to be plural in number when we were there.

Second, Sandel argues that our conception of our essential nature makes it impossible for us, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, to choose a conception of justice. As he explains,

On this interpretation, what it means to say that the principles chosen will be just ‘whatever they turn out to be’ is simply that, given their situation, the parties are guaranteed to choose the *right* principles. While it may be true that, strictly speaking, they can choose any principles they wish, their situation is designed in such a way that they are guaranteed to ‘wish’ to choose only certain principles. (Sandel 1998, 127)

Sandel’s point is that, insofar as our essential nature is defined so as to include only our moral personality and our rationality, it is impossible for us to choose a conception of justice when we are behind the veil of ignorance in the sense that it is impossible for us either to confront or to resolve any genuine dilemmas over a conception of justice when we are there. For the veil of ignorance ensures that we are attending to none of the factors that could lead us to encounter real conflicts within ourselves and that could, therefore, lead us to make real decisions about a conception of justice. Of course, if our essential nature were defined in some other way, this would not be the case. For example, if it were defined so as to include, say, our conceptions of our good, at least some of these factors would be attended to when we were behind the veil of ignorance. In this way, it would be possible for us to choose a conception of justice when we were there.⁴

But Sandel goes further. For even if, in Rawls’ theory, our conception of our essential nature is incompatible with the structure of a social contract argument as Sandel defines it, it is compatible with the structure of another sort of argument. What is this structure? Sandel suggests that it is as follows: our conception of justice is itself justified if we, *whose perspectives are one*

⁴ Sandel notes that, in Rawls’ theory, our conception of our essential nature makes it impossible for us, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, also to engage in various other activities that are often involved in making contracts, such as deliberating, discussing, and bargaining (Sandel 1998, 128-9). David Lyons makes a similar point in his early article “Nature and Soundness of the Contract and Coherence Arguments” when he writes, “These features of Rawls’ hypothesis simplify the argument enormously, for they mean that the deliberators reason alike from the exact same premises. An incidental effect is that this is a ‘contract argument’ in the most attenuated sense, since no room is left for disagreement, bargaining, or even relevant differences among the parties” (Lyons 1976, 151).

in number, would *acknowledge* it in a situation where we are attending only to our essential nature and to the essential nature of our world. But he observes that the structure of this argument implies not an unencumbered self but a subject with at least some of the features of the encumbered self. For, in the first place, it implies a subject with the status of what Sandel calls “an intersubjective being.” That is, it implies a subject whose perspective is united with the perspectives of others and who, in this way, is connected to the others with whom its perspective is shared. And, in the second place, it implies a subject with agency in what Sandel calls “a cognitive sense.” That is, it implies a subject who agrees to its conception of justice and who, in this way, does not decide on but assents to its conception of justice.⁵ Thus Sandel writes,

The secret to the original position—and the key to its justificatory force—lies not in what they *do* there but rather in what they *apprehend* there. What matters is not what they choose but what they see, not what they decide but what they discover. What goes on in the original position is not a contract after all, but the coming to self-awareness of an intersubjective being. (Sandel 1998, 132)

Thus Sandel argues that, in Rawls’ theory, our conception of our essential nature is compatible with the structure of another sort of argument, which implies a subject with at least some of the features of the encumbered self. That is, it implies a subject who participates in “the coming to self-awareness of an intersubjective being.”

Sandel’s second major coherence argument succeeds in its attempt to demonstrate that, in Rawls’ theory, our conception of our essential nature is incompatible with the structure of a social contract argument as he defines it. But does it succeed as a critique? As before, I want to argue it does not. And this for two reasons. In the first place, it is not clear why the structure of a social contract argument has to be as Sandel defines it. Indeed, *why* does he suggest that it

⁵ As Sandel explains, “In this sense of agreement, to agree to a proposition amounts to acknowledging its validity, and this requires neither that others be involved nor that I take the validity of the proposition to be a matter of choice. It may be enough that I *see* it to be valid, as when I agree to (accept, or acknowledge) the proposition that $2 + 2 = 4$. To agree in this sense is to grasp something already there” (Sandel 1998, 130).

requires that it is possible for us, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, 1) to be plural in number and 2) to choose a conception of justice? Sandel ultimately seems to suggest the former because, he observes, plurality is 1) implied in the word “contract,” 2) required for entering into ordinary contracts, 3) presupposed by the possibility of a conception of justice, 4) presupposed by the necessity for a conception of justice, and 5) ignored by unjust political institutions (Sandel 1998, 124). But these reasons are dubious. Indeed, the first is trivial, suggesting only that the phrase “social *contract* argument” might be misleading in some respects, and the rest are complete *non sequiturs*. For, even if plurality is in fact required, presupposed, and ignored in all these ways, it is not clear why this means that it must be possible for us to be plural in number when we are behind the veil of ignorance. And, even if it does mean this, it is not clear why this means that it must be possible for *our perspectives* to be plural in number when we are there. Indeed, it is not obvious how any of these conclusions follow.⁶

Sandel ultimately seems to suggest that latter because, he argues, choice is 1) required for the exercise of our capacity to have a conception of our good and 2) required for the execution of what Rawls calls “pure procedural justice,” which is exemplified in the structure of a social contract argument. But these reasons too are dubious. As before, the first is a complete *non sequitur*. For, even if choice is in fact required for the exercise of our capacity to have a conception of our good, it is not clear why this means that it must be possible for us to choose a conception of justice when we are behind the veil of ignorance. As before, it is not obvious how

⁶ In fact, with his second reason, Sandel seems to make the same mistake that he at one point criticizes Robert Nozick for making, namely, the mistake of confusing ordinary contracts with contract arguments. As Sandel writes, “But [Nozick’s] objection overlooks the distinction between the imperfect procedural justice that typically describes our actual agreements, and the pure procedural justice that obtains, or at least is meant to obtain, in the original position. Or to put the point another way, the objection confuses contracts with contract arguments” (Sandel 1998, 112).

this conclusion follows. The second is dubious on more complicated grounds and so requires a more involved discussion.

For what is pure procedural justice? And how is it exemplified in the structure of a social contract argument? In general, pure procedural justice is exemplified by any procedure that generates an outcome that is just simply *because* it was so generated. In this way, it generates an outcome whose justness is established without reference to any standard external to the procedure. As Rawls explains, “pure procedural justice obtains when there is no independent criterion for the right result: instead there is a correct or fair procedure such that the outcome is likewise correct or fair, whatever it is, provided that the procedure has been correctly followed” (Rawls 1971, 86). In particular, pure procedural justice is exemplified in the structure of a social contract argument because that structure involves a procedure that generates a conception of justice that is itself justified insofar as we would agree to it in a situation where we are attending only to our essential nature and to the essential nature of our world. In this way, it generates an outcome whose justness is established without reference to any standard external to the procedure. Thus Rawls writes, “The idea of the original position is to set up a fair procedure so that any principles agreed to will be just. The aim is to use the notion of pure procedural justice as a basis of theory” (Rawls 1971, 136).

Sandel argues that choice is required for the execution of what Rawls calls “pure procedural justice,” which is exemplified in the structure of a social contract argument. His argument here is obscure but it appears to be as follows: If a procedure generates an outcome whose justness is *discovered*, then it would seem to generate an outcome whose justness is determined in advance and is established with reference to some standard external to the procedure. But a procedure that exemplifies pure procedural justice cannot generate such an

outcome. Thus it cannot generate an outcome whose justness is discovered—it must generate an outcome whose justness is *chosen*. As Sandel writes, “for contract to be prior to principle, the parties must choose the principles of justice rather than find them” (Sandel 1998, 122). This argument is dubious for at least two reasons. First, it is not clear how a procedure that exemplifies pure procedural justice *could* generate an outcome whose justness is chosen. Indeed, even if the *outcome* were chosen, how could *its justness* be chosen? It seems that its justness could only be chosen if the standard with reference to which its justness is established were also chosen. But this would mean that its justness were arbitrary, which seems incompatible with justness as such. Second, even if a procedure that exemplifies pure procedural justice *could* generate an outcome whose justness is chosen, it is not clear why it *must* do so. Indeed, even if a procedure that generates an outcome whose justness is discovered does generate an outcome whose justness is determined in advance, why must its justness be established with reference to some standard *external* to the procedure? It seems that its justness could also be established with reference to some standard *internal* to the procedure. For Rawls insists that only a “*correct or fair procedure*” exemplifies pure procedural justice, which suggests that such a procedure has standards of correctness or fairness internal to the procedure with reference to which the justness of an outcome could be established. And this would mean that a procedure could both exemplify pure procedural justice and generate an outcome whose justness is discovered.

In the second place, even if the structure of a social contract argument has to be as Sandel defines it, it is not clear why Rawls could not simply set aside the structure of that argument and take up the structure of the other sort of argument outlined above, which implies a subject with at least some of the features of the encumbered self. Indeed, the structure of such an argument would seem to be fully compatible with the strategic summary presented in the previous chapter.

And, in fact, Sandel himself notes that, in some passages, Rawls' language seems to suggest the structure of such an argument anyway (Sandel 1998, 130). For example, he writes,

To begin with, it is clear that since the differences among the parties are unknown to them, and everyone is equally rational and similarly situated, each is convinced by the same arguments. *Therefore, we can view the choice in the original position from the standpoint of one person selected at random. If anyone after due reflection prefers a conception of justice to another, then they all do, and a unanimous agreement can be reached* [emphasis added]. (Rawls 1971, 128)

And he also writes, the principles of justice “are the principles that free and rational persons concerned to further their own interests would *accept* in an initial position of equality [emphasis added]” (Rawls 1971, 118). In such passages, Rawls' language seems to suggest the structure of the other sort of argument outline above, which implies a subject whose perspective is united with the perspectives of others and who agrees to its conception of justice—a subject who participates in “the coming to self-awareness of an intersubjective being.” And, if Rawls were to take up the structure of such an argument, it could be to his considerable advantage. For it brings out what *really* makes his conception of justice powerful, which is not that we, who are plural in number, would choose it when we are behind the veil of ignorance but that it reflects our essential nature and the essential nature of our world.

Sandel's third major coherence argument is that, in Rawls' theory, our conception of our essential nature is incompatible with the reasoning that would lead each of us to agree to our conception of justice and, specifically, to the difference principle. What is this reasoning? Sandel suggests that it is as follows: our essential nature does not include our natural talents; thus the individuals endowed with them possess these natural talents only in a weak and contingent way and so deserve none of the material rewards that follow from them; but this is not the case for society as a whole; for society as a whole possesses these natural talents in a strong and necessary way—as a “common asset”— and so deserves all of the material rewards that follow

from them; thus each of us has a rightful share in these material rewards; thus, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would agree to a principle that secures equal access to them except when an unequal access is to the benefit of the least advantaged; that is, each of us would agree to the difference principle. Thus this reasoning requires that it is possible for society as a whole to possess these natural talents in a strong and necessary way. However, Sandel argues that our conception of our essential nature makes this impossible, which means that it is incompatible with the reasoning that would lead each of us to agree to the difference principle.

Now Sandel's argument here is that if our essential nature does not include our natural talents, then *neither* the individuals endowed with them *nor* society as a whole possesses these natural talents in a strong or necessary way or deserves any of the material rewards that follow from them. As Sandel explains,

To show that individuals, as individuals, do not deserve or possess 'their' assets is not necessarily to show that society as a whole *does* deserve or possess them. Simply because the attributes accidentally located in me are not *my* assets, why must it follow, as Rawls seems to think, that they are common assets, rather than nobody's assets? If they cannot properly be said to belong to me, why assume automatically that they belong to the community? Is their location in the *community's* province any less accidental, any less arbitrary from a moral point of view? (Sandel 1998, 96)

Thus our conception of our essential nature is incompatible with the reasoning that would lead each of us to agree to the difference principle. But Sandel goes further and observes that this reasoning implies not an unencumbered self but a subject with at least some of the features of the encumbered self. For it implies a subject with the status of what he calls "a wider subject of possession" (Sandel 1998, 134). That is, it implies a subject whose natural talents are shared by others and who, in this way, is connected to the others with whom these natural talents are shared. Thus Sandel writes "an adequate defense of the difference principle must presuppose a conception of the person unavailable on deontological assumptions... we cannot be subjects for

whom justice is primary and also be subjects for whom the difference principle is a principle of justice” (Sandel 1998, 66).

Sandel’s third major coherence argument succeeds in its attempt to demonstrate that, in Rawls’ theory, our conception of our essential nature is incompatible with the reasoning that would lead each of us to agree to the difference principle as he defines it. But does it succeed as a critique? As before, I want to argue it does not. For it is not clear why this reasoning has to be as Sandel defines it. Indeed, I want to suggest that it could be as follows: our essential nature does not include our natural talents; thus neither the individuals endowed with them nor society as a whole possesses these natural talents in a strong and necessary way or deserves any of the material rewards that follow from them; thus none of us has a rightful share in these material rewards; *but none of us has a rightful cause to protest their redistribution either*; thus, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would agree to a principle that secures equal access to them except when an unequal access is to the benefit of the least advantaged; that is, each of us would agree to the difference principle. Thus this reasoning neither requires that it is possible for society as a whole to possess these natural talents in a strong and necessary way nor implies a subject with any of the features of the encumbered self—it is compatible with our conception of our essential nature. Indeed, this reasoning would seem to be fully compatible with the strategic summary presented in the previous chapter. And, in fact, Sandel himself raises this as a possibility when he writes,

To this Rawls might reply that no antecedent social claim is involved, since the parties to the original position are... faced... only with the prudential question of how, given the relevant constraints on information, etc., they would, from the standpoint of individual self-interest, *prefer*, that individual shares be allocated. (Sandel 1998, 102)

Now Sandel ultimately—and mysteriously—rejects this possibility. But I want to argue that Rawls would in fact reply in this way. To be sure, Rawls sometimes presents the reasoning that

would lead each of us to agree to the difference principle as involving society as a whole possessing natural talents as a common, social, or collective asset (Rawls 1971, 101, 107, 179). However, he does not usually do so—in fact, he does not even list these terms in his otherwise comprehensive index. Indeed, Rawls usually presents this reasoning as involving each of us simply following the maximin rule, which neither requires that it is possible for society as a whole to possess these natural talents in a strong and necessary way nor implies a subject with any of the features of the encumbered self and so is compatible with our conception of our essential nature. And, insofar as Rawls would in fact reply in this way, I want to suggest that Sandel’s argument is rendered moot.

Now that we have considered Sandel’s three major coherence arguments, let us turn to his two major experience arguments, in which he attempts to demonstrate that Rawls’ theory “fails plausibly to account for certain indispensable aspects of our moral experience” (Sandel 1998, 178-9).

Sandel’s first major experience argument is that, in Rawls’ theory, our conception of our essential nature is incompatible not only with how we really *do* but also with how we really *must* conceive of ourselves and so is incompatible with an essential aspect of our experience. That is, Sandel argues that we do not and cannot really think of ourselves as subjects who are prior to our goods—as unencumbered selves. Indeed, if we did, we would be unable to make sense of many common experiences such as, for example, that of being *radically* transformed by changes in our moral ends. For such experiences require that we think of ourselves not as subjects who are prior to our goods but as subjects who are constituted by our goods. And, insofar as such aspects of our experience are essential, we do and must really think of ourselves in this way. As Sandel explains, we necessarily conceive of ourselves in terms of “loyalties and convictions whose

moral force consists partly in the fact that living by them is inseparable from understanding ourselves as the particular persons we are” as well as “more or less enduring attachments and commitments which taken together partly define the [persons we are]” (Sandel 1998, 179). Put differently, we necessarily conceive of ourselves not as unencumbered selves but as encumbered selves.

Sandel’s second major experience argument is that, in Rawls’ theory, our conception of our essential nature is incompatible not only with how we really *do* but also with how we really *must* conceive of our relationships with others and so is incompatible with an essential aspect of our experience. That is, Sandel argues that we do not and cannot really think of our relationships with others as relationships between subjects who are prior to their goods—as relationships between unencumbered selves. Indeed, if we did, we would be unable to make sense of many common experiences such as, for example, that of relating to our friends as subjects who are constituted by intersubjective goods. As Sandel explains,

Uncertain which path to take, I consult a friend who knows me well, and together we deliberate, offering and assessing by turns competing descriptions of the person I am, and of the alternatives I face as they bear on my identity. To take seriously such deliberation is to allow that my friend may grasp something I have missed, may offer a more adequate account of the way my identity is engaged in the alternatives before me. To adopt this description is to see myself in a new way; my old self-image now seems partial or occluded, and I may say in retrospect that my friend knew me better than I knew myself. To deliberate with friends is to admit this possibility, which presupposes in turn a more richly-constituted self than deontology allows. (Sandel 1998, 181)

Indeed, if we did think of our relationships with others as relationships between subjects who are prior to their goods—as relationships between unencumbered selves—we would be unable to make sense of the common experience of knowing our friends’ goods better than they do. For such experiences require that we think of our relationships with others not as relationships between subjects who are prior to their goods but as relationships between subjects who are

constituted by their goods and, in fact, by intersubjective goods. And, insofar as such aspects of our experience are essential, we do and must really think of our relationships with others in this way. As Sandel explains, we necessarily conceive of our relationships with others in terms of “a common vocabulary of discourse and a background of implicit practices and understandings within which the opacity of the participants is reduced if never fully dissolved” (Sandel 1998, 172). Put differently, we necessarily conceive of our relationships with others not as relationships between unencumbered selves but as relationships between encumbered selves.

Now Sandel’s major experience arguments succeed as critiques only if they succeed in showing that these purportedly essential aspects of our experience are, in fact, essential aspects of our experience. But neither succeeds in showing this. That is, neither succeeds in showing that we really *must* conceive of ourselves and our relationships with others in the ways Sandel suggests. And, indeed, considerable evidence exists not only that we really must not do so but also that many of us really do not. In their now classic study of American society, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, Robert Bellah and his team of sociologists address precisely the issues of how we do really think of ourselves and how we do really think of our relationships with others. With regard to the first issue, they write,

Of course, not everyone in America or everyone to whom we talked believes in an unencumbered self arbitrarily choosing its “values,” “entirely independent” of everyone else... But we found such people often on the defensive, struggling for the biblical and republican language that could express their aspirations, often expressing themselves in the very therapeutic rhetoric that they consciously reject. It is a rhetoric that educated middle-class Americans, and, through the medium of television and other mass communications, increasingly all Americans, cannot avoid. (Bellah 1985, 83-4)

With regard to the second issue, they first point out that the classical definition of friendship included three components: “Friends must enjoy one another’s company, they must be useful to

one another, and they must share a common commitment to the good” (115). And they then write,

Today we tend to define friendship most in terms of the first component: friends are those we take pleasure in being with... What we least understand is the third component, shared commitment to the good, which seems to us quite extraneous to the idea of friendship. In a culture dominated by expressive and utilitarian individualism, it is easy for us to understand the components of pleasure and usefulness, but we have difficulty seeing the point of considering friendship in terms of common moral commitments. (Bellah 1985, 115)

In these passages and many others like them, Bellah and his coauthors provide considerable evidence not only that we really must not conceive of ourselves and our relationships with others in the ways Sandel suggests but also that many of us—and, in fact, increasingly many of us—really do not. In this way, they provide considerable evidence that these purportedly essential aspects of our experience are not, in fact, essential aspects of our experience.⁷

To conclude, I have tried to argue that none of Sandel’s major coherence arguments or experience arguments succeeds as a critique of Rawls’ theory. Regarding the latter, I tried to argue that none of them succeeds because they are all based in undemonstrated assumptions about our experience—specifically, in the undemonstrated assumptions that certain ways of viewing ourselves and that certain ways of viewing our relationships with others are, in fact, essential aspects of our experience. Regarding the former, I tried to argue that none of them succeeds because they are all based in misunderstandings about Rawls’ project in *A Theory of Justice*—specifically, in the misunderstandings that it expresses the views of an unqualified proponent of deontological liberalism, that the structure of its social contract argument requires our plurality and choice, and that its argument for the difference principle requires our natural

⁷ At other points, they make similar claims about how we do really think of our love relationships with others. For example, they write, “Americans are, then, torn between love as an expression of spontaneous inner freedom, a deeply personal, but necessarily somewhat arbitrary, choice, and the image of love as a firmly planted, permanent commitment, embodying obligations that transcend the immediate feelings or wishes of the partners in a love relationship” (Bellah 1985, 93).

talents to be possessed by society as a whole. Now the strategic summary presented in the previous chapter was meant to anticipate these misunderstandings in order to make Rawls' project in *A Theory of Justice* less vulnerable to these specious arguments and, in so doing, allow us better to assess the more promising ones. And I want to suggest that some of these more promising ones have been advanced by another communitarian critic of liberalism, Charles Taylor, to whose work we may now turn.

§2. Taylor's Critique and its Limitations

Now Sandel's critique and Taylor's critique differ in at least two important ways. First, they differ in their targets. For Sandel's critique, as it is developed in his *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, takes Rawls' project in *A Theory of Justice* as its main target—it is, in this way, comparatively narrow. But Taylor's critique, as it is developed in *The Ethics of Authenticity*, takes what Taylor calls “the ideal of authenticity” as its main target. That is, it takes as its main target the ideal that, in Taylor's view, Rawls' liberalism and others like it have their basis in—it is, in this way, comparatively broad. Second, they differ in their executions. For Sandel's arguments consist in what I have called “coherence arguments” and “experience arguments.” But Taylor's argument employs what may be called “the method of immanent critique.” Let us commence with the second stage and Taylor's critique.

Taylor characterizes his project in *The Ethics of Authenticity* as being to address what he calls three “malaises of modernity” or three “features of our contemporary culture and society that people experience as a loss or decline” (Taylor 1991, 1). These include: 1) what he calls “a loss of meaning,” 2) the primacy of instrumental reason, and 3) what he calls “a loss of freedom” (Taylor 1991, 10). Now Taylor characterizes his project in *The Ethics of Authenticity* as being to address all of these malaises of modernity but he carries it out by focusing on the first of these

features of our contemporary culture and society (Taylor 1991, 12). That is, he carries it out by focusing on the inability of many in our age to experience their lives as meaningful.⁸

Now Taylor argues that the first malaise of modernity, like the other two, is rooted in what he calls “our moral horizon.” What is a moral horizon? Put simply, it is a categorial framework that underlies an age and specifies its conception of the good.⁹ That is, a moral horizon specifies “a moral ideal... a picture of what a better or higher mode of life would be, where ‘better’ and ‘higher’ are defined not in terms of what we happen to desire or need, but offer a standard of what we ought to desire” (Taylor 1991, 16). Put differently, it is a categorial framework that underlies an age and specifies its conception of what human beings ought to do and to be. Now, for Taylor, the moral horizons of different ages will differ in that the conceptions of the good they specify will differ. But the conception of the good specified by the moral horizon of an age will be shared by those whose age it is. And Taylor argues that the first malaise of modernity is rooted in our moral horizon or, more precisely, in the conception of the good specified by the moral horizon of our age. But what is this conception of the good? And how does it give rise to this malaise?¹⁰

⁸ Taylor notes that these malaises have been commented on by many philosophers and critics. As he observes, “The worries I will be talking about are very familiar. No one needs to be reminded of them; they are discussed, bemoaned, challenged, and argued against all the time in all sorts of media” (Taylor 1991, 2). For example, he notes that the first malaise has been noticed by philosophers such as Alexis de Tocqueville, Søren Kierkegaard, and Friedrich Nietzsche (Taylor 1991, 4) and by social scientists such as Daniel Bell, Christopher Lasch, and Robert Bellah (Taylor 1991, 14). To this list, he might have added existentialist philosophers like Camus and Sartre as well as writers like Samuel Beckett and William Burroughs and filmmakers like Ingmar Bergman and Woody Allen.

⁹ What Taylor calls here a “moral horizon” is nothing other than what he calls in his *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* a “background language” or a “background picture” (Taylor 1989, 3). Indeed, the notion of a categorial framework that underlies an age and specifies its conception of the good is the basis for much of Taylor’s work. For example, it is the basis for the famous distinction he introduces in his article “What is Human Agency?” between the “simple weigher,” who merely weighs the strength of competing desires, and the “strong evaluator,” who evaluates the moral worth of desires (Taylor 1971, 21-7). For the strong evaluator does so precisely on the basis of the conception of the good specified by her moral horizon. And it is also the basis for the famous critique he advances in his articles “How is Mechanism Conceivable?” and “Cognitive Psychology” (and elsewhere) of the explanations of human behavior offered by the social sciences.

¹⁰ One might wonder here whether the idea of a moral horizon as such is really plausible. Indeed, is there such a thing as a categorial framework that underlies an age and specifies a conception of the good that is shared by those

Taylor claims that the conception of the good specified by the moral horizon of our age is what he calls “the ideal of authenticity.” What is the ideal of authenticity? Taylor suggests that it is a conception of the good that found one of its earliest expressions in the work of Johann Gottfried Herder. As he explains,

Herder put forward the idea that each of us has an original way of being human. Each person has his or her own “measure” is his way of putting it. This idea has entered very deep into modern consciousness... There is a certain way of being human that is *my* way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else’s. But this gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life, I miss what being human is for *me*. (Taylor 1991, 28-9)

Thus the ideal of authenticity is a conception of the good that says human beings ought to look within themselves in order to discover their own original ways of being human and, on the basis of what they discover, be true to themselves (Taylor 1991, 61). And, insofar as the ideal of authenticity is the conception of the good specified by the moral horizon an age, it will be shared by those whose age it is. Thus Taylor observes, “I think that everyone in our culture feels the force of this ideal... we can practically *define* the cultural mainstream of Western liberal society in terms of those who feel the draw of this and the other main forms of individualism” (Taylor 1991, 74-5).¹¹

whose age it is? The question is fair. In response, I would say two things. First, I would say that the fact that certain moral judgments seem to be almost universally shared within a culture suggests that a conception of the good *might* be shared as well—the idea is perhaps not wholly implausible. Second, I would say that, even if one finds the idea wholly implausible, Taylor certainly does not. And, in my attempt to interpret his critique in *The Ethics of Authenticity*, I am not concerned to take up this question in depth here.

¹¹ One might wonder here whether the idea of a moral horizon of our age is really plausible. Indeed, is there such a thing as a categorial framework that underlies our age and specifies a conception of the good that is shared by those whose age it is? And, if there is, is the conception of the good the ideal of authenticity? These questions are fair. In response to the first, I would say the same two things as before—the fact that certain moral judgments seem to be almost universally shared within our culture (for example, against slavery or theocracy) suggests that a conception of the good *might* be shared as well and that, even if one finds the idea wholly implausible, Taylor certainly does not and I am not concerned to take up this question in depth here. In response to the second, I would say, along with Taylor, that, “it is hard to find anyone we would consider as being in the mainstream of our Western societies who, faced with their own life choices, about career or relationships, gives no weight at all to something they would identify as fulfillment, or self-development, or realizing their potential, or for which they would find some other term from the range that has served to articulate this ideal. They may override these considerations in the name of other goods, but they feel their force” (Taylor 1991, 75).

Thus Taylor argues that the first malaise of modernity, like the other two, is rooted in the conception of the good specified by the moral horizon of our age or, more precisely, in the ideal of authenticity. But not in the ideal of authenticity as such. For Taylor claims that the ideal of authenticity admits of at least two different forms, a genuine form, which we will call “the ideal of authenticity proper,” and a nongenuine form, which he calls “the ideal of self-determining freedom.” And Taylor argues that the first malaise of modernity is rooted in the ideal of authenticity or, more precisely, in the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form. Put differently, he argues that the inability of many in our age to experience their lives as meaningful is rooted in the ideal of self-determining freedom. What is the ideal of self-determining freedom? Taylor suggests that it is a conception of the good that found one of its earliest expressions in the work of Jean Jacques Rousseau. As he explains,

Rousseau also articulated a closely related idea in a most influential way. This is the notion of what I want to call self-determining freedom. It is the idea that I am free when I decide for myself what concerns me, rather than being shaped by external influences... Self-determining freedom demands that I break the hold of all such external impositions, and decide for myself alone. (Taylor 1991, 27)

Thus the ideal of self-determining freedom is a conception of the good that says human beings ought to look within themselves in order to discover their own original ways of being human and, on the basis of what they discover, be true to themselves *without being constrained by any external factors and, in particular, by any other ideals*. And Taylor argues that the first malaise of modernity, like the other two, is rooted in the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form or, put differently, in the ideal of self-determining freedom.

Now Taylor argues that the first malaise of modernity, like the other two, can and should be overcome not by our rejecting the ideal of authenticity as such but by our rejecting the ideal of self-determining freedom in favor of the ideal of authenticity proper. As he explains,

The picture I am offering is rather that of an ideal that has degraded but that is very worthwhile in itself, and indeed, I would like to say, unreproducible by moderns. So what we need is neither root-and-branch condemnation nor uncritical praise; and not a carefully balanced trade-off. What we need is a work of retrieval, through which this ideal can help us restore our practice. (Taylor 1991, 23)

Thus Taylor argues that the first malaise of modernity, like the other two, can and should be overcome through what he calls “a work of retrieval.” That is, he argues that it can and should be overcome not by our rejecting the ideal of authenticity as such but by our retrieving the ideal of authenticity proper from out of the ideal of self-determining freedom. But how is it that Taylor carries out this work of retrieval? What is his method?

Taylor carries out this work of retrieval through the method of immanent critique. What is the method of immanent critique? In general, it is the method of critique whereby the standard against which the object of critique is measured is internal to the object itself. In this way, the method of immanent critique has at least one great advantage over any other method of critique. For, in the case of any other method of critique, the standard against which the object of critique is measured is external to the object itself. And this means that the validity of the standard requires a separate proof. But, in the case of the method of immanent critique, the standard against which the object of critique is measured is internal to the object itself. And this means that the validity of the standard requires no separate proof—it derives from the object itself. Now, through this method, the object of critique either succeeds in measuring up to its own internal standard or fails to measure up to its own internal standard. And, insofar as the object of critique succeeds in this way, it must be allowed to stand. But, insofar as the object of critique fails in this way, it must not be allowed to stand—it must be either amended or abandoned.

Thus Taylor carries out this work of retrieval through the method of critique whereby the standard against which the ideal of authenticity is measured is internal to the ideal itself (Taylor

1991, 35). And he does so for at least two reasons beyond its great advantage over any other method of critique. First, in showing how the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form fails to measure up to its own internal standard, Taylor also takes himself to be showing how it gives rise to the first malaise of modernity. Indeed, in his view, insofar as the ideal of self-determining freedom fails in this way, it gives rise to the inability of many in our age to experience their lives as meaningful. Second, in showing how the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form fails to measure up to its own internal standard, Taylor also takes himself to be showing why it must be amended so as to become the ideal of authenticity in its genuine form. Indeed, in his view, insofar as the ideal of self-determining freedom fails in this way, it must be amended so as to become the ideal of authenticity proper. But what is the standard against which the ideal of authenticity is to be measured?

Taylor argues that the standard against which the ideal of authenticity is to be measured is one that is internal to all moral ideals, namely, that it must be an ideal such that its expression can be *recognized* as valuable by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified. And this in two senses. First, it must be an ideal such that its expression can be *respected* by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified. What does it mean for the expression of an ideal to be respected? Put simply, it means that the *fact* of its expression is recognized as valuable. Thus any moral ideal that can be expressed in any way succeeds in measuring up to the standard in this sense. And, importantly, in the case of such an ideal, its different expressions can be respected equally. Second, it must be an ideal such that its expression can be *esteemed* by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified. What does it mean for the expression of an ideal to be esteemed? Put simply, it means that the *excellence* of its expression is recognized as valuable. Thus only a moral ideal that can be expressed in more and less perfect ways

succeeds in measuring up to the standard in this sense. And, importantly, in the case of such an ideal, its different expressions cannot be esteemed equally.¹² Now, for Taylor, any moral ideal that succeeds in measuring up to this standard in both senses is an ideal such that its expression can be recognized as *meaningful* by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified. But why is this standard one that is internal to all moral ideals?

Taylor argues that this standard is one that is internal to all moral ideals because only if a moral ideal is an ideal such that its expression can be recognized as meaningful by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified can an ideal be a true moral ideal. For Taylor argues that only if a moral ideal is an ideal such that its expression can be recognized as meaningful by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified can its expression be experienced as meaningful by the one whose expression it is. In this way, he argues that one's ability to experience one's own life as meaningful depends upon the ability of others to recognize it as meaningful. And, for Taylor, this is an instance of a more general principle. For he argues that one's ability to experience oneself and one's own life as anything at all depends upon the ability of others to recognize them as such. As he explains, "our identity requires recognition by others... our identities are formed in dialogue with others, in agreement or struggle with their recognition of us" (Taylor 1991, 45-6). And, as he continues,

In the nature of the case, there is no such thing as inward generation, monologically understood, as I tried to argue above. My discovering my identity doesn't mean that I work it out in isolation but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internalized, with others. That is why the development of an ideal of inwardly generated identity gives a new and crucial importance to recognition. My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others. (Taylor 1991, 47-8)

¹² At one point, Taylor equates esteem with honor and suggests that, in the case of such an ideal, its different expressions cannot be *honored* equally. As he explains, "I am using 'honour' in the ancien régime sense in which it is intrinsically related to inequalities. For some to have honour in this sense it is essential that not everyone have it" (Taylor 1991, 46).

Thus Taylor argues that one's ability to experience oneself and one's own life as anything at all depends upon the ability of others to recognize them as such. For instance, one's ability to experience one's own life as meaningful depends upon the ability of others to recognize it as meaningful. And Taylor argues that only if its expression can be experienced as meaningful by the one whose expression it is can an ideal be a true moral ideal. For a moral ideal is a conception of the good or a conception of what human beings ought to do and to be. That is, it is a conception of what one should strive for in life. But only if its expression can be experienced as meaningful can an ideal be what anyone *would* strive for—no one would strive for an ideal whose expression can only be experienced as meaningless. In this way, Taylor argues that the standard against which the ideal of authenticity is to be measured is one that is internal to all moral ideals, namely, that it must be an ideal such that its expression can be recognized as meaningful by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified.

Now Taylor argues that the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form is an ideal such that its expression can be *respected* by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified. For the ideal of self-determining freedom is a moral ideal that can be expressed in some way. Indeed, he suggests that its expression not only *can be* respected but, in fact, *is* respected in at least three different spheres in our culture. First, Taylor suggests that it is respected in the moral sphere by way of a widely held moral view, which he calls "soft relativism." As he explains,

[According to the moral view of soft relativism] one ought not to challenge another's values. That is their concern, their life choice, and it ought to be respected. The relativism was partly grounded in a principle of mutual respect. In other words, the relativism was itself an offshoot of a form of individualism, whose principle is something like this: everyone has a right to develop their own form of life, grounded on their own sense of what is really important or of value. People are called upon to be true to themselves and to seek their own self-fulfillment. What this consists of, each must, in the last instance, determine for him- or herself. No one else can or should try to dictate its content. This is a familiar enough position today. (Taylor 1991, 13-4)

Those who are committed to soft relativism recognize the *fact* of the expression of the ideal of self-determining freedom as valuable and, indeed, respect its different expressions equally. That is, they respect equally the different lives of those are true to themselves without being constrained by any external factors in the sense that they think their lives should not be challenged by others (provided, of course, that their lives do not interfere with the lives of others). And, as Taylor notes, this view is “a familiar enough position today.”¹³

Second, Taylor suggests that it is respected in the social sphere through various practices such as the widespread use of the honorifics of “Mister” and “Ms.” As he explains,

The concept of dignity is the only one compatible with a democratic society, and it was inevitable that the old concept of honour be marginalized. But this has also meant that the forms of equal recognition have been essential to democratic culture. For instance, that everyone should be called Mister, Mrs, or Miss, rather than some people being called Lord or Lady, and others simply by their surnames, or, even more demeaning, by their first names, has been thought crucial in some democratic societies, such as the U.S.A. And more recently, for similar reasons, Mrs and Miss have been collapsed into Ms. Democracy has ushered in a politics of equal recognition, which has taken various forms over the years, and which now has returned in the form of demands for the equal status of cultures and of genders. (Taylor 1991, 46-7)

Indeed, the honorifics of “Mister” and “Ms” signify equal respect for those to whom they refer.

And, as Taylor notes, it “has been thought crucial” in our culture, which, he suggests, is characterized by “a politics of equal recognition,” for these honorifics to refer to everyone.

Third, Taylor suggests that it is respected in the political sphere by way of a widely held political view, which he calls “neutral liberalism.” As he explains,

¹³ Taylor cites Allan Bloom as one who views soft relativism as “a familiar enough position today,” especially among college students. Indeed, as Taylor observes, Bloom’s bestselling *The Closing of the American Mind* “was severely critical of today’s educated youth. The main feature it noted in their outlook on life was their acceptance of a rather facile relativism. Everybody has his or her own ‘values,’ and about these it is impossible to argue. But as Bloom noted, this was not just an epistemological position, a view about what the limits of reason can establish; it was also held as a moral position” (Taylor 1991, 13). Now Taylor shares Bloom’s concerns about soft relativism but he also criticizes Bloom’s apparent failure to recognize that soft relativism is based in a moral ideal. As Taylor observes, “He doesn’t seem to recognize that there is a powerful moral ideal at work here, however debased and travestied its expression might be” (Taylor 1991, 15).

In adopting the ideal, people in the culture of authenticity give support to a certain kind of liberalism, which has been espoused by many others as well. This is the liberalism of neutrality. One of its basic tenets is that a liberal society must be neutral on questions of what constitutes a good life. The good life is what each individual seeks, in his or her own way, and government would be lacking in impartiality, and thus in equal respect for all citizens, if it took sides on this question. (Taylor 1991, 17-8)

Those who are committed to neutral liberalism recognize the *fact* of the expression of the ideal of self-determining freedom as valuable and, indeed, respect its different expressions equally. That is, they respect equally the different lives of those who are true to themselves without being constrained by any external factors in the sense that they think their lives should not be challenged by power (provided, of course, that their lives do not interfere with the lives of others). And, as Taylor notes, this view is “espoused by many others as well.” Thus Taylor suggests that the expression of the ideal of self-determining freedom not only *can be* respected but, in fact, *is* respected in at least three different spheres in our culture.¹⁴ Now, insofar as its different expressions can be respected by those sharing our moral horizon, they can be experienced as respectable by those whose expressions they are. In this way, those who are true to themselves without being constrained by any external factors can enjoy not only respect but also self-respect.

But Taylor argues that the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form is not an ideal such that its expression can be *esteemed* by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified. For the ideal of self-determining freedom is not a moral ideal that can be expressed in more or less perfect ways. Indeed, Taylor suggests that one either is true to oneself without being constrained by any external factors or is not. That is, he suggests that the expression of the ideal

¹⁴ At one point, Taylor connects the first and third of these when he writes, “Two modes of social existence are quite evidently linked with the contemporary culture of self-fulfillment. The first is based on the notion of universal right: everyone should have the right and capacity to be themselves. This is what underlies soft relativism as a moral principle: no one has a right to criticize another’s values. This inclines those imbued with this culture toward conceptions of procedural justice: the limit on anyone’s self-fulfillment must be the safeguarding of an equal chance at this fulfillment for others” (Taylor 1991, 45).

of self-determining freedom is a matter of “yes” or “no” and not a matter of more or less.¹⁵ Now, insofar as its different expressions cannot be esteemed by those sharing our moral horizon, they cannot be experienced as estimable by those whose expressions they are. In this way, those who are true to themselves without being constrained by any external factors cannot enjoy either esteem or self-esteem.¹⁶

Thus Taylor argues that the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form is not an ideal such that its expression can be recognized as *meaningful* by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified. For its expression can be respected but not esteemed. As Taylor explains,

Even the sense that the significance of my life comes from its being chosen—the case where authenticity is actually grounded on self-determining freedom—depends on the understanding that *independent of my will* there is something noble, courageous, and hence significant in giving shape to my own life. There is a picture here of what human beings are like, placed between this option for self-creation, and easier modes of copping out, going with the flow, conforming with the masses, and so on, which picture is seen as true, discovered, not decided. Horizons are given. But more: this minimum degree of givenness, which underpins the importance of choice, is not sufficient as a horizon... It may be important that my life be chosen, as John Stuart Mill asserts in *On Liberty*, but unless some options are more significant than others, the very idea of self-choice falls into triviality and hence incoherence. (Taylor 1991, 39)

Indeed, Taylor suggests that one either “chooses” to be true to oneself without being constrained by any external factors or does not. That is, he suggests that the expression of the ideal of “self-choice” is a matter of “yes” or “no” and not a matter of more or less. Thus its expression can be respected but not esteemed. In this way, the ideal of “self-choice” is not an ideal such that its expression can be recognized as “significant” by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified (Taylor 1991, 37).

¹⁵ One might wonder here whether the idea that one either is true to oneself without being constrained by any external factors or is not is really correct. For it could be argued that one can strive to be true to oneself without being constrained by any external factors to varying degrees of excellence—that the expression of the ideal of self-determining freedom is not only a matter of “yes” or “no” but also a matter of more or less. Now, if this were the case, it would create serious problems for Taylor’s critique. But I will not pursue the issue here.

¹⁶ For an excellent discussion of the difference between respect and esteem as well as their relation to self-respect and self-esteem, see Michael Walzer’s *Spheres of Justice*, chapter 11.

Thus Taylor argues that the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form fails to measure up to its own internal standard. For it is not an ideal such that its expression can be recognized as meaningful by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified. And, insofar as the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form fails in this way, it cannot be a true moral ideal. For, insofar as the ideal of self-determining freedom is not an ideal such that its expression can be recognized as meaningful by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified, its expression cannot be experienced as meaningful by the one whose expression it is. And, insofar as its expression cannot be experienced as meaningful by the one whose expression it is, the ideal of self-determining freedom cannot be what anyone would strive for. Thus Taylor argues that the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form cannot be a true moral ideal. As he explains, “Self-choice as an ideal makes sense only because some *issues* are more important than others... Which issues are significant, *I* do not determine. If I did, no issue would be significant. But then the very ideal of self-choosing *as a moral ideal* would be impossible” (Taylor 1991, 39). And, in showing how the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form fails to measure up to its own internal standard, Taylor also takes himself to be showing how it gives rise to the first malaise of modernity. For one’s ability to experience one’s own life as meaningful depends upon the ability of others to recognize it as meaningful. Indeed, in his view, insofar as the ideal of self-determining freedom fails in this way, it gives rise to the inability of many in our age to experience their lives as meaningful.

Now Taylor argues that the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form fails to measure up to its own internal standard. For it is not an ideal such that its expression can be recognized as meaningful by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified. And, insofar as the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form fails in this way, it must be either amended or abandoned.

Thus Taylor argues that it must be amended so as to become the ideal of authenticity in its genuine form. Put differently, he argues that the ideal of self-determining freedom must be amended so as to become the ideal of authenticity proper. What is the ideal of authenticity proper? Taylor suggests that it is a conception of the good that says human beings ought to look within themselves in order to discover their own original ways of being human and, on the basis of what they discover, be true to themselves *while being constrained by certain external factors and, in particular, by certain other ideals*. What other ideals? Taylor argues that they must be ideals with three features. First, Taylor argues that the other ideals by which human beings ought to be constrained must be specified by the moral horizon of their age. As he explains,

Things take on importance against a background of intelligibility. Let us call this a horizon. It follows that one of the things we can't do, if we are to define ourselves significantly, is suppress or deny the horizons against which things take on significance for us. This is the kind of self-defeating move frequently being carried out in our subjectivist civilization. In stressing the legitimacy of choice between certain options, we very often find ourselves depriving the options of their significance... All options are equally worthy, because they are freely chosen, and it is choice that confers worth. The subjectivist principle underlying soft relativism is at work here. But this implicitly denies the existence of a pre-existing horizon of significance, whereby some things are worthwhile and others less so, and still others not at all, quite anterior to choice. (Taylor 1991, 37-8)

Thus Taylor argues that the other ideals by which human beings ought to be constrained must be specified by the moral horizon of their age. In this way, they will define some things as “worthwhile, and others less so, and still others not at all, quite anterior to choice.”

Second, Taylor argues that these other ideals must be ideals that can be expressed in more or less perfect ways. As he observes,

Defining myself means finding what is significant in my difference from others. I may be the only person with exactly 3,732 hairs on my head, or be exactly the same height as some tree on the Siberian plain, but so what? If I begin to say that I define myself by my ability to play the Hammerklavier like no one else, or revive the traditions of my ancestors, then we are in the domain of recognizable self-definitions. (Taylor 1991, 36)

Indeed, Taylor suggests a number of possible ideals by which human beings ought to be constrained. For example, the ideals of mastery in the arts and fidelity to both secular and religious traditions. And, in all cases, he suggests ideals that can be expressed in more or less perfect ways.

Third, Taylor argues that the other ideals by which human beings ought to be constrained must be discovered by their looking within themselves. As he explains, “If authenticity is being true to ourselves, is recovering our own ‘sentiment de l’existence,’ then perhaps we can only achieve it integrally if we recognize that this sentiment connects us to a wider whole” (Taylor 1991, 91). And he suggests that they may be discovered by their looking within themselves not only in life but also in art and, especially, in poetry. As he explains, “the effort of some of the best of modern poets has been precisely to articulate something beyond the self” (Taylor 1991, 88).¹⁷ And, as he continues,

The Romantic poets and their successors have to articulate an original vision of the cosmos... They make us aware of something in nature for which there are as yet no adequate words. In this ‘subtler language’ —the term is borrowed from Shelley— something is defined and created as well as manifested. (Taylor 1991, 85)

Thus Taylor argues that the other ideals by which human beings ought to be constrained must be discovered by their looking within themselves. In this way, they will define “an original vision” as well as “something beyond the self.” Thus Taylor suggests that the ideal of authenticity proper is a conception of the good that says human beings ought to look within themselves in order to discover their own original ways of being human and, on the basis of what they discover, be true to themselves while being constrained by other ideals with the above three features. But why is it that Taylor argues that the ideal of self-determining freedom must be amended so as to become the ideal of authenticity proper?

¹⁷ Taylor includes among “some of the best of modern poets” Rainer Rilke, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and Thomas Mann (Taylor 1991, 89).

Taylor argues that the ideal of self-determining freedom must be amended so as to become the ideal of authenticity proper because only if it is amended in this way can the ideal of authenticity be an ideal that succeeds in measuring up to its own internal standard. For, in order to be an ideal that succeeds in this way, it must be an ideal such that its expression can be recognized as meaningful by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified. That is, it must be an ideal such that its expression can be not only respected but also esteemed by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified. And, in order to be an ideal that can be recognized in this way, it must be an ideal that can be expressed in more or less perfect ways. But the ideal of authenticity cannot be amended so as to become an ideal such that its expression can be not only respected but also esteemed on its own. Indeed, Taylor suggests that one either is true to oneself in general or is not. That is, he suggests that the expression of the ideal of authenticity on its own is a matter of “yes” or “no” and not a matter of more or less. But, if the ideal of authenticity cannot be amended so as to become an ideal such that its expression can be not only respected but also esteemed on its own, in what way must it be amended? Put simply, it must be amended so as to become an ideal such that its expression involves the expression of *other ideals*. What other ideals? In the first place, they must be ideals that can be expressed in more or less perfect ways. For only if the ideal of authenticity is an ideal such that its expression involves the expression of other ideals with this feature can *it* be an ideal that can be expressed in more or less perfect ways. And only if it is an ideal of this kind can the ideal of authenticity be an ideal such that its expression can be not only respected but also esteemed. That is, only if it is an ideal of this kind can the ideal of authenticity be an ideal such that its expression can be recognized as meaningful. But this is not all.

In the second place, they must be, with regard to those sharing the moral horizon by which the ideal of authenticity is specified, 1) specified by the moral horizon of their age and 2) discovered by their looking within themselves. For only if the ideal of authenticity is an ideal such that its expression involves the expression of other ideals with these features as well can *it* be an ideal that can be 1) *shared* by those whose age it is and 2) *accepted* by them as well. And only if it is an ideal of this kind can the ideal of authenticity be an ideal such that its expression can be not only respected but also esteemed *by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified*. That is, only if it is an ideal of this kind is the ideal of authenticity an ideal such that its expression can be recognized as meaningful *by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified*. But, insofar as the ideal of authenticity is an ideal such that its expression involves the expression of other ideals with these three features, it is nothing other than the ideal of authenticity proper. Thus Taylor argues that the ideal of authenticity proper is an ideal such that its expression can be recognized as meaningful by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified. For its expression can be not only respected but also esteemed. Indeed, Taylor suggests that one can strive to be true to oneself while being constrained by other ideals with the above three features to varying degrees of excellence. That is, he suggests that the expression of the ideal of authenticity proper is not only a matter of “yes” or “no” but also a matter of more or less. And its expression can be not only respected but also esteemed by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified. In this way, Taylor argues that the ideal of self-determining freedom must be amended so as to become the ideal of authenticity proper because only if it is amended in this way can the ideal of authenticity be an ideal that succeeds in measuring up to its own internal standard.

Thus Taylor argues that the ideal of authenticity in its genuine form succeeds in measuring up to its own internal standard. For it is an ideal such that its expression can be recognized as meaningful by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified. And, insofar as the ideal of authenticity in its genuine form succeeds in this way, it can be a true moral ideal. For, insofar as the ideal of authenticity proper is an ideal such that its expression can be recognized as meaningful by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified, its expression can be experienced as meaningful by the one whose expression it is. And, insofar as its expression can be experienced as meaningful by the one whose expression it is, the ideal of authenticity proper can be what someone would strive for. Thus Taylor argues that the ideal of authenticity in its genuine form can be a true moral ideal. And, in showing how the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form fails to measure up to its own internal standard, Taylor also takes himself to be showing why it must be amended so as to become the ideal of authenticity in its genuine form. For only if it is amended in this way can the ideal of authenticity be an ideal that succeeds in measuring up to its own internal standard. Indeed, in his view, insofar as the ideal of self-determining freedom fails in this way, it must be amended so as to become the ideal of authenticity proper.

Thus Taylor argues that the first malaise of modernity, like the other two, can and should be overcome not by our rejecting the ideal of authenticity as such but by our retrieving the ideal of authenticity proper from out of the ideal of self-determining freedom. For, insofar as the ideal of authenticity proper is an ideal such that its expression can be recognized as meaningful by those sharing the moral horizon by which is specified, its expression can be experienced as meaningful by the one whose expression it is. Now the first malaise of modernity is nothing other than the inability of many in our age to experience their lives as meaningful. Thus it could

be overcome by our rejecting the ideal of self-determining freedom in favor of the ideal of authenticity proper. For one's ability to experience one's own life as meaningful depends upon the ability of others to recognize it as meaningful. Thus Taylor argues that the first malaise of modernity could be overcome by our retrieving the ideal of authenticity proper from out of the ideal of self-determining freedom.

In my view, Taylor's critique is both promising and problematic. Indeed, Taylor's critique is promising in that, if its basic assumptions are granted, it succeeds in its attempt to demonstrate that the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form fails to measure up to its own internal standard and that, insofar as the ideal fails in this way, it 1) cannot be a true moral ideal, 2) gives rise to the first malaise of modernity, and 3) must be either amended or abandoned. But this is not all. For, insofar as his critique succeeds in this way, it is not only promising as a critique of the ideal of self-determining freedom but also promising as a critique of anything that has its basis in this ideal. In particular, it is promising as a critique of both "soft relativism" and "neutral liberalism." For both of these have their basis in the ideal of self-determining freedom. Indeed, those who are committed to soft relativism and/or neutral liberalism recognize the fact of the expression of the ideal of self-determining freedom as valuable and, indeed, respect its different expressions equally. That is, they respect equally the different lives of those who are true to themselves without being constrained by any external factors in the sense that they think their lives should not be challenged by others and/or by power (provided, of course, that their lives do not interfere with the lives of others). In this way, both of these not only have their basis in an ideal that cannot be a true moral ideal and must be either amended or abandoned but also provide support for the inability of many in our age to experience their lives as meaningful. Thus Taylor's critique is also promising as a critique of both soft relativism and neutral liberalism.

But is Taylor's critique also promising as a critique of Rawls' liberalism as it is developed in *A Theory of Justice*? I would like to argue that it is. But, if it is, then Rawls' liberalism must have its basis in the ideal of self-determining freedom or, if not in this ideal, in a conception of the good that is similar enough to the ideal of self-determining freedom to be vulnerable to Taylor's critique. But the Rawlsian liberal will likely protest here. Indeed, he will claim, Rawls' liberalism has its basis neither in this conception of the good nor in any other conception of the good. For, in this variety of liberalism, the right is prior to the good. In this way, he will claim, Rawls' liberalism has its basis not in a conception of the good but in a conception of the right. Thus the Rawlsian liberal will likely protest. But, I would like to argue, this protest is incoherent. For it suggests that a political theory need not have its basis in a conception of the good. And this is impossible. For a political theory is a theory of where the power to govern ought to be located and how it ought to be used. And "ought" implies a conception of the good. For a political theory says that it is better for the power to govern to be located in these hands rather than in those and that it is better for it to be used to do these things than to do those. But "better" with respect to what? Indeed, one thing can be better than another only with respect to a conception of the good. In this way, a political theory must have its basis in a conception of the good.

Consider, for example, the case of liberalism. In general, liberalism says that it is better for the power to govern to be located in the hands of the people and their representatives than, say, in the hands of a priestly class and that it is better for it to be used primarily to protect certain basic rights than, say, primarily to enforce religious law. The different varieties of liberalism all agree on this. But "better" with respect to what? Indeed, one thing can be better than another only with respect to a conception of the good. In this way, liberalism must have its

basis in a conception of the good.¹⁸ The different varieties of liberalism almost all agree on this as well. Indeed, if they disagree with one another, it is on the particular conceptions of the good they have their bases in. For the Hobbsian liberal, a liberal society is better than, say, a theocracy because it better preserves human life. Kant's liberalism says that it is better because it better expresses and enables autonomy. For the Millian liberal, a liberal society is better than, say, a theocracy because it better promotes human progress. Thus they all agree that liberalism must have its basis in a conception of the good. Indeed, Rawls' liberalism is one of the only varieties of liberalism that disagrees on this.¹⁹ But, insofar as it says that it is better for the power to govern to be located in these hands than in those and that it is better for it to be used to do these things than to do those, it *must* have its basis in a conception of the good. Thus, I would like to argue, the Rawlsian liberal's protest is incoherent. Indeed, the question is not whether or not Rawls' liberalism has its basis in a conception of the good but which conception it has its basis in.²⁰

Now Rawls' liberalism would seem to have its basis in a conception of the good that says each human being ought to pursue what he values in life irrespective of its specific features. Indeed, Rawls argues that, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would agree to

¹⁸ Taylor makes a similar point in his influential essay "Atomism" when he writes, "asserting a right is more than issuing an injunction. It has an essential conceptual background, in some notion of the moral worth of certain properties or capacities, without which it would not make sense" (Taylor 1985e, 195).

¹⁹ Rawls' liberalism even disagrees with Richard Rorty's liberalism on this. For Rorty's liberalism says that a liberal society is better than, say, a theocracy because it better prevents cruelty. Indeed, for Rorty, liberals are "people for whom (to use Judith Shklar's definition) 'cruelty is the worst thing they do'" (Rorty 1989, 74). Thus they are committed to the "idea that we all have an overriding obligation to diminish cruelty, to make human beings equal in respect to their liability to suffering" (Rorty 1989, 88). In this way, even Richard Rorty's liberalism agrees that liberalism must have its basis in a conception of the good. Indeed, if it disagrees with other varieties of liberalism, it is in refusing to provide a ground for that conception. As Rorty explains, "liberals have come to expect philosophy to do a certain job—namely, answering questions like 'Why not be cruel?' and 'Why be kind?'... But that expectation is a result of a metaphysical upbringing" (Rorty 1989, 94).

²⁰ Thomas Nagel picks up on this in his article "Rawls on Justice" when he writes that the restrictions of the original position and the veil of ignorance "can be justified only in terms of a conception of the good. It is one of those cases in which there is no neutrality to be had, because neutrality needs as much justification as any other position" (Nagel 1976, 9).

our conception of justice and not some other conception because each of us would reason that our conception advances his interests better than any other. And he argues that the primary interest here is the interest that each of us has in expressing his essential nature—in expressing his ability not only to have but also to pursue a conception of his good. Thus Rawls argues that, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would agree to our conception of justice and not some other conception because each of us would reason that our conception advances his interest in securing his ability to pursue what he values in life better than any other. But, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, none of us knows any of the specific features of what he values in life. So Rawls suggests that each of us can advance his interest in securing his ability to pursue what he values in life *irrespective of its specific features*—by proceeding in terms of what he calls “the thin theory of the good” and by securing for himself what he calls “primary goods.” Thus Rawls argues that, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would agree to our conception of justice and not some other conception because each of us would reason that our conception secures his primary goods to a greater extent or in a more optimal way than any other. In this way, Rawls’s liberalism would seem to have its basis in a conception of the good that says each human being ought to pursue what he values in life irrespective of its specific features.²¹ Now, if this is correct, then, in this variety of liberalism, the right is not prior to the good as such. For the right is not prior to what each of us values in life irrespective of its specific features—in fact, it has its basis in it.²² In this way, Rawls’ liberalism would seem to say that a

²¹ Thomas Nagel picks up on this in his article “Rawls on Justice” when he writes that “The original position seems to presuppose not just a neutral theory of the good, but a liberal, individualistic conception according to which the best that can be wished for someone is the unimpeded pursuit of his own path, provided it does not interfere with the rights of others” (Nagel 1976, 10).

²² The Rawlsian liberal might protest here that this is not, in fact, a conception of the good at all but, rather, something else entirely. Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift respond well to this in their *Liberals and Communitarians* when they write, “Even if we do not spell it out, we are necessarily relying upon a complex and sophisticated sense of the good when we advocate those principles; and the claim, essential to Rawls’s understanding of his project, that no such conception is at stake is simply an instance of repression or denial” (Mulhall 1996, 120).

liberal society is better than, say, a theocracy because it better allows everyone to pursue what he values in life, whatever it is, in whichever way he wants. That is, it would seem to say that a liberal society is better because it is one in which “Everyone is assured an equal liberty to pursue whatever plan of life he pleases so long as it does not violate what justice demands” (Rawls 1971, 94).

Now Rawls’ liberalism seems not to have its basis in a conception of the good that is *identical* to the ideal of self-determining freedom. For it does not specify how human beings ought to come to their specific conceptions of the good. For example, it does not specify whether they ought to come to them through choice or through discovery.²³ In this way, this conception of the good does not say, as the ideal of self-determining freedom does, that human beings ought to look within themselves in order to discover their own original ways of being human and, on the basis of what they discover, be true to themselves. But it does specify that, however human beings come to their specific conceptions of the good, they need not be constrained by other ideals that 1) are specified by the moral horizon of their age, 2) can be expressed in more or less perfect ways, and 3) are discovered by their looking within themselves. As Rawls observes,

Thus imagine someone whose only pleasure is to count blades of grass in various geometrically shaped areas such as park squares and well-trimmed lawns... The definition of the good forces us to admit that the good for this man is indeed counting blades of grass, or more accurately, his good is determined by a plan that gives an especially prominent place to this activity... It will be for him the end that regulates the schedule of actions, and this establishes that it is good for him. (Rawls 1971, 432-3)

In this way, this conception of the good does say, as the ideal of self-determining freedom does, that human beings need not be constrained by other ideals with the above three features. Indeed, as Rawls observes, its expression may involve the expression of an ideal such as counting blades of grass in parks and well-trimmed lawns. Now an ideal such as this may be an ideal that is

²³ Sandel stresses in *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* that Rawls’ language in *A Theory of Justice* vacillates between these two possibilities (Sandel 1998, 122-32).

discovered by their looking within themselves and can be expressed in more or less perfect ways. But it will not be one that is specified by the moral horizon of their age. In this way, Rawls' liberalism seems to have its basis in a conception of the good that is similar enough to the ideal of self-determining freedom to be vulnerable to Taylor's critique.

Indeed, Rawls' liberalism seems to be an example of what Taylor calls "neutral liberalism." For those who are committed to Rawls' liberalism seem to recognize the *fact* of the expression of the conception of the good that it has its basis in as valuable and, indeed, seem to respect its different expressions equally. That is, they seem to respect equally the different lives of those who pursue what they value in life irrespective of its specific features in the sense that they think their lives should not be challenged by power (provided, of course, that their lives do not interfere with the lives of others). In this way, Rawls' liberalism seems not only to have its basis in a conception of the good that cannot be a true moral ideal and must be either amended or abandoned but also to provide support for the inability of many in our age to experience their lives as meaningful. Thus I would like to argue that Taylor's critique is also promising as a critique of Rawls' liberalism as it is developed in *A Theory of Justice*.

However, Taylor's critique is problematic in that it argues that the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form must be amended so as to become an ideal that Taylor himself admits is inherently unstable. For, as he admits, the ideal of authenticity in its genuine form has a natural tendency to slide into its nongenuine form. Indeed, Taylor calls this "the slide to subjectivism" and, as he explains, "There are also reasons internal to the ideal of authenticity that facilitate the slide" (Taylor 1991, 60). What are these reasons? Taylor suggests that they are reasons internal to the ideal of authenticity in its genuine form or, more precisely, to the other ideals by which human beings ought to be constrained. For the ideal of authenticity proper is a conception of the

good that says human beings ought to look within themselves in order to discover their own original ways of being human and, on the basis of what they discover, be true to themselves while being constrained by other ideals that are 1) specified by the moral horizon of their age and 2) discovered by their looking within themselves. And the reasons that “facilitate the slide” are reasons internal to the other ideals by which human beings ought to be constrained. For, insofar as human beings discover these other ideals by their looking within themselves, they tend to view these other ideals not as having been specified by the moral horizon of their age but as having been specified by themselves alone. As Taylor explains, “they tend to see fulfillment as just of the self, neglecting or delegitimizing the demands that come from beyond our own desires and aspirations, be they from history, tradition, society, nature, or God; they foster, in other words, a radical anthropocentrism” (Taylor 1991, 58).²⁴ In this way, the ideal of authenticity proper has a natural tendency to slide into the ideal of self-determining freedom. For the ideal of self-determining freedom is a conception of the good that says human beings ought to look within themselves in order to discover their own original ways of being human and, on the basis of what they discover, be true to themselves without being constrained by other ideals. Thus whether they view these ideals as having been specified by the moral horizon of their age or they view these ideals as having been specified by themselves alone makes no difference. As Taylor explains, “the notion of self-determining freedom, pushed to its limit, doesn’t recognize any boundaries, anything given that I *have* to respect in my exercise of self-determining choice”

²⁴ In this connection, Taylor notes that they may even tend to view the ideal of authenticity itself as having been specified by themselves alone and not by the moral horizon of their age. Indeed, he suggests that this possibility is expressed in those strains of postmodern thought that “carry their Nietzschean challenge to our ordinary categories to the point even of ‘deconstructing’ the ideal of authenticity, and the very notion of the self” (Taylor 1991, 60). And he argues that, “As this ‘higher’ theory filters down into the popular culture of authenticity... it further strengthens the self-centered modes, gives them a certain patina of deeper philosophical justification” (Taylor 1991, 61).

(Taylor 1991, 68). Thus, as he admits, the ideal of authenticity in its genuine form has a natural tendency to slide into its nongenuine form.

In this way, Taylor's critique argues that the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form must be amended so as to become an ideal that Taylor himself admits is inherently unstable. And this means at least two things. First, it means that the first malaise of modernity can never be overcome once and for all. For, even if it is overcome for a while by our retrieving the ideal of authenticity proper from out of the ideal of self-determining freedom, the former has a natural tendency to slide back into the latter. But the ideal of self-determining freedom is not an ideal such that its expression can be recognized as meaningful by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified. Thus the ideal of authenticity proper has a natural tendency to slide back into an ideal that fails to measure up to its own internal standard. And, insofar as it does, it again gives rise to the inability of many in our age to experience their lives as meaningful. For one's ability to experience one's own life as meaningful depends upon the ability of others to recognize it as meaningful. As Taylor explains,

In the end, authenticity can't, shouldn't go all the way with self-determining freedom. It undercuts itself. Yet the temptation is understandably there. And where the tradition of authenticity falls for any other reason into anthropocentrism, the alliance easily recommends itself, becomes almost irresistible. That's because anthropocentrism, by abolishing all horizons of significance, threatens us with a loss of meaning and hence a trivialization of our predicament. At one moment, we understand our situation as one of high tragedy, alone in a silent universe, without intrinsic meaning, condemned to create value. But at a later moment, the same doctrine, by its own inherent bent, yields a flattened world, in which there aren't very meaningful choices because their aren't any crucial issues. (Taylor 1991, 68)

Thus the first malaise of modernity can never be overcome once and for all.

Second, it means that the work of retrieval can never be concluded once and for all. For, even if it is concluded for a while by our retrieving the ideal of authenticity proper from out of the ideal of self-determining freedom, the former has a natural tendency to slide back into the

latter. But the ideal of self-determining freedom is not an ideal such that its expression can be recognized as meaningful by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified. Thus the ideal of authenticity proper has a natural tendency to slide back into an ideal that fails to measure up to its own internal standard. And, insofar as it does, it again must be amended so as to become the ideal of authenticity proper. For, insofar as the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form fails in this way, it must be either amended or abandoned. As Taylor explains,

The nature of a free society is that it will always be the locus of a struggle between higher and lower forms of freedom. Neither side can abolish the other, but the line can be moved, never definitively but at least for some people for some time, one way or the other. Through social action, political change, and winning hearts and minds, the better forms can gain ground, at least for a while. In a sense, a genuinely free society can take as its self-description the slogan put forward in quite another sense by revolutionary movements like the Italian Red Brigades: “la lotta continua,” the struggle goes on—in fact, forever. (Taylor 1991, 78)

Thus the work of retrieval can never be concluded once and for all.

In this way, Taylor’s critique is problematic. For it argues that the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form must be amended so as to become an ideal that, at worst, again gives rise to “a loss of meaning” and again must be amended so as to become one of “the higher... forms of freedom” and, at best, is the site of “a struggle” that “goes on—in fact, forever.” As Taylor explains,

The tension comes from the sense of an ideal that is not being fully met in reality. And this tension can turn into a struggle, where people try to articulate the shortfall of practice, and criticize it. On this perspective, society isn’t simply moving in one direction. The fact that there is tension and struggle means that it can go either way. On one side are all the factors, social and internal, that drag the culture of authenticity down to its most self-centered forms; on the other are the inherent thrust and requirements of this ideal. A battle is joined, which can go back and forth. (Taylor 1991, 76-7)

Now Taylor seems to think that his critique is not problematic for all this. Or that, if it is, it will not be problematic for everyone. As he observes, “This may come across as good news or bad news. It will be bad news for anyone who hoped for a definitive solution... Nothing will ever

ensure a systematic and irreversible move to the heights” (Taylor 1991, 77). Now Taylor may be right in thinking that there is no real possibility for a definitive solution. But I think he must be wrong in thinking that the lack of such a solution will not be problematic for many, perhaps most, of those sharing our moral horizon. For, if a definitive solution is simply a solution that does not involve, at best, “tension and struggle” or “a battle” that “can go back and forth,” then I think that such a solution will be hoped for by many. And, if it is, then the lack of such a solution will be “bad news” for many. But then Taylor’s critique will be problematic for many, perhaps most, of those sharing our moral horizon. In this way, in my view, Taylor’s critique is both promising and problematic.

§3. Taylor’s Critique in Relation to Political Liberalism and Liberal Perfectionism

To this point, we have been considering the communitarian critique primarily as it relates to Rawls’ liberalism as it is developed in *A Theory of Justice*. But, in the two decades following its publication, Rawls’ work began to shift toward what he called “political liberalism.” This shift was announced with the publication of *Political Liberalism* (1993) and refined in later works such as “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited” (1997) and *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (2001). And, in these same decades, other important varieties of liberalism began to emerge as well. Perhaps the most significant was the variety developed in such works as Joseph Raz’s *The Morality of Freedom* (1986) and Will Kymlicka’s *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (1989), which has since come to be known as “liberal perfectionism.” At this point, then, we should begin considering the communitarian critique as it relates to these as well. Let us commence with the third stage and Rawls’ liberalism as it is developed in *Political Liberalism*.

Now the differences between Rawls’ liberalism as it is developed in *A Theory of Justice* and Rawls’ liberalism as it is developed in *Political Liberalism* and later works are significant

but they must not be overstated. For there is considerable overlap. Indeed, in political liberalism, our sense of justice in all of its key elements is preserved. That is, our conception of justice, its justifying conceptions, and its argument structure all remain. However, in political liberalism, our sense of justice in all of its key elements is transformed into what Rawls calls “a political conception” and is relegated to the realm of what he calls “public reason.” And this realm is distinct from the realm of what he calls “comprehensive doctrines.” As Rawls explains,

The distinction between a comprehensive doctrine and a political conception is unfortunately absent from *Theory* and while I believe nearly all the structure and substantive content of justice as fairness (including goodness as rationality) goes over unchanged into that conception as a political one, the understanding of the view as a whole is significantly shifted. (Rawls 1996, 177ff.)

But what do these two realms consist in? And how are they related to one another?

Rawls argues that the realm of public reason consists in a plurality of broadly liberal conceptions of justice, justifying conceptions, and argument structures. To be sure, it consists in the ones described in *A Theory of Justice* but it consists in others as well. Now, that public reason consists in a plurality of broadly liberal *conceptions of justice* and *argument structures* is very clear in Rawls’ account. For, with regard to its conceptions of justice, Rawls explains that they all belong to what he calls “a family of reasonable liberal political conceptions of justice” (Rawls 1996, xlviii). By this he means that each conception of justice secures the primary goods of rights, liberties, opportunities, powers, income, and wealth, though each conception may not proportion or prioritize them in exactly the same way as any other (Rawls 1996, xlviii-xlix).

And, with regard to its argument structures, Rawls explains,

The point of the ideal of public reason is that... each of us must have, and be ready to explain, a criterion of what principles and guidelines we think other citizens (who are also free and equal) may reasonably be expected to endorse along with us. We must have some test we are ready to state as to when this condition is met. I have elsewhere suggested as a criterion the values expressed by the principles and guidelines that would

be agreed to in the original position. Many will prefer another criterion. (Rawls 1996, 227)

By this he means that each conception of justice is located with the structure of an argument by which each is itself justified, though each argument may not be structured in exactly the same way as any other.

But, that public reason consists in a plurality of broadly liberal *justifying conceptions* is less clear in Rawls' account. For, if it does, then it must consist in a plurality of broadly liberal conceptions of our essential nature and a plurality of broadly liberal conceptions of the essential nature of our world. Indeed, no broadly liberal conception of justice can be itself justified without these justifying conceptions. But Rawls repeatedly says that,

Accepting the idea of public reason and its principles of legitimacy emphatically does not mean, then, accepting a particular liberal conception of justice down to the last details of the principles defining its content. We may differ about these principles and still agree in accepting a conception's more general features. *We agree that citizens share in political power as free and equal, and that as reasonable and rational they have a duty of civility to appeal to public reason, yet we differ as to which principles are the most reasonable basis of public justification.* The view I have called "justice as fairness" is but one example of a liberal political conception; its specific content is not definitive of such a view [emphasis added]. (Rawls 1996, 226)

And he clarifies,

Since we start with the tradition of democratic thought, we also think of citizens as free and equal persons. The basic idea is that in virtue of their two moral powers (a capacity for a sense of justice and for a conception of the good) and the powers of reason (of judgment, thought, and inference connected with these powers), persons are free. Their having these powers to the requisite minimum degree to be fully cooperating members of society makes persons equal. (Rawls 1996, 18-9)

Thus public reason, it seems, consists not in a *plurality* of justifying conceptions but in a *single set* of justifying conceptions and, in fact, the single set described in *A Theory of Justice*. And this is a potential problem. For, if it does, then it is not clear how public reason could consist in a *plurality* of broadly liberal conceptions of justice or a *plurality* of broadly liberal argument

structures either. Indeed, the only conception of justice that would seem to reflect our nature as free and equal persons with the two moral powers and the only argument structure that would seem viable are the ones described in *A Theory of Justice*. In this way, it is not clear how public reason could consist in the plurality Rawls argues it does. That is, it is not clear how justice as fairness “is but one example of a liberal political conception” or why “its specific content is not definitive of such a view.” But we may leave this potential problem aside.

Rawls also argues that, in what he calls “a well-ordered democratic society,” this plurality of broadly liberal conceptions of justice, justifying conceptions, and argument structures will be embodied and expressed in its political institutions and public culture. That is, this political conception will be embodied and expressed therein. As Rawls explains,

[This] political conception assumes a wide role as a part of public culture. Not only are its first principles embodied in political and social institutions and in public traditions of their interpretation, but the derivation of citizens’ rights, liberties, and opportunities also contains a conception of citizens as free and equal. In this way citizens are made aware of and educated to this conception. They are presented with a way of regarding themselves that otherwise they would most likely never be able to entertain. (Rawls 1996, 71)

And, as he continues, “it is not formulated in terms of any comprehensive doctrine but in terms of certain fundamental ideas viewed as latent in the public political culture of a democratic society” (Rawls 1996, 175). Indeed, in a well-ordered democratic society, this political conception will define what Rawls calls “the political relation” or the state’s relation to its citizens and its citizens’ relation to one another (Rawls 2001, 132). And, in such a society, the political relation will be one wherein the state relates to its citizens and its citizens relate to one another as free and equal persons (Rawls 1996, 136-7). That is, it will be one wherein the state secures for its citizens the primary goods of rights, liberties, opportunities, powers, income, and wealth and its citizens maintain with one another the bonds of civic friendship.

Rawls further argues that, in a well-ordered democratic society, its political institutions and public culture will give rise to what he calls “the fact of reasonable pluralism” or the fact of “a diversity of conflicting and irreconcilable—and what’s more, reasonable—comprehensive doctrines” (Rawls 1996, 36). Now a comprehensive doctrine “includes conceptions of what is of value in human life, as well as ideals of personal virtue and character, that are to inform much of our nonpolitical conduct (in the limit our life as a whole)” (Rawls 1996, 175). That is, it defines “what we as individuals or members of associations see as the whole truth” (Rawls 1996, 225). In this way, a comprehensive doctrine consists in a conception of the good and its justifying conceptions. And a *reasonable* comprehensive doctrine consists in a conception of the good and its justifying conception that are “congruent with, or supportive of, or else not in conflict with, political values as these are specified by a political conception of justice for a democratic regime” (Rawls 1996, 169). That is, it consists in a conception of the good and its justifying conceptions that are supportive of one of the plurality of broadly liberal *conceptions of justice*. In this way, a reasonable comprehensive doctrine consists in a conception of the good and its justifying conceptions that are supportive of a conception of justice that secures the primary goods of rights, liberties, opportunities, income, and wealth. Thus Rawls argues that, in a well-ordered democratic society, its political institutions and public culture will give rise to a realm of comprehensive doctrines that are conflicting in the sense that they are irreconcilable with one another but also reasonable in the sense that they “endorse some member of this family of reasonable conceptions [of justice]” (Rawls 1996, xlix). In this way, they will form what Rawls calls “an overlapping consensus.”

Rawls finally argues that, in a well-ordered democratic society, citizens who run for public office, perform the duties of public office, or discuss fundamental political questions in a

public forum must ultimately explain their platforms, actions, and viewpoints with reference to the conceptions of the realm of public reason and not the conceptions of the realm of comprehensive doctrines (Rawls 1996, 252-3). That is, in such a society, “public discussion, when constitutional essentials and questions of basic justice are at stake, is conducted in terms of the political conception of justice” (Rawls 1996, 44). For, in doing so, citizens appeal to reasons that fulfill what Rawls calls “the criterion of reciprocity” in that they express “public values that we might reasonably expect others to endorse” (Rawls 1996, 253). And, in doing so, they themselves fulfill what Rawls calls their “duty of civility” and potentially live up to what he calls “the *ideal* of public reason” (Rawls 1996, 252).

Now is Taylor’s critique also promising as a critique of Rawls’ liberalism as it is developed in *Political Liberalism*? I would like to argue that is. But, if it is, then political liberalism must have its basis in the ideal of self-determining freedom, or, if not in this ideal, in a conception of the good that is similar enough to be vulnerable to Taylor’s critique. And, in political liberalism, *the political conception* would seem to have its basis in a conception of the good that says each human being ought to pursue what he values in life irrespective of its specific features. For, as we have seen, Rawls’ liberalism as it is developed in *A Theory of Justice* would seem to have its basis in this conception. But, in political liberalism, our sense of justice in all of its key elements is preserved but transformed into a political conception and relegated to the realm of public reason. And, insofar as it is, the political conception would seem to have its basis in this conception as well.

Indeed, as before, Rawls argues that, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would agree to our conception of justice and not some other conception because each of us would reason that our conception advances his interests better than any other. And he again

argues that the primary interest here is the interest that each of us has in expressing his essential nature—in expressing his ability not only to have but also to pursue a conception of his good. As he explains, “Since citizens are regarded as having the two moral powers, we ascribe to them two corresponding higher-order interests in developing and exercising these powers” (Rawls 1996, 74). Thus, as before, Rawls argues that, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would agree to our conception of justice and not some other conception because each of us would reason that our conception advances his interest in securing his ability to pursue what he values in life better than any other. As he explains, “From this it follows that as citizens’ representatives the parties adopt principles that guarantee the conditions securing for those powers their adequate development and full exercise” (Rawls 1996, 74). But, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, none of us knows any of the specific features of what he values in life. So Rawls again suggests that each of us can advance his interest in securing his ability to pursue what he values in life *irrespective of its specific features*—by proceeding in terms of what he calls “the thin theory of the good” and by securing for himself what he calls “primary goods.” As he explains,

To identify the primary goods we look to social background conditions and general all-purpose means normally needed for developing and exercising the two moral powers and for effectively pursuing conceptions of the good with widely different contents... The parties are trying to guarantee the political and social conditions for citizens to pursue their good and to exercise the moral powers that characterize them as free and equal. (Rawls 1996, 75-6)

Thus, as before, Rawls argues that, when we are behind the veil of ignorance, each of us would agree to our conception of justice and not some other conception because each of us would reason that our conception secures his primary goods to a greater extent or in a more optimal way than any other. In this way, the political conception would seem to have its basis in a

conception of the good that says each human being ought to pursue what he values in life irrespective of its specific features. As Rawls observes,

In democratic culture we expect, and indeed want, citizens to care about their basic liberties and opportunities in order to develop and exercise their moral powers and to pursue their conceptions of the good. We think they show a lack of self-respect and weakness of character in not doing so. Thus, the aim of the parties is to agree on principles of justice that enable the citizens they represent to become full persons, that is, adequately to develop and exercise fully their moral powers and to pursue the determinate conceptions of the good they come to form. The principles of justice must lead to a scheme of basic institutions—a social world—congenial to this end. (Rawls 1996, 76-7)

In this way, the political conception would seem to say that a liberal society is better than, say, a theocracy because it better allows everyone to pursue what he values in life, whatever it is, in whichever way he wants.

Now, if this is correct, then the political conception would seem to have its basis in a conception of the good that is similar enough to the ideal of self-determining freedom to be vulnerable to Taylor's critique. In this way, the political conception seems not only to have its basis in a conception of the good that cannot be a true moral ideal and must be either amended or abandoned but also to provide support for the inability of many in our age to experience their lives as meaningful. Thus I would argue that Taylor's critique is also promising as a critique of Rawls' liberalism as it is developed in *Political Liberalism*. But the political liberal will likely protest here. Indeed, he will claim, even if the political conception has its basis in a conception of the good that is vulnerable to Taylor's critique, our comprehensive doctrines need not have their bases in any such conception. For, in political liberalism, a reasonable comprehensive doctrine may consist in any conception of the good that is supportive of a broadly liberal conception of justice. In this way, he will claim, even if the political conception has its basis in a conception of the good that is vulnerable to Taylor's critique, our comprehensive doctrines not only may

consist in true moral ideals that must be allowed to stand but also may provide support for our ability to experience our lives as meaningful. Thus the political liberal will likely protest. But, I would like to argue, this protest is, at best, inconclusive. In order to see why, we must take a closer look at how the realm of public reason and the realm of comprehensive doctrines are related to one another.

To begin, in a well-ordered democratic society, each citizen will dwell both in the realm of public reason and in the realm of comprehensive doctrines. As Rawls explains,

Political liberalism tries, then, to present an account of these values as those of a special domain—the political—and hence as a freestanding view. It is left to citizens individually—as part of liberty of conscience—to settle how they think the values of the political domain are related to other values in their comprehensive doctrine. For we always assume that citizens have two views, a comprehensive and a political view; and that their overall view can be divided into two parts, suitably related. (Rawls 1996, 140)

Now, in such a society, it is not entirely clear whether each citizen will dwell in the two realms at different times or at the same time. For, on the one hand, Rawls argues that “public discussion, when constitutional essentials and questions of basic justice are at stake, is conducted in terms of the political conception of justice” (Rawls 1996, 44). And this suggests that each citizen may dwell in each realm at different times. But, on the other hand, Rawls argues that “we always assume that citizens have two views, a comprehensive and a political view; and that their overall view can be divided into two parts, suitably related” (Rawls 1997, 140). And this suggests that each citizen may dwell in both realms at the same time. In any case, in such a society, each citizen will affirm, either at different times or at the same time, both the conception of the good that belongs to the political conception and the conception of the good that belongs to his comprehensive doctrine.²⁵ And Rawls says that each citizen, as part of liberty of conscience, will

²⁵ Importantly, each citizen *does not* affirm the conception of the good that belongs to the political conception as a compromise. Rawls is very clear on this. As he explains, “So while a political conception of justice addresses the fact of reasonable pluralism, it is not political in the wrong way: that is, its form and content are not affected by the

settle for himself how these conceptions are related to one another. But there would seem to be three main possibilities here. The first possibility is that the conception of the good that belongs to the comprehensive doctrine is the same as the one that belongs to the political conception. In this case, the comprehensive doctrine will be supportive of a conception of justice that secures the primary goods of rights, liberties, opportunities, income, and wealth because it consists in a conception of the good that says each human being ought to pursue what he values in life irrespective of its specific features. This possibility is exemplified by the “comprehensive liberalism” of *A Theory of Justice*.

The second possibility is that the conception of the good that belongs to the comprehensive doctrine is not the same as the one that belongs to the political conception but nevertheless endorses a broadly liberal conception of justice *as a consequence of* its expression. This possibility is exemplified by the comprehensive doctrines of Christian activists such as Christian abolitionists, Christian civil rights workers, and, more recently, proponents of liberation theology. For, in these cases, the comprehensive doctrines are supportive of a conception of justice that secures the primary goods of rights, liberties, opportunities, income, and wealth because they consist in a conception of the good that says human beings ought to obey the will of God. And these doctrines interpret the will of God as opposing racial and/or economic inequality and so endorse a broadly liberal conception of justice. However, it is worth noting here that such comprehensive doctrines are not supportive of such a conception of justice

existing balance of political power between comprehensive doctrines. Nor do its principles strike a compromise between the more dominant ones” (Rawls 1996, 142). And, as he says repeatedly, the political conception is not a mere *modus vivendi* (Rawls 1996, 144-50). Thomas Nagel picks up on this in his article “Rawls and Liberalism” when he writes, “[In political liberalism] Rawls favors the more demanding standard that the equal respect for others expressed by recognition of their rights *should be valued for itself* and that this should be the highest value in the sphere of political institutions, although not in the conduct of personal life [emphasis added]” (Nagel 2003, 83). And Charles Larmore picks up on it too in his article “Public Reason” when he writes, “Political liberalism is not ‘political’ in the sense that, forsaking principled argument, it reduces justice to a compromise among given interests or to the common denominator of existing opinion” (Larmore 2003, 379). Indeed, in a well-ordered society, each citizen affirms two conceptions of the good *as* conceptions of the good.

by necessity. Indeed, if these doctrines were to interpret the will of God otherwise, they could endorse a conception of justice that is quite illiberal—for example, one that promotes racial and/or economic inequality.

The third possibility is that the conception of the good that belongs to the comprehensive doctrine is not the same as the one that belongs to the political conception but nevertheless endorses a broadly liberal conception of justice *as a requirement for* its expression. This possibility is exemplified by the comprehensive doctrines of liberal perfectionists such as John Stuart Mill and, more recently, Will Kymlicka. For, in these cases, the comprehensive doctrines are supportive of a conception of justice that secures the primary goods of rights, liberties, opportunities, income, and wealth because they consist in a conception of the good that says human beings ought to live a truly good life—a life in accord with the true human good. As Kimlicka explains,

Our essential interest is in leading a good life, in having those things that a good life contains. That may seem like a pretty banal claim. But it has important consequences. For leading a good life is different from leading the life that we *currently believe* to be good—that is, we recognize that we may be mistaken about the worth or value of what we are currently doing... Some people say that our essential interest is in living our life in accordance with the ends that we, as individuals or as a community, currently hold and share. But that seems a mistake: for our deliberations are not just about predictions about how to maximize the achievement of current ends and projects. They are also judgments about the value of those ends and projects, and we recognize that our current or past judgments are fallible. (Kymlicka 1989, 10-11)

And again, “our essential interest is in living a good life, not the life we currently believe to be good”—it is “in living a life that is *in fact* good [emphasis added]” (Kymlicka 1989, 11, 34).

But these doctrines hold that human beings can only live a truly good life if they are not forced to do so by others. For, if they are, they will never truly be able to accept that their lives are in accord with the true human good. As Kymlicka explains,

But while we may be mistaken in our beliefs about value, it doesn't follow that someone else, who has reason to believe a mistake has been made, can come along and improve my life by leading it for me, in accordance with the correct account of value. On the contrary, no life goes better by being led from the outside according to values the person doesn't endorse. My life only goes better if I'm leading it from the inside, according to my beliefs about value. Praying to God may be a valuable activity, but you have to believe that it's a worthwhile thing to do—that it has some worthwhile point and purpose. You can coerce someone into going to church and making the right physical movements, but you won't make someone's life better that way. (Kymlicka 1989, 12)

Thus these doctrines hold that human beings can only live a truly good life if they come to the true human good by themselves and so endorse a broadly liberal conception of justice. As Kymlicka explains, "Some projects *are* more worthy than others, and liberty is needed precisely to find out what is valuable in life—to question, re-examine, and revise our beliefs about value" (Kymlicka 1989, 18). However, it is worth noting here that such comprehensive doctrines are not supportive of such a conception of justice *by necessity* either. Indeed, even if human beings can only live a truly good life if they are not forced to do so by others, it does not follow that they can only live a truly good life if they come to the true human good by themselves. For between these two extremes lies the middle way of education. And, if these doctrines were to hold that human beings can also live a truly good life if they are brought to one by education, they could endorse a conception of justice that is quite illiberal—for example, one that promotes public schooling in virtue. In any case, these would seem to be the three main possibilities for how each citizen, as part of liberty of conscience, will settle for himself how the conception of the good that belongs to the political conception and the conception of the good that belongs to his comprehensive doctrine are related to one another.

Thus, I would like to argue, the political liberal's protest is, at best, inconclusive. For, in the case of the first possibility above, the conception of the good that belongs to the comprehensive doctrine is itself close enough to ideal of self-determining freedom to be

vulnerable to Taylor's critique. And, in the case of the second and third possibilities above, other problems arise. Indeed, let us suppose that, in a well-ordered democratic society, each citizen will dwell in the realm of public reason and the realm of comprehensive doctrines at different times and will therefore affirm, at different times, the conception of the good that belongs to the political conception and the conception of the good that belongs to his comprehensive doctrine. In that case, each citizen will alternate between, on the one hand, a conception of the good that cannot be a true moral ideal and must be either abandoned or amended and, on the other hand, a conception of the good that may provide support for our ability to experience our lives as meaningful but is not supportive of a broadly liberal conception of justice by necessity. Or let us suppose that, in such a society, each citizen will dwell in the two realms at the same time and will therefore affirm, at the same time, the two conceptions of the good. In that case, each citizen will not only embrace two distinct conceptions of the good at once but also run the risk of the one trivializing the other.²⁶ For, insofar as citizens embrace a conception of the good that is similar enough to the ideal of self-determining freedom to be vulnerable to Taylor's critique, they embrace a conception that "pushed to its limit, doesn't recognize any boundaries, anything given that I *have* to respect in my exercise of self-determining choice" (Taylor 1991, 68). Thus, insofar as citizens embrace such a conception, they tend to view other conceptions of the good not as having been specified by the moral horizon of their age but as having been specified by themselves alone. In this way, each citizen will run the risk of the conception of the good that belongs to the political conception trivializing the conception of the good that belongs to his

²⁶ Importantly, the fact that the two conceptions of the good are distinct is a potential problem in itself. For, insofar as they are distinct, so are their justifying conceptions and, therefore, their conceptions of our essential nature. In this way, insofar as citizens embrace two distinct conceptions of the good, they also embrace two distinct conceptions of their essential nature. Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift pick up on this in their *Liberals and Communitarians* when they describe this situation as one of schizophrenia (Mulhall 1996, 28). Indeed, I am not at all convinced that such a situation is sustainable for human beings (or, at least, for those who bother to think about such things).

comprehensive doctrine. In this way, I would like to argue, the political liberal's protest is, at best inconclusive. Indeed, it would seem to raise at least as many problems as it hopes to solve.

Chapter 3: Hegel and the Method of Immanent Critique

In this chapter, my primary task is to explain the method of immanent critique as it is developed in the introduction to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and bring it into relation with Taylor's method in *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Indeed, as we have seen, Taylor argues that the first malaise of modernity, like the other two, can and should be overcome through what he calls "a work of retrieval." That is, he argues that it can and should be overcome not by our rejecting the ideal of authenticity as such but by our retrieving the ideal of authenticity proper from out of the ideal of self-determining freedom. And, as we have seen, Taylor carries out this work of retrieval through the method of immanent critique. That is, he carries out this work of retrieval through the method of critique whereby the standard against which the object of critique is measured is internal to the object itself. But Taylor's method would seem to have its roots in Hegel's method. And this is perhaps not too surprising. For Taylor's work in general is greatly indebted to Hegel's thought. And, indeed, in Hegel's thought the method of immanent critique finds its most sophisticated modern expression.¹

Now the effort to explain the method of immanent critique as it is developed in the introduction to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* will, of course, be worthwhile generally. For this method is basic to Hegel's thought and, in the introduction to his *Phenomenology*, it finds its most detailed and extended presentation. Indeed, the introduction, as Jean Hyppolite observes, "seems to contain the original thought from which the whole work emerged" (Hyppolite 1974, 3-4). But, leaving this aside, the effort to bring Hegel's method into relation with Taylor's will be helpful within the context of the present work in at least two ways. First, insofar as Taylor's

¹ Of course, this does not necessarily mean that the method of immanent critique finds its most sophisticated expression as such in Hegel's thought. For, arguably, it finds this in the thought of Plato. For an illuminating account of the similarities and differences between Hegel's method of immanent critique and the method of the ancients, see Hans-Georg Gadamer's essay, "Hegel and the Dialectic of the Ancient Philosophers."

method has its roots in Hegel's, it will be helpful in bringing into focus exactly what Taylor's method is. Indeed, the question of method in general remains largely unthematized in Taylor's work.² Second, insofar as Taylor's method strays from its roots in Hegel's, it will be helpful in bringing into relief the reasons why Taylor's critique seems not to propose any solutions that could prevent unhappy social consequences—such as the first malaise of modernity—from arising.

In this chapter, I will proceed in two stages. In the first, I will attempt to explain the method of immanent critique as it is developed in the introduction to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. And, in doing so, I hope to provide an interpretation that is somewhat more thorough and integrated than can be found in many of the standard commentaries. In the second, I will attempt to bring Hegel's method into relation with Taylor's. And, in doing so, I hope not only to show how they are similar and different but also to suggest what the consequences for Taylor's critique might be if Taylor's method were more strictly Hegelian.

§1. Hegel's Introduction

In the first line of the introduction, Hegel defines the *Sache selbst* of science as “the actual cognizing of what is in truth” (Hegel 1977, 46).³ But the phrase “*Sache selbst* of science” is ambiguous. For it can mean the *Gegenstand* or object itself of science as well as the *Arbeit* or work itself of science. If the former, the *Sache selbst* of science would be the proper subject matter of science—it would be what philosophers study. If the latter, the *Sache selbst* of science would be the proper activity of science—it would be what philosophers do. In fact, we will see

² Indeed, even Taylor's most detailed discussion of Hegel's method of immanent critique in his *Hegel* (pages 127-40) only contains a handful of references to the actual text of *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

³ More precisely, Hegel defines the *Sache selbst* of *philosophy* as “the actual cognizing of what is in truth” (Hegel 1977, 46). Now, in some contexts, Hegel distinguishes science from philosophy by indicating that the former is the fulfillment of the latter. But, in other contexts, he suggests that they are one and the same. For example, he writes “the way to science is itself already science” and so collapses the distinction between science as the fulfillment of philosophy and philosophy as the “way to science” (Hegel 1977, 56). At this point, we will treat them as one and the same.

that both meanings are correct. However, we will begin with the latter and so with the work itself of science. What is this work? Again, it is the actual cognizing of what is in truth. Or, in other words, it is the actual cognizing of what Hegel also calls “the truth,” “what is in itself,” “the in itself,” “the essence,” “the absolute essence,” or simply “the absolute.” For Hegel, all of these are ultimately equivalent, as is suggested with regard to the first and the last by such claims as: “the absolute alone is true or the true alone is absolute” (Hegel 1977, 47). However, we will begin with the last and so with the work itself of science as the actual cognizing of the absolute.

Of course, this definition of the *Sache selbst* of science is unrevealing so long as the terms “cognizing” and “the absolute” are undefined. And, in fact, these terms are only defined adequately in and through the long development of the entire text. However, in the first paragraphs of the introduction, Hegel at least cautions against two assumptions about the definition of “cognizing.” First, he cautions against the assumption that it means an activity that is somehow separable from us. Second, he cautions against the assumption that it means an activity that is somehow separable from the absolute. Hegel observes that these two assumptions are indissociable from the further assumption that cognizing is some sort of *means* that we can use to know the absolute—that cognizing is either some sort of instrument with which we can grasp or some sort of medium through which we can see the absolute.⁴ And Hegel also observes that this further assumption inevitably leads to a certain fear. For instruments always alter and media always distort their objects. Thus this further assumption inevitably leads to the fear that “clouds of error instead of the heaven of truth will be taken hold of [*erfaßt*]” or to what Hegel calls simply “the fear of error” (Hegel 1977, 46). Hegel observes that this fear inevitably leads to the “natural assumption that, in philosophy, before the *Sache selbst*... is dealt with, it would first

⁴ As Hegel explains, “all these assumptions of a cognizing separated from the absolute and an absolute separated from cognizing” are indissociable from “useless assumptions and phrases about cognizing as an instrument to catch the absolute or as a medium through which we view the truth and so forth” (Hegel 1977, 48).

be necessary to come to an agreement over cognizing” (Hegel 1977, 46). Indeed, if cognizing is some sort of means that we can use to know the absolute, we should want to determine its nature so that we can discover and correct for its effects on its object. That is, if cognizing is either some sort of instrument with which we can grasp or some sort of medium through which we can see the absolute, we should want to determine its “mechanical” or “refractive” properties so that we can discover and correct for how it alters or distorts its object. For only then can we know the absolute as it really is, as it is in itself.

But an obvious problem arises here. For if cognizing were some sort of means that we can use to know the absolute, we could never discover or correct for its effects on its object. Thus cognizing would be set apart from all other instruments and media. For, in the case of all other instruments and media, we can always discover and correct for how they alter or distort their objects. And this for a simple reason: at least some of their objects can be known without their use. For example, at least some of the objects of instruments that grip (such as vices, pliers, and tweezers) and at least some of the objects of media that magnify (such as telescopes, spectacles, and microscopes) can be known without their use. Thus we can observe these objects both before and after their use and so discover and correct for how they alter or distort them. Moreover, on this basis, we can discover and correct for how they alter or distort those of their objects that cannot be known without their use. For we can infer that how they alter or distort these objects must be comparable to how they alter or distort those of their objects that can be known without their use. Indeed, in the case of all other instruments and media, we can always discover and correct for how they alter or distort their objects by making observations and inferences of this kind.

But, in the case of cognizing, we could never make observations or inferences of this kind. And this for a simple reason: none of its objects could be known without its use. In fact, without its use, objects could not be known at all. And this means that we could never observe any of its objects before its use—we could only observe them after. And because, in the case of cognizing, we could never make observations or inferences of this kind, we could never discover or correct for how it alters or distorts its objects. As Hegel writes,

If we take away again from a formed thing what the instrument has done to it, then the thing—here the absolute—is to us again exactly so much as [it was] before this consequently superfluous effort... Or, if [through] the testing of cognizing, which we present to ourselves as a *medium*, we become acquainted with the law of its refraction, it is likewise of no use to subtract this from the result; for [it is] not the refraction of the ray [that] is cognizing, but the ray itself through which the truth reaches us; and [if] this were subtracted, only a pure direction or an empty space would be described to us. (Hegel 1977, 46)

Again, in the case of cognizing, we could never make observations or inferences of this kind. And this because, without its use, the absolute could not be known at all—it is not the refraction of the ray but the ray itself through which the truth reaches us. And this means that we could never observe the absolute before its use—we could only observe it after. And because, in the case of cognizing, we could never make observations or inferences of this kind, we could never discover or correct for how it alters or distorts the absolute. In fact, any attempt to do so would be nothing more than an attempt to render the absolute unknown to us—an attempt to render nothing more described to us than a pure direction or an empty space. Indeed, if cognizing were some sort of means that we can use to know the absolute, we could never discover or correct for its effects on its object.⁵

⁵ Hegel also considers the possibility that cognizing is an instrument that ensnares but neither alters nor distorts the absolute—as a lime twig ensnares a bird. However, he points out that, if cognizing were an instrument of this kind, it would also be a ruse or a deception because it would have an entirely passive character instead of the entirely active character it appears to have. As Hegel writes, “for cognizing would be in this case a ruse, since it gives itself,

This obvious problem could lead us to two very different conclusions. On the one hand, the problem could lead us to the conclusion that we cannot know the absolute as it really is. Now this is not the conclusion to which Hegel is led. But he observes that this conclusion “must surely transform itself into the conviction that the whole beginning of acquiring for consciousness through cognizing what is in itself would be in its concept nonsensical [*widersinnig*]” (Hegel 1977, 46). That is, it must lead to the conviction that the work itself of science is pointless in principle. Or, in other words, this conclusion must surely transform itself into what Hegel calls “the mistrust of science.”

On the other hand, the problem could lead us to the conclusion that we should question the two assumptions that gave rise to the problem in the first place. Now this is the conclusion to which Hegel is led. Thus he observes that “[it] is not foreseen why [we should] not turn around [and] place a mistrust in this mistrust” (Hegel 1977, 47). And quite so, since the mistrust of science, along with (1) the assumption that cognizing is some sort of means that we can use to know the absolute, (2) the fear of error, (3) the assumption that “it would first be necessary to come to an agreement over cognizing,” (4) the obvious problem that arises, and (5) the conclusion that we cannot know the absolute as it really is all follow from these assumptions. As he explains,

In fact, [the fear of error] takes for granted something—that is, many things—as truth, and hence supports its scruples [*Bedenklichkeiten*] and consequences on what is itself first to be proved [as to] whether it is truth. Namely, it takes for granted *assumptions* about *cognizing* as an *instrument* and *medium*, [and] also [about] a *difference* [between] *ourselves* [and] *this cognizing*; but above all, [it takes for granted] that the absolute stands *on one side* and *cognizing on the other side*, for itself and separated from the absolute. (Hegel 1977, 47)

through its manifold efforts, the air of doing something wholly other than bringing out only [an] immediate and therefore effortless [*mühe*lose] relation” (Hegel 1977, 47).

Now Hegel is led not only to the conclusion that we should question the two assumptions that gave rise to the problem in the first place but also to the conclusion that we should reject these assumptions entirely. As he says, we should “reject them as adventitious and arbitrary [*zufällige und willkürliche*] assumptions” (Hegel 1977, 48).

Why is Hegel led to the conclusion that we should reject these assumptions entirely? He gives at least three reasons. First, they are *mere* assumptions. As Hegel explains, under these assumptions, one notices that “‘the absolute,’ ‘cognizing,’ and so forth are words which presuppose a meaning that is first to be ascertained [*um die zu erlangen es erst zu tun ist*]” (Hegel 1977, 48). In fact, he adds, “the assumption [*Vorgeben*], [which is] partly that their meaning is generally familiar [and] also partly that one has their concept, seems sooner only to be supposed to avoid the main thing, namely, to give this concept” (Hegel 1977, 48). Hegel’s point is that our continuing to accept mere assumptions about the definition of “cognizing” even though they remain undemonstrated would seem to reveal in us a deeper desire to let them remain undemonstrated.

Second, they are *dubious* assumptions. For they lead to the conviction that the work itself of science is pointless in principle. But science, it would seem, “without such scruples, gets on [with] the work itself and actually cognizes” (Hegel 1977, 47). Thus we should reject these assumptions as nothing more than “excuses that create the incapacity of science” and “through which science itself is supposed to be warded off” (Hegel 1977, 48).

Third, they are *contradictory* assumptions. As he explains, under these assumptions, one supposes that “cognizing, which, since it is other than the absolute, is also surely other than the truth, but nevertheless would be truly “ (Hegel 1977, 47). Indeed, the second of these assumptions is that cognizing is an activity that is somehow separable from the absolute. But if

this were the case, then cognizing would be able somehow *to be* apart from the absolute. Or, in other words, cognizing would be able somehow to be truly, to be what is in truth, or to be true apart from the absolute. But Hegel insists that “the absolute alone is true or the true alone is absolute.” And if this is the case, then cognizing cannot be an activity that is in any way separable from the absolute. In fact, he adds, the second of these assumptions is one “through which what calls itself fear of error sooner gives itself to cognizing as fear of truth” (Hegel 1977, 47). Hegel’s point is that our continuing to accept contradictory assumptions about the definition of “cognizing” even though they lead not only to the fear of error but also to the conclusion that we cannot know the absolute as it really is would seem to reveal in us a deeper fear of coming to know the absolute as it really is or a deeper fear of truth. For at least these reasons, Hegel is led to the conclusion that we should reject these assumptions entirely.

But what would our rejecting these assumptions entirely suggest about the definition of “cognizing?” It would suggest at least two things. First, it would suggest that it means an activity that is not somehow separable from us but entirely inseparable from us. And indeed, for Hegel, each of us *is* the activity of cognizing. More precisely, each of us is a *Bewusstsein* or consciousness, which is nothing other than the activity of cognizing. In this way, cognizing is not some sort of means that we can use to know the absolute but an activity that we ourselves *are*. Second, it would suggest that it means an activity that is not somehow separable from the absolute but is entirely inseparable from the absolute. And indeed, for Hegel, the activity of cognizing *is* the absolute. Put differently, the activity of cognizing is the truth, the in itself, or the absolute essence, which is nothing other than the absolute. In this way, cognizing is neither some sort of instrument with which we can grasp nor some sort of medium through which we can see the absolute but an activity that the absolute itself *is*. But these identities are misleading. For

although each of us is the activity of cognizing and the activity of cognizing is the absolute, none of us is the absolute *simpliciter*. And this is because, for Hegel, the human being is not the only being that is the activity of cognizing. God or what Hegel calls *Geist* is also a being that is the activity of cognizing and only *Geist* or the divine activity of cognizing is the absolute simply and without qualification.⁶

But what is *Geist* or the divine activity of cognizing? And how does it differ from our activity of cognizing? Although we cannot give complete answers to these questions here, we can at least establish three basic points with regard to the first and one basic point with regard to the second. Let us begin with the question of what *Geist* is. The first basic point is that *Geist* or the divine activity of cognizing is responsible for the *being* of all that is.⁷ And this means that it is responsible for the being of all that comes to stand before us—for the being of all things. Now that which comes to stand before us is always a conjunction of form and matter. For a thing always comes to stand before us as a “what.” And this means that it is always partly form. But a thing never comes to stand before us as a *mere* “what”—it always does so as a *substantial* “what.” And this means that it is always partly matter. For example, a human being never comes to stand before us as the mere form of human being—he always does so as the form instantiated in some matter. And this is true whether he comes to stand before us physically, with the form

⁶ In the preface, Hegel refers explicitly to the divine activity of cognizing when he writes, “So the life of God and divine cognizing [*das göttliche Erkennen*] may well be spoken of as a play of love with itself” (Hegel 1977, 10).

⁷ Now this position, that *Geist* is responsible for the *being* of all that is, has become a controversial one in recent decades. For some commentators have argued that *Geist* is simply Hegel’s name for human beings’ categorial system of knowing at its most comprehensive and integrated. For two important examples, see Klaus Hartmann’s “Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View” and Robert Pippin’s *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*. However, this position remains outside the mainstream and, in my view, for good reason. For it can only be sustained by ignoring many aspects of Hegel’s thought—for example, his philosophy of history—and many passages in Hegel’s texts. Indeed, Hartmann even seems to admit this when he writes, “With our categorial and systematic interpretation, we feel we have to discriminate between the various levels Hegel meant to encompass—that of world history and divine revelation, on the one hand, and that of a fully developed civilization capable of systematic treatment, on the other. We feel free to single out that systematic core of Hegel’s philosophy which exhibits strictness” (Hartmann 1972, 123).

instantiated “in the flesh” so to speak, or he comes to stand before us mentally, with the form instantiated in the element of thought. In any case, a thing is always a conjunction of form and matter. And insofar as *Geist* or the divine activity of cognizing is responsible for the being of all that is, it is responsible for both the form and the matter of all things—it provides them both.⁸

The second basic point is that *Geist* or the divine activity of cognizing is responsible for the *knowing* of all that is. And this means that it is responsible for the knowing of all that comes to stand before us—for the knowing of all things. Now insofar as *Geist* is responsible for the form of all things, it is already responsible for the *knowability* of all that comes to stand before us. For to know a thing is to know what it is or to know its form. And for a thing to have a form is for it to be knowable. But *Geist* is not just responsible for the knowability of all that comes to stand before us—it is responsible for the knowing of all that comes to stand before us. Or, more

⁸ Of course, the idea that that which comes to stand before us is always a conjunction of form and matter has deep philosophical roots. In his *Metaphysics*, its taproot as it were, Aristotle writes, “For the thing that comes into being will always have to be divisible, and be not only this but also that—I mean, not only form but also material” (Aristotle 2002, 131). And the idea is reiterated by many figures throughout the history of philosophy. For example, Aquinas, in his *On Being and Essence*, writes, “it is necessary that an essence, by which a thing is denominated a being, be neither the form alone nor the matter alone, but both” (Aquinas 1965, 38). And Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, writes, “That in the appearance which corresponds to sensation I term its *matter*; but that which so determines the manifold of appearance that it allows of being ordered in certain relations, I term the *form* of appearance” (Kant 2003, 65-6). And it is reiterated by the German Idealists as well. For example, Schelling, in his *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom and Related Matters*, writes, “Following the eternal act of self-revelation, all is rule, order, and form in the world as we now see it. But the ruleless still lies in the ground as if it could break through once again, and nowhere does it appear as though order and form were original, but rather as if something initially ruleless had been brought to order. This is the incomprehensible basis of reality in things, the indivisible remainder, that which with the greatest exertion cannot be resolved in the understanding, but rather remains eternally in the ground” (Schelling 1987, 238-9). In such passages, Schelling indicates that God is responsible not only for the form of all things but also for what he calls here “the ruleless” and elsewhere “nature” (Schelling 1987, 240). And, at one point, he explicitly links these to Platonic *matter*, specifically as it is discussed in the *Timeaus* (Schelling, 1987, 250). In this way, Schelling indicates that God is responsible not only for the form of all things but also for the matter of all things. And Hegel would seem to agree with Schelling here. Admittedly, Hegel is not entirely clear on this point. However, some of his most important commentators provide clues that lead in this direction. For example, Jean Hyppolite writes, “Logos and nature mutually presuppose each other; one cannot be posed without the other... Logos does not exist without nature nor nature without logos... So if the absolute poses itself as logos, it is because it negates itself as nature, but by the same token it opposes itself to nature; by excluding nature from itself is presupposes it and bears it within itself, just as nature on its side is the whole which negates itself as logos and thus opposes itself and presupposes this logos” (Hyppolite 1974, 602). In such passages, Hyppolite indicates that *Geist* is both logos and nature, which, recalling Schelling’s distinctions, would seem to be nothing other than form and matter.

precisely, it is responsible for the knowing of the form of all things.⁹ And this in two senses. As Hegel explains, “consciousness is, on the one hand, consciousness of the object, [and] on the other hand, consciousness of itself” (Hegel 1977, 54). On the one hand, *Geist* is responsible for knowing the form of all things as *Gegenstand* or *object*. That is, it is responsible for knowing this form *as it is being provided*—before it is instantiated in some matter and comes to stand before us. In other words, it knows it in an *immediate* way. On the other hand, *Geist* is responsible for knowing the form of all things as *Begriff* or *concept*. That is, it is responsible for knowing this form *as it has been provided*—after it is instantiated in some matter and comes to stand before us. In other words, it knows it in a *mediated* way. Thus, insofar as *Geist* is responsible for the knowing of all that is, it is responsible for knowing the form of all things both as object and as concept—it knows it in both senses.¹⁰

The third basic point is that *Geist* or the divine activity of cognizing is responsible for both the being and the knowing of itself and, in fact, *nothing other than itself*. That is, it is reflexive. With regard to being, *Geist* is responsible for the being of itself at least in the sense that it is responsible for the being of its activity of cognizing. Indeed, it *is* this activity—it *is* only

⁹ This point carries an important consequence. For if to know a thing is to know what it is or to know its form, then for *Geist* to know a thing is for it not to know the thing in its entirety. More precisely, it is for it not to know the thing in its ultimate matter. Importantly, a thing’s ultimate matter is not matter in any normal sense. For example, a human being’s ultimate matter is neither his flesh, bones, and fluids, nor his molecules and atoms, nor his hadrons, bosons, and fermions. For each of these is itself a conjunction of form and matter. Indeed, a thing’s ultimate matter is that which has been called “prime matter” throughout the history of philosophy. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle writes, “By material I mean that which, in its own right, is not said to be either something or so much or anything else by which being is made definite” (Aristotle 2002, 119). And Aquinas, in his *The Principles of Nature*, writes, “Only that matter which is understood without any form or privation, but which is subject to form and privation, is called prime matter, inasmuch as there is no other matter prior to it” (Aquinas 1965, 13). Indeed, a thing’s ultimate matter is that which is radically other than its form. And thus it is entirely unknowable.

¹⁰ In fact, Hegel observes that these terms, “object” and “concept,” can be reversed so that, in this interpretation, the former would mean “the form of all things as it has been provided” and the latter would mean “the form of all things as it is being provided” (Hegel 1977, 53). However, within the context of the introduction, these terms are most often used in the way suggested above.

insofar as it acts and it acts only insofar as it *is*.¹¹ But *Geist* is responsible for the being of itself in another sense as well. For it is responsible for the being of all that comes to stand before us and so for both the form and the matter of all things. But this means that all things are nothing other than *Geist* itself. Indeed, it provides both the form and the matter to nothing other than itself—it is nothing other than itself that receives either. Thus, insofar as *Geist* is responsible for the being of its activity of cognizing as well as for the being of all things, and insofar as these are both nothing other than *Geist* itself, it is responsible for the being of nothing other than itself. With regard to knowing, insofar as all things are nothing other than *Geist* itself, it is responsible for the knowing of itself at least in the sense that it is responsible for the knowing of the form of all things. But *Geist* is responsible for the knowing of itself in another sense as well. For it is also responsible for the knowing of its activity of cognizing.¹² Thus, insofar as *Geist* is responsible for the knowing of the form of all things as well as for the knowing of its activity of cognizing, and insofar as these are both nothing other than *Geist* itself, it is responsible for the knowing of nothing other than itself. In all of these ways, *Geist* or the divine activity of cognizing is reflexive.

¹¹ As Hegel explains in the preface, *Geist* “is in truth actual only insofar [as] it is the movement of self-positing [*Sich-selbst-setzens*]” (Hegel 1977, 10).

¹² This point creates intractable problems for thought. For if to know a thing is to know what it is or to know its form, then for *Geist* to know its activity of cognizing would be for it to know the form of this activity. But its activity of cognizing in general includes the activity of providing the form of all things. And how could the activity of providing form itself have form? What could provide it? Of course, to answer that *Geist* could do so is not to answer at all. And this is because, in that case, for *Geist* to know its activity of cognizing would be for it to know the form of *this* activity as well, which would simply invite the same questions. But this is not all. For its activity of cognizing in general also includes the activity of providing the matter of all things. Now, even if this activity could have form, it would require matter to receive it. And how could the activity of providing matter itself have matter? What could provide it? As before, to answer that *Geist* could do so is not to answer at all. And this is because, in that case, for *Geist* to know its activity of cognizing would be for it to know the form of *this* activity as well, which would require matter to receive it, which would simply invite the same questions. Indeed, these problems would seem to lead to two inescapable conclusions. First, they would seem to lead to the conclusion that, because the divine activity of cognizing is not a conjunction of form and matter as things are, the being of this activity is very different from the being of things. To be sure, this activity *is* in some way but not as things *are*. Second, they would seem to lead to the conclusion that, because the divine activity of cognizing is not a conjunction of form and matter, this activity is entirely unknowable.

Let us turn to the question of how *Geist* differs from our activity of cognizing. Now, in one sense, *Geist* does not differ. For the divine activity of cognizing happens only in and through our *collective* activity of cognizing and vice versa—each happens only in and through the other. In this way, our collective activity of cognizing is *constituted by* and *coextensive with* the divine activity of cognizing.¹³ And this means that it is responsible for both the being and the knowing of all that is as well as for both the being and the knowing of itself and, in fact, nothing other than itself.¹⁴ But, in another sense, *Geist* does differ. For the divine activity of cognizing exceeds each of our *individual* activities of cognizing. In this way, each of us is constituted by but none of us is coextensive with the divine activity of cognizing. And this means that each of us is partly but none of us is wholly responsible for the being and the knowing of all that is and for the being and the knowing of our collective activity of cognizing itself. Put simply, each of our individual activities of cognizing *participates in* the divine activity of cognizing. Thus, although each of us is the activity of cognizing and the activity of cognizing is the absolute, none of us is the absolute *simpliciter*. For only *Geist* or our collective activity of cognizing is the absolute simply and without qualification.¹⁵

¹³ This view is widely shared among commentators. For example, it is shared by Charles Taylor, who writes, “For we come to discover that the world which is supposedly beyond thought is really posited by thought, that it is a manifestation of rational necessity. And at the same time the thought which was supposedly over against the world, that is, our thinking as finite subjects, turns out to be that of the cosmos itself, or the cosmic subject, God, whose vehicles we are” (Taylor 1975, 117). And it is also shared by Robert Solomon, who writes, “What clearly emerges from Hegel’s writings is that ‘*Geist*’ refers to some sort of *general consciousness, a single ‘mind’ common to all men*” (Solomon, 1972, 125).

¹⁴ This point recreates the same intractable problems for thought as before, which would seem to lead to the same inescapable conclusions as before. For, insofar as our collective activity of cognizing is responsible for both the being and the knowing of all that is, our activity in general includes the activity of providing the form of all things as well as the activity of providing the matter of all things. And, insofar as our collective activity of cognizing is responsible for both the being and the knowing of itself, this recreates the same problems. And these problems would seem to lead to the same conclusions: that, because our collective activity of cognizing is not a conjunction of form and matter as things are, the being of this activity is very different from the being of things and that, because our collective activity of cognizing is not a conjunction of form and matter, this activity is entirely unknowable.

¹⁵ Now the question of how *Geist* differs from our activity of cognizing is a notoriously difficult one. And none of its possible answers is uncontroversial. As Jean Hyppolite writes, “This encounter between a nontemporal infinite spirit and temporal humanity in the I=I, an encounter which alone makes spirit absolute, is the central problem of the

We can now see why both meanings of the phrase “*Sache selbst* of science” are correct. For, on the one hand, the actual cognizing of the absolute is the *Arbeit* or work itself of science. That is, it is the proper activity of science—it is what philosophers do. Indeed, for Hegel, philosophers participate in the activity of cognizing what is in truth, which is nothing other than *Geist*, the divine activity of cognizing, or the absolute. But, on the other hand, the actual cognizing of the absolute is the *Gegenstand* or object itself of science. That is, it is the proper subject matter of science—it is what philosophers study. Indeed, for Hegel, philosophers participate in the activity of cognizing the absolute, which is nothing other than its activity of cognizing itself, the absolute. Or, put differently, they participate in the activity of cognizing the absolute, which is nothing other than our collective activity of cognizing, which is nothing other than its activity of cognizing itself, the absolute. In this way, both meanings of the phrase “*Sache selbst* of science” are correct. For philosophers participate both in the activity of cognizing the absolute and in the activity of cognizing the activity of cognizing the absolute—the actual cognizing of the absolute is both what they do and what they study.

To summarize, Hegel defines the work itself of science as the actual cognizing of the absolute. But he cautions against two assumptions about the definition of “cognizing”: first, that it means an activity that is somehow separable from us and, second, that it means an activity that

Phenomenology of Spirit... There is not in Hegelianism a clear solution to these problems, and it is on these points that the great Hegelian synthesis will tend to come apart in the hands of Hegel’s disciples” (Hyppolite 1974, 596). Now my answer is roughly the same as Charles Taylor’s, who writes, “Thus *Geist* must have a vehicle in finite spirit. This is the only kind of vehicle it can have. Moreover, there cannot be only one such. For *Giest* cannot be confined to a particular place and time of any one finite spirit. It has to compensate for its necessary localization, as it were, by living through many finite spirits” (Taylor 1975, 90). Now my answer is not without its problems. However, it does have the benefit of avoiding some of the manifest absurdities of various other possible answers. For example, Alexandre Kojève writes that, in the end, “Hegelian anthropotheism ceases to be an image; Hegel is actually God, God the *creator*, and the *eternal* God. Now, (unless he is mad) a man cannot assert that he created the World. If, then, the thought that is revealed in the *Logik* is the thought that *created* the World, it is certainly not Hegel’s thought. It is the thought of a Creator *other* than Hegel, *other* than Man in general; it is the thought of *God*” (Kojève 1969, 147). In such passages, Kojève suggests that Hegel is claiming, in the end, to be coextensive with God and thus is, in the end, quite mad. Of course, if Hegel were in fact claiming this, Kojève would be quite right. But I would argue that Hegel is not claiming this. Rather, he is claiming to participate in *Geist* along with the rest of humanity. Again, this is not without its problems but it is also not obviously insane.

is somehow separable from the absolute. For he observes that these two assumptions lead to the conviction that the work itself of science is pointless in principle—to the mistrust of science. Ultimately, he is led to the conclusion that we should reject these assumptions entirely, which would suggest that “cognizing” means an activity that is entirely inseparable from us as well as entirely inseparable from the absolute. And indeed, for Hegel, each of us *is* the activity of cognizing and the activity of cognizing *is* the absolute. But these identities are misleading because none of us is the absolute *simpliciter*. For only *Geist* or the divine activity of cognizing is the absolute simply and without qualification. Now *Geist* is responsible for both the being and the knowing of all that comes to stand before us in that it is responsible both for the form and the matter of all things and for knowing the form of all things both as object and as concept. And, insofar as *Geist* is responsible for these as well as for both the being and the knowing of its activity of cognizing, it is responsible for both the being and the knowing of itself and, in fact, nothing other than itself; that is, it is reflexive. Now *Geist* differs from our activity of cognizing in that it exceeds each of our individual activities of cognizing though it happens only in and through our collective activity of cognizing and vice versa. Thus only *Geist* or our collective activity of cognizing is the absolute simply and without qualification. Finally, insofar as philosophers participate in the activity of cognizing the absolute, which is nothing other than its activity of cognizing itself, they participate in the activity of cognizing the activity of cognizing the absolute. In this way, the work itself of science is also the object itself of science.¹⁶

¹⁶ Now one might wonder whether the conviction that the work itself of science is pointless in principle—the mistrust of science—has really been overcome. For if the work itself of science is the actual cognizing of the absolute and if the absolute is all things as well as its activity of cognizing, then this work would seem to be pointless at least in part. For if to know a thing is to know what it is or to know its form, then a thing’s ultimate matter as well as the activity of cognizing are entirely unknowable. Thus if the work itself of science involves knowing the absolute *in its entirety*, then this work would seem to be pointless at least in part. Indeed, only if it involves knowing the absolute just in the sense of knowing the form of all things would it seem to be otherwise—but this does not seem to be supported by the text. Of course, if this work is pointless at least in part, one might

Let us consider the work itself of science in more detail. Importantly, this work happens through a series of stages. Or, more precisely, it *progresses* through a series of stages. Indeed, Hegel regards the work itself of science as “the way of the soul, which wanders through the series of its configurations [*Gestaltungen*], as through stations appointed to it [by] its nature” (Hegel 1977, 49). Now, in this series, each stage is a stage of the activity of cognizing the absolute. Or, put differently, each is a stage of our collective activity of cognizing. Thus, in this series, each stage is a stage of the activity of our coming to be and coming to know what we essentially are.

But how does one stage differ from another? We can answer this question by returning to our activity of cognizing. As we have seen, our collective activity of cognizing is responsible for both the being and the knowing of all that is, which means, in part, that it is responsible for the form of all things—for all things being each and every one a “what.” And this in two senses. On the one hand, our collective activity of cognizing is responsible for the form of *everything in general*—the form that determines what things are insofar as they do not differ from one another. Now many different forms of everything in general are possible. And they exist at various levels of generality such that each form at one level comprises many more at the next. For example, at the highest level of generality, our collective activity of cognizing is responsible for everything being an opposition to a consciousness, a self-consciousness, an expression of a self-consciousness, an expression of a community of self-consciousnesses, or an expression of *Geist*. But each form at this first level comprises many more at the next. For example, at the next level of generality, our collective activity of cognizing is responsible for every opposition to a consciousness being “this,” a thing with many properties, or a force. Indeed, each form at the

wonder whether that which is inaccessible to scientific knowing is accessible in other ways—perhaps, for example, to some form of aesthetic intuition in the realm of nature or art.

first level comprises many more at the second level, each of which comprises many more at the third, and so on. But, in all cases, they are the forms of everything in general.

On the other hand, our collective activity of cognizing is responsible for the form of *each thing in particular*—the form that determines what things are insofar as they differ from one another. Now, as before, many different forms of each thing in particular are possible. And, as before, they exist at various levels of generality such that each form at one level comprises many more at the next. For example, at a very high level of generality, our collective activity of cognizing is responsible for each thing being a natural thing or an artificial thing. At a somewhat lower level, it is responsible for each natural thing being a mineral, plant, animal, or human being and for each artificial thing being a craftwork or an artwork. And, at a very low level of generality, our collective activity of cognizing is responsible for each mineral being, say, a salt or a sapphire, for each animal being, say, a beetle or a baboon, and for each craftwork being, say, a sundial or a satellite. Indeed, as before, each form at the first level comprises many more at the second level, each of which comprises many more at the third, and so on. But, in all cases, they are the forms of each thing in particular.

Thus our collective activity of cognizing is responsible for the form of all things in two senses, and, in both senses, many different forms are possible. But *how* it provides these many different forms depends on whether it is providing the forms of everything in general or it is providing the forms of each thing in particular. For, insofar as our collective activity of cognizing is providing the forms of everything in general, it must provide each one to all things at the same time. And this means that it can provide, at any given time, only one because one will necessarily conflict with another. For example, all things being things with many properties will conflict with all things being forces. But, insofar as our collective activity of cognizing is

providing the forms of each thing in particular, it can provide each one to some things and not to other things at the same time. And this means that it may provide, at any given time, more than one because one will not necessarily conflict with another. For example, some things being plants will not conflict with other things being human beings or artworks. And this difference allows us to answer the above question. For, insofar as our collective activity of cognizing is providing the forms of everything in general, and insofar as it can provide, at any given time, only one, it must provide them in a series. And this is how one stage differs from another—by virtue of the form of everything in general that our collective activity of cognizing provides in each one. In this way, in each stage, our activity of cognizing differently determines what everything *is* in general. That is, it differently determines the answer to the question: what *is* as such?

But how does one stage progress to the next? We can answer this question by returning again to our activity of cognizing. As we have seen, our collective activity of cognizing is responsible for both the being and the knowing of all that is, which means, in part, that it is responsible for knowing the form of everything in general—the form that determines what things are insofar as they do not differ from one another.¹⁷ And this in two senses. On the one hand, our collective activity of cognizing is responsible for knowing the form of everything in general as *Gegenstand* or object. That is, it is responsible for knowing this form as it is being provided—before it is instantiated in some matter and comes to stand before us. In other words, it knows it in an immediate way. On the other hand, our collective activity of cognizing is responsible for

¹⁷ Of course, our collective activity of cognizing is also responsible for the knowing of the form of each thing in particular—the form that determines what things are insofar as they differ from one another. However, this activity neither allows us to answer the above question nor belongs to the work itself of science. As Hegel explains in the preface to his *Philosophy of Right*, “For since rationality... enters upon external existence simultaneously with its actualization, it emerges with an infinite wealth of forms, shapes, and appearances... But the infinite variety of circumstance which is developed in this externality by the light of the essence glinting in it—this endless material and its organization—this is not the subject matter of philosophy. To touch this at all would be to meddle with things to which philosophy is unsuited” (Hegel 1949, 10-11).

knowing the form of everything in general as *Begriff* or concept. That is, it is responsible for knowing this form as it has been provided—after it is instantiated in some matter and comes to stand before us. In other words, it knows it in a mediated way. And this difference allows us to answer the above question. For, insofar as our collective activity of cognizing is responsible for knowing the form of everything in general both as object and as concept, it may discover an incompatibility between the two. And this is how one stage progresses to the next—by virtue of an incompatibility of this kind that our collective activity of cognizing discovers in each one.

Let us consider this incompatibility in more detail. What exactly does it consist in? And how exactly does it account for how one stage progresses to the next? We can answer these questions by returning once again to our activity of cognizing. As we have seen, our collective activity of cognizing is responsible for knowing the form of everything in general both as object and as concept—it knows it in both senses. But much more can be said here.

To begin, whether our consciousness knows the form of everything in general as object or our consciousness knows the form of everything in general as concept, it knows it only as it is *for us* and not as it is *in itself*. Hegel writes,

[Consciousness] *differentiates* something from itself to which it at the same time relates itself; or, as it is expressed, it is something *for* [consciousness]; and the determinate aspect of this *relating*, or the *being* of something *for a consciousness*, is *knowing*. But from this being-for-another we differentiate *being-in-itself*; that to which knowing is related is differentiated from it as well, and posited as *being* also outside of this relationship; the aspect of this in-itself is called *truth*. (Hegel 1977, 52)

Indeed, insofar as our consciousness knows something, it is in relation with it. And this means that it knows it only as it is *in this relation* and not as it is *outside this relation*. Put differently, it knows it only as it is for us and not as it is in itself. In this way, whether our consciousness knows the form of everything in general as object or our consciousness knows the form of everything in general as concept, it knows it only as it is for us and not as it is in itself. As Hegel

explains, “both are *for that same* [consciousness]” (Hegel 1977, 54) And again, “The object seems only to be for [consciousness] as it knows it; [consciousness] seems, as it were, not to be able to get behind [the object as it knows it so as to apprehend it] as it is *not for it* but *in itself*” (Hegel 1977, 54).

However, whether our consciousness *takes itself* to be knowing the form of everything in general only as it is for us and not as it is in itself depends on whether it knows it as object or it knows it as concept. Hegel writes,

In [consciousness] one [thing] is *for another* or it has in it, in general, the determinateness of the moment of knowing; at the same time, this other is to [consciousness] not only *for it* but also outside of this relation or *in itself*: the moment of truth... But the essential point to hold fast for the whole investigation is that both of these moments, *concept and object*, being-*for-another* and being-*in-itself*, themselves fall within the knowing that we are investigating... the difference is already present in [the fact] that that [consciousness] knows of an object in general: something is *to it* the *in-itself*, but knowing, or the being of the object *for* consciousness, is *to it* another moment. (Hegel 1977, 53-4)

Thus, insofar as our consciousness knows the form of everything in general as object, it takes itself to be knowing the form of everything in general as it is in itself—as it is outside this relation. In other words, it takes itself to be knowing what all things *really are*. But, insofar as our consciousness knows the form of everything in general as concept, it takes itself to be knowing the form of everything in general only as it is for us—only as it is in this relation. In other words, it takes itself to be knowing what all things only *apparently are*. In this way, whether our consciousness *takes itself* to be knowing the form of everything in general only as it is for us and not as it is in itself depends on whether it knows it as object or it knows it as concept.

Now, insofar as our consciousness knows the form of everything in general both as object and as concept, it also *compares* the former with the latter. Or, more precisely, it also *tests* the former against the latter. Hegel writes,

Consciousness gives its standard from within itself and, through that, the investigation becomes a comparison of itself with itself; for the distinction that has been made falls within it... in what consciousness declares [*erklärt*] from within itself [as] the *in-itself* or the *true* we have the standard, which it itself sets up, by which to measure its knowing... since both are *for that same* [*consciousness*], it is itself their comparison; it is *for that same* [*consciousness* to discover] whether its knowing of the object corresponds to [the object] or not. (Hegel 1977, 53-4)

Indeed, insofar as our consciousness knows the form of everything in general both as object and as concept, it also tests the former, which it regards as *der Maßstab* or the standard, against the latter, which it regards as *das zu Prüfende* or what is to be measured by the standard. As Hegel explains, “concept and object, the standard and what is to be tested, are present in consciousness itself” (Hegel 1977, 54). And, insofar as our consciousness tests the former against the latter, it may discover an incompatibility between the two.¹⁸

But what exactly does an incompatibility of this kind consist in? In general, it consists in a conflict between the unity of the form of everything in general as object and the duality of the form of everything in general as concept. For, insofar as our consciousness knows the form of everything in general as it is being provided—before it is instantiated in some matter and comes to stand before us—it knows it not only in an immediate way but also in a unified and self-consistent way. That is, it knows it as a unity that comprehends a specific plurality. But, insofar as our consciousness knows the form of everything in general as it has been provided—after it is instantiated in some matter and comes to stand before us—it knows it not only in a mediated way but also in a duplied and self-contradictory way. That is, it knows it as a duality with two

¹⁸ Curiously, even the few commentators who explain what the object and the concept in general *are* seldom go on to explain what the object and the concept in general *have in common* such that our consciousness *can* compare and test the former against the latter. For example, H.S. Harris, one of the few, explains that, “now our object is the self-defining, self-conceptualizing power and activity of consciousness. The object ‘in itself’ is the self-conceptualizing *power*; the object ‘for us’ is the *activity*. Both of these we can define without transcending consciousness” (Harris 1997, 181). Thus he explains—in my view, wrongly—what the object and the concept in general *are*. But he does not go on to explain what the object and the concept in general *have in common* such that our consciousness *can* compare and test the former against the latter. My interpretation at least has the benefit of *trying* to do so. For, in my interpretation, what they have in common is that they are both the form of everything in general.

ineliminable and irreconcilable sides that are not comprehended by the unity of the form of everything in general as object. For example, at one early stage in its progress called “perception,” our consciousness knows a form of everything in general called “the thing with many properties.” Now, insofar as our consciousness knows this form as object, it knows it as a unity that comprehends a specific plurality—namely, the specific plurality of many properties. But, insofar as our consciousness knows this form as concept, it knows it as a duality with two ineliminable and irreconcilable sides that are not comprehended by the unity of the form of everything in general as object—namely, the two ineliminable and irreconcilable sides of *also* and *one*. It is precisely in such conflicts that an incompatibility of this kind consists.

But how exactly does an incompatibility of this kind account for how one stage progresses to the next? In general, it accounts for it by causing in our consciousness what Hegel calls an *Unruhe* or an “unrest,” which, in turn, causes in our consciousness a striving to rid itself of the incompatibility. As Hegel explains, insofar as our consciousness discovers an incompatibility of this kind, “it can find no rest. If it wants to remain in thoughtless inertia, thought troubles its thoughtlessness, and its unrest disturbs the inertia” (Hegel 1977, 51). And, insofar as our consciousness discovers in itself an unrest of this kind, it discovers in itself a striving to rid itself of the incompatibility—a striving that manifests in two modes. In the first mode, it manifests as our consciousness attempting either to reconcile the two sides of the form of everything in general as concept or to eliminate one of them. As Hegel explains, “[If], in this comparison, neither [the form as object nor the form as concept] corresponds to the other, so [it] appears [that] consciousness must alter its knowing in order to make it conform to the object” (Hegel 1977, 54). For example, in perception, this striving initially manifests as our consciousness attempting to eliminate one side of the thing with many properties as concept and

then attempting to eliminate the other—the side of also and then the side of one. But, insofar as these two sides are irreconcilable and ineliminable, this first mode of striving is destined to fail.

In the second mode, it manifests as our consciousness opening itself to a new form that comprehends the two sides of the form of everything in general as concept. And, insofar as our consciousness thereby happens upon a new form of this kind, this new form comes to supersede the old form both as object and as concept. For the old form as object and the old form as concept are one and the same form—just at different moments in the process of its being provided. Thus to supersede the one is to supersede the other. And, insofar as this new form comes to supersede the old form both as object and as concept, our consciousness comes to realize that, when it knew the old form of everything in general as object, it *mistook* itself to be knowing the form of everything in general as it is in itself. That is, it mistook itself to be knowing what all things *really* are. As Hegel explains,

But, in the altering of the knowing, the object itself in fact alters itself to it also; for the knowing that was present was essentially a knowing of the object; [along] with the knowing, [the object] also becomes another, for it essentially belonged to this knowing. Herewith it comes to pass to consciousness that what before was to it the *in-itself* is not in itself or that it was only *in itself for* [consciousness]. Since [consciousness] thus finds that its knowing does not correspond to its object, the object itself also does not stand; or the standard of testing alters if that for which it was supposed to be the standard does not pass in the testing; and the testing is not only a testing of knowing, but also [a testing of] its standard. (Hegel 1977, 54-5)

For example, in perception, this striving ultimately manifests as our consciousness opening itself to a new form that comprehends the two sides of the thing with many properties as concept—a form called “force.” And, insofar as our consciousness thereby happens upon this new form, force comes to supersede the thing with many properties both as object and as concept—“[along] with the knowing, [the object] also becomes another, for it essentially belonged to this knowing.” And, insofar as this new form comes to supersede the old form both as object and as concept, our

consciousness comes to realize that, when it knew the thing with many properties as object, it mistook itself to be knowing the form of everything in general as it is in itself or what all things really are—“it comes to pass to consciousness that what before was to it the *in itself* is not in itself or that it was only *in itself for [consciousness]*.” Thus, insofar as our consciousness happens upon a new form that comprehends the two sides of the form of everything in general as concept and that comes to supersede the old form both as object and as concept, this second mode of striving is destined to succeed. It is precisely by causing in our consciousness such a striving that an incompatibility of this kind accounts for how one stage progresses to the next.

Hegel calls this movement wherein a new form of everything in general comes to supersede an old form both as object and as concept—wherein one stage progresses to the next—*Erfahrung* or “experience.” As he explains, “This *dialectical* movement, which consciousness exercises on itself, both on its knowing and on its object, *insofar as the new true object appears to it* from out of it, is precisely what is called *experience*” (Hegel 1977, 55). And he observes at least four things about the movement of experience. First, Hegel observes that the movement of experience is a movement of what he calls “determinate negation.” As he writes,

[The] presentation of the untrue consciousness in its untruth is not a merely *negative* movement. The natural consciousness generally has such a one-sided view of it... It is, namely, the skepticism that only ever sees *pure nothingness* in the result and abstracts from it that this nothingness is specifically the nothingness *of that from which it results*. But only [when] taken as the nothingness of that from which it emerges [*herkömmt*], is the nothingness in fact the true result; it is herewith itself a *determinate* [nothingness] and has a *content*... [When] the result is understood [*aufgefaßt*] as it is in truth, as *determinate* negation, so has a new form therewith immediately arisen [*entsprungen*], and in the negation the transition [*Übergang*] [is] made through which the progress [*Fortgang*] through the complete series of shapes comes about of itself. (Hegel 1977, 50-1)

Indeed, the movement of experience is not a movement of *pure* negation—a movement of setting aside an old form of everything in general and nothing more. For, if it were, it would result in a “pure nothingness”—a result without content—and neither in a new form nor in the next stage.

Instead, the movement of experience is a movement of *determinate* negation—a movement of setting aside an old form of everything in general and then taking up a new form, which arises from out of the old. Thus it results in a “determinate nothingness”—a result with content—and both in a new form and in the next stage.

Second, Hegel observes that the movement of experience is a movement of determinate negation that results *in a series of stages*. As he writes,

[Science] can from this standpoint be regarded as the way of the natural consciousness, which presses to true knowing; or as the way of the soul, which wanders through the series of its configurations [*Gestaltungen*], as through stations appointed to it [by] its nature, that it might purify itself to spirit by achieving through the fulfilled experience of itself the awareness of what it is in itself. (Hegel 1977, 49)

Indeed, the movement of experience is not a movement that takes place only once. For, insofar as our consciousness opens itself to and thereby happens upon a new form that comprehends the two sides of the form of everything in general as concept, and insofar as this new form comes to supersede the old form both as object and as concept, our consciousness goes through the same steps again. That is, insofar as our consciousness knows this form as object, it again takes itself to be knowing the form of everything in general as it is in itself and, insofar as our consciousness knows this form as concept, it again takes itself to be knowing the form of everything in general only as it is for us; it again tests the former against the latter; it again may discover an incompatibility between the two that consists in a conflict between the unity of the form as object and the duality of the form as concept; and, in that case, it again discovers in itself an unrest and a striving to rid itself of the incompatibility, which, in the first mode, again manifests as our consciousness attempting either to reconcile the two sides of the form of everything in general as concept or to eliminate one of them and, in the second mode, again manifests as our consciousness opening itself to a new form that comprehends the two sides of the form of

everything in general as concept; and so on. In this way, our consciousness goes through the same steps again and again, thus giving rise to a series of stages.

Third, Hegel observes that the movement of experience is a movement of determinate negation that results in a series of stages *in a necessary sequence*. As he writes, “Herewith a new shape of consciousness comes on the scene also, for which the essence is something other than the preceding. It is this circumstance that guides the whole series of the shapes of consciousness in their necessity” (Hegel 1977, 56). Indeed, the movement of experience is not a movement that takes place in an accidental way. For, insofar as our consciousness happens upon a new form that comprehends the two sides of the form of everything in general as concept, it always happens upon one that is nothing other than the unity of that specific plurality. That is, it always happens upon one that adds nothing other than this unity and so is entirely determined by the old form it comes to supersede. In this way, our consciousness goes through the same steps again and again, thus giving rise to a series of stages in a necessary sequence.

Fourth, Hegel observes that the movement of experience is a movement of determinate negation that results in a series of stages in a necessary sequence *that culminates in a final stage*. As he writes, “The *fulfillment* of the forms of the unreal consciousness will arise through the necessity of the progression and interconnection [of the forms]” (Hegel 1977, 50). And again, “But the *goal* is fixed for knowing just as necessarily as the series of the progression” (Hegel 1977, 51). Indeed, the movement of experience is not a movement that takes place without end. For, insofar as our consciousness goes through the same steps again and again, it only goes through them until it happens upon a new form that comprehends the two sides of the form of everything in general as concept where it discovers no incompatibility between this form as object and this form as concept. That is, it only goes through them until it happens upon a new

form “where [knowing] no longer has need to go beyond itself, where it finds itself, and concept corresponds to object [and] object corresponds to concept” (Hegel 1977, 51). In this way, our consciousness goes through the same steps again and again, thus giving rise to a series of stages in a necessary sequence that culminates in a final stage.

Hegel calls this final stage *Wissenschaft* or “science” as well as *absolute Wissen* or “absolute knowing.” Now he does not provide a full account of this final stage in the introduction but he does write the following:

The experience that consciousness goes through [*über sich macht*] can, according to its concept, conceptualize in itself nothing less than the whole system [of consciousness] or the whole realm of the truth of spirit... By pressing itself forward to its true existence, it comes to arrive at a point at which it gets rid of its look of being burdened with something strange [*Fremdartigem*], what is only for it and as another, or where the appearance becomes identical with the essence; at just this point its presentation herewith coincides [*zusammenfällt*] with the authentic science of spirit, and finally, by itself grasping its own essence, it comes to signify the nature of absolute knowing itself. (Hegel 1977, 57)

Now, in this final stage, our consciousness determines the ultimate answer to the question: what *is* as such? And this answer is: *Geist* or the divine activity of cognizing. Thus, in this final stage, our consciousness comes to know what *Geist* is and what it is responsible for, namely, the being and the knowing of all that is or, in other words, the being and the knowing of itself and, in fact, nothing other than itself. Moreover, it comes not only to know what *Geist* is but also to know what *Geist* has been throughout the series of stages. In this way, it comes to “conceptualize in itself nothing less than the whole system [of consciousness] or the whole realm of the truth of spirit.” But, in this final stage, our consciousness also comes to know what it itself is and what it itself is responsible for. For, insofar as the divine activity of cognizing happens only in and through our collective activity of cognizing and vice versa, to come to know the one is to come to know the other. Thus our consciousness comes to know that it participates in the divine

activity of cognizing and so is partly responsible for the being and the knowing of all that is.¹⁹ In this way, “it gets rid of its look of being burdened with something strange.” Absolute knowing thus represents the ultimate stage in the activity of our coming to be and coming to know what we essentially are.

To summarize, the work of science progresses through a series of stages, wherein one stage differs from another by virtue of the form of everything in general that our collective activity of cognizing provides in each one and wherein one stage progresses to the next by virtue of an incompatibility between the form of everything in general as object and as concept that our collective activity discovers in each one. This incompatibility consists in the conflict between the unity of the form of everything in general as object and the duality of the form of everything in general as concept and accounts for how one stage progresses to the next by causing in our consciousness an unrest and a striving to rid itself of the incompatibility, which, in the first mode, manifests as our consciousness attempting either to reconcile the two sides of the form of everything in general or to eliminate one of them and, in the second mode, as our consciousness opening itself to a new form that comprehends the two sides of the form of everything in general as concept. And, insofar as our consciousness thereby happens upon a form of this kind, this new form comes to supersede the old form both as object and as concept. Hegel calls this movement “experience” and observes that it is a movement of determinate negation that results in a series of stages in a necessary sequence that culminates in a final stage, which he calls “science” or “absolute knowing.” In this final stage, our consciousness comes to know both what *Geist* is and

¹⁹ As Hyppolite explains, in absolute knowing “Hegel begins by showing how the self has experienced itself as *identical with being*... Being thinks itself as self, and self thinks itself as being. This thought of the self, this ontologic, which is the thought of thought at the same time that it is the thought of all things, constitutes absolute knowledge” (Hyppolite 1974, 574).

what it itself is. It thus represents the ultimate stage in the activity of our coming to be and coming to know what we essentially are.

§2. Taylor's and Hegel's Methods of Critique in Contrast

Let us now attempt to bring the method of immanent critique as it is developed in the introduction to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* into relation with Taylor's method in *The Ethics of Authenticity*. And, in doing so, let us attend not only to how they are similar and different but also to what the consequences for Taylor's critique might be if his method were more strictly Hegelian.

Now Taylor and Hegel both carry out their work through the method of immanent critique. Indeed, as we have seen, Taylor argues that the first malaise of modernity, like the other two, can and should be overcome through what he calls "a work of retrieval." That is, he argues that it can and should be overcome not by our rejecting the ideal of authenticity as such but by our retrieving the ideal of authenticity proper from out of the ideal of self-determining freedom. And, as we have seen, Taylor carries out this work of retrieval through the method of immanent critique. That is, he carries out this work of retrieval through the method of critique whereby the standard against which the object of critique is measured is internal to the object itself. And this method is also the method at work in Hegel. Indeed, the work itself of science progresses through what Hegel calls a *Methode der Ausführung* or "method of execution" that is nothing other than the method of immanent critique. For it progresses through a method of execution whereby our consciousness tests the form of everything in general as object, which it regards as the standard, against the form of everything in general as concept, which it regards as what is to be measured against the standard. Thus the work itself of science progresses through a method of execution whereby the standard against which the object of critique is measured is internal to the

object itself. For the form of everything in general as object and the form of everything in general as concept are one and the same form—just at different moments in the process of being provided. Thus the work itself of science progresses through a method of execution that is nothing other than the method of immanent critique. In this way, this method is also the method at work in Hegel.

And, as we have seen, the method of immanent critique has at least one great advantage over any other method of critique. For, in the case of any other method of critique, the standard against which the object of critique is measured is external to the object itself. And this means that the validity of the standard requires a separate proof. But, in the case of the method of immanent critique, the standard against which the object of critique is measured is internal to the object itself. And this means that the validity of the standard requires no separate proof—it derives from the object itself. And this great advantage is noted by Hegel. Indeed, he notes that, in the case of any other method of critique, the validity of the standard against which the object of critique is measured requires a separate proof and that, if the work itself of science were to proceed through such a method, it would, in the absence of such a proof, become a matter of mere assertion. As he explains,

For [science] can neither merely reject a knowing that is not truthful as a common view of things and assure [us] that it is a wholly other cognition and [that the] knowing [that is not truthful] is nothing for it at all nor appeal to the intimation [*Ahndung*] of a better in itself. Through this assurance it explains its being [as constituting] its power; but the untrue knowing likewise appeals to [the fact] that *it is* and *assures* [us] that science is nothing to it; but *one* bald assurance is valid just as much as another. (Hegel 1977, 48-9)

Thus Hegel notes that, if the work itself of science were to proceed through any other method of critique, it would, in the absence of such a proof, become a matter of mere assertion. And, indeed, he also notes that, in the case of the method of immanent critique, the validity of the standard against which the object of critique is measured requires no separate proof and that,

since the work itself of science progresses through this method, the validity of the standard derives from the object itself. As he explains, “we do not need to bring standards with [us] or apply *our* vagaries and thoughts throughout the inquiry” (Hegel 1977, 54). Thus Hegel notes that, since the work itself of science progresses through the method of immanent critique, the validity of the standard derives from the object itself. In this way, this great advantage is noted by Hegel.

Thus Taylor and Hegel both carry out their work through the method of immanent critique. Now, through this method, the object of critique either succeeds in measuring up to its own internal standard or fails to measure up to its own internal standard. And, insofar as the object of critique succeeds in this way, it must be allowed to stand. Taylor’s method and Hegel’s method agree on this. But, insofar as the object of critique fails in this way, it must not be allowed to stand—it must be either amended or abandoned. Taylor’s method and Hegel’s method agree on this as well. But they seem to disagree on the ultimate viability of these two possibilities. For Taylor’s method suggests that, if an object of critique fails to measure up to its own internal standard, it may be amended rather than abandoned. Indeed, Taylor argues that the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form fails to measure up to its own internal standard. For it is not an ideal such that its expression can be recognized as meaningful by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified. And, insofar as the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form fails in this way, it must be either amended or abandoned. Now Taylor argues that it must be amended so as to become the ideal of authenticity in its genuine form. Put differently, he argues that the ideal of self-determining freedom must be amended so as to become the ideal of authenticity proper. In this way, Taylor’s method suggests that, if an object of critique fails to

measure up to its own internal standard, it may be amended rather than abandoned—that, in principle, both of these possibilities are viable.

But Hegel's method suggests that, if an object of critique fails to measure up to its own internal standard, it must be abandoned rather than amended. Indeed, insofar as our consciousness tests the form of everything in general as object against the form of everything in general as concept and discovers an incompatibility between the two that consists in a conflict between the unity of the former and the duality of the latter, it discovers in itself an unrest and a striving to rid itself of this incompatibility—a striving that manifests itself in two modes. In the first mode, it manifests as our consciousness attempting to reconcile the two sides of the form of everything in general as concept or to eliminate one of them. But Hegel argues that, insofar as these two sides are irreconcilable and ineliminable, this first mode of striving is destined to fail. In the second mode, it manifests as our consciousness opening itself to a new form that comprehends the two sides of the form of everything in general as concept. And, insofar as our consciousness thereby happens upon a new form of this kind, this new form comes to supersede the old form both as object and as concept. For the old form as object and the old form as concept are one and the same form—just at different moments in the process of being provided. And Hegel argues that, insofar as our consciousness happens upon a new form that comprehends the two sides of the form of everything in general as concept and that comes to supersede the old form both as object and as concept, this second mode of striving is destined to succeed. In this way, Hegel's method suggests that, if an object of critique fails to measure up to its own internal standard, it must be abandoned rather than amended—that, in principle, only one of these possibilities is viable.²⁰

²⁰ Of course, Hegel suggests not that the object of critique must be abandoned utterly but that the object of critique must be comprehended and superseded. That is, it must be *aufgehoben*—it must be both negated and preserved. In

Thus Taylor's method and Hegel's method seem to disagree on the ultimate viability of these two possibilities. And this disagreement is not entirely inconsequential. For, if Hegel's method agreed with Taylor's that, if an object of critique fails to measure up to its own internal standard, it may be amended rather than abandoned, the work itself of science would be compromised. Indeed, this work progresses through a series of stages only insofar as our consciousness opens itself to and thereby happens upon a new form that comprehends the two sides of the form of everything in general as concept and only insofar as this new form comes to supersede the old form both as object and as concept. But, if an object of critique may be amended rather than abandoned, our consciousness may not open itself and thereby happen upon a new form in this way and this new form may not come to supersede the old form in this way. Thus the work itself of science would be compromised. And, if Taylor's method agreed with Hegel's that, if an object of critique fails to measure up to its own internal standard, it must be abandoned rather than amended, the work of retrieval would be compromised. Indeed, Taylor argues that the first malaise of modernity, like the other two, can and should be overcome not by our rejecting the ideal of authenticity as such but by our retrieving the ideal of authenticity proper from out of the ideal of self-determining freedom. But, if an object of critique must be abandoned rather than amended, the ideal of authenticity as such may have to be rejected. Thus the work of retrieval would be compromised. In this way, it is not entirely inconsequential that Taylor's method and Hegel's method seem to disagree on the ultimate viability of these two possibilities.

But let us imagine for a moment that Taylor's critique were more strictly Hegelian. That is, let us imagine that Taylor's method agreed with Hegel's that, if an object of critique fails to

this way, Hegel suggests that the object of critique must be abandoned in a sense that is close to its etymological significance—it must be put under the control of another.

measure up to its own internal standard, it must be abandoned rather than amended. And let us imagine that, as a result, the work of retrieval were compromised and that the ideal of authenticity as such had to be rejected. In my view, this could, using Taylor's words, "come across as good news or bad news." Indeed, for Taylor, it would come across as bad news. For, in his view, the ideal of authenticity as such is "very worthwhile in itself" and "unrepudiable by moderns" (Taylor 1991, 23). Thus, if the ideal of authenticity as such were abandoned rather than amended, all that is potentially positive about it would be left behind. In this way, if the ideal had to be rejected, it would come across as bad news for Taylor. However, for many others, it could come across as good news. For, in my view, Taylor's critique is problematic because it argues that the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form must be amended so as to become an ideal that, at worst, again gives rise to "a loss of meaning" and again must be amended so as to become one of "the higher... forms of freedom" and, at best, is the site of "a struggle" that "goes on—in fact, forever." But then I think it will be problematic for many, perhaps most, of those sharing our moral horizon. And, if the ideal of authenticity as such were abandoned rather than amended, all that is potentially negative about it would also be left behind. In this way, if the ideal had to be rejected, it could come across as good news for many others.

Chapter 4: Hegel and the Concept of Recognition

In this chapter, my primary task is to explain the concept of recognition as it is developed in the opening sections of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and bring it into relation with Taylor's concept in *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Indeed, as we have seen, Taylor argues that the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form fails to measure up to its own internal standard. For it is not an ideal such that its expression can be recognized as meaningful by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified. And, as we have seen, in showing how the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form fails to measure up to its own internal standard, Taylor also takes himself to be showing how it gives rise to the first malaise of modernity. For one's ability to experience one's own life as meaningful depends upon the ability of others to recognize it as meaningful. Indeed, in his view, insofar as the ideal of self-determining freedom fails in this way, it gives rise to the inability of many in our age to experience their lives as meaningful. But Taylor's concept of recognition would seem to have its roots in Hegel's concept. And this is perhaps not too surprising. For Taylor's work in general is greatly indebted to Hegel's thought. And, indeed, in Hegel's thought the concept of recognition finds its most sophisticated modern expression.¹

Now the effort to explain the concept of recognition as it is developed in the opening sections of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* will, of course, be worthwhile generally. For this concept is basic to Hegel's thought and, in these opening sections of his *Phenomenology*, its advent is explained through the method of immanent critique. But, leaving this aside, the effort to bring Hegel's concept into relation with Taylor's will be helpful within the context of the present work in at least two ways. First, insofar as Taylor's concept has its roots in Hegel's, it

¹ Taylor himself observes, "the topic of recognition is given its most influential early treatment in Hegel" (Taylor 1991, 49).

will be helpful in bringing into focus exactly what Taylor's concept is. Second, insofar as Taylor's concept strays from its roots in Hegel's, it will be helpful in bringing into relief the reasons why, if Taylor's critique seems not to propose any solutions that could prevent unhappy social consequences—such as the first malaise of modernity—from arising, the stakes might be higher than he thinks.

In this chapter, I will proceed in two stages. In the first, I will attempt to explain the concept of recognition as it is developed in the opening sections of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. And, in doing so, I hope to provide an interpretation that is somewhat more thorough and integrated than can be found in many of the standard commentaries.² In the second, I will attempt to bring Hegel's concept of recognition into relation with Taylor's. And, in so doing, I hope not only to show how they are similar and different but also to suggest what the consequences for Taylor's critique might be if Taylor's concept were more strictly Hegelian.

§1. Sensible Certainty

The first major division of *Phenomenology of Spirit* is entitled "Consciousness." Now, within this division, our collective activity of cognizing is responsible for everything being an opposition to a consciousness. Thus, within this division, our consciousness is a consciousness that opposes the world and is aware of itself as such—it is aware of itself as an "I" that opposes the world as an "other." And this is the case throughout the first division.

Now this first major division consists in three main sections: "Sensible Certainty or the This and Meaning," "Perception or the Thing and Deception," and "Force and the

² Indeed, these opening sections are passed over almost entirely by Charles Taylor in his *Hegel* as well as by Alexandre Kojève, in his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. In fact, the original French text of his *Introduction à la Lecture de Hegel*, which is around six-hundred pages long, devotes only six pages (pages 43-48) to the first three sections. Or, more precisely, it devotes only six pages to the sketch of an outline of the first three sections. And his chapter entitled *Résumé des Six Premiers Chapitres de la Phénoménologie de l'Esprit* or "Summary of the First Six Chapters of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*" scarcely mentions sensible certainty and never mentions perception or force and the understanding at all.

Understanding: Appearance and the Supersensible World.” And, within these sections, our collective activity of cognizing is responsible for every opposition to a consciousness being “this,” a thing with many properties, or a force, respectively. Thus, within these sections, our activity of cognizing differently determines the answer to the question: what *is* as such? Let us begin with the first.

The first section of *Phenomenology of Spirit* is entitled “Sensible Certainty or This and Meaning.” And it presents a stage called *sinnliche Gewißheit* or “sensible certainty.” Now this stage is unusual because, in sensible certainty, our consciousness does not begin with a form of everything in general—it ends with one. Indeed, sensible certainty is the stage wherein our consciousness first discovers a form of everything in general. But if, in sensible certainty, our consciousness does not begin with a form of everything in general, with what does it begin?

Hegel explains,

consciousness, for its part, is in this certainty only as pure *I*; or *I* am in it only as pure *this* and the object likewise only as pure *this*. I, *this*, am *certain* about *this Sache*, not because *I*, as consciousness, have hereby developed myself and had manifold thoughts. And also not because *the Sache* of which I am certain, in virtue of a host [*Menge*] of different qualities [*Beschaffenheiten*], would be a rich [set of] relations [*Beziehung*] in itself or a multifaceted comportment [*Verhalten*] to others. (Hegel 1977, 58)

Thus, in sensible certainty, our consciousness begins not with a form of everything in general but with a particular. More specifically, it begins with a particular *this*. But, as Hegel indicates above, a particular *this* is not a particular item that stands alongside other particular items within one or another larger context—it is not “a multifaceted comportment to others.” For example, it is not a particular volume of Hopkins that stands alongside other particular volumes of poetry within one or another library. Instead, a particular *this* is a particular *scene* that is externally unbounded. But, as Hegel also indicates above, a particular *this* is also not a larger context within which particular items stand alongside one another—it is not “a rich set of relations in itself.”

For example, it is not a particular pasture, a particular industrial park, a particular cathedral nave, or a particular pub. Instead, a particular *this* is a particular *scene* that is internally unvariegated.³ Thus, in sensible certainty, our consciousness begins with a particular *this*. And, if it were asked at this point: what *is* as such?, it would answer: this particular *scene*.

But a particular *this* can be rearticulated as a particular *here and now*. As Hegel explains, “So [sensible certainty] is to ask itself: *What is this?* If we take it in the twofold shape of its being, as *now* and as *here*, the dialectic, which it has in it, will receive a form as understandable as it itself is” (Hegel 1977, 60). Thus, in sensible certainty, our consciousness begins with a particular *this*. And, if it were asked at this point: what *is* as such?, it would answer: this particular *here and now*.

Now our consciousness knows this particular here and now in two senses—as object and as concept. And, insofar as our consciousness knows this particular here and now as object, it knows it in a unified and self-consistent way. That is, it knows it as a unity. But, insofar as it knows this particular here and now as concept, it knows it in a duplied and self-contradictory way. That is, it knows it as a duality with two ineliminable and irreconcilable sides that are not comprehended by the unity of this particular here and now as object. Hegel argues that these two ineliminable and irreconcilable sides are the sides of *one particular here and now* and *another particular here and now*. And this duality is implicit in this unity. But only in this particular here and now as concept—as it comes to stand before us—does our consciousness come to *know* this duality. Let us see how this happens.

³ Hegel reiterates this point a number of times. For example, he writes, “[Sensible certainty] declares of what it knows only this: it *is*; and its truth contains the *being* of the *Sache* alone” (Hegel 1977, 58). And again, “in [sensible certainty] neither I nor the *Sache* has the significance of a manifold mediation; I do not have the significance of a manifold representing or thinking, nor does the *Sache* have the significance of manifold qualities [*Beschaffenheiten*]” (Hegel 1977, 58). And, in fact, this is why he notes that, although the “concrete content of *sensible certainty* lets it immediately appear as the *richest* cognition... [and as] the *truest*,” it finally “displays itself as the most abstract and poorest *truth*” (Hegel 1977, 58).

Hegel suggests that our consciousness comes to know this duality through the movement of this particular here and now coming to stand before us and being replaced by a different particular here and now. With regard to this particular now, Hegel explains, “To the question: *What is now?* let us answer, for example: *Now is night*. In order to test the truth of this sensible certainty a simple experiment is sufficient. We write down this truth... If *now, this noon*, we look again at the written-down truth we must say that it has become stale” (Hegel 1977, 60). With regard to this particular here, Hegel explains, “It will be the same case with the other form of this, with *here*. *Here* is, for example, the *tree*. If I turn around, this truth has vanished and has converted [*verkehrt*] itself into the opposite [*entgegengesetzte*]: *Here is not a tree*, but rather a *house*” (Hegel 1977, 60-1). Indeed, this particular here will be replaced by a different particular here if I should only turn my head. And, even if I should not, this particular now will be replaced by a different particular now.⁴ Thus, through this movement, our consciousness comes to know this duality of the two sides of one particular here and now and another particular here and now.⁵

⁴ Of course, Hegel’s reasoning here is inconsistent. For this particular here and now are supposed to be both externally unbounded and internally unvariegated. But the movement of this particular here and now coming to stand before us and being replaced by another particular here and now consists in the movement from day to night, which are both internally variegated, and in the movement from a house to a tree, which are both not only internally variegated but also externally bounded. Now Hegel’s inconsistent reasoning here is not inexplicable. Indeed, our consciousness could only observe a difference between one particular here and now and another particular here and now if both were at least internally variegated. But Hegel’s inconsistent reasoning here is nevertheless indefensible. Curiously, even the few commentators who note that it is inconsistent seldom go on to say that it is also indefensible. For example, Hyppolite, one of the few, notes that, “Sensuous certainty, indeed, does not have the right to rise above the notions of the this, the here, the now. In saying ‘the now is daytime’ or ‘the this is a tree,’ it introduces qualitative determinations into its knowledge which are opposed to the immediateness that it requires for its object” (Hyppolite 1974, 90). But he does not go on to say that it is indefensible as well.

⁵ Hegel suggests that this is the *Geheimnis* or “secret” of the Eleusinian Mysteries of Ceres and Bacchus, whose rites involved “the eating of bread and the drinking of wine.” As he explains, “For he who is initiated into these mysteries not only comes to doubt the being of sensible things, but to despair of it; in part he brings about the nothingness of such things himself in his dealings with them, and in part he sees them reduce themselves to nothingness. Even the animals are not shut out from this wisdom but, on the contrary, show themselves to be most profoundly initiated into it; for they do not just stand idly by in front of sensible things as if these possessed intrinsic being, but, despairing of their reality, and completely assured of their nothingness, they fall to without ceremony and eat them up. And all nature, like the animals, celebrates these open mysteries which teach the truth about sensible things” (Hegel 1977, 65). Hegel suggests here that these rites centered around the movement of this particular here and now coming to stand before us and being replaced by a different particular here and now — they centered around the fleetingness of things. And he suggests that this is a movement that even animals are aware of.

Thus our consciousness discovers an incompatibility between this particular here and now as object and this particular here and now as concept, which causes in our consciousness an unrest and a striving to rid itself of the incompatibility. And this striving ultimately manifests as our consciousness opening itself to a form that comprehends the two sides of this particular here and now as concept—a form called *das sinnlich Allgemeine* or “the sensible universal.” As Hegel explains, “Such a simple [thing], which is through negation, [which is] neither this nor that, [which is] a *not this*, and [which] is also likewise as indifferently this as that, we call a *universal*; so the universal is, in fact, the truth of sensible certainty” (Hegel 1977, 60). And, insofar as our consciousness thereby happens upon this form, the sensible universal comes to supersede this particular here and now both as object and as concept. More precisely, both as object and as concept, this particular here and now comes to be superseded by the *universal* here and now. With regard to the universal now, Hegel explains,

Now indeed preserves itself, but in such a way that it is not night; likewise it preserves itself against the day, which it now is, in such a way that it is also not day; or as a *negative* in general... It is thereby still as simply *now* as before, and in this simplicity is indifferent to what bandies about in it; as little as night and day are its being, just as much it is also day and night; it is not at all affected by this its other being. (Hegel 1977, 60)

With regard to the universal here, Hegel explains, “*Here* itself does not vanish; rather, *it* remains in the vanishing of the house, tree, and so forth, and is indifferently house [or] tree” (Hegel 1977, 61). Thus, in sensible certainty, our consciousness begins with a particular this and ends with the sensible universal. In this way, it first discovers a form of everything in general. And, if it were asked at this point: what *is* as such?, it would answer: the *universal* here and now.

Now Hegel points out that our consciousness has in fact been *saying* this all along. Indeed, it has been saying that what *is* as such is the universal here and now even if it has been

saying that what *is* as such is this particular here and now. For the term “this particular here and now” is universal and denotes many particulars. As Hegel explains,

We also *pronounce* the sensible as a universal; what we say is: *this*, which means the *universal this*; or: *it is*, which means, *being in general*. Of course, we do not thereby *represent* to us the universal this or being in general but we *pronounce* the universal; or we plainly do not speak as we *mean* it in this sensible certainty. But language is, as we see, the more truthful; in it we ourselves immediately refute our *meaning*, and since the universal is the true of sensible certainty, and language only expresses this true, so it is just not possible for us that we could say a sensible being that we *mean*. (Hegel 1977, 60)

Indeed, all terms are universal and denote many particulars. For example, “Socrates” denotes not only the philosopher of Athens but also any and every other Socrates who has been, is, or will be. Similarly, “this particular here and now” denotes not only the here and now that *is* but also any and every here and now that has been or will be. Thus our consciousness has been saying that what *is* as such is the universal here and now even if our consciousness has been saying that what *is* as such *is* this particular here and now. As Hegel explains, “one [who makes] such [a] claim knows not what he speaks, knows not that he says the opposite of what he wants to say” (Hegel 1977, 65). In this way, it has in fact been saying this all along.

But Hegel does not leave sensible certainty behind here. And this is because he observes that a particular this can be rearticulated again as a particular *I*. For our consciousness has been *meaning* that what *is* as such is this particular scene even if our consciousness has been *saying* that what *is* as such is the universal scene. As Hegel explains, “*our meaning*, for which the true of sensible certainty is not the universal, is all that is left over in the face of this empty or indifferent here and now” (Hegel 1977, 61). But meaning is only ever the meaning of an I—*Meinung* is always *mein*. More precisely, meaning is only ever the activity of an I. And a particular meaning is only ever the particular activity of a particular I. And this suggests that this particular scene can be rearticulated again as this particular I. As Hegel explains, “The force of

its truth thus lies now in the *I*, in the immediacy of my *seeing, hearing*, and so forth; the vanishing of the single now and here that we mean is prevented by [the fact] that *I* hold them fast. *Now is day* because I see it; *here is a tree* for the same reason” (Hegel 1977, 61). Thus, in sensible certainty, our consciousness begins again with a particular *this*. And, if it were asked at this point: what *is* as such?, it would answer: this particular *I*.

But our consciousness has the same experience with this particular *I* as it had with this particular here and now. As Hegel explains, “But sensible certainty experiences in this relationship the same dialectic in it as in the previous [one]” (Hegel 1977, 61). In brief, our consciousness knows this particular *I* as object and as concept. And, insofar as it knows it as concept, it knows it as a duality with two ineliminable and irreconcilable sides—the sides of one particular *I* and another particular *I*—that cannot be comprehended by the unity of this particular *I* as object. And this duality is implicit in this unity. But only in this particular *I* as concept—as it comes to stand before us—does our consciousness come to *know* this duality. Hegel suggests that our consciousness comes to know this duality through the movement of this particular *I* coming to stand before us and being replaced by a different particular *I*. As Hegel explains,

I, this, see the tree and *claim the tree as here*; but *another I* sees the house and claims that here is not a tree [but] rather a house. Both truths have the same authentication, namely, the immediacy of seeing, and the certainty and assurance of both over their knowing; but the one vanishes in the other. (Hegel 1977, 61)

Indeed, this particular *I* will be replaced by a different particular *I* if I should only change my meaning. Thus, through this movement, our consciousness comes to know this duality of the two sides of one particular *I* and another particular *I*.

Thus our consciousness discovers an incompatibility between this particular *I* as object and this particular *I* as concept, which causes in our consciousness an unrest and a striving to rid itself of the incompatibility. And this striving ultimately manifests as our consciousness opening

itself to a form that comprehends the two sides of this particular I as concept—the sensible universal. And, insofar as our consciousness thereby happens upon this form, both as object and as concept, this particular I comes to be superseded by the *universal I*. As Hegel explains,

What does not vanish therein is *I*, as *universal*, whose seeing is neither a seeing of the tree nor of this house, [but] is rather a simple seeing which is mediated through the negation of this house and so forth [and is] therein likewise simple and indifferent about what happens in it [*was noch beiher spielt*], about the house, the tree, [and so forth]. I is only universal, as *now, here, or this* in general. (Hegel 1977, 62)

Thus, in sensible certainty, our consciousness begins again with a particular this and ends again with the sensible universal. And, if it were asked at this point: what *is* as such?, it would answer: the *universal I*. And Hegel points out that our consciousness has in fact been *saying* this all along. As he explains,

I sure mean a *single I*, but I can no more say what I mean in the case of I than in the case of now and here. When I say: *this here, now*, or a *singular*, I say: *all thises, all heres, nows, singulars*. Likewise, when I say: *I, this singular I*, I say in general: *all Is; everyone is what I say: I, this singular I*. (Hegel 1977, 62)

Thus our consciousness has been saying that what *is* as such is the universal I even if our consciousness has been saying that what *is* as such is this particular I. In this way, it has in fact been saying this all along.

But Hegel does not leave sensible certainty behind here either. And this is because he observes that a particular this can be rearticulated once again as a particular *relation* between a particular here and now and a particular I. Hegel writes,

We come through this to posit the *whole* of sensible certainty itself as its *essence* [and] no longer only a moment of it, as happened in both cases wherein, first, the object opposed to the I [and], then, the I were supposed to be its reality... Its truth maintains itself as relation that remains selfsame [and] makes no distinction between the I and the object [or between] the essential and the unessential, and also in which therefore no distinction in general can penetrate. Thus I, this, claim the here as tree and do not turn around so that the here would become to me a not-tree; also I take no notice of [the fact] that another I sees the here as not-tree or that I myself [at] another time take here as not-tree, the now as not-day, [and so forth]. (Hegel 1977, 62-3)

But our consciousness has the same experience with this particular relation between a particular here and now and a particular I as it had with this particular here and now and with this particular I. We need not examine all of the details here since the experience is familiar by now. Let it suffice to say that, in sense certainty, our consciousness begins once again with a particular this and ends once again with the sensible universal. And, if it were asked at this point, what *is* as such?, it would answer: the *universal* relation between the universal here and now and the universal I. And here Hegel finally leaves sensible certainty behind.

To summarize, in sense certainty, our consciousness begins not with a form of everything in general but with a particular *this* or a particular *scene*. But a particular scene can be rearticulated in several ways. First, it can be rearticulated as this particular *here and now*. But, insofar as our consciousness knows this particular here and now as concept, it knows it as a duality with the two ineliminable and irreconcilable sides of one particular here and now and another particular here and now. Thus our consciousness opens itself to a form that comprehends the two sides of this particular here and now as concept and comes to supersede this particular here and now both as object and as concept—the sensible universal as the *universal* here and now. Second, it can be rearticulated as this particular *I*. But, insofar as our consciousness knows this particular I as concept, it knows it as a duality with the two ineliminable and irreconcilable sides of one particular I and another particular I. Thus our consciousness opens itself to a form that comprehends the two sides of this particular I as concept and comes to supersede this particular I both as object and as concept—the sensible universal as the *universal* I. Third, it can be rearticulated as this particular *relation* between this particular here and now and this particular I. But our consciousness has the same experience with this particular relation between a particular here and now and a particular I as it had with this particular here and now and with this

particular I. Thus it opens itself to the sensible universal as the *universal* relation between the universal here and now and the universal I. And, in each case, Hegel points out that our consciousness has in fact been *saying* this all along.

§2. Perception or the Thing and Deception

The second section of *Phenomenology of Spirit* is entitled “Perception or the Thing and Deception.” And it presents a stage called *Wahrnehmung* or “perception,” which begins where sensible certainty ended. Thus, in perception, our consciousness begins with the sensible universal as the form of everything in general—the universal *this*, which includes the universal here and now, the universal I, and the universal relation between the universal here and now and the universal I. As Hegel explains,

Immediate certainty does not apprehend the true, for its truth is the universal, but it wants to apprehend *this*. Perception, on the other hand, apprehends as universal what is being to it. As universality [is] its principle in general, so its moments are also [universal] in their immediate self-differentiation: I [is] universal and the object [is] universal. This principle has *arisen* [*entstanden*] for us, and our taking up of perception [is] therefore no longer an apparent taking up, as [it was for] sensible certainty, [but is] rather a necessity. (Hegel 1977, 67)

Indeed, in perception, our consciousness begins with the sensible universal as the form of everything in general. And it knows it not only as the universal *this* but also as what the universal *this* comprehends. For, in sense certainty, the universal *this* comprehends the specific plurality of the two sides of one particular here and now and another particular here and now. But, at this point, the sensible universal is the form of everything in general and so is also the form of what the universal *this* comprehends. Thus, in perception, the universal *this* comprehends the specific plurality of particular sensible universals. And, in fact, particular sensible universals of two kinds.

On the one hand, the universal *this* comprehends particular sensible universal *properties*, such as particular colors, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures. As he explains,

The sensible is itself still present, but not as it was supposed to be in immediate certainty, as the meant singular, but as universal, or as that which is determined as *property*... But being is a universal through [the fact] that it has mediation or the negative in it; when it *expresses* this in its immediacy, it is a *differentiated, determinate* property. As a result *many* such properties are posited at the same time, one the negative of the other. (Hegel 1977, 68)

For example, the universal *this* comprehends such particular properties as whiteness and blackness, saltiness and sugariness, and coarseness and smoothness.

On the other hand, the universal *this* comprehends particular sensible universal *media* for these properties, which Hegel calls *Dinge* or “things.” As he explains,

The abstract universal medium, which can be called *thinghood* in general or *pure essence*, is nothing other than the *here* and *now* as it has proved itself, namely, a *simple togetherness* of many, but the many are *in their determinateness* themselves *simple universals*. (Hegel 1977, 68)

For example, the universal *this* comprehends such things as cubes of salt and cubes of sugar, which are the particular media for such properties as whiteness, saltiness or sugariness, and coarseness. Indeed, in perception, our consciousness knows the sensible universal not only as the universal *this* but also as what the universal *this* comprehends—the specific plurality of particular sensible universal properties and particular sensible universal media for these properties, which Hegel calls *Dinge* or “things.”

Now our consciousness knows the sensible universal in two senses—as object and as concept. And, insofar as our consciousness knows the sensible universal as object, it knows it in a unified and self-consistent way. That is, it knows it as a unity that comprehends a specific plurality. Indeed, it even blends the two kinds of particular sensible universals into what Hegel calls *das Ding von vielen Eigenschaften* or “the thing with many properties.” As Hegel explains, “Since [the object’s] principle, the universal, is in its simplicity a *mediated* [universal], so [the

object] must express this in itself as its nature. Through this it shows itself as *the thing with many properties*” (Hegel 1977, 67). But, insofar as our consciousness knows the thing with many properties as concept, it knows it in a duplied and self-contradictory way. That is, it knows it as a duality with two ineliminable and irreconcilable sides that are not comprehended by the unity of the thing with many properties as object.

Hegel argues that these two ineliminable and irreconcilable sides are the sides of *also* and *one*. Indeed, universals, whether the universal *this*, sensible universal properties, or sensible universal media for these properties, are both inclusive and exclusive. In the case of properties, they are inclusive in the sense that they include all of their instances—they comprehend that specific plurality. For example, whiteness is inclusive in that it “holds in” its instances in, say, cubes of salt and cubes of sugar. And properties are exclusive in the sense that they exclude other properties and all of their instances. For example, whiteness is exclusive in that it “keeps out” blackness and its instances in, say, bites of licorice. As Hegel explains, “if the many determinate properties were strictly indifferent... they would not be *determinate*; for they are [determinate] only insofar as they *differentiate* themselves and *relate* themselves *to others* as opposites” (Hegel 1977, 69). In this way, every property is both an *also* and a *one*.

In the case of things, they are inclusive in the sense that they include all of their properties—they comprehend that specific plurality. For example, a cube of salt is inclusive in that it “holds in” its whiteness, saltiness, and coarseness. As Hegel explains, “This salt is [a] simple here, and at the same time manifold; it is white and *also* tart, *also* cubically shaped, *also* of a specific gravity, and so on... This *also* is thus the pure universal itself, or the medium, the *thinghood* that so holds them together” (Hegel 1977, 68-9). And things are exclusive in the sense that they exclude other things and all of their properties. For example, a cube of salt is exclusive

in that it “keeps out” cubes of sugar and their whiteness, sweetness, and coarseness. As Hegel explains, “[the medium] is therefore not only an *also*, [an] indifferent unity, but also [a] *one*, [a] *unity that excludes*. The one is the *moment of negation*, as it itself, in a simple way, relates itself to itself and excludes another; and, through this, *thinghood* is determined as *thing*” (Hegel 1977, 69). In this way, every thing is both an also and a one.

Again, our consciousness knows the sensible universal in two senses—as object and as concept. And, insofar as our consciousness knows the thing with many properties as object, it knows it in a unified and self-consistent way—as a unity that comprehends a specific plurality. But, insofar as our consciousness knows the thing with many properties as concept, it knows it in a duplied and self-contradictory way—as a duality with two ineliminable and irreconcilable sides that are not comprehended by the unity of the thing with many properties as object. And this duality is implicit in this unity. As Hegel explains,

In these moments together the thing as the true of perception is completed, so far as it is needful to develop it here. It is (a) the indifferent, passive universality, the *also* of the many properties or rather *matters*; (b) negation, likewise as simply, or the *one* that excludes opposite properties; and (c) the many *properties* themselves... Thus is the thing of perception constituted; and consciousness is determined as percipient insofar as this thing is its object. (Hegel 1977, 69-70)

Thus this duality of the two ineliminable and irreconcilable sides of also and one is implicit in the unity of the thing with many properties as object. But only in the thing with many properties as concept—as it is instantiated in some matter and comes to stand before us—does our consciousness come to *know* this duality. Let us see how this happens.

Hegel suggests our consciousness comes to know this duality in both kinds of sensible universals through a cycle that begins with a thing being instantiated in what Hegel calls *Materien* or “matters” and coming to stand before as a one, which excludes other things and all of their properties. For example, it begins with a cube of salt, which “keeps out” cubes of sugar

and their whiteness, sweetness, and coarseness. However, our consciousness then notices that the thing as a one is exceeded by one of its properties as an also, which includes all of its instances. For example, a cube of salt is exceeded by its whiteness, which “holds in” its instances in, say, cubes of salt and cubes of sugar. However, our consciousness then notices that the property is not only an also but also a one, which excludes other properties and all of their instances. For example, whiteness not only “holds in” its instances in, say, cubes of salt and cubes of sugar but also “keeps out” blackness and its instances in, say, bites of licorice. However, our consciousness then notices that the property as a one can coexist with some other properties in the thing as an also, which includes all of its properties. For example, whiteness can coexist with saltiness and coarseness in a cube of salt, which “holds in” its whiteness, saltiness, and coarseness. Thus, through this cycle, our consciousness comes to know this duality of the two sides of also and one in properties and in things (Hegel 1977, 70-1).

Now this duality is ineliminable. Indeed, all universals are both inclusive and exclusive—every universal is both an also and a one. But is it irreconcilable? Indeed, it seems that this duality *is not* irreconcilable with regard to properties. For there is nothing self-contradictory in a property including all of its instances while excluding other properties and all of their instances. For example, there is nothing self-contradictory in whiteness “holding in” its instances in, say, cubes of salt and cubes of sugar while “keeping out” blackness and its instances in, say, bites of licorice. However, it seems that this duality *is* irreconcilable with regard to things. For there is something self-contradictory in a thing including its properties while excluding other things and their properties *insofar as they include the same properties*. For example, there is something self-

contradictory in a cube of salt “holding in” its whiteness while “keeping out” cubes of sugar and their whiteness.⁶ For a thing thereby both includes and excludes one and the same property.⁷

Thus our consciousness discovers an incompatibility between the thing with many properties as object and the thing with many properties as concept, which causes in our consciousness a striving to rid itself of the incompatibility. And this striving initially manifests as our consciousness attempting to *eliminate* one side of the thing with many properties as concept and then attempting to *eliminate* the other—the side of also and then the side of one. More specifically, it initially manifests as our consciousness attempting to eliminate one side and then the other *by taking each into itself*. As Hegel explains,

Thus I at first become aware [*werde gewahr*] of the thing as *one* and have to hold fast to it in its true determination... Now there also occur in perception diverse properties, which seem to be properties of the thing; only the thing is one and we are conscious that this diversity, through which it would cease to be a one, falls in us. Thus, in fact, this thing is only white to *our eyes*, *also* tart to *our tongue*, *also* cubical to *our touch*, and so forth. Thus we are the *universal medium*, in which such moments are kept apart [*absondern*] and for themselves. (Hegel 1977, 72)

Thus our consciousness, in the first place, attempts to eliminate the side of also from the thing with many properties as concept by taking it into itself. In this way, it *becomes* the side of also, which includes all of its properties. For example, our consciousness, in the first place, attempts to eliminate the side of also from a cube of salt as concept by taking it into itself and so *becomes* the side of also, which “holds in” its whiteness, saltiness, and coarseness.

⁶ Now the question of what *exactly* the contradiction is in perception is a rather difficult one. Indeed, most of the major commentators observe that it has *something to do* with our consciousness knowing the thing with many properties as a duality with the two ineliminable and irreconcilable sides of also and one but few—indeed, *very* few—go on to explain what *exactly* the contradiction is. My interpretation at least has the benefit of *trying* to do so. For another interpretation that at least has the benefit of trying to do so, see Charles Taylor’s “The Opening Arguments of the Phenomenology.”

⁷ Of course, one might object here that there is nothing self-contradictory in this either. For, one might suggest, a thing is not thereby including and excluding one and the same property as much as it is including and excluding different instances of one and the same property. And there is nothing self-contradictory in this. But Hegel might respond that the problem cannot be resolved in this way precisely because it appeals to *instances* of one and the same property. For, in perception, the form of everything in general is the sensible universal and this means that, if the problem is to be resolved, it must be resolved by appealing to this form and to this form alone.

However, this mode of striving to rid itself of the incompatibility is destined to fail. As Hegel explains,

the thing is one just by virtue of the fact that it is opposed to others. But it does not exclude another from itself insofar as it is one; for to be one is the universal relating-of-self-to-self and, by virtue of the fact that it is one, it is like all [the others]; rather [it excludes another from itself] through its *determinateness*. (Hegel 1977, 72-3)

Indeed, insofar as our consciousness becomes the side of also, the thing becomes merely the side of one, which excludes other things and all of their properties. But this is not possible. For, insofar as the thing becomes merely the side of one, it cannot exclude other things because it cannot be distinguished from other things—it comes to lack all markers of difference. Indeed, it can only exclude other things from itself “through its determinateness.” For example, insofar as our consciousness becomes the side of also, the cube of salt becomes merely the side of one, which cannot exclude cubes of sugar because it cannot be distinguished from cubes of sugar—it comes to lack not only saltiness but also all other markers of difference.

But our consciousness does not give up here. As Hegel explains,

Consciousness quite rightly makes itself responsible for the *oneness*, first in such a way that what was called property is represented as *free matter*. The thing is in this way raised to true *also* since it becomes a collection of matters and, instead of being one, becomes a merely enclosing surface. (Hegel 1977, 73-4)

Thus our consciousness, in the second place, attempts to eliminate the side of one from the thing with many properties as concept by taking it into itself. In this way, it *becomes* the side of one, which excludes other things and all of their properties. For example, our consciousness, in the second place, attempts to eliminate the side of one from a cube of salt as concept by taking it into itself and so *becomes* the side of one, which “keeps out” cubes of sugar and their whiteness,

sweetness, and coarseness. However, this mode of striving to rid itself of the incompatibility is destined to fail here as well.⁸

At this point, our consciousness finally realizes that the two sides of also and one are ineliminable. As Hegel explains,

If we look back on what consciousness previously took on itself and [what it] now takes on itself, what it previously ascribed to the thing and [what it] now ascribes to it, so it is revealed that [consciousness] alternatively makes itself as well as the thing both into a pure manyless *one* and into an *also* that resolves itself into independent matters... the object is now to [consciousness] this whole movement, which previously was distributed [*verteilt*] between the object and consciousness. (Hegel 1977, 74)

Indeed, our consciousness finally realizes not only that the two sides of also and one are ineliminable but also that each side endlessly transitions into the other—“the object is now to consciousness this whole movement.” In this way, our consciousness finally realizes that the thing with many properties as concept is “*in one and the same respect the opposite of itself*” (Hegel 1977, 76).

At this point, then, our consciousness sets aside the first mode of striving to rid itself of the incompatibility, which Hegel calls *die Sophisterei des Wahrnehmens* or “the sophistry of perception,” and takes up the second mode of striving to rid itself of the incompatibility. Thus this striving ultimately manifests as our consciousness opening itself to a new form that comprehends the two sides of also and one—a form called *das unbedingt Allgemeine* or “the unconditioned universal.” As Hegel explains, “But since [the two sides of also and one] are essentially *in a unity*, so the unconditioned absolute universality is now present, and consciousness here for the first time truly enters into the realm of understanding” (Hegel 1977, 77). And, insofar as our consciousness thereby happens upon this new form, the unconditional

⁸ Hegel never explains why this is so. But, if the reasoning here is consistent with the reasoning before, it could be because the thing cannot include all of its properties insofar as our consciousness becomes the side of one and the thing becomes merely the side of also.

universal comes to supersede the thing with many properties both as object and as concept. Thus, in perception, our consciousness begins with the sensible universal and ends with the unconditioned universal. And, if it were asked at this point: what *is* as such?, it would answer: the unconditioned universal.

To summarize, in perception, our consciousness begins with the sensible universal as the form of everything in general. And it knows it not only as the universal *this* but also as what the universal *this* comprehends—the specific plurality of particular sensible universal properties and particular sensible universal media for these properties. Now, insofar as our consciousness knows the sensible universal as object, it knows it as a unity that comprehends a specific plurality—as the thing with many properties. But, insofar as our consciousness knows the sensible universal as concept, it knows it as a duality with two ineliminable and irreconcilable sides that are not comprehended by the unity of the thing with many properties—the sides of *also* and *one*. Thus our consciousness discovers an incompatibility between the thing with many properties as object and the thing with many properties as concept, which causes in our consciousness a striving to rid itself of this incompatibility. And this striving initially manifests as our consciousness attempting to *eliminate* one side of the thing with many properties as concept and then attempting to *eliminate* the other *by taking each into itself*. In this way, our consciousness *becomes* the side of also and then the side of one. However, this mode of striving is destined to fail. In the end, our consciousness finally realizes not only that the two sides of also and one are ineliminable but also that each side endlessly transitions into the other and it sets aside the first mode of striving to rid itself of the incompatibility and takes up the second mode of striving to rid itself of the incompatibility. Thus our consciousness opens itself to a new form that comprehends the two sides of also and one—the unconditioned universal—which comes to

supersede the thing with many properties both as object and as concept. Thus, in perception, our consciousness begins with the sensible universal and ends with the unconditioned universal.

And, if it were asked at this point: what *is* as such?, it would answer: the unconditioned universal.

§3. Force and the Understanding: Appearance and the Supersensible World

The third section of *Phenomenology of Spirit* is entitled, “Force and the Understanding: Appearance and the Supersensible World.” And it presents a stage called *Verstand* or “understanding,” which begins where perception ended. Thus, in understanding, our consciousness begins with the unconditioned universal as the form of everything in general.

But the unconditioned universal can be rearticulated as what Hegel calls *Kraft* or “force.”

As Hegel explains,

But, in fact, force is the unconditioned universal... Here, these two sides [of also and one] are moments of force; they are just as much in a unity, as this unity, which appears as the middle term against the extremes that are for themselves, always decomposes into just these extremes, which first are through [this process]. (Hegel 1977, 82-3)

Thus, in understanding, our consciousness begins with force as the form of everything in general.

And, if it were asked at this point: what *is* as such?, it would answer: force.

Now force comprehends the specific plurality of the two sides of also and one. And, insofar as the two sides of also and one are the two sides of the sensible universal as concept, they are themselves sensible—they are instantiated in what Hegel calls *Materien* or “matters” and come to stand before us “in the flesh” so to speak. Thus the two sides of also and one are what Hegel calls *das entwickelte Sein der Kraft* or “the developed being of force” or simply *Erscheinung* or “appearance.” As he explains,

This [developed being of force] is therefore called *appearance*; for we call *being* that is immediately [and] in itself a *nonbeing* “show” [*Schein*]. But it is not only a show; [it is] rather appearance, a *totality* of show... In it, the objective ways of the essence of

perception are *posited* for consciousness as they are in themselves, namely, as moments [that] without rest or being immediately transform themselves into their opposite, the one immediately in to the universal, the essential immediately into the unessential, and vice versa. (Hegel 1977, 87)

But, insofar as force *comprehends* the specific plurality of the two sides of also and one, it is itself not sensible but *supersensible*—it is instantiated not in “matters” but in what Hegel calls *Gedanke* or “thought” and comes to stand before us not “in the flesh” so to speak but in the element of thought. As he writes, “Thus the truth of force remains only in the *thought* of the same” (Hegel 1977, 86). Thus force is not appearance but beyond appearance. As Hegel explains, “there now opens up above the *sensible* world as the *apparent* world, a *supersensible* world as the *true* world, above the vanishing *present* [*Diesselts*] the enduring *beyond*” (Hegel 1977, 87).

However, force, even abstracted from the specific plurality of the two sides of also and one, is not empty. As Hegel explains, “the inner or the supersensible beyond has *come into being* [*entstanden*], it *comes* from appearance and [appearance] is its mediation; or *appearance is its essence* and, in fact, its filling” (Hegel 1977, 89). Indeed, force, even abstracted from the two sides of also and one, contains what we might call the “trace” of appearance and so also the “trace” of difference. As Hegel explains, “The absolute flux of appearance becomes *simple difference* through its relation to the simplicity of the inner or of the understanding. The inner is, to begin with, only the universal [that is] in itself; but this simple *universal* [that is] in itself is essentially just as absolutely *universal difference*, for it is the result of the flux itself” (Hegel 1977, 90).

Thus the unconditioned universal can be rearticulated again as what Hegel calls *das Gesetz der Kraft* or “the law of force.” For, insofar as it is a universal that contains the trace of appearance and so also the trace of difference, force and law in general have one and the same

structure. Now, for Hegel, the law of “universal attraction,” a kind of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century “theory of everything,” illustrates this point the best. For it “says only that *everything* has a *constant difference* [in relation] to *others*” (Hegel 1977, 91). But any law illustrates this point. Consider, for example, Newton’s second law of motion: $F=ma$. This is a universal that contains the trace of appearance and so also the trace of difference. Indeed, “F” signifies the universal of force. Hegel calls any universal of this kind *Kraft* or “force.” And “ma” signifies the trace of appearance and so also the trace of difference between mass and acceleration. Hegel calls any trace of this kind *Gesetz* or “law.” Indeed, law in general is a universal that contains the trace of appearance and so also the trace of difference. Thus law in general is both force and law. And, insofar as force and law in general have one and the same structure, force can be rearticulated as the law of force. Thus, in understanding, our consciousness begins with the law of force as the form of everything in general. And, if it were asked at this point: what *is* as such?, it would answer: the law of force.

Now our consciousness knows the law of force in two senses—as object and as concept. And, insofar as our consciousness knows the law of force as object, it knows it in a unified and self-consistent way. That is, it knows it as a unity that comprehends a specific plurality. As Hegel explains,

But since this unconditioned universal is object for consciousness, there emerges in [consciousness] the distinction of form and content; and in the shape of content the moments have the look in which they first presented themselves [*sich darboten*]: on the one side, universal medium of many subsistent matters and, on the other side, one [that is] reflected into itself wherein its independence is eradicated... It is clear at the outset that [the sides of also and one] are only in and through this [unconditioned universality], that [they] are in general no longer separated from one another but are essentially in themselves self-superseding sides, and only their transition into one another is posited. (Hegel 1977, 81)

But, insofar as our consciousness knows the law of force as concept, it knows it in a duplied and self-contradictory way. That is it knows itself as a duality with two ineliminable and irreconcilable sides that are not comprehended by the unity of the law of force as object.

Hegel argues that these two ineliminable and irreconcilable sides are the sides of *force* and *law*. For the law of force is a universal that contains the trace of appearance and so also the trace of difference. Now, insofar as it is a universal, it is force. And, insofar as it is the trace of difference, it is law. Thus the law of force is both force and law. Again, our consciousness knows the law of force in two senses—as object and as concept. And, insofar as our consciousness knows the law of force as object, it knows it in a unified as self-consistent way—as a unity that comprehends a specific plurality. But, insofar as our consciousness knows the law of force as concept, it knows it in a duplied and self-contradictory way—as a duality with two ineliminable and irreconcilable sides that are not comprehended by the unity of the law of force as object. And this duality is implicit in this unity. As Hegel explains,

The law [of force] is thereby present in a doubled way: in the first place as law in which the differences are expressed as independent moments; and in the second place also in the form of *simple* being that goes back into itself, which can again be called *force*, but not [in the sense of force that] is driven back [into itself], but rather [as] force in general or as the concept of force, an abstraction that draws into itself the differences themselves of what attracts and what is attracted. (Hegel 1977, 92)

Thus this duality of the two ineliminable and irreconcilable sides of force and law is implicit in the unity of the law of force as object. Now this duality is ineliminable. Indeed, the law of force is both force and law. But is it irreconcilable? Indeed, it seems so. *For force is a unity but law is a duality*. Consider, for example, Newton's second law of motion. Indeed, "F" signifies a unity and "ma" signifies a duality. Thus there is something self-contradictory in the law of force being both force and law. For the law of force is thereby both a unity and a duality.

Thus our consciousness discovers an incompatibility between the law of force as object and the law of force as concept, which causes in our consciousness a striving to rid itself of this incompatibility. And this striving initially manifests as our consciousness attempting to *reconcile* the two sides of the law of force as concept—the side of force and the side of law. More specifically, it initially manifests as our consciousness attempting to reconcile the two sides by establishing the necessity of their connection with one another. As Hegel explains, the law of force “must be so grasped that in it, the *differences* that are present in the law as such, as absolute *simples*, themselves again go back *into the inner as simple unity*; it is the inner *necessity* of the law” (Hegel 1977, 92). Thus our consciousness, in the first place, attempts to reconcile the two sides of the law of force as concept by establishing the necessity of their connection with one another *outside itself*. For example, it might attempt to reconcile “F” and “ma” in this way.

However, this mode of striving to rid itself of the incompatibility is destined to fail. As Hegel explains, “But necessity is here an empty word; force *must*, just *because it must*, so double itself... it only *has* this property, which means that it is not in itself necessary to it (Hegel 1977, 93). Indeed, the connection between force and law seems not to be one of necessity—it seems, rather, to be an arbitrary connection. For example, the connection between “F” and “ma” seems not to be one of necessity. Indeed, why *must* “F” be connected to “ma?” Why not to “mc²?” Or to the trace of some other difference? Is the connection between “F” and “ma” not an arbitrary connection? As Hegel explains with respect to the law of electricity, “But that electricity as such so divides itself is not in itself a necessity; it is, as *simple force*, indifferent to its law, *to be positive and negative*” (Hegel 1977, 93).

But our consciousness does not give up here. As Hegel explains,

Thus it is only its *own* necessity that understanding pronounces; thus [understanding] only makes a difference such that, at the same time, it expresses that the difference is no

difference of the Sache itself... This movement is called explanation [*Erklären*]. Thus a law is pronounced; from this the universal being in itself or the ground is differentiated as force; but of this difference [it] is said that it [is] none but rather that the ground is wholly constituted as the law... which means, *force is constituted just as the law*... In this tautological movement, as [it] arises, understanding insists on the calm unity of its object, and the movement falls only in itself, not in the object. (Hegel 1977, 94-5)

Thus our consciousness, in the second place, attempts to reconcile the two sides of the law of force as concept by establishing the necessity of their connection with one another *inside itself*. In this way, it *becomes* the two sides of the law of force as concept—the side of force and the side of law. Hegel calls this *Erklären* or “explanation.” However, this mode of striving to rid itself of the incompatibility is destined to fail here as well. As Hegel explains, “It is an explanation that not only explains nothing but [for which it] is so clear that, while it gets ready to say something different from what was already said, really says nothing, but only repeats the same” (Hegel 1977 95). Indeed, the connection between force and law seems not to be one of necessity—it seems, rather, to be an arbitrary connection—here as well.⁹

At this point, our consciousness finally realizes that the two sides of force and law are irreconcilable. As Hegel explains,

In the *Sache* itself this movement gives rise to nothing new; rather it comes into consideration as movement of understanding. But in it we cognize just what was missing in the law, namely, the absolute flux itself; for this *movement*, if we look at it more closely, is immediately the opposite of itself... It is not only the bare unity [that is] present, such that *no difference* would be *posited*, but rather it is this *movement* in which *a difference is certainly made, but, since it is none, is again superseded*. (Hegel 1977, 95)

Indeed, our consciousness finally realizes not only that the two sides of force and law are irreconcilable but also that each side endlessly transitions into the other—it is a “movement in which a difference is certainly made but, since it is none, is again superseded.” In this way, our

⁹ At this point, Hegel takes a detour into what he calls “the inverted world.” I do not discuss it here—though it is interesting in its own right—because it is not vital to the movement of the chapter. For one of the more helpful treatments of this section, see Hans-Georg Gadamer’s essay “Hegel’s ‘Inverted World.’”

consciousness finally realizes that unconditioned universal as concept is “immediately the opposite of itself.”

At this point, then, our consciousness sets aside the first mode of striving to rid itself of the incompatibility and takes up the second mode of striving to rid itself of the incompatibility. Thus this striving ultimately manifests as our consciousness opening itself to a new form that comprehends the two sides of force and law—a form called *die Unendlichkeit* or “infinity.” As Hegel explains,

We see that through infinity law fulfills itself in a necessity [that is] in it... what was called *simple* force *doubles* itself and through its infinity is law... the [two sides of force and law] both endure; they are *in themselves* and *in themselves as opposites*, i.e. each is the opposite of itself, each has its other in it and they are only *one* unity. (Hegel 99-100)

And, insofar as our consciousness thereby happens upon this new form, infinity comes to supersede the unconditioned universal both as object and as concept. Thus, in understanding, our consciousness begins with the unconditioned universal and ends with infinity. And, if it were asked at this point: what *is* as such?, it would answer: infinity.

To summarize, in understanding, our consciousness begins with the unconditioned universal or force as the form of everything in general. Now force comprehends the specific plurality of the two sides of also and one, which are themselves sensible and which Hegel calls simply “appearance.” But, insofar as force *comprehends* the specific plurality of the two sides of also and one, it is not itself sensible but *supersensible*—it is not appearance but beyond appearance. However, force, even abstracted from the specific plurality of the two sides of also and one, is not empty—it contains the trace of appearance and so also the trace of difference. Thus the unconditioned universal can be rearticulated again as the law of force. For, insofar as it is a universal that contains the trace of difference, force and law in general have one and the same structure. Now, insofar as our consciousness knows the law of force as object, it knows it

as a unity that comprehends a specific plurality. But, insofar as our consciousness knows the law of force as concept, it knows it as a duality with two ineliminable and irreconcilable sides that are not comprehended by the unity of the thing with many properties—the sides of *force* and *law*. Thus our consciousness discovers an incompatibility between the law of force as object and the law of force as concept, which causes in our consciousness a striving to rid itself of this incompatibility. And this striving initially manifests as our consciousness attempting to *reconcile* the two sides of the law of force as concept by establishing the necessity of their connection with one another *outside itself* and then *inside itself*. In this way, our consciousness *becomes* the two sides of the law of force as concept. However, this mode of striving is destined to fail. In the end, our consciousness finally realizes not only that the two sides of force and law are irreconcilable but also that each side endlessly transitions into the other and it sets aside the first mode of striving to rid itself of the incompatibility and takes up the second mode of striving to rid itself of the incompatibility. Thus our consciousness opens itself to a new form that comprehends the two sides of force and law—infinity—which comes to supersede the law of force both as object and as concept. Thus, in understanding, our consciousness begins with the unconditioned universal and ends with infinity. And, if it were asked at this point: what *is* as such?, it would answer: infinity.

§4. The Truth of Self-Certainty and the Struggle of Life and Death

The second major division of *Phenomenology of Spirit* is entitled “Self-Consciousness.” Now, within this division, our collective activity of cognizing is responsible for everything being a potential site for our consciousness. Thus, within this division, our consciousness is a consciousness that may be in the world and is aware of itself as such—it is aware of itself as an “I” that may be in the world as an “other.” And this is the case throughout the second division.

Now this second major division consists in a single section entitled “The Truth of Self-Certainty,” which itself consists in several subsections. But they all present a stage called *Selbstbewußtsein* or “self-consciousness,” which begins where understanding ended. Thus, in self-consciousness, our consciousness begins with infinity as the form of everything in general.

But infinity can be rearticulated as *Bewußtsein* or “consciousness.” As Hegel explains, “Since this concept of infinity is object to [consciousness], so [consciousness] is consciousness of the difference as one no less *immediately* superseded; [consciousness] is *for itself*, it is a *differentiation of what is not different* or *self-consciousness*” (Hegel 1977, 102). For infinity comprehends the two sides of force and law. That is, it comprehends a unity and a duality. In this way, infinity and consciousness have one and the same structure. For consciousness comprehends the two sides of object and concept. That is, it comprehends a unity and a duality. In this way, in self-consciousness, our consciousness begins with consciousness. And, if it were asked at this point: what *is* as such?, it would answer: consciousness. But this is not all. For, in understanding, our consciousness attempted to reconcile the two sides of the law of force as concept by establishing the necessity of their connection with one another *inside itself* and so *became* the two sides of the law of force as concept—the side of force and the side of law. Hegel called this *Erklären* or “explanation.” Thus, insofar as infinity comprehends the two sides of force and law and comes to supersede the unconditioned universal both as object and as concept, our consciousness comes to know itself *as infinity* or *as consciousness*. As Hegel explains, “as *explanation* [infinity] for the first time freely appears [*tritt*]; and since it is finally object for consciousness *as that which it is*, so consciousness is *self-consciousness*” (Hegel 1977, 101). In this way, in self-consciousness, our consciousness begins with *itself* as the form of everything in general. And, if it were asked at this point: what *is* as such?, it would answer: itself.

Now, insofar as our consciousness knows itself as the form of everything in general, it must come to know it in two senses—as object and as concept. But, at this point, our consciousness knows itself only as object. That is, it knows itself only before it is instantiated in some matter and comes to stand before us—only in an immediate way. In other words, it is merely *self-certainty*. Thus, at this point, our consciousness strives to know itself also as concept. That is, it strives to know itself also after it is instantiated in some matter and comes to stand before us—also in a mediated way. In other words, it strives to become *self-consciousness*. As Hegel explains, “*self-consciousness* is only the motionless tautology of: I am I; but since to it the difference does not have the shape of *being*, it is not self-consciousness” (Hegel 1977, 105). Indeed, the stage called “self-consciousness” consists in our consciousness striving to come to know itself not only as object but also as concept in various modes. For, until it does, it is merely self-certainty and does not become self-consciousness.

Hegel suggests that our consciousness first strives to know itself as concept by seeking to destroy life in general. And he calls this mode of striving *Begierde* or “desire.”¹⁰ For, insofar as infinity comprehends the specific plurality of the two sides of force and law, it is itself not sensible but supersensible—it is not appearance but beyond appearance. Thus our consciousness strives to know itself as concept beyond appearance. But, in self-consciousness, appearance becomes what Hegel calls *Leben* or “life.” Thus our consciousness strives to know itself as concept beyond life. And it first does so by seeking to destroy it in general. As Hegel explains,

self-consciousness is only certain of itself through the superseding of this other that presents itself to it as independent life; [self-consciousness] is *desire*. Certain of the nothingness of this other, [self-consciousness] posits [the nothingness] *for itself* as [the other’s] truth; it destroys the independent object and through that gives itself the certainty

¹⁰ Alexandre Kojève, in his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, argues that the concept of desire is central to the movement of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* in general. In my view, this seems unlikely, especially given its meaning in this section and its limited recurrence throughout the text.

of itself as *true* certainty, as [certainty] which has become [present to self-consciousness] itself in an objective way. (Hegel 1977, 109)

But this mode of striving is destined to fail. For infinity does not come to stand before us by our destroying life in general. Indeed, our destroying life reveals nothing beyond appearance—it leaves nothing behind but a void. Thus our consciousness cannot become self-consciousness in this way. Thus Hegel observes, “it is in fact something other than self-consciousness [that is] the essence of desire” (Hegel 1977, 109).

Hegel suggests that our consciousness next strives to know itself as concept beyond life not by seeking to destroy life in general but by seeking to destroy the life of another consciousness in particular. And he calls this mode of striving *der Kampf auf Leben und Tod* or “the struggle of life and death.” But why is it that our consciousness strives to know itself as concept beyond life in this way? Indeed, even if infinity could come to stand before us by our destroying the life of another consciousness, it would seem that not *our* consciousness but only the *other’s* would thereby be revealed. Thus it would seem that our consciousness could not become self-consciousness in this way. Hegel’s response here is decisive. For he observes that this is true only insofar as our consciousness and the other’s are in some way distinguishable from one another. But, insofar as our consciousness and the other’s are in no way distinguishable from one another, it would seem that our consciousness could become self-consciousness in this way. For our consciousness could thereby be *recognized* in the other’s. In this way, Hegel introduces what he calls *der Begriff des Anerkennens* or “the concept of recognition.”

Indeed, Hegel argues that our consciousness can become self-consciousness only insofar it recognizes itself in another’s. As he explains, “*Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness... A self-consciousness is for a self-consciousness.* In fact, it is [self-consciousness] only through this; for the unity of itself in its other-being only becomes for

it through this” (Hegel 1977, 110). But our consciousness can recognize itself in another’s only insofar as our consciousness and the other’s are in no way distinguishable from one another—only insofar as each is and does exactly what the other is and does. Thus Hegel observes,

Thus the movement is simply the doubled [movement of] both self-consciousnesses. Each sees *the other* do the same as *it* does; each does itself what it demands of the other, and therefore also does what it does *only* insofar as the other does the same. Action by one side would be useless because what is to happen can come to pass only by [the action of] both. (Hegel 1977, 112)

Thus our consciousness can recognize itself in another’s only insofar as each is and does exactly what the other is and does—only insofar as each perfectly reflects the other. In this way, insofar as our consciousness recognizes itself in another’s, the other consciousness must recognize itself in ours as well. Thus Hegel observes, “Self-consciousness is *in* and *for itself* when and by virtue of the fact that it is in and for itself for another; that is, it is [so] only in being recognized” (Hegel 1977, 111). And, insofar as our consciousness is aware that it recognizes itself in another’s, the other consciousness must be aware that it recognizes itself in ours as well and each must recognize that the other is so aware. Thus Hegel observes, “they *recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing themselves*” (Hegel 1977, 112).

Now, in the struggle of life and death, our consciousness strives to know itself as concept beyond life by seeking to destroy the life of another consciousness in particular. But this mode of striving could succeed only insofar as our consciousness recognizes itself in the other’s—only insofar as each perfectly reflects the other. As Hegel explains, “Each is indeed certain of itself, but not of the other, and therefore its own certainty of itself still has no truth... But according to the concept of recognition this is not possible unless each is for the other what the other is for it” (Hegel 1977, 113). In this way, insofar as our consciousness seeks to destroy another’s life, the other consciousness must seek to destroy ours as well. And, insofar as our consciousness is

aware that it seeks to destroy another's life, the other must be aware that it seeks to destroy ours as well and each must recognize that the other is so aware. Thus each not only seeks to destroy the life of the other but also stakes its own life. As Hegel explains,

This presentation is a *doubled* action: action of the other and action of itself. Insofar as it is the action of *the other*, each seeks the death of the other. But the second [action] is also present therein: *action of itself*; for each stakes its own life in itself [*schließt das Daransetzen des eignen Lebens in sich*]. Thus the relation of the two self-consciousnesses is so determined that they *prove* themselves to one another through the struggle of life and death. (Hegel 1977, 113-4)

But this mode of striving is destined to fail as well. For infinity does not come to stand before us by our destroying the life of another consciousness either. Indeed, our destroying life reveals nothing beyond appearance—it leaves nothing behind but a void. As Hegel explains, “But this proving through death likewise supersedes the truth that was supposed to issue from it...

Through death it becomes certain that each staked its life... but that is not for those who survived this struggle” (Hegel 1977, 114). Thus our consciousness cannot become self-consciousness in this way either.

But our consciousness does not give up here. Indeed, the struggle of life and death is only the first struggle for recognition in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. For our consciousness can become self-consciousness only insofar as it recognizes itself in another's. Thus, if recognition fails, so does the activity of our coming to be and coming to know what we essentially are. Thus our consciousness does not give up here. But, in the struggle of life and death, our consciousness learns that it cannot come to know itself as concept by seeking to destroy life in general or by seeking to destroy the life of another consciousness in particular. For our destroying life reveals nothing beyond appearance. In fact, through the struggle of life and death, our consciousness learns that “life is the *natural* setting of consciousness” and that “[death] is the *natural* negation [of consciousness]” (Hegel 1977, 114). For our destroying life leaves nothing behind but a void.

Thus, in the struggle of life and death, our consciousness learns that it can only come to know itself as concept *in* life and, ultimately, by working on life. In this way, these sections lead to the famous sections on lordship and slavery.

To summarize, in self-consciousness, our consciousness begins with infinity as the form of everything in general. But infinity can be rearticulated as consciousness and, ultimately, itself. For infinity and consciousness have one and the same structure. And, in understanding, our consciousness attempted to reconcile the two sides of the law of force as concept by establishing the necessity of their connection with one another inside itself and so became the two sides of the law of force as concept—the side of force and the side of law. Thus, insofar as infinity comprehends the two sides of force and law and comes to supersede the unconditioned universal both as object and as concept, our consciousness comes to know itself as infinity or as consciousness. Now, insofar as our consciousness knows itself as the form of everything in general, it must come to know it as object and as concept. But, at this point, our consciousness knows itself only as object—it is merely self-certainty—and thus strives to know itself also as concept—it strives to become self-consciousness. And our consciousness first strives to know itself as concept beyond life by seeking to destroy life in general or through desire. But this mode of striving is destined to fail because our destroying life reveals nothing beyond appearance. Thus our consciousness strives to know itself as concept beyond life by seeking to destroy the life of another consciousness in particular or through the struggle of life and death. But this mode of striving could succeed only insofar as our consciousness recognizes itself in the other's—only insofar as each perfectly reflects the other. Thus each not only seeks to destroy the life of the other but also stakes its own life. But this mode of striving is destined to fail as well because our destroying the life of another consciousness reveals nothing beyond appearance either.

§5. Taylor's and Hegel's Concepts of Recognition in Contrast

Let us now attempt to bring the concept of recognition as it is developed in the opening sections of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* into relation with Taylor's concept in *The Ethics of Authenticity*. And, in doing so, let us attend not only to how they are similar and different but also to what the consequences for Taylor's critique might be if his concept were more strictly Hegelian.

Now Taylor and Hegel both employ the concept of recognition. Indeed, as we have seen, Taylor argues that the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form fails to measure up to its own internal standard. For it is not an ideal such that its expression can be recognized as meaningful by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified. And, as we have seen, in showing how the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form fails to measure up to its own internal standard, Taylor also takes himself to be showing how it gives rise to the first malaise of modernity. For one's ability to experience one's own life as meaningful depends upon the ability of others to recognize it as meaningful. Indeed, in his view, insofar as the ideal of self-determining freedom fails in this way, it gives rise to the inability of many in our age to experience their lives as meaningful. And the concept of recognition is also a concept employed by Hegel. Indeed, Hegel argues that our consciousness can become self-consciousness only insofar as it recognizes itself in another's. But our consciousness can recognize itself in another's only insofar as our consciousness and the other's are in no way distinguishable from one another—only insofar as each perfectly reflects the other. In this way, insofar as our consciousness recognizes itself in another's, the other consciousness must recognize itself in ours as well. And, insofar as our consciousness is aware that it recognizes itself in another's, the other consciousness must be aware that it recognizes itself in ours as well and each must recognize that

the other is so aware. Thus Hegel observes, “they *recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing themselves*” (Hegel 1977, 112). In this way, the concept of recognition is also a concept employed by Hegel.

Thus Taylor and Hegel both employ the concept of recognition. Now, according to this concept, one’s ability to experience oneself and one’s own life as anything at all depends upon the ability of others to recognize them as such. Taylor’s concept and Hegel’s concept both agree on this. As Taylor observes, “My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others” (Taylor 1991, 47-8). And, as Hegel observes, “Self-consciousness is *in and for itself* when and by virtue of the fact that it is *in an for itself for another*; that is, it is [so] only in being recognized” (Hegel 1977, 111). But they seem to disagree on the ultimate stakes of recognition. For Taylor’s concept suggests that the stakes of recognition are primarily epistemic. As he explains,

Equal recognition is not just the appropriate mode for a healthy democratic society. Its refusal can inflict damage on those who are denied it, according to a widespread modern view. The projecting of an inferior or demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress, to the extent that it is interiorized. Not only contemporary feminism but also race relations and discussions of multiculturalism are undergirded by the premiss that denied recognition can be a form of oppression. (Taylor 1991, 49-50)

Taylor suggests here that, if one is denied recognition, one can still *be* even if one cannot *know oneself to be* whatever one is not recognized as being. Indeed, if this were not the case, it is not clear how the denial of recognition could “be a form of oppression.” For those who are denied recognition would seem to be oppressed only insofar as they in some sense *are* whatever they are not recognized as being. For example, women and racial minorities who are denied recognition as being, say, the equals of white men in terms of their essential interests and capacities would seem to be oppressed only insofar as they in some sense *are* the equals of white men in these terms. Thus, if the denial of recognition can be a form of oppression, it is not because one cannot

be but because one cannot *know oneself to be* whatever one is not recognized as being. In this way, Taylor's concept suggests that the stakes of recognition are primarily epistemic.¹¹

But Hegel's concept suggests that the stakes of recognition are equally ontic. As he explains, "*Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness... A self-consciousness is for a self-consciousness. In fact, it is [self-consciousness] only through this; for the unity of itself in its other-being only becomes for it through this*" (Hegel 1977, 110).

Hegel suggests here that, if one is denied recognition, one cannot *be* nor can one *know oneself to be* whatever one is not recognized as being. For our consciousness can become self-consciousness only insofar as it recognizes itself in another's. In this way, insofar as recognition fails, so does the activity of our coming to be and coming to know what we essentially are. In this way, Hegel's concept suggests that the stakes of recognition are equally ontic.

Thus Taylor's concept and Hegel's concept seem to disagree on the ultimate stakes of recognition.¹² And this disagreement is not entirely inconsequential. Indeed, as we have seen, Taylor's critique argues that the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form must be amended so as to become an ideal that Taylor himself admits is inherently unstable. For, as he admits, the ideal of authenticity in its genuine form has a natural tendency to slide into its nongenuine form. But the ideal of self-determining freedom is not an ideal such that its expression can be recognized as meaningful by those sharing the moral horizon by which it is specified. Thus, insofar as the ideal of authenticity as such is not rejected, the very possibility for recognition of a certain kind remains precarious. As Taylor himself observes,

The thing about inwardly derived, personal, original identity is that it doesn't enjoy this recognition a priori. It has to win it through exchange, and it can fail. What has come about in the modern age is not the need for recognition but the conditions in which this

¹¹ For a longer discussion of Taylor's concept of recognition, see his essay "The Politics of Recognition."

¹² Now this disagreement is not entirely unexpected. For Taylor accepts certain elements of Hegel's philosophy but rejects his ontology. As Taylor remarks, "Hegel's ontology is no longer a live option" (Taylor 1979, 137).

can fail... On the social plane, the understanding that identities are formed in open dialogue, unshaped by a defined social script, has made the politics of equal recognition more central and stressful. It has, in fact, considerably raised its stakes. (Taylor 1991, 48-9)

Now, according to Taylor's concept of recognition, the stakes here are primarily epistemic. For, insofar as recognition fails, one can still *be* even if one cannot *know oneself to be* whatever one is not recognized as being. But, according to Hegel's concept of recognition, the stakes here are equally ontic. For, insofar as recognition fails, one cannot *be* nor can one *know oneself to be* whatever one is not recognized as being. In this way, the stakes would seem to be considerably higher according to Hegel's concept than according to Taylor's concept. In this way, it is not entirely inconsequential that Taylor's concept and Hegel's concept seem to disagree on the ultimate stakes of recognition.

But let us imagine for a moment that Taylor's critique were more strictly Hegelian. That is, let us again imagine that Taylor's method agreed with Hegel's that, if an object of critique fails to measure up to its own internal standard, it must be abandoned rather than amended. And let us again imagine that, as a result, the work of retrieval were compromised and that the ideal of authenticity as such had to be rejected. Now, as we have seen, this could, using Taylor's words, "come across as good news or bad news." Indeed, for Taylor, it would come across as bad news because, if the ideal of authenticity as such were abandoned rather than amended, all that is potentially positive about it would be left behind. However, for many others, it could come across as good news because, if the ideal of authenticity as such were abandoned rather than amended, all that is potentially negative about it—for example, that it is an ideal that, at best, is the site of "a struggle" that "goes on—in fact, forever"—would be left behind. But let us imagine for a moment that Taylor's critique were even more strictly Hegelian than this. That is, let us also imagine that Taylor's concept agreed with Hegel's that the ultimate stakes of recognition are

equally ontic. In my view, this could make the news that the ideal of authenticity as such had to be rejected even better. For, insofar as the ideal of authenticity as such is not rejected, the very possibility for recognition of a certain kind remains precarious. But, if the stakes here are equally ontic, they would seem to be considerably higher. For, insofar as recognition fails, one cannot *be* nor can one *know oneself to be* whatever one is not recognized as being. In this way, if the ideal had to be rejected, it could come across as even better news for everyone.

Conclusion

Now, as we have seen, Taylor's critique is problematic because it argues that the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form must be amended so as to become an ideal that Taylor himself admits is inherently unstable. For, as he admits, the ideal of authenticity in its genuine form has a natural tendency to slide into its nongenuine form. In this way, it argues that the ideal of authenticity in its nongenuine form must be amended so as to become an ideal that, at worst, again gives rise to "a loss of meaning" and again must be amended so as to become one of "the higher... forms of freedom" and, at best, is the site of "a struggle" that "goes on—in fact, forever." And I suggested that this will be problematic for many, perhaps most, of those sharing our moral horizon. Thus I also suggest that, if Taylor's critique were more strictly Hegelian, this could, using Taylor's words, "come across as good news" for many. For, if his method of critique agreed with Hegel's that, if an object of critique fails to measure up to its own internal standard, it must be abandoned rather than amended, the ideal of authenticity as such might have to be rejected. But, if it had to be rejected, all that is potentially negative about it would also be left behind. In this way, it could come across as good news for everyone. And, if his concept of recognition agreed with Hegel's that the ultimate stakes of recognition are equally ontic, this could make the news that the ideal of authenticity as such had to be rejected even better. For, insofar as it is not rejected, the very possibility for recognition of a certain kind remains precarious. But, if the stakes here are equally ontic, they would seem to be considerably higher. For, insofar as recognition fails, one cannot *be* nor can one *know oneself to be* whatever one is not recognized as being. In this way, if it had to be rejected, it could come across as even better news for everyone.

But let us imagine for a moment that Taylor's critique were even more strictly Hegelian than this. That is, let us imagine that Taylor's method of critique agreed with Hegel's not only that, if an object of critique fails to measure up to its own internal standard, it must be abandoned rather than amended but also that, if an object of critique is abandoned, it must be replaced by a new object. For Hegel's method suggests precisely this. Indeed, insofar as our consciousness tests the form of everything in general as object against the form of everything in general as concept and discovers an incompatibility between the two that consists in a conflict between the unity of the former and the duality of the latter, it discovers in itself an unrest and a striving to rid itself of this incompatibility—a striving that manifests itself in two modes. In the first mode, it manifests as our consciousness attempting to reconcile the two sides of the form of everything in general as concept or to eliminate one of them. But Hegel argues that, insofar as these two sides are irreconcilable and ineliminable, this first mode of striving is destined to fail. In the second mode, it manifests as our consciousness opening itself to a new form that comprehends the two sides of the form of everything in general as concept. And, insofar as our consciousness thereby happens upon a new form of this kind, this new form comes to supersede the old form both as object and as concept. For the old form as object and the old form as concept are one and the same form—just at different moments in the process of being provided. And Hegel argues that, insofar as our consciousness happens upon a new form that comprehends the two sides of the form of everything in general as concept and that comes to supersede the old form both as object and as concept, this second mode of striving is destined to succeed. Indeed, Hegel observes that the movement of experience is not a movement of *pure* negation—a movement of setting aside an old form of everything in general and nothing more. For, if it were, it would result in a “pure nothingness”—a result without content—and neither in a new form nor in the next stage. Instead,

the movement of experience is a movement of *determinate* negation—a movement of setting aside an old form of everything in general and then taking up a new form, which arises from out of the old. Thus it results in a “determinate nothingness”—a result with content—and both in a new form and in the next stage.

Thus let us imagine for a moment that Taylor’s method of critique agreed with Hegel’s not only that, if an object of critique fails to measure up to its own internal standard, it must be abandoned rather than amended but also that, if an object of critique is abandoned, it must be replaced by a new object. That is, let us imagine that Taylor’s method of critique agreed with Hegel’s on the subject of determinate negation. In that case, if the ideal of authenticity as such had to be rejected, it would also have to be replaced by a new ideal. But what could this new ideal be? Here we can only speculate. But Taylor mentions something almost in passing that suggests an interesting possibility. For, in his discussion of what he calls “the slide to subjectivism,” he notes that the ideal of authenticity proper has a natural tendency to slide into the ideal of self-determining freedom in part because they are both ideals of freedom. As he explains, “Their relations have been complex, involving both affinity and contestation. The affinity is obvious. Authenticity itself is an ideal of freedom; it involves my finding the design of my life myself, against the demands of external conformity. The basis is there for an alliance” (Taylor 1991, 67-8). Now, if the fact that two ideals are both ideals of freedom accounts in part for the slide from one into the other, could the fact that two ideals are ideals of freedom account in part for the replacement of one by the other? And, if so, what could another ideal of freedom be? In fact, Taylor himself introduces another ideal of freedom within the context of his discussion of the third malaise of modernity. Let us take a brief look at this discussion.

Now Taylor argues that the third malaise of modernity, like the other two, is rooted in the ideal of self-determining freedom. For, as we have seen, this ideal is a conception of the good that says human beings ought to look within themselves in order to discover their own original ways of being human and, on the basis of what they discover, be true to themselves without being constrained by any other ideals. But one of the other ideals by which human beings need not be constrained is the ideal of political participation. And Taylor observes that this ideal is also an ideal of freedom. As he notes, it “is what Tocqueville called ‘political liberty’” (Taylor 1991, 10). And Taylor also observes that, insofar as human beings are not constrained by this ideal, they run a very serious risk. As he explains,

A society in which people end up as the kind of individuals who are “enclosed in their own hearts” is one where few will want to participate actively in self-government. They will prefer to stay home and enjoy the satisfactions of private life, as long as the government of the day produces the means to these satisfactions and distributes them widely. This opens the danger of a new, specifically modern form of despotism, which Tocqueville calls “soft” despotism. It will not be a tyranny of terror and oppression as in the old days. The government will be mild and paternalistic. It may even keep democratic forms, with periodic elections. But in fact, everything will be run by “an immense tutelary power,” over which people will have little control... the loss of political liberty would mean that even the choices left would no longer be made by ourselves as citizens, but by irresponsible tutelary power. (Taylor 1991, 9-10)

Indeed, insofar as human beings are not constrained by the ideal of political freedom, they run the risk of losing their influence over political institutions, which, as a result, may begin to function as “an irresponsible tutelary power” engaged in what Tocqueville called “soft” despotism.

Now Taylor argues that the third malaise of modernity, like the other two, can and should be overcome not by our rejecting the ideal of authenticity as such but by our rejecting the ideal of self-determining freedom in favor of the ideal of authenticity proper. For, as we have seen, this ideal is a conception of the good that says human beings ought to look within themselves in

order to discover their own original ways of being human and, on the basis of what they discover, be true to themselves while being constrained by other ideals that 1) are specified by the moral horizon of their age, 2) can be expressed in more or less perfect ways, and 3) are discovered by their looking within themselves. And one of the other ideals by which human beings could in principle be constrained is the ideal of political participation. For it could in principle be an ideal with the above three features. And Taylor observes that, insofar as human beings are constrained by this ideal, the risk of losing their influence over political institutions is greatly reduced. As he explains, “The only defense against this [risk], Tocqueville thinks, is a vigorous political culture in which participation is valued, at several levels of government and in voluntary associations as well” (Taylor 1991, 9). But, as we have seen, the ideal of authenticity proper has a natural tendency to slide into the ideal of self-determining freedom. For, insofar as human beings discover these other ideals by their looking within themselves, they tend to view these other ideals not as having been specified by the moral horizon of their age but as having been specified by themselves alone. And so they tend to view the ideal of political participation. And, insofar as they do, its expression cannot be experienced as meaningful—it cannot be what anyone would strive for. Thus, as before, the third malaise of modernity can never be overcome and the work of retrieval can never be concluded once and for all in this way.

But let us imagine for a moment that Taylor’s method of critique agreed with Hegel’s on the subject of determinate negation. In that case, if the ideal of authenticity as such had to be rejected, it would also have to be replaced by a new ideal. And let us imagine that the fact that the ideal of authenticity as such and the ideal of political participation are both ideals of freedom could account in part for the replacement of one by the other. In that case, perhaps the ideal of authenticity as such would be replaced by the ideal of political participation. That is, the former

would be replaced by the latter as the conception of the good specified by the moral horizon of our age. What might this look like? In fact, this question has been taken up in recent years by various thinkers in the tradition of what has come to be called “civic republicanism.”

Interestingly, one of its strongest and most influential voices has belonged to none other than Michael Sandel. Indeed, in his *Democracy's Discontent*, Sandel argues that one can begin to discern what a society that is marked by the prevalence of the ideal of political participation or, in his terms, “republican ideals” might look like by attending to America’s past. As he explains,

The idea that freedom consists in our capacity to choose our ends finds prominent expression in our politics and law... So familiar is this vision of freedom that it seems a permanent feature of the American political and constitutional tradition. But Americans have not always understood freedom in this way. As a reigning public philosophy, the version of liberalism that informs our present debates is a recent arrival, a development of the last forty or fifty years. Its distinctive character can best be seen by contrast with a rival public philosophy that it gradually displaced. This rival public philosophy is a version of republican political theory. Central to republican theory is the idea that liberty depends on sharing in self-government. (Sandel 1996, 5)

Indeed, Sandel argues here that, if American society today is in fact marked by the prevalence of liberal ideals, the ideal of individualism, or the ideal of authenticity, it has not always been so. For, at an earlier time, it was marked by the prevalence of republican ideals, the ideal of “sharing in self-government,” or the ideal of “deliberating with fellow citizens about the common good and helping to shape the destiny of the political community” (Sandel 1996, 5).¹

Now, insofar as the ideal of political participation is the conception of the good specified by the moral horizon of an age, it will be shared by those whose age it is. And, insofar as this conception of the good will be shared by those whose age it is, it will also be promoted by them. Indeed, in a society marked by the prevalence of republican ideals, the society will have an

¹ One might wonder here why such an ideal should be considered an ideal of *freedom*. One possibility is that it is an ideal not of *individual* freedom but of *collective* freedom—that it is an ideal of self-government wherein the self that governs itself is not the individual but the collective.

interest in cultivating in its members the qualities and abilities needed for the expression of these ideals. As Sandel explains,

But to deliberate well about the common good requires more than the capacity to choose one's ends and to respect others' rights to do the same. It requires a knowledge of public affairs and also a sense of belonging, a concern for the whole, a moral bond with the community whose fate is at stake. To share in self-rule therefore requires that citizens possess, or come to acquire, certain qualities of character, or civic virtues. But this means that republican politics cannot be neutral toward the values and ends its citizens espouse. The republican conception of freedom, unlike the liberal conception, requires a formative politics, a politics that cultivates in citizens the qualities of character self-government requires. (Sandel 1996, 5-6)

Indeed, Sandel explains here that, in a society marked by the prevalence of republican ideals, the society will have an interest in cultivating in its members the abilities, for example, to reason, speak, persuade, and be persuaded as well as the willingness to be informed about matters of common concern and to sacrifice for the common good. That is, the society will have an interest in cultivating in its members what Sandel calls "civic virtues"—it will engage in what he calls "a formative politics."

Of course, if Taylor's method really agreed with Hegel's on the subject of determinate negation, it would not be the fact that the ideal of authenticity as such and the ideal of political participation are both ideals of freedom that would account for the replacement of one by the other. Indeed, Hegel observes that the movement of experience is a movement of determinate negation that results in a series of stages *in a necessary sequence*—it is not a movement that takes place in an accidental way. Thus, if Taylor's method really agreed with Hegel's on the subject of determinate negation, it would be some immanent necessity that would account for the replacement of the ideal of authenticity as such by the ideal of political participation. Indeed, to determine what this immanent necessity is would be the aspiration of the Hegelian republican.

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