Understanding Taylor

Charles Taylor and the shaping of a philosophical therapy for the crisis of modernity

A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Degree of Master of Arts in Political Science

University of Canterbury

May 2002

By

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This thesis is a contextual examination of Charles Taylor’s philosophical system applied to politics. It traces the origins of Taylor’s project in Isaiah Berlin’s revival of political philosophy at Oxford in the late 1950s and the critique of Stalinism. This thesis argues that Taylor’s philosophy developed out of the New Left project of reconsidering the foundations of socialism. This developed into a critique of the common faults of Marxism and Liberalism as having fallen prey to a modernity characterised by a scientific and bureaucratic world-view. This thesis argues that Taylor redeveloped Hegel using linguistic and psychoanalytic theory to reconsider the foundations of Marxism and modernity, and to develop a post-modern *Sittlichkeit*. Finally, this thesis shows how Taylor viewed the crisis of modernity exemplified in the delayed modernisation of Québec.
Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Mark Francis for the shape and direction he has given to this thesis, and for his patience and willingness to be available for impromptu consultation, even though he is a very busy man. I would also like to thank Doctor Jim Okey for consenting to be my second supervisor and for the time and encouragement he has given me.

I would also like to thank the Departmental Secretary Jill Dolby, who saved my hide when I was in big trouble in stage two, and several times afterwards as well.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents for supporting me as much as they were able.

Adam Heinz

Tuesday, 07 May 2002
A Note on Referencing

The Political Science Department “Essay Writing Guide” states that “Any recognised form of footnoting or endnoting is acceptable, but our preference is for in text referencing” (p. 7). Due to the complex nature of the textual interpretation entered in this thesis, this thesis follows the footnoting procedure used by Quentin Skinner. That is, a work is referred to in the footnotes, but where extended discussion of that work continues uninterrupted, page numbers are given in brackets in the text.
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INTRODUCTION
The need for understanding

An initial and unavoidable problem that confronts the study of Charles Taylor's philosophy is the problem of understanding. Taylor has developed a considerable philosophical project over a career spanning five decades, and yet he remains an enigma at best to the student of politics. At bottom, this is simply because a philosophical explanation of politics is unfamiliar terrain to those approaching his work from a background in political science.

This problem immediately confronts any person unfortunate or foolish enough to attempt to study, say, the work of Charles Taylor without any preconceptions. A reasonable procedure to go about this business might be, one would assume, to embark upon a quick reading of the work of the author in question and to then consult the secondary literature on the author in question, yet if one adopts this procedure in regards to Charles Taylor, then one finds that not only is his work difficult and unintelligible enough as it is, but the figure of Charles Taylor attacked in the secondary literature is unrecognisable with the works just read. There are difficulties in Taylor's positions, but they are simply not discussed in the general literature.

Furthermore, what discussions of Taylor's work that do occur in the literature tend to be of an analytical nature. I want to suggest that there is an inherent limitation in an analytical approach to Taylor. An inherent problem with the analytical approach is that it does not seem to be a problem to construct a chimera of the author being studied which one then proceeds to attack. It would be absurd, however, to publish a thorough-going refutation or defence of an author unless this was a refutation or defence of something that the author in question actually wrote, or a position that the author actually held. It would be absurd because any refutation, defence, or
amendment of an author's position would fall to pieces should it be pointed out that
the critic attributed positions or assumptions to the author in question which the
author did not in fact hold, or which could not be reasonably be attributed to him or
her on the balance of evidence available. This is a difficult problem when attempting
to study Charles Taylor's political philosophy because no-one — neither his detractors
nor his defenders — understands him. This is clearly a ridiculous situation, but the fault
may lie in both his writing and his readers.

The need for a proper understanding has partly been recognised and addressed in Ruth
Abbey's *Charles Taylor*. Abbey presents an introduction to the main features of
Taylor's philosophy and defends him against the multitude of misunderstandings by
his critics. While Abbey presents a very helpful and articulate discussion of the merits
of Taylor's work, there are some difficulties with her approach. First, Abbey's
approach is essentially philosophical, one that is concerned to present his
philosophical system as a whole, and so it does not really bridge the gap between
philosophy and politics in a ready manner. Furthermore, in her concern to explain and
introduce Taylor's system, she is to a large extent trapped within Taylor's concepts.
Thus, for instance, Abbey's second chapter introduces Taylor's interpretation of
selfhood, but without justification of why we would want to go about interpreting
"selves," it is hard to really know what this all means. But above all lies the problem
of synthesising and constructing "Taylor".

Taylor's intellectual career spans five decades, and is so voluminous that it is often
remarked that the bibliography of his writings alone is larger than the average M. A.
thesis. There is thus an immediate problem of sorting out the essential from that which
is not, and of being able to justify the final selection made. There is also the problem
of the comparative weighting between the various aspects of Taylor's writing, which
ranges from contributions to highly specialised academic debates, to student and
popular editions of his work, to book reviews and interviews, and finally through to
his journalistic writings (however intellectual or popular they may be).

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2000.
Abbey largely avoids these problems by working in close co-operation with Taylor, but this means that Abbey is stuck with debating Taylor on his own terms and the problem of reaching a disinterested assessment of Taylor's work is still left unresolved. The question of the relative weighting and assessment of all the various articles in Taylor's writings is also left unaddressed. Flipping to and fro between Taylor's early and late writings even to the extent of referring to journalistic articles written when he was a student in the 1950s cannot be justified whether or not the mature Taylor in the year 2000 or whatever is essentially unchanged from the young Taylor of the 1950s, and whether he is still pursuing the same themes today as he was in the 1950s. (This thesis argues that Taylor essentially is doing just that, but there is a lot more evidence to consider yet before we can reach this conclusion).

In sum, reaching a proper understanding of Taylor is a theoretical and methodological issue in itself, and this is the problem that this thesis seeks to address. The next section turns to consider some of these issues in greater depth.
A theoretical framework for understanding

The problem of understanding is one that is normally the province only of historians or anthropologists, but it is one that Taylor among others has extended to the realm of politics (or more precisely to the issue of comparative politics). In the study of the history of political thought, however, the problem of understanding is principally associated (though not necessarily so) with the methodological work of Quentin Skinner, and Skinner’s philosophy provides a useful reference point to begin with.

Skinner’s contextual approach

Quentin Skinner’s polemic, in its initial stages at least, was addressed the problem of understanding the classic texts of political philosophy, a problem that his contemporaries did not seem to worry about. “My aim”, Skinner stated, “is to consider what I take to be the basic question which necessarily arises whenever an historian of ideas confronts a work which he [or she] hopes to understand”.1 “The basic question”, Skinner continued, “will in all such cases remain the same: what are the appropriate procedures to adopt in the attempt to arrive at an understanding of the work?” (p. 29). In particular, Skinner railed against the practice of debating the timeless problems of philosophy that his contemporaries, both “liberal” and “Marxist” discerned in the classic texts.2 Skinner pointed out that the authors of the classics in question were not


engaged in a timeless debate but were arguing the issues of their day and age. This meant that one could not simply read and re-read a classic text until one understood it properly, for unless one read the text within its historical context, one could never understand the arguments that it was in fact addressing.

Skinner provides the example of Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government*, which has, among other things, been taken as a rebuttal of Hobbes’ *Leviathan* when a simple, unprejudiced reading of the *Two Treatises* shows that Locke was in fact attacking the arguments of Sir Robert Filmer. Unfortunately, this is not a particularly helpful example for Skinner’s case, seeing as Locke states clearly in the text that he is attacking Filmer. In fact, we have to look no further than the opening paragraph of the *Two Treatises* to find it. The example of Locke and Filmer does not really support Skinner’s contextual approach, but rather aims at combating the practice of reading into a text things that are not actually there. Skinner’s more memorable example of this argument was his critique of C. B. Macpherson’s *Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*.

Macpherson had argued that the failure of contemporary liberal-democracy lay in its philosophical foundations in the “possessive” individualism of seventeenth-century political theory (pp. 1-3). The basic failure, Macpherson stated, “is found in the conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capabilities, owing nothing to society for them” (p. 3). Macpherson’s account of the development of modern “possessive” market society is essentially a historicist one, broadly similar to that of Marx or Weber (p. 48). The “possessive” market society, MacPherson states, is differentiated from a “customary” or “status” society and a “simple” market society by the development of two essential features; that is, “the pre-eminence of market relations and the treatment of labour as an alienable possession” (pp. 48-51). Macpherson read Hobbes’ *Leviathan* and Locke’s *Two

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Treatises in particular as early examples of the "possessive" individualism of modern market society. In Hobbes' conception of power and honour, Macpherson argues, we find the basic conception of market value, for "every man's value, manifested by the honour given him by others, is both determined by and determines the other's opinion of his power, manifested by what they would give for the use of his power (p. 38). Similarly, Macpherson argued that Locke shows us an early example of the justification of property, capital and the alienation of labour. Taken together, Macpherson states, these two writers develop a new conception of political obligation as a contractual relation based on consent, which becomes invalid if the state does not honour its contractual obligations to protect the "natural" and inherent rights its citizens enjoy outside of any particular social contract.

The problem with Macpherson's approach, however, is his comparison of Hobbes to his theoretical "models of society". In this work, MacPherson proposed that "there is a prima facie case for turning to social and historical considerations" when studying Hobbes (p. 14), yet then proceeded on an "unhistorical level of abstraction", as Quentin Skinner has noted (p. 100). Macpherson compared Hobbes' theory to three theoretical models of society: "customary or status society", "the simple market society", and finally that of the "possessive market society" (p. 47). Macpherson, however, then proceeds to draw historical conclusions between Hobbes and the development of early capitalism, based on the correlations between Hobbes' supposed model of society and Macpherson's model of the "possessive" market society. The only stated relation between the theory and the history seems to be Macpherson's statement that "The concept of possessive market society is neither a novel nor an arbitrary construction" (p. 48). "It is clearly similar", he continues, "to the concepts of bourgeois or capitalist society used by Marx, Weber, Sombart, and others, who have made the existence of a market in labour a criterion of capitalism, and like their concepts it is intended to be a model or ideal type to which modern (i.e. post-feudal) European societies have approximated" (p. 48).

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6 MacPherson, Possessive Individualism, p. 47.
Skinner has pointed out some of the consequences of this approach when applied to Locke, for instance (p. 78). Skinner points out the difficulties of explaining Locke's defence of money, which transcended the "spoilage limitation" by virtue of being imperishable, as the defence of capital (p. 78). "The characteristic purpose of money is to serve as capital", Macpherson states; "Land itself Locke sees as merely a form of capital"; and finally that "Locke saw money as not merely a medium of exchange but as capital" (pp, 206-207). Skinner, however, pointed out that for this statement of Locke's intentions to be true, Locke would have already have had to been aware of the existence of capitalism, that this new system needed justifying, and finally that Locke himself would provide the defence of the early capitalist system (p. 78). The problem with this interpretation of Locke, however, is that it contrasts with Locke's stated aims of writing a treatise on Government (not capitalism), and there is no evidence whatsoever to show that Locke was aware of the development of the future system of capitalism, or even that it might need defending. (p. 78) It is a great burden to lay upon a person to hold them responsible for events that happened long after they were dead. Skinner states his point thus: "if Locke did not in fact hold these beliefs (and perhaps could not in principle have held them), then he could not have had the intention in writing which Macpherson's account ascribes to him" (p. 78).

Skinner defended his contextual approach using the "ordinary language" philosophy in vogue at the time. Skinner simply pointed out that in everyday life the meaning of a word or sentence is often unintelligible if taken out of context. Furthermore, the meaning of a word or sentence is often quite obscure even in context. Even in such simple circumstances, there are several possible meanings of the constable's utterance, none of which has any obvious priority; the question then becomes one of interpreting which sense is more or less the one intended. Skinner points out that once we admit the opacity of ordinary everyday communication, we must also admit that there is an even greater opacity between ourselves and the historical figures of the past because without great familiarisation with the period in question, we lack the


8 Macpherson, Possessive Individualism, pp. 206-207.

necessary knowledge of the ordinary everyday assumptions which were the familiar
environment of the authors in question.

Skinner’s greatest example in this field is that of Machiavelli’s *The Prince*. Machiavelli, Skinner points out, was writing within and competing against the conventionalised *genre* of advice books to Princes (p. 95).10 This “fact”, however, is nowhere contained in the text of *The Prince*, and so cannot be understood by reading the standard philosophical issues “found” in the work. “To fail to grasp this fact”, Skinner states, “is to fail to grasp the point of Machiavelli’s argument in the later chapters of the book” (p. 95). And again, for further emphasis, Skinner states that “no one can be said to fully understand Machiavelli’s text who does not understand this fact about it” (p. 95).

Although Skinner is certainly able to unearth some interesting historical facts about the works in question, it is by no means certain that we can ever achieve the contextual understanding that his approach assumes. Even at the “armchair” level of the “speech acts” example Skinner provides, the range of possible meanings of what the constable might have said is very large indeed, and we cannot even be certain that Skinner has provided us with all the possible options. It must surely be questionable whether we can *ever* discern the true meaning of another person’s actions. It may even be doubtful if a true meaning can be said to exist, for that would suppose a level of coherency and premeditation in the spontaneous thought of the person in question. Rather, given the almost limitless range of possible interpretations of another’s actions, what we must surely be doing is selecting a more or less favourable interpretation of that person’s intentions according to some heuristic or rough rule of thumb that is good enough to get by with for the vast majority of occasions. Unless something happens to make us radically reconsider that opinion, then this mental “set” will determine our interpretations of the other’s actions.

This is actually a problem that Skinner himself has raised. We cannot simply study the writing of another person, let alone those of a person from an alien culture, without

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inevitably “bringing to bear some of one’s own expectations about what he [or she] must have been saying” (p. 31). Our past experience, Skinner continues, leads us to perceive details within a certain “frame of reference”, and once this mindset is in place, we then tend to perceive or react to new or familiar experiences in certain standard ways. “We must classify in order to understand”, Skinner states, “and we can only classify the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar” (p. 31). This leads to the ever-present danger that in everyday interaction, historical research, or cross-cultural interpretation “our expectations about what someone must be saying or doing will themselves determine that we understand the agent to be doing something that he [or she] would not – or even could not – … have accepted as an account of what he [or she] was doing” (p. 31). It is by no means clear, however, that Skinner’s contextual method is able to surmount this problem of mental set.

First, although Skinner has certainly been able to unearth some interesting historical curios regarding Machiavelli and Hobbes in particular, it is not clear that this amounts to establishing the “context” that Skinner’s own method demands. As Isaiah Berlin relates, Giambattista Vico pointed out (around four centuries ago) that even the most erudite historian of Rome knows less of the common stock of knowledge of the time than the lowliest servant in Cicero’s house. Skinner’s approach might be considered to enlarge our understanding of the past, but it is doubtful that anyone can ever reach a full understanding of their own era, let alone that of another’s. Skinner’s approach could only ever enlarge our present understanding of the past, for it could never arrive at the total understanding of the historical context that Skinner’s approach might lead one to expect.

Second, if one is always condemned to exist within one’s existing mental “set”, then this then leaves the question of how one could ever come to understand the thoughts of historical figures. Skinner adapts Collingwood’s “logic of question and answer”, but Skinner, assumes that it is possible to understand people from other eras once we

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know the context of their arguments. This, however, begs the question of how, if historical epochs are so opaque to our understanding, we can ever gain enough context to truly understand them.

Finally, however, there is the issue that while Skinner was concerned to debate the understanding of the classical texts of political philosophy, he doesn’t seem to think this problematic extends to the problem of understanding one’s contemporaries. This thesis, however, is engaged in the problem of understanding the texts of a contemporary philosopher. Skinner could simply assume that the classic texts were read, while the problem this thesis faces is simply that this assumption does not apply to contemporary texts.

Synthesising an approach for this thesis

There are some general features that we can adopt from Skinner’s approach. First is the question of what people were doing when they argued in the way that they did. The study of political philosophy is not a dry academic dispute but the investigation of real ideas that inspired the minds of a generation, revolutionised the conduct of government, or justified the formation of a political opposition. The meaning of these philosophies does not simply lie in them alone, but also rests in the issues they were addressing. Understanding those issues, therefore, requires an investigative process of recovering the meaning of these texts.

Examining the context of a text is a potentially limitless exercise, and it is possible to get by simply by examining its immediate context. That is, other works of the author in question, and the intellectual debates of the day they were engaged in. When we study political philosophy, we are studying arguments made by real people that address real issues. When the philosophers in question are still alive and publishing, these issues are often known and familiar to all; if the philosopher in question is no longer living, or the point of their argument has fallen into obscurity, then understanding the issues they were addressing is integral to understanding their argument. Our procedure, then, must be like that of a judge, taking each issue case by case, establishing whether the cases are similar enough to be decided according to the
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one rule, or whether they are so distinct as to require a new rule. This is an essentially comparative method.

If the context of a text is potentially limitless, then it is necessary to establish how to know when to stop. We can view our procedure as the “way of doubt”.\(^\text{14}\) That is, we engage in a process of articulating and questioning our assumptions. As we bring our articulations to light – if we are self-reflective enough to do so – we see not so much that our understanding is an accurate description of what we are trying to understand, but rather just how limited and incoherent our own understandings are. We launch on a process of stripping away those articulations that are clearly wrong in the hope that by refining and refining again, we may reach a position in which our articulations make sense, for the time being at least.

This is a process of “self-education” through stripping away falsehood as a process of developing and articulating our understandings (pp. 49-50).\(^\text{15}\) Hegel, speaking from experience, called this “the way of despair”, in which once we begin the journey of self-doubt we are pulled ever-onwards by this very same doubt, until we reach a position we can finally stand by (pp. 49-52).\(^\text{16}\) Hegel seems to think that we can actually reach a final resting-point of self-awareness, but it is by no means sure that this is possible in a human lifetime or that once we have finished our initial journey we might have changed so much that new questions and experiences arise. Any understandings we reach, therefore are not permanent, but resting stages on the journey, always liable to be revised and reinterpreted in the light of new understanding.

The next section turns to give an outline of the thesis.


\(^\text{15}\) Ibid, ss. 78-79, pp. 49-50.

\(^\text{16}\) Ibid, ss. 79-80, pp. 49-52.
Outline of thesis

This thesis is engaged in a historical study of Charles Taylor’s political thought. It argues that Taylor’s approach originates in the revival of a philosophical understanding of politics at Oxford University instituted by Isaiah Berlin. The general approach was that of a metaphysical critique of politics, and the agenda of this project was largely set by Isaiah Berlin’s inaugural lecture, “Two Concepts of Liberty” (Berlin 1969 iii). Berlin argued against what he identified as the metaphysical foundations of collectivism, maintaining that the defence of the individual was the only proper course of political action. Berlin’s essay was largely part of the cold war debate, and the “end of ideology”.

Charles Taylor was also engaged in the critique of totalitarianism, but he was not prepared to accept that all socialist idealism should be outlawed simply because of Stalin. He was actively involved in the project of shaping a “new left” alternative to the cold war oppositions of communism or social-democracy. The new left came to develop a theory that Marxism had failed because it had fallen prey to the same problems as the industrial society that it opposed. The new left came to see this as the problem of the dominance of scientific and technological thinking in a dialectics of modernity. This thesis traces the development of this theme in Taylor’s thought and shows how Taylor sought to solve this problems through a politics of identity, to be resolved in a form of participatory democracy for the modern era.

This thesis is structured in two general parts. The first investigates the origins of Taylor’s political philosophy in the crisis of the “end of ideology” in left politics in

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the 1950s. The second part argues that the full development of Taylor's philosophy can be found in his merging of new left theoretical concepts in his study of Hegel.

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PART ONE – GENESIS
Hope and Despair in Philosophy and Politics

The most obvious place to begin understanding Taylor is with his own statements of his intellectual project. In the continuing absence of any autobiography, the only extant statements occur in the introduction to his collected Philosophical Papers, and in the introduction to his supplementary volume of Philosophical Arguments, which was published ten years later.

In the opening lines of his introduction to his Philosophical Papers, Taylor states that this is the work of a “monomaniac” or “hedgehog” in Berlin’s terms. “If not a single idea,” Taylor declares, “then at least a single rather tightly related agenda underlies all of them” (p. 1). That agenda, he continued, was the critique of understanding human life and action on the model of the natural sciences (p. 1). Ten years later, Taylor announced that he was still engaged in his old theme of “a direct attack on the Hydra whose serpentine heads wreaks havoc throughout the intellectual culture of modernity — in science, in criticism, in ethics, in political thinking, almost everywhere you look.”.

Perhaps the best way to begin discussing the critique of politics in terms of a philosophy of science or a philosophy of knowledge is to question what Taylor was meaning when he referred to Berlin when offering his self-diagnosis of monomania.

The difference between foxes and hedgehogs marked what Berlin saw as one of the basic differences in philosophical thought, but this division also highlights the contrasts between Berlin and his former doctoral student Charles Taylor.

"The Hedgehog", Berlin once remarked, "knows one big thing," while "the fox knows many things." Foxes, Berlin elaborated, "lead lives, perform acts, and entertain ideas that are centrifugal rather than centripetal; their thought is scattered or diffused, moving on many levels, seizing upon the essence of a vast variety of experiences and objects for what they are in themselves, without, consciously or unconsciously, seeking to fit them in, or exclude them from, any one unchanging, all-embracing, sometimes contradictory and incomplete, at times fanatical, inner vision" (p. 22). Now, "unchanging," "all-embracing," "self-contradictory," "incomplete," and "fanatical" are hardly complimentary attributes of hedgehogs, especially when the pursuit of a great variety of often conflicting interests is considered a virtue in foxes. This really raises the question of what Berlin was getting at in his distinction between foxes and hedgehogs, and what Taylor was getting at when he confessed to being a hedgehog.

Monism and pluralism contrasted

The differences between hedgehogs and foxes can best be characterised in Berlin's scheme as the differences between monists and pluralists respectively. Irreducible pluralism is the doctrine that lies at the heart of Isaiah Berlin's defence of the individual. The world in Berlin's eyes consists of a vast multiplicity of interests which by their very diversity are inevitably in conflict with one another. Berlin holds in general that these interests, by the very nature of their multiplicity and mutual antagonism, can never be accommodated in a single all-embracing political solution. Thus, given this irreducible pluralism, the only reasonable political philosophy must be to admit this diversity while protecting the weak. Monists -- hedgehogs that is -- are those in Berlin's view who do not accept this diversity and who attempt to impose a single solution upon the vast multiplicity that is political society.

1 Berlin, "The Hedgehog and the Fox", Russian Thinkers, ch. 2, p. 22.
Monism, in Berlin’s view, is the application of the philosophy of knowledge to the realm of human life and action. This philosophy is the belief that all proper questions have one true answer, that the proper method will obtain this answer, and that any truth so discovered will be eternal, immutable, and uncontradictory. While this conception of knowledge may well be applicable to logic or mathematics and perhaps even the physical sciences, Berlin holds that it is wrong to study human life and action as if it were a science, for there are no such necessary truths to be discovered. Political philosophy exists for Berlin simply because we live “in a world where ends collide.” If this was not the case, and people “never disagreed about the ends of life,” then political philosophy as such could never have arisen in the first place. Yet, Berlin argued, the great limitation of Marxism and other forms of totalitarianism inspired by the French Revolution was that they thought that all political problems could be resolved, that immutable laws of human behaviour existed, and that once discovered these laws could be wielded by social engineers like the first laws of physics.

The problem for Berlin is that we can never obtain such sure knowledge of human nature. Berlin argued that “science” consists of those domains of enquiry in which we have arrived at sure methods of deciding problems. There are, he stated, two areas in which we are sure that we know the best methods of answering questions: the first are those which can be answered by observation and be inference from observational data (e.g. is there any food to be found in the cupboard?); the second are those formal questions in mathematics and formal logic which can be answered by calculation alone (p. 144). These two methods, Berlin states, are generally described as the empirical and the formal, and they are characterised by the fact that although we may not initially know the answer to a particular question, we do know what kinds of methods we should adopt to reach an answer (p. 144). Berlin pointed out, however, that there is a third class of questions which are distinguished from the first two by the fact that we do not know how to go about answering them, nor even what would count as a “correct” answer (pp. 147-148). It is this third class of unanswered questions that Berlin classed as philosophical, and they were those that – for the present time at least – involve inescapable questions of value judgement.

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6 Berlin, “The divorce between the sciences and humanities”, Against the Current, ch. 3, p. 81.
What is interesting to note about Berlin's essay on Tolstoy is that having introduced the distinction between foxes and hedgehogs, Berlin immediately proceeds to argue that Tolstoy fits neither of these categories. Rather, if we examine the text carefully, the issue seems to be whether, knowing as much of the dark and irreducibly contradictory nature of human history as Berlin and Tolstoy do, one can only collapse into some sort of pessimistic scepticism, or whether any hope for the world can emerge from this slough of despond. Tolstoy, Berlin tells us, held to a belief of the scientific nature of history as the "sum of the actual experience of actual men and women in their relation to one another and to an actual, three-dimensional, empirically experienced, physical environment". This "sum of ... concrete events in time and space" was "the truth", the empirical evidence from which "genuine answers" to the problems of human affairs could be constructed (p. 29). Yet, perversely, Tolstoy and Berlin held the bitter knowledge that such knowledge of human affairs was impossible. "History does not reveal causes", Berlin despaired, "it presents only a blank succession of unexplained events" (p. 31).

Like Marx (of whom at the time of writing War and Peace he apparently knew nothing) Tolstoy saw that if history were a science, it must be possible to discover and formulate a set of true laws of history which, in conjunction with the data of empirical observation, would make prediction of the future (and 'retrdition' of the past) as feasible as it had become, say, in geology or astronomy. But he saw more clearly than Marx and his followers that this had, in fact, not been achieved, and said so with his usual dogmatic candour, and reinforced his thesis with arguments designed to show that the prospect of achieving this goal was non-existent; and clinched the matter by observing that the fulfilment of this scientific hope would end human life as we knew it: 'if we allow that human life can be ruled by reason, the possibility of life {i.e. as a spontaneous activity involving consciousness of free will} is destroyed' (p. 32).

The agony of Tolstoy, Berlin states, is the inescapably arbitrary nature of historical evidence (p. 32). "We know too few facts" (p. 41). What we do know we select at random "in accordance with our subjective inclinations" (p. 41). If we were all-seeing

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and all-knowing, Berlin remarks, we might be able to trace the course of every drop in the stream of history, but we are not. We remain "pathetically ignorant, and the areas of our knowledge are pathetically small compared to what is uncharted and ... unchartable" (p. 41). History constitutes a vast multiplicity of facts waiting to be explained, out of which the historian selects only one, presenting it as "primary," a single "efficient cause of social change", ignoring or obscuring all the others (p. 32). “How can we escape the conclusion,” Berlin demands, “that the histories which exist represent what Tolstoy declares to be ‘perhaps only 0.001 per cent of the elements which actually constitute the real history of peoples’” (pp. 32-33).

At the same time, Berlin develops the apparently contradictory thesis that although knowledge of historical causes is impossible, so too is free will. “Tolstoy,” Berlin elaborates, "sees that there is a natural law whereby the lives of human beings no less than that of nature are determined, yet not only are these laws unknowable, but we are “unable to face this inorexable process”, preferring instead to represent history as a succession of “free choices,” fixing responsibility for events upon our heroes, endowing them with extraordinary virtues and vices as if they were half-human and half-god (p. 41). Heroes, alas, are merely “ordinary human beings,” “ignorant and vain enough to accept responsibility for the life of society,” who would rather “take the blame for all the cruelties, injustices [and] disasters justified in their name, than recognise “their own insignificance and incompetence in the cosmic flow which pursues its course irrespective of their wills and ideals” (p. 42).

Tolstoy’s historical determinism, however, is simply wrong and overstated. It has been pointed out even by the most sympathetic critics that historical “laws” are nothing more than “statistical probabilities” and not “hideous and inorexable ‘forces’," – a mistake that Tolstoy more than anyone else had fought to denounce in other writers (p. 47). Yet Berlin leaps to his defence. Tolstoy’s dilemma, Berlin states, springs from something deeper and more profound than abstract questions of knowledge, “a bitter inner conflict between his actual experience and beliefs, between his vision of life, and his theory of what it, and he himself, ought to be, if the vision was to be bearable at all”(pp. 47-48). Burdened by this despair, Tolstoy argues in his Anna Karenina that it would be better to believe in communism”, for all its
"artificial, 'geometrical' symmetry" than to live a life blighted by the agony of "total scepticism" (p. 48).

Tolstoy, Berlin states, clearly saw "the manifold objects and situations on earth in their full multiplicity," grasping their "individual essences," and the divisions between them "with a clarity to which there is no parallel" (p. 48). "Any comforting theory which attempted to collect, relate, 'synthesis', reveal hidden substrata and concealed inner connections, which, though not apparent to the naked eye, nevertheless guaranteed the unity of all things ... he exploded contemptuously and without difficulty" (p. 48). Tolstoy, however, became driven, obsessed. He "longed for a universal explanatory principle" which he could never find (p. 48). In the belief that a "universal core" must exist beneath all the deceptions and delusions of the world, Tolstoy "continued to kill his rival's rickety constructions with cold contempt, always hoping that the desperately-sought-for 'real' unity would presently emerge from the destruction of the shams and frauds – the knock-kneed army of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophies of history" (p. 49). Yet the more frenzied his search became, the more he failed to find it. Tolstoy "wished to be stopped by an immovable obstacle," an "impregnable fortress" that could resist "his engines of destruction," his "mines and battering rams," but he could find none (p. 49). The "thin, 'positive' doctrine" of history in War and Peace is all that remains of his search (p. 49).

We thus have the basic difference between the hedgehog and the fox, between hope for this world and despair that it can ever change. If we take this view of foxes and hedgehogs, then the difference between Berlin and Taylor is that Berlin argues that there is no single underlying cause of human life and action and that the search for one is doomed. Taylor, on the other hand, is not so willing to admit defeat.

The issues between the two resurfaced in Berlin's contribution to Taylor's festschrift, where he essentially argued that Taylor was indeed a hedgehog. Berlin's judgement of Taylor was that Taylor – so Berlin tells us – "truly believes" that human beings, and perhaps the entire universe, have a basic purpose," however that purpose is viewed through Christian, Jewish, Aristotelian, or even Hegelian, lenses." Berlin, however, suggests that purposes are not found by humans, but imposed by them upon an
external universe, and that human society in all its complexity can never “march inexorably” towards any “single predestined goal (p. 2).” Unlike the various “determinists and teleologists” that have existed throughout history (and who continue to the present day, he maintains) Berlin cannot believe with all his knowledge of the complexity and irrationality of human history, that any such single and non-contradictory truth exists. Taylor, however, is “reluctant to take this as the last word”.\(^7\) He still maintains that “we can and should struggle for a ‘transvaluation’ (to borrow Nietzsche’s word *umwertung*) which could open the way to a mode of life individual and social in which these demands could be recognised (p. 214).

In his essay discussing “What’s Wrong With Negative Liberty”, Taylor argued that Berlin was so afraid of the twentieth-century “Totalitarian Menace” that he constructed a personal “Maginot line” of negative liberty seeking thereby to defend the individual from physical coercion. Taylor argued however that Berlin’s conception of negative liberty was such a last-ditch line in the sand that in the process of constructing it he actually abandoned all the most favourable grounds of liberalism to the enemy. Taylor argued that we can and should defend qualitative distinctions about the development of human potential because without such a concept there is no reason to defend a person’s rights. Moreover, the question remains as to whether embarking on this course necessarily leads to “totalitarian oppression”, a question which Berlin evaded by definitional fiat, thereby relegating it to “the limbo of metaphysical pseudo-questions.”\(^7\)

Taylor’s critique of Berlin’s “Two Concepts of Liberty” is invariably mentioned in passing in any discussion of Berlin’s work, but the engagement between the two stretches far beyond any discussion of “positive” or “negative” liberty. At heart lies the issue of the interpretation of human life and action, whether by a disillusioned former English Hegelian or by a converted Frankfurt School Hegelian who reads his *Hegel* through Heideggerian lenses. On the philosophy of history and science rests such issues as the explanation of totalitarianism, the idea of freedom and the conception of

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the person, the defence of political philosophy against the anti-philosophy of political
science, and the question of whether, given our knowledge of the dark history of
humanity, one should seek to protect the weak from coercion by the stronger or
whether one should embrace a politics of identity in an attempt to rise above the
minor squabbles of individual interests. This, perhaps, is the real issue between Taylor
and Berlin, and it is an issue that this thesis shall proceed to investigate.
The critique of totalitarianism

In 1958, Isaiah Berlin unveiled his “Two Concepts of Liberty” in his inaugural lecture for the Chichelle Chair of Social and Political Theory at Oxford University. Berlin’s “Two Concepts” has dominated much of the debate over liberty in the second half of the twentieth century, yet it tends to be completely misunderstood by political scientists for despite the title, Berlin’s “Two Concepts” does not examine the problem of liberty at all. Rather, this essay attempted to denounce the metaphysical origins of collectivism and totalitarianism in the twentieth century.

The philosophy of irreducible pluralism emerges in the opening lines of Berlin’s essay. “If men never disagreed about the ends of life”, Berlin stated, political philosophy “could scarcely have been conceived”.1 Political philosophy exists simply because we live “in a world where ends collide”.2 If the ends of life were somehow settled, Berlin stated, political philosophy would be replaced by technical questions “capable of being settled by experts or machines like arguments between engineers or doctors”.3 It was the feature of the great revolutionary theories of anarchism or communism (particularly of the Marxist variant) that the nature of the world could be transformed in such a way that all political and moral problems could somehow be transformed into technological ones. “This is the meaning of Saint-Simon’s phrase about ‘replacing the government of persons by the administration of things’,” Berlin

stated, "and the Marxist prophecies about the withering away of the state and the beginning of the true history of humanity" (p. 118). Berlin quickly makes the identification between philosophical "monism" and totalitarianism as the search for a single, unifying solution to the problems of politics:

One belief, more than any other, is responsible for the slaughter of individuals on the altars of the great historical ideals.... This is the belief that somewhere, in the past or in the future, in divine revelation or in the mind of an individual thinker, in the pronouncements of history or sciences, or in the simple heart of an uncorrupted good man, there is a final solution. This ancient faith rests on the conviction that all the positive values in which men have believed must, in the end, be compatible, and perhaps even entail one another (p. 167).

In his discussion of monists and pluralists, Berlin was specifically discussing the problems of totalitarianism in the twentieth century in light of what he saw as its historical precedents. Yet these were not the only targets that Berlin sought to engage with.

The great revolutionary positivists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not the only people who thought that questions of philosophy could be replaced by technical discussion. In fact, a number of people believed that they already had. The revolutionary and world-transforming outlook, Berlin stated, "is called utopian by those for whom speculation about this condition of perfect social harmony is the play of idle fancy", but "a visitor from Mars to any British – or American – university might perhaps be forgiven if he sustained the impression that its members lived in something very like this innocent and idyllic state" (p. 118). What Berlin was referring to here was the development of political science and the "end of ideology thesis", and this was a problem that very much exercised the attention of both Berlin and his doctoral student Charles Taylor.
The “end of ideology” and the Cold War

The “end of ideology” thesis was simply the idea that the era of the great political philosophies was dead. Economic liberalism, that classical doctrine of *laissez-faire laissez passer*, had become utterly discredited in the collapse of the Great Depression and had since become modified out of all recognition: first by the development of the welfare state, the “Great Deal” and Keynesian economic intervention. Fascism and Communism had become discredited by the simple horror at the destruction of Europe in their name during the Second World War. The great political philosophies became conceived as “ideologies” responsible for “the conversion of ideas into social levers”, or even more strongly, into “weapons”. These “total ideologies” became seen in eschatological terms as complete explanations of reality that seek to utterly transform the given social system. “Ideology in this sense”, Bell concluded, “is a secular religion” (p. 400).

Secondly, the partial nationalisation of British industry in the post-war years highlighted the practical problems with putting socialism into practice. Compared with the economic record of the Soviet Union, the development of “social democracy” – a convenient term for the combination of welfare state and economic intervention that avoids further confusing the already overburdened term “liberalism” with which it came to be associated in America – became perceived as addressing the “practical” issues of raising the standard of living in a way that the old ideological groupings had never been able to address. It was reflections such as these that led Edward Shills, among others, to proclaim the “end of ideology” in his *Encounter* magazine report on the Future of Freedom conference (which was convened by the Congress for Cultural Freedom).

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The Critique of Totalitarianism

Critiquing the “scientific” creditability of political sociology

The “end of ideology” thesis – or rather the “down with political philosophy” thesis – became particularly associated with the work of Daniel Bell and Seymour Lipset, with the development of a political science and the development of practical, scientifically “neutral”, policy advice. The defence of political philosophy – or the critical study of ideas (i.e. ideology) as both Taylor and Berlin variously referred to it – was a subject that exercised the attention of both Taylor and Berlin. In their eyes, the social sciences of the 1950s and 60s became lost in an arid intellectual wasteland of operationalism, structural-functionism, pluralism, behaviouralism, and the quest for “scientific neutrality”. Both were united in arguing that it is inappropriate to study human life and action on the model of the natural sciences and both in their unique ways turned to a philosophy of history as the model of the proper study of humanity.

Berlin pointed out that the uncritical abandonment of political ideologies in favour of technical discussions of public policy led to the perverse effect that the combating of these ideologies was neglected. Berlin pointed out that if the ideological weapons forged in “the stillness of a professor’s study” were indeed so dangerous, then it must be the duty of “those who have been trained to think critically about ideas” to combat them and not “governments or Congressional committees”. The reference to Congressional committees is a curious one, and it is probably a reference to the fact that while lecturing in America, Berlin – that self-styled cold war warrior – was at risk of being indicted before the McCarthy committee for his impolitic study of the origins of Russian totalitarianism. Berlin pointed out, however, that there has never been such a time in modern history when “so large a number of human beings, both in the East and West, have had their notions, and indeed their lives, so deeply altered, and in some cases violently upset, by fanatically held social and political doctrines”. Both sides in “the open war that is being fought between two systems of ideas”, “each claiming the allegiance of very large numbers of men” – whether they admitted this or

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not – were ideologies in Berlin’s view, and to fail to recognise this is to fail to justify our beliefs and in effect leaves them undefended (p. 121).

**Berlin’s critique of Stalinism**

Berlin’s “Two Concepts of Liberty” essentially discusses the ontological explanation of Totalitarianism. The crucial statement of this aim occurs in the summing up of his “two concepts” before applying them to a number of philosophical problems. In this passage Berlin states:

... conceptions of freedom directly derive from views of what constitutes, a self, a person, a [human]. Enough manipulation with the definition of [humanity], and freedom can be made to mean whatever the manipulator wishes. Recent history has made it only too clear that the issue is not merely academic (p. 134).

Berlin argues that the “positive” ideal easily gets interpreted in an “ominous” fashion, but he also states that “This magical transformation, or sleight of hand ... can no doubt be perpetrated just as easily with the ‘negative’ concept of freedom” (p. 134). Berlin points out that the “self” defended in the negative conception of freedom is “just as easily” conceived not as the individual normally understood but instead as “the ‘real’ man within, identified with the pursuit of some ideal purpose not dreamed of by his empirical self” (p. 134). Furthermore, Berlin states, “as in the case of the ‘positively’ free self, this entity may be inflated into some super-personal entity – a state, a class, a nation, or the march of history itself, regarded as a more ‘real’ subject of attributes than the empirical self” (p. 134). For Berlin, the distinction between the two is that the positive ideal has “lent itself more easily to this splitting of personality into two”; that this is a “historical fact”; that “Recent history has made it only too clear that the issue is not merely academic”; and finally that “The consequences of distinguishing between two selves will become even clearer if we consider the two major forms which the desire to be self-directed ... has historically taken” [emphasis added] (p. 134). If we examine Berlin’s text, we find that the differences between positive and negative freedom “have led in the end to the great clash of ideologies that
The Critique of Totalitarianism

dominate our world" (p. 131). In this light, Berlin stated, the defence for positive freedom appears “no better than a specious disguise for brutal tyranny” (p. 131).

If we examine what is meant by “positive freedom”, it is quickly apparent that Berlin was talking about the doctrine of Totalitarianism. Berlin’s point was that once the “real self” is conceived as part of a “social whole” that is something greater than the individual person, it then becomes justifiable to coerce or even sacrifice the individual in the name of a greater good of which they are but an insignificant part (p. 132). The positive conception of freedom, Berlin continued, appears plausible in the first place because we use the very same language to justify the coercion of public health, education, or justice, because if the persons were enlightened rather than “blind or ignorant or corrupt” this would be a course of action that they would take of their own volition (pp. 132-133). It is possible, however, to go further than this, Berlin argued, so far as to say that it is necessary to overcome any resistance by the person concerned on behalf of their real interests of which they know nothing (p. 133).

Once I take this view, I am in a position to ignore the actual wishes of [persons] or societies, to bully, oppress, torture them in the name, and on behalf, of their ‘real’ selves, in the secure knowledge that whatever is the true goal of [humanity] (happiness, performance of duty, wisdom, a just society, self-fulfilment) must be identical with his [or her] freedom – the free choice of his [or her] ‘true’, albeit often submerged and inarticulate self (p. 133).

If we further examine what Berlin meant by his discussion of divided selves, it rapidly emerges that Berlin is arguing that collectivism develops out of philosophical idealism on much the same grounds as the critique of ideology discussed above.

If we examine the text we find that Berlin is here discussing the Kantian freedom of the will – that very “freedom” that J. S. Mill proposed not to discuss. The “positive” conception of freedom, Berlin argues, is derived from the separation of the noumenal self, “the possessor of reason and will”, and the phenomenal self, the body with “a wound in my leg” (p. 135). In this respect, the Kantian notion of freedom has been restated by Charles Taylor: “In being determined by a purely formal law, binding on me simply qua rational will, I declare my independence, as it were, from all natural
considerations and motives and from the natural causality which rules them”, Taylor states. Kant described this independence from physical determination as freedom “in a strict, i.e. transcendental sense”. Thus, Taylor concludes, “I am free in a radical sense, self-determining not as a natural being, but as a pure, moral will”. Likewise, Berlin restates Kant’s formula as saying that: “I am free because, and in so far as, I am autonomous. I obey laws, but I have imposed them on, or found them in, my own uncoerced self. Freedom is obedience, but ‘obedience to a law which we prescribe ourselves’, and no man can enslave himself”. Berlin points out, however, that Kant’s idealism arose during a particularly degraded period of German culture, “when the character of public life, particularly in the small principalities, forced those who prized the dignity of human life, not for the first or last time, into a kind of inner emigration” (p. 139). Berlin concludes that the conception of freedom as freedom of the will merely avoids the problem of politics altogether. “If”, in the real world of politics, “I find that I am able to do little or nothing of what I wish”, Berlin retorts, “I need only contract or extinguish my wishes and I am made free” (p. 139).

At this point, Berlin’s thesis is little different from Marx’s critique that German philosophy had been restricted to idealism because there was no German state in which to develop real politics, as discussed above. Berlin points out, however, that wishing them away is not the only means by which to remove obstacles. Obstacles can also be removed by force, such as “when I induce somebody to make room for me in his carriage, or conquer a country which threatens the interests of my own”, Berlin states (p. 140). Such acts may be unjust, violent or cruel, Berlin continues, but it must be admitted that they increase the freedom of the person in question, even if they entail the enslavement of others (p. 140). This view rules “over half the world”, Berlin states, and he proposes to reveal the “metaphysical” foundations upon which it rests (p. 141).

The metaphysical foundation of totalitarianism, Berlin states, is the belief in reason, the understanding of ultimate reality (p. 141). Critical reason is like the logic of

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10 Kant, Immanuel, Critique of Practical Reason, bk. 1, pt. 1, s. 5, quoted by Taylor in Hegel, p. 31.
11 Taylor, Hegel, p. 31.
mathematics, Berlin states; the rules of logic are initially unfathomable and must be dictated to the ignorant by authority, but once one reaches the stage of grasping the point of these rules, one cannot see how it could be otherwise (p. 141). For the accomplished mathematician, Berlin relates, “the proof of these theorems is part of the free exercise of his [or her] natural reasoning capacity” (p. 141). This leads to the Hegelian position, Berlin argues, that once “you understand the necessity – the rational necessity – you cannot, while remaining rational, want to be otherwise” (p. 142). This leads further still, Berlin continued, to Marx’s position of revealing the false understandings of those children who have not yet grasped the true structure of reality:

Marx and his disciples maintained that the path of human beings was obstructed not only by natural forces, or the imperfections of their own social institutions, which they had originally created (not always consciously) for certain purposes, but whose functioning they systematically came to misconceive [in practice even more than in theory], and which thereupon became obstacles in their creators’ progress. He offered social and economic hypotheses to account for the inevitability of such misunderstanding, in particular of the illusion that such [artificial] arrangements were independent forces, as inescapable as the laws of nature. … Not until we had reached a stage at which the spells of these illusions could be broken, that is, until enough men [and women] reached a social stage that alone enabled them to understand that these laws and institutions were themselves the work of human minds and hands, historically needed in their day, and later mistaken for inexorable, objective powers, could the old world be destroyed, and more adequate and liberating social machinery be developed (p. 143).

Berlin is clearly discussing here the concept of alienation which equally exercised the attention of the “socialist humanism” of the New Left. For example, Erich Fromm quotes from *Capital*, noting that for Marx, “alienation” is called that human condition where a man’s “own act becomes to him an alien power, standing over and against

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him, instead of being ruled by him". Likewise, for Taylor, the concept of "alienation" provided an explanation of the specific problems of industrial society. "a model ... of human capacities and powers becoming foreign to [humanity]". Taylor argued that alienation was embodied in industrialised society and was exemplified in utilitarian theory which is "the self-consciousness of alienated [humanity] in our society" (p. 14). "To the extent that [people] see themselves in this way", Taylor concluded, "their alienation is complete" (p. 15). These understandings of alienation are completely compatible with Berlin's statement that in the Marxist view, humanity was oppressed by social institutions that humans had created for their own purposes, the origins of which are now long forgotten, and which now "became obstacles in their creators' progress".

Berlin argues that socialised forms of the metaphysical doctrine of the freedom of the will or "liberation by reason" lie "at the heart of many of the nationalist, communist, authoritarian, and totalitarian creeds of our day", and he proceeds to discuss some of its "vicissitudes" (p. 144). The problem with the freedom of the will, Berlin argues, is not so much when it is applied to the individual person but when it is applied to society (p. 145). This raises the previously unconsidered problem of avoiding a collision between wills (p. 145). Using the conception of pure reason, however, the problem of a conflict of wills could not arise if the true structure of society is developed because two truths (i.e. individual wills) cannot be incompatible (p. 145). "So long as each player recognises and plays the part set ... by reason ... there can be no conflict" (p. 147). This, however, brings the problem of what to do with the uneducated rabble who have no grasp of the true nature of reason (p. 149). The solution adopted by every authoritarian, totalitarian, or paternalistic "dictator, inquisitor, and bully", Berlin tells us, is that "I must do for men (or with them) what they cannot do for themselves, and I cannot ask their permission or consent, because they are in no condition to know what is best for them" (p. 151). The ultimate

justification of this approach, Berlin states, is Fichte’s declaration that “No one has …
rights against reason (p. 151).

In this way, the rationalist argument, with its assumption of the single true
solution, has lead by steps which, if not logically valid, are historically and
psychologically intelligible, from an ethical doctrine of individual responsibility
and individual self-perfection to an authoritarian state obedient to the directives
of an élite of Platonic guardians (p. 152).

Taylor resists what he sees as a “caricatural” portrait of both positive and negative
liberty. Taylor points out that Berlin’s portrait of official communism, though
extreme, “undoubtedly expresses the inner logic of this kind of theory”, yet there are
far many more political philosophies that might be considered as “positive freedom”
that cannot be reduced to a simple formula of “collective control over the common
life”, or which hold a doctrine of forcing people to be free. 16 Taylor concludes by
stating that the question of whether the idea of freedom as self-realisation must
necessarily lead on to “the excesses of totalitarian oppression” is a question that is yet
to be addressed. 17 Although Taylor left this question hanging in the air, so to speak, in
his critique of Berlin, the defence of socialist idealism was a problem that Taylor
discussed at great length. Taylor was instrumental in the development of the “socialist
humanism” of the British New Left which mounted a critique of the “ideology” of
Stalinism similar to that of Berlin’s, but refused to take this as the last word on the
matter. Taylor, among others, was engaged on a project to see if hope in socialist
idealism could remain after the crimes of Stalin.

The socialist humanism debate

The measure of the New Left's disillusionment with Stalinism can perhaps be demonstrated in the following passage from E. P. Thompson's *William Morris*, which was published a year before the Hungarian Uprising.

Twenty years ago, even among socialists and communists, many must have regarded Morris's picture of "A Factory as it Might Be" as an unpoetical poet's dream: today visitors return from the Soviet Union with stories of the poet's dream already fulfilled. Yesterday, in the Soviet Union, the Communists were struggling against every difficulty to build up their industry to the level of the leading capitalist powers: to-day they have before them Stalin's blueprint of the advance to communism.... Thus have the "claims" of William Morris, the "unpractical" poet, been promised fulfilment!\(^1\)

That the passage in question rapidly became a source of embarrassment is perhaps shown by the fact that it was later excised from Thompson's second edition of this work. The reason it rapidly became an embarrassment was that Khrushchev's revelations highlighted the extent to which the "old" Left had been, at best, captivated by their idealism, or, at worst, manipulated by a cynical Soviet propaganda machine. Khrushchev's revelations had momentous consequences for the British Communist Party. Within the Party, John Saville and E. P. Thompson founded the *Reasoner*, in order to debate the implications for communism of Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin. At the time, the party held an ideal of staunch solidarity in the face of opposition, and the original *Reasoner* was closed down by the party (coincidentally)

on the eve of the Soviet Invasion of Hungary. Both Saville and Thompson resigned from the party in disgust and left to form a new journal of "socialist humanism", the *New Reasoner*. Any socialist idealism that still lingered was brutally cut short following the Soviet invasion of Hungary, which brought about the near-total collapse of the British Communist Party. The Soviet crushing of the Hungarian uprising was televised world-wide, showing graphic images of one communist state brutally subjecting another – hardly the "international brotherhood of man" that Marx had envisaged. In the year following the invasion of Hungary, the British Communist Party lost nearly two-thirds of its membership, many of the disaffected finding a home in *New Reasoner*.

The "socialist humanism" debate was launched in England by E. P. Thompson. Whereas the conception of Stalinism, at least, as "ideology" was the beginning and end of the matter for Berlin or the newly converted American liberals like Daniel Bell, this was actually the beginning for the debate on the left of the mainstream consensus. The problem, as E. P. Thompson saw it, was whether Marxism could be cleansed of Stalinism. Thompson took particular inspiration from the young Marx's tenth thesis on Feuerbach: "The standpoint of the old materialism is 'civil society'; the standpoint of the new is human society or socialised humanity".2

Interestingly enough, the critique of ideology developed out of Marx's adaptation of Feuerbach. Feuerbach had argued that humanity could only be free if it was able to rid itself of the "false consciousness" of religion.3 For Feuerbach, human history was a long process of disenchantment, reaching its culmination in the Christian transformation of a Jewish tribal deity into a universal abstraction (p. 394). Religion, however, was a fraud, Feuerbach argued, and the task of philosophy is to rescue humanity from its "false consciousness" in God to a "true consciousness" of itself, placing humanity at the centre of consciousness, thereby reconciling the infinite into the finite (p. 394). Marx, however, adopted Feuerbach's critique by turning it inside-out in the process. Whereas Feuerbach immersed himself in the world, Marx sought to

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3 Bell, *The End of Ideology*, p. 394.
transform it (p. 394). Whereas Feuerbach retrieved Kantian philosophical anthropology, Marx reworked Hegel’s conception of history and action (p. 394). For Marx there was no generic essence of humanity, only men and women defined by their class and historical society (p. 394). All received truths were “false consciousness”, the product of a particular class (p. 394). “True consciousness” could only be discovered through the evolution of class struggle to conscious rationality (p. 394). Finally, if the resolution of world historical moments lay in action, then one must ultimately act to bring them about – a requirement for revolutionary change that could never be satisfied with mere internal change within a particular society (p. 394). Marx deployed these concepts in his critique of Hegel, where he argued that German philosophy had been restricted to the “false consciousness” of idealism. Philosophical idealism was the belief that truth and consciousness are to be found in the realm of ideas, but Marx argued that this was an example of “false consciousness”, that German Idealism was the product of a particular class and society, and finally that German philosophy had been restricted to idealism because there was no German state in which to develop real politics. In the hands of the “left” Hegelians, philosophy was to be redirected as a radical critique of society, ridding it of vestigial elements and reshaping it for the demands of the present. In the twentieth century, however, Marxism – or at least the historical derivations of it – came to be seen as an “ideology” itself.

This was the topic of E. P. Thompson’s thesis that Stalinism was an ideology. “Stalinism”, Thompson declared, “is, in a true sense, an ideology”, a form of “false consciousness” stemming from a “partial, partisan, view of reality”, thereby “establishing a complete system of partially false concepts with a mode of thought which – in the Marxist sense – is idealist”. Stalinism had not begun with “facts” or “social reality”, Thompson declared, but with “the idea, the text, the axiom” to which “facts”, “institutions” and “people”, must be made to conform (p. 107). In the second issue of New Reasoner, Charles Taylor supported Thompson’s view of Stalinism as an ideology, “an incomplete, partisan, distorted view of reality”, as Charles Taylor

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1 Bell, The End of Ideology, p. 393.
described it. Yet, Taylor was quick to point out, even the early Marx could not be completely exonerated from the crimes of Stalin. Taylor argued that while socialist humanism is derived from Marxism, Marxism is at best an “incomplete humanism”, and that socialist humanism could not simply cleanse Marxism of Stalinism, but must also reconsider the basic values of Marxism itself (p. 98).

Taylor pointed out that the theoretical precedent for Stalin’s contempt for the humanity of the Kulaks, etc, could be found in the contempt shown in the Communist Manifesto, where Marx refers to the lumpenproletariat as “social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society” (p. 97). Taylor pointed out that while Marxism had originally been conceived as the defence of our common humanity – of man the “species-being”, in the Paris Manuscripts – under Lenin and later Stalin the definition of humanity had been increasingly restricted first to the proletariat, later to the vanguard of the party, and perhaps finally to Stalin alone (p. 97). The “enemies of Socialism”, Taylor argued, “ceased to be really human. If they could not be used or moulded, they could be swept aside like obstacles, as a bulldozer removes the unevenness of the terrain” (p. 94). Taylor argued that in contrast to the communist bulldozer, socialist humanism must be concerned even with “those individuals who will not be freed”, adding that “the proletariat must not free itself by depriving some [individuals] of their status as human beings” (p. 97).

Summary

Berlin’s argument for the failures of Marxism is echoed by Taylor. Berlin was arguing against the idealist conception of freedom of the will, and he argued that this conception of the person, as divided between the phenomenal and ideal, had led, in the justification of totalitarianism, to the brutal sacrifice of actual, physical human beings in the name of an ideal. Taylor was similarly engaged in a critique of Stalinist “ideology”. Thus, the two of them were effectively engaged in a defence of individualism against collectivism. Both argued that it can never be justified to sacrifice individuals on the altar of social necessity. Yet Taylor is not so quick to

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conclude that *all* socialist idealism must necessarily be vanquished simply because of the brutality of Stalin. The next chapter further pursues this re-examination of Marxism in terms of a conflict between liberalism and romanticism.
Taylor and the New Left

Although Thompson’s *William Morris* showed the last gasps of uncritical belief in Stalinism, its investigation of a native British socialism also uncovered some fruitful themes that would become very important for the formation of a new Left. One of the themes that emerged in both Thompson’s *William Morris* and William’s *Culture & Society* was the view of much of modern English history as a conflict between a utilitarian economic liberalism and a proto-socialist romanticism inspired by the idealism of the French Revolution.

For Thompson, William Morris sat at the end of a generation of romantic poets who had revolted against the inhumanity and vulgarity of the utilitarianism of the industrial revolution, who had their hopes raised by the promise of the French Revolution, and which were dashed by the middle-class reactionism of the “Whiggish” reform bills. Above all, Thompson found in romanticism an artistic sense and sensibility of the human condition, a “sympathetic imagination” that was able to capture the experience of history in a way that the “cold hand” of scientific realism was not. It was this artistic sensitivity to the amorality of industrial life – for those condemned to spend their days welding the head of a pin – that led Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites to escape to the cloistered community of the mediaeval monastery, “a real community of human beings” that contradicted the mass society of industrial England.

Yet Thompson ultimately finds the romantic movement a failure. Unable to bring about a revolutionary spirit in *this* world, the romantic “revolt” retreated to the medievalism of its ideal world of romance (p. 104). For Thompson, the aspirations of

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1 Thompson, *William Morris*, pp. 27, 32.
Taylor and the New Left

romanticism could only become fulfilled when Morris became involved in working-class struggles, “into the socialist realism which needs to project the aspirations of [humanity] into no dream-world of art, but, rather, finds them in the heroism and beauty of the real world of struggle on every side” (p. 112). Thompson found in the later Morris a man who had turned the romantic spirit of revolt against the inhumanity of industrialism into a practical, British socialism that would not be satisfied with “the compromise and betrayal” of social democracy (pp. 841-842).

Likewise, Raymond Williams traced the development of the idea of culture and the artistic imagination as a reaction to the “cold” hand of utilitarian philosophy. For Williams, the artistic sensibility could not be accommodated with a world that was conceived as a machine and which viewed the masses as separate individuals and which denied any social conception of political economy. These two streams of romanticism and utilitarianism were perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in J. S. Mill’s essays on Bentham and Coleridge – although his contemporaries saw Mill as having fallen prey to “German mysticism”. Mill’s opinions are perhaps worth quoting at length. On Bentham, Mill wrote:

[Bentham] brought into philosophy something which it greatly needed, and for want of which it was at a stand. It was not his doctrines which did this: it was his mode at arriving at them. He introduced into morals and politics those habits of thought, and modes of investigation, which are essential to the idea of science, and the absence of which had made those departments of inquiry, as physics had been before Bacon, a field of interminable discussion, leading to no result. ... Bentham's method may be shortly described as the method of detail; of treating wholes by separating them into their parts; abstractions, by resolving them into things; classes and generalities, by distinguishing them into the individuals of which they are made up; and breaking every question into pieces before attempting to solve it. The precise amount of originality of this process, considered as a logical conception – its degree of connection with the methods of physical science, or with the previous labours of Bacon, Hobbes, or Locke – is not an essential consideration in this place. Whatever originality there was in
the method, in the subjects he applied it to, and in the rigidity with which he adhered to it, there was the greatest.3

By contrast, Mill wrote on Coleridge that:

... every excess in either direction determines a corresponding re-action....

Now, the Germano-Coleridgian is, in our view of the matter, the result of such a re-action. It expresses the revolt of the human mind against the philosophy of the eighteenth century. It is ontological, because that was experimental; conservative, because that was innovative; religious, because so much of that was infidel; concrete and historical, because that was abstract and metaphysical; poetical, because that was matter-of-fact and prosaic. In every respect, it flies off in the contrary direction to its predecessor....3

Interestingly enough, Williams argued that the idea of an organic conception of society was common to both conservatives (e.g. Burke) and socialists alike, who shared a common hatred of the effects of liberal economics, which they saw as having been justified by the “scientific laws” of utilitarian political economy.

Williams reintroduced the organic conception of society in the conclusion of his Culture and Society. Williams argued that any possible transition to socialism must be conceived as organic growth, with all the unpredictability this implied for what might develop in the future, as opposed to the “scientific” model of Stalinism. What Stalinism consisted of is perhaps illustrated by Alasdair MacIntyre in his “Notes From A Moral Wilderness”, which was first published as part of E. P. Thompson’s socialist humanism debate in the New Reasoner.4 “What the Stalinist thinks he possesses,” MacIntyre related, and “what the empiricist critic thinks to be logically impossible, is a blueprint of the social clockwork” (p. 35). That is, in Stalinist theory “the laws which govern social development” are regarded as if they were “laws which regulate

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3 Mill, J. S. “Bentham”.
4 Mill, J. S. “Coleridge”.
the behaviour of a mechanical system” (p. 35). Historical development, in other words, is “governed by laws” making its future course entirely predictable (p. 36). If the Soviet Union did not possess the requisite stage of economic development for a truly communist revolution to occur, then Stalin himself would have to introduce the stages of capitalism (tractor factories and collective farms if necessary) for this to occur.

Williams argued that the modern world needed to develop the idea of a common culture to overcome the fragmentation of modern society. The development of this culture was to be conceived as the organic growth with all the unpredictability that implied for how it might evolve in the future. The development of a common culture was to be achieved through incorporating the diversity of particular communities, in which each person would be able to participate meaningfully in the common life.

Culture and society

One of the aims of Williams’ Culture and Society was to argue for a conception of society as culture, a system of common meanings. He pointed to the development of utilitarianism and political economy (i.e. economic liberalism), as depicted in Charles Dickens’ Hard Times, which recognised only individuals, hard “facts”, and a conception of national economy which consisted of the sum total of individual gains. (Interestingly enough, one of Taylor’s major explanations of his “holistic” conception of society was developed in support of Amyarta Sen’s critique of liberal economics as focussing on too narrow a definition of individual well-being). Williams also argued that the class system of English society prevented the development of a working class system of common meanings.

Williams pointed out that the main purpose of English “middle-class education” is to train loyal servants of the establishment and this created a crisis of conscience in him

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for, as working-class “scholarship boy”, “One cannot in conscience then become, when invited, an upper servant in an establishment that one thus radically disproves”.

Williams found that the middle-class ethic of public service was no substitute for working class solidarity (pp. 330-331). Indeed, he argued, the effect of scholarships (The education act of 1944 had established scholarships to provide for those with talent but little access to the elite educational establishments) was to break working class solidarity by offering selected individuals the opportunity to climb the “social ladder” at the expense of his fellow members (p. 331). The following passage is so important to the following discussion that it is here quoted in full:

On the educational ladder, the boy who has gone from a council school to Oxford or Cambridge is of course glad that he has gone, and he sees no need to apologise for it in either direction. But he cannot then be expected to agree that such an opportunity constitutes a sufficient educational reform. A few voices, softened by the climb, may be found to say this, which they are clearly expected to say. Yet, if he has come from any conscious part of the working class, such a boy will take leave to doubt the proffered version. The education was worth the effort, but he sees no reason why it should be interpreted as a ladder. For the ladder, with all of its extra-educational implications, is merely an image of a particular version of society; if he rejects the version, he will reject the image. Take the ladder image away, and interest is returned to what is, for him, its proper object: to the making of a common educational provision; to the work for equity in material distribution; to the process of shaping a tradition, a community of experience, which is always a selective organisation of past and present, and which he has been given particular opportunities to understand. The ladder, which is a substitute for all these things and must be understood in all its implications; and it is important that the growing number who have had the ladder stamped on their brows should interpret it to themselves and to their own people, whom, as a class, it could greatly harm (pp. 331-332).

These cultural differences became significant for the emerging identity of the New Left. The Universities & Left Review was formed by a group of “scholarship boys [and girls]” at Oxford – Stuart Hall (West Indies), Charles Taylor (Québec), Gabriel

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1 Williams, *Culture & Society*, p. 329.
Taylor and the New Left

Pearson (Communist), and Ralph Samuel (Jewish Communist). The significance of this is perhaps hinted at in an interview with Charles Taylor in which he stated that the inherent sacrifices involved in university study had previously been justified as the necessary apprenticeship for joining the English elite, but this ceased when the universities were opened up to the general population so that large numbers of students no longer identified themselves with the “establishment” but with the population at large. This also links with Stuart Hall’s statement that the “scholarship boys [and girls]” felt out of place in an Oxford dominated by the banalities of “ordinary language” philosophy and peopled by various reincarnations of “Lord Haw-Haw” furiously attempting to relive *Brideshead Revisited.* This antipathy to “establishment” Britain led for instance to Ernest Gellner, that maverick liberal, being regularly published in *Universities & Left Review* simply because his critiques of Wittgensteinian philosophy were so refreshing.

One of the crucial parts of the passage quoted above was Williams’ statement that the purposes of the working class “scholarship boy” should be first, “the making of a common educational provision”; second, to “work for equity in material distribution”; and third, “the process of shaping a tradition, a community of experience, which is always a selective organisation of past and present ... which he has been given particular opportunities to understand.” The third aim is of particular interest because we see Charles Taylor develop a similar theme in his article on “Alienation and the Community”.

*Alienation and the Community*

In his article on “Alienation and the Community”, Charles Taylor linked the problems of the rebuilding of London with a general theme of the dominance of utilitarianism, alienation and anomie in modern liberal society. Taylor articulated alienation as the

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2 Williams, *Culture & Society*, p. 332.

existential problem of *anomie*, as the loss of any sense of meaning in work, arising from the modern condition where work is separated from play, and the individual can no longer participate in the cultural life of the community. Taylor argued that alienation was embodied in industrialised society and exemplified in Utilitarian theory which is, he stated, “the self-consciousness of alienated man in society” (p. 14). Taylor (and others of like mind) argued that the life was being torn out of the City of London, that previously mixed housing and commercial zones were being demolished for the development of a soulless financial centre purely designed for work and which lies empty and deserted at night when all the workers have to commute back to “dormitory” suburbs at the edges of the city.

For Taylor, the utilitarianism behind this commercial development established a dichotomy of work and leisure, production and consumption, fragmenting the essence of life and separating the individual from the common life because it failed to recognise the existence of participation in cultural life except as either work or pleasure, even though such participation is not compatible with such utilitarian understandings (p. 12). “To the extent that [people] see their lives this way” Taylor stated, “their alienation is complete” (p. 15).

Now this kind of model cannot account for the kind of activity which is crucial to all cultural life, the participation by people who are not themselves creators of culture in the normal sense, in a heritage of meanings, which they take on, shape, whose offered continuations they accept or reject and which they ultimately hand on. This kind of activity, visible in anything from the square dance to the alive theatre audience, is not even thinkable in the original utilitarian scheme, or unthinkable without fragmentation into two (p. 12).

Taylor argued, like Raymond Williams, that a larger national community needed to be supported by local communities where people can exist “on a ‘face to face’ scale” (p. 17). “The most urgent job”, Taylor concluded, “is to rescue the old communities, to prevent their sinking into the amorphous mass of the surrounding conurbations, to plan the rebuilding so that the old relationships are not torn down with the condemned housing, to give their development some of the impetus that has been given to the New Towns, to associate the communities in their own development projects” (p. 18).
Summary of the genesis of Taylor’s project

We have here the beginnings of an explanation of Taylor’s intellectual project. Its theoretical foundations lay in Isaiah Berlin’s resurrection of political philosophy at Oxford, but was inimically opposed to Berlin’s blanket condemnation of all forms of socialist idealism along with Stalinist totalitarianism. This can be seen in Taylor’s involvement in the “New Left” project of developing a third way between the polar opposites of either “communism” or “the welfare state – no further” as the options were then presented at the height of the cold war. The difficulty of this project was finding a model for a New Left to replace the model of the Soviet Union and the Third International that had sustained the “old” Left of the 1930s. The old forms of “left” and “right” had collapsed into the post-war consensus of social democracy – that is, the combination of Keynesian economic intervention, social welfare, and democratically elected governments.

One of the peculiar features of this consensus is that liberalism – classical economic liberalism – is nowhere to be found in Great Britain. In the United States, “liberalism” seems to mean “liberality,” and it formed the political centre of social democracy or New Deal politics in America. In Britain, Hayek was the only person who preached a return to classical economic liberalism, yet he was a marginalized figure, haunting the outer reaches of the social-democratic consensus. Perhaps the greatest indication of just how forgotten classical liberalism was is Hayek’s statement that no-one born after the social and political reforms of the 1870s knows what it is like to live in a liberal state, and this statement probably has great merit. If true, it would make sense of how E. P. Thompson’s portrayal of William Morris as fighting against the “compromise

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1 Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom.*
and betrayal” of social democracy could seem relevant to the resurrection of socialist idealism in the 1950s, for social democracy in this light could be seen to have had a gradual development from the 1970s to the welfare state consensus.

Isaiah Berlin is often seen today as a defender of liberalism, but this “liberalism”, if such, must be linked with the “end of ideology” thesis and the social democratic or liberal-democratic consensus in America. Berlin’s “negative concept of liberty”, when examined closely, advocates the protection of the individual from the totalitarian evil of the twentieth century and is not reducible to the \textit{laissez-faire laissez-passer} doctrine of classical liberalism.

The dearth of liberalism in the 1950s is also possibly deducible in that the New Left’s explanations of politics were in terms of the dominance of technological and mechanistic world-views. Liberalism in this view was a product of eighteenth-century industrial society, now found only in Dickens’ novels, and which suffered from the same “mechanical” faults of the imagination as Marxism had done. One of the major themes that emerged was the conception of a “dialectics of modernity” between industrial society and the romantic revolt, and that dialectical materialism became seen by one and all to have fallen prey to the dominance of “science” in modern technological society.
PART TWO – THE SYSTEM ESTABLISHED
In 1967, certain members of the “first” New Left regrouped for a symposium on Williams' *Culture and Society*. The symposium was organised by *Slant* magazine, which was a “New Left” journal of Christian Socialism. Charles Taylor travelled back to England from Montréal for the conference to submit his paper “From Marxism to the Dialogue Society”. This paper is a crucial link between Taylor’s formative years in the New Left and his later “holistic” and Hegelian conception of society.

This article is examined in some detail because its existence undercuts some statements made about Taylor. Ruth Abbey, for instance, declares that Taylor’s “sources of secularity” project represents a new direction for Taylor, and if this is not already contradicted by the Taylor’s longstanding use of Weber’s discussion of the desacralisation of the world and the development of the protestant work ethic – particularly in Taylor’s Hegel, his “Legitimacy Crisis?”, and his Sources of the Self – then it must finally be put to rest in the text retrieved here. More importantly, this discussion contradicts Vincent Descombes’ otherwise excellent discussion of Taylor’s “objective spirit of society”. Descombes remarks that Taylor resurrects Hegel’s “objective spirit of society” in terms of Montesquieu’s mores or “spirit of the laws”, rather than as “a theodicy which makes of the human community a kind of corpus

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mysticum through which the divine can achieve its full presence”. A close reading of Hegel would rather reveal that Taylor does both. If any doubt lingers about Taylor’s intentions, then this would be put to rest in reading the text of the following article. Finally, this article should put to rest any complaints that Taylor’s Catholicism is not promoted enough; it is there – one just has to wade through volumes of incomprehensible text to find it.

Underlying Taylor’s argument is a conception of finding the meaning of one’s life from the awareness of the sacred – although this argument is not stated clearly until his Hegel. Marxism, Taylor states, is an answer to a question that arises in “the historical dialectic” of enlightenment humanism, the question of why the increasing development of a technological civilisation has produced such “anti-human” consequences. The “spiritual” stance of the enlightenment, Taylor contended, is a way of treating nature “as material which waits to be transformed or manipulated in order to produce certain results”, goals which are dictated by humans and imposed upon the material in question (p. 149). This has resulted in the desacralisation of the world, Taylor continued, which – following Heidegger – cuts humans off from their “living relation to nature”, from their “meaningful relations of solidarity” with others, and even from their own nature, crushing individuality, blunting creativity, and killing spontaneity (p. 150). Marxism, Taylor argued, had adopted the romantic conception of self-expression found in Herder, to a view of human nature as producer, a nature that is realised in its own particular form through social production (pp. 151-153). This is why, Taylor states, that private appropriation is so alienating in the Marxist system, because it separates the worker from the common “essence” in which all should share (pp. 152-153). Yet Taylor argues that the promise Marxism offers, “of complete reconciliation of man to other men, his creation and himself, all in one act, is unfulfillable” (p. 153). The reason, Taylor continues, is that without restoring humanity’s ability to “reach beyond … and make contact with the non-human, and … the more than human” (p. 154). “Marxism”, Taylor declared, “seems caught in the

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circle of the whole European spiritualist tradition, which underlies enlightenment thought, that in raising [humanity] above nature (including [our] own nature) it leaves [us] without interlocutor and therefore with nothing to say” (p. 154).

Taylor then turned to illustrate his thesis with the concept of “community”, a central idea, Taylor stated, that the New Left had put back on the map (p. 155). The subject, Taylor stated was “the contradiction between private appropriation and social production”, which could be examined in terms of the “breakdown of community into the self-stultifying private”, which, Taylor argued, is the “essence” of the theory of alienation (pp. 154-155).

Community, Taylor stated, provides a locus of meanings “which provide the growing person with the language with which to obtain his [or her] maturity” (p. 159). “Maturity”, Taylor declares, “is coming to terms with this community, so that one is neither simply a passive unconscious reflection of its dominant meanings, nor caught in an unresolved relation of rejection which is part self-rejection, but an independent being aware of what one receives and ready to give in return, by helping to shape its future” (p. 159). This is the “discovery of identity” discussed in Freudian psychoanalysis (pp. 159-160). This is not something that can be discovered in isolation, Taylor continued, because identity is developed in terms of relations to some outside reality, “that from which one has received and to which one gives in return” [original emphasis] (p. 160).

The breakdown of community in capitalist society, Taylor argued, must be seen as an “atrophying of the recipient-donor relation” (p. 162). In primitive society, Taylor stated, all the communities of God, society, and the family are one, and are channels to mediate between the individual and the sacred, but the desacralisation of the “capitalist/technological” civilisation of the enlightenment “has dried up the springs by which the presence of the sacred in human life was periodically renewed” (pp. 162-163). Not only has the desacralised universe been regarded as an instrument for control and manipulation, Taylor declared, but the community too has been desacralised, torn up “to serve the ends of production”, reconceptualised as an “instrument ... designed for the furtherance of individual happiness on the classical liberal view” (p. 164). Furthermore, this technological society is so pervasive that
partial societies, like the church, cannot survive to provide a meaningful counterculture (p. 165). Cathedrals are dwarfed by skyscrapers (p. 165). A single service at church on a Sunday becomes meaningless without a wider context (p. 165). Churches wither and die (p. 165). Basic human solidarity, Taylor declared, seems to “atrophy” in the private life enshrined in modern urban civilisation (p. 171). People are cut off from the community, “from the ultimate under any description”, their growth as human beings is stunted, and this in turn affects the development of society as a whole (p. 169).

The solution of creating a truly “socialist” society, Taylor concluded, lies not in simply just abolishing private ownership of the means of production, but in creating a sense of community that people can identify with, a community that serves to mediate the person with the ultimate reality, one that is too large to be reduced to the “instrumental”, and which calls forth “a recipient/donor response” (p. 174). Unlike the “classless society” of Marxist prophecy, Taylor argued, a future socialist society must allow “a fundamental diversity of meanings” (p. 175). This allowed the rehabilitation of “one of the most cherished values of post-romantic liberalism”, Taylor argued, that of “the autonomy of the individual to develop in his [or her] own way” (p. 175). This is possible, he elaborated, if personal development is seen as a “growth in responsibility”, as “an autonomous relating to a greater reality” (p. 176). If this was the case, then imposing “oppressive ideals” would prevent the attainment of personal autonomy and responsibility (p. 176).

The development of this truly socialist society, Taylor argued, needs to occur through the creation of “public meanings” using the media, theatre, and public architecture, and reconstructing our cities so as to contain “a genuine living centre”, which through these various media would present “the most important ideas, ideals, preoccupations and realisations of the civilisation” (pp. 176-177, 180). Furthermore, Taylor contended that socialists “need to exploit the obvious places where even on liberal grounds private property needs to be overruled by collective control” (such as the environment, public transport, regional development, etc) (pp. 168, 180). Finally, Taylor concluded that socialism needs to abandon Marxism (p. 180). “In Iris Murdoch’s phrase” Taylor declared, “we need a new house of theory; in the old
From Culture to Revolution

Marxist mansion, the winter winds break in and the roof leaks in summer. We have to move” (p. 181).
Marxism and the dialectics of modernity

In this chapter I want to focus on Taylor’s rather obscure reference to the “historical dialectic” of enlightenment and how this could count towards an explanation of the failures of marxism.

The desacralisation of modernity

Before the desecularisation of the enlightenment, Taylor states, the universe was seen as the embodiment of a meaningful cosmic order, such as, for instance, in the Platonic conception of reality as Ideas, or in the medaeval notion of correspondences, where for instance, “the lion represents in the kingdom of animals what the eagle does among birds, the king in the realm, etc, ... because they make up an order which makes sense and which in virtue of this is pressing for realisation.” This in turn leads to a definition of reason as understanding the true order of the universe. Society, in this view, is thus a manifestation of the cosmic order of the universe.

This understanding of reason continued down to the mediaeval period, Taylor argues in his *Hegel*, in the form of the Catholic religion, and its destruction at the hands of the reformation led to a new “desacralised” conception of the universe. “For the majority of non-philosophical [people],” he declares, “the sense of being defined in relation to a larger order is carried by their religious consciousness,” particularly in “their sense of the sacred,” which is the sense of “the heightened presence of the divine in certain privileged places, times, and actions (p. 9). The importance of the

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Reformation was that Catholicism was classed with “idolatry” and “waged war upon it. “It is probable,” Taylor claims, “that the unremitting struggle to desacralise the world in the name of an undivided devotion to God waged by Calvin and his followers helped to destroy the sense that the creation was a locus of meanings in which [humanity] had to define [itself] (p. 9).” Rather, what the reformation brought about was a sense of God as a spiritual – rather than earthly – force, and the need for “the recovery of a sense of the presence of God in the community” (p. 400). This lead, in the Hegelian scheme of things, to the Enlightenment, where “More and more aware of themselves as at one with the universal, [people] came to recognise that they are inwardly free with the freedom of pure thought” (p. 400). Once the excessive piety of the Reformation faded from view, however, all that was left was the conception of a “desacralised world”, which, without any conception of christian spirituality left simply a picture of human reason in a cold, empty universe, a concept of “human subjectivity, which now reaped a harvest sown originally for its creator” (p. 9). Thus, in the enlightenment, “The world becomes a set of external realities simply laid out before human consciousness, transparent to it” (p. 400).

The enlightenment leads to a new understanding of reason in “purely human” terms, Taylor argues, seeing the world as “external reality” capable of being understood in terms of human reason, “but it loses its sense of the larger cosmic self, Geist, which is the fundamental sense of reason” rightly understood as the underlying cosmic order of the universe (pp. 400-401). Once we “lose sight of Geist,” Taylor relates, “the form of reason remains but the substantive content is lost, that is, we no longer have a vision of the ontological structure of things, in which all that we live in must conform to if it is to be adequate to reason” (p. 401). This leads to the problem that without being able to see “the inner connections which link all separate realities,” the operations of the enlightenment are restricted merely to “the level where thought clearly distinguishes things and separates them” (p. 400).

The universe in this order of things becomes “objectified” as something external and separate from human subjectivity, Taylor argues (pp. 9-10). The new science of the enlightenment rejected scholastic explanations in terms of “final causes”, turning instead to “mechanistic” explanations (p. 10). It was also “atomistic” in that it rejected
Marxism and the dialectics of modernity

explanations in terms of "gestalt or holistic properties," instead explaining wholes as compounds which could be explained in terms of "essential causal relations among constituent" elements (p. 10). It was also homogenous in that all events of the universe were to be reduced to the first laws of physics. Thus, "One of the most spectacular results of the new physics was to collapse the Aristotelian distinction between the supra- and the sub-lunar to account for moving planets and falling apples in the same formula" (p. 10). Accordingly, the new science turned to explain human beings in terms of these principles, which were "mechanistic, atomistic, homogenising and based on contingency" (p. 10). When extended to political theory, Taylor continues, the result of this "atomistic science of nature" was "a political theory whose starting point was the individual in a state of nature" (p. 10).

Thus, the enlightenment completes the process of desacralisation, "for it only sees the world as a heap of objects, open to human scrutiny and use; it does not see it also as manifestation, the emanation of reason" (p. 401). The enlightenment's values are also radically utilitarian, for "all objects are seen as lying to hand," and are not respected as the "manifestation of something higher", for their only value now lies in their use for human subjects (p. 401). "One of the most important protagonists" of the utilitarianism of the enlightenment, Taylor states, is Thomas Hobbes (p. 367). "Reason and nature were dethroned as the ultimate criteria", Taylor argued, so that "reason" comes to mean no more than "reckoning" (pp. 367-368). When this was applied to politics, the "normative order of things" was no longer found in nature, but in the calculation to "submit to a sovereign" in the "universal desire to avoid death" (p. 368). "Hence," Taylor concludes, "the importance of the myth of the original contract" in the utilitarian conception of politics (p. 368). If we apply this utilitarianism to the understanding of society, society is then seen in terms of how it meets the purposes of individuals. It is no longer seen as the manifestation of cosmic order. There is also nothing stopping altering the structures of society if it becomes irksome or opposed to the needs of the present generation.
Enlightenment humanism came to a sticky end in the romantic revolt of the German Sturm und Drang. Yet Taylor is at pains to argue that it was no simple return to pre-enlightenment ways of thinking (p. 5). If anything, two of the greatest inspirations of the German Romantics, Kant and Herder, furthered and deepened the enlightenment project. The origins of both are traceable to Rousseau in the Hegelian scheme (p. 368).

The importance of Herder, Taylor argues is his articulation of a new “expressivist” anthropology (p. 14). Life in this system is seen as the realisation of a purpose or idea (p. 15). This is no simple return to an Aristotelian conception of telos, however, Taylor asserts, because in Herder’s scheme of things this potential is not something that is set for us, but rather something that is self-created (p. 15). In this view, life is an expression of potential, and one’s life is not complete until one can recognise one’s life’s-work as a “fully adequate expression” of one’s inner potential (p. 17). This requires an active struggle, “striving to realise and maintain its own shape against those the surrounding world might impose” (p. 15). Furthermore, this takes on the aspect of a moral struggle “of whether a given form of life was an authentic expression” of one’s inner nature” (p. 17). The problem with this view of authenticity however, is that it is conceived as self-expression; it is truly modern and does not hark back to the pre-modern conceptions of the universe as the embodiment of order.

Kant, Taylor affirms, was part of the German reaction to the material determination exemplified in Hobbes. Kant was the author of the “radical notion of freedom”, Taylor states (p. 31). In order to save human freedom from material determination, Kant reintroduced the Platonic distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal, thereby introducing a new dualism in the understanding of humanity.\(^3\) On the one hand, human beings could be considered as material objects, phenomena subject to the laws of physics; on the other, humans are spiritual beings, having free will when participating in the world of ideas. Thus, humans as active, purposive beings cannot be understood in terms of mechanics or through the analytical methods of the physical sciences, since the contemplation of ideas is free from the laws of physics (p. 474).

\(^3\) Talcott Parsons, \textit{The structure of social action} (1949 edn), pp. 474-475.
short, philosophical idealism championed the possibility of free will even though our bodies are constrained by physics. “In being determined by a purely formal law,” Taylor relates, “binding on me simply qua rational will I declare my independence, as it were, from all natural considerations and motives and from the natural causality which rules them”.4 This is freedom in a radical sense as “a pure moral will”, one in which we choose to obey moral laws because we see the rightness in them (p. 31). A moral subject in this sense “obeys only the dictates of his [or her] own will” (p. 369). “Morality is to be entirely separated from the motivation of happiness or pleasure” (p. 31)

The problem with the Kantian conception of freedom in Hegel’s eyes is that it is purely formal, and this has problems when it is applied to real politics (p. 372). The free will, “determined purely by itself” is the ultimate criterion of what is right (p. 370). Thus all individuals must do what they think is right, regardless of the “oughts” of the situation (p. 372), but a formal law, if true, must be universalisable and cannot be self-contradictory (p. 31). The problem of politics, therefore, becomes one of finding a way for the individual freedom of each to unite “under a universal law” (p. 372). It is little different from the utilitarian problem of limiting the “negative freedom” of each so that all can co-exist together (p. 372). Kant’s conception of freedom is linked in the Hegelian scheme with the source of its inspiration, Taylor relates, in Rousseau’s theory of the general will (p. 372). “Hegel complains that Rousseau sees will still as individual will, and thinks of the general will not as ‘the absolutely rational element in the will’ … but only of the common element … which emerges from the conscious individual wills” (p. 372).

What Hegel’s critique of the French revolution “was really driving at,” Taylor argued, was that “Rousseau, Kant, both revolutionary and liberal protagonists of radical autonomy, all defined freedom as human freedom, the will as human will”, when Hegel had demonstrated (in his own view, at least) that humanity discovers its true identity in seeing itself as a “vehicle” of Geist.5 Taylor points out that in the Hegelian system, the norms and ideas a society expresses “are not just human inventions” but

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4 Taylor, Hegel, p. 31.
5 Taylor, Hegel, p. 373.
“the Idea, the ontological structure of things” (p. 386). The ontological atomism of the enlightenment, Taylor relates, lead inexorably to the humanitarian disaster of the French Revolution, where once the moral framework of the *ancien regime* had been erased, the new revolutionary society blundered about in a moral vacuum with murderous results.

Confident in himself as Reason and in reason as mastery over reality, the man of the Enlightenment rejects all authority and sets out to shape reality to reason, i.e. to himself. But this is where his onesidedness is disastrous. For once we lose sight of *Geist*, the form of reason remains but the substantive content is lost. [...] We are ready to master the world, and to shape it, but we have lost the plan. In our desperation to find an alternative we tear things to pieces (pp. 401-402).

The reason this is so important to Taylor is his thesis that Hegel’s critique of Rousseau and the French Revolution “was also a critique by anticipation of Marx.” Hegel associated the formalism of Kantian ethics with the murderous course of the French Revolution, and Taylor adapts Hegel to explain the disastrous aftermath of the Russian Revolution. The one uniting feature of Taylor’s critique of “atomist” individualism, Kantian ethics, the scientific enlightenment, and even Stalinist dialectical materialism is that they all derive – in Taylor’s eyes at least – from enlightenment humanism, for their focus is solely on human (rather than divine) good.

*Marx turned upside down by Taylor’s Hegel*

Marx, Taylor states, was the “heir of the radical enlightenment” because he sees human nature in terms of shaping an objectified universe for human purposes, and because he shares the enlightenment’s critique against “the inhumanity of the old order” (p. 547). If it is no longer believed that the King rules by divine right, then all the iniquities of the social order are exposed as just that, but worse, for without any hope for reward in a future kingdom of heaven, “unrequited deprivation is inconsolable, absolute loss” (p. 548). Marx, Taylor states, took up this “radical

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*Taylor, Hegel*, p. 419.
Marxism and the dialectics of modernity

critique of inhumanity,” but the subject of this critique was no longer the now discredited forms of religion, “but the new atomistic, utilitarian Enlightenment philosophy itself, principally as reflected in the theories of the classical economists” (p. 548).

Marx took up the enlightenment conception of human nature as that of working the inert material of the universe for human purposes. This conception of human nature is not of a telos waiting to be fulfilled, however, but rather one that develops through the work of self-creation. “[A person] makes nature over into an expression of himself or [herself],” Taylor states, “and in the process properly becomes [human]” (p. 549). Production, therefore, is the participation and integration of the person in the life of the human species. Under the dynamics of class society, however, a person’s work – the expression and realisation of one’s own unique nature – are “detached” from its author, “transferred and circulated as private property”, becoming thereby “an alien reality”, with a dynamic of its own, resisting and oppressing its originator (p. 548).

Hence under class society [people] are not in control of their own expression. It escapes them and takes on a dynamic of its own. They suffer alienation in their lives. And this is matched by an alienated consciousness in which they take this estranged world seriously as though it were really the locus of an alien force; the divine in earlier epochs; or the iron laws of classical economics in the bourgeois epoch (p. 549).

By reinstating a social ownership of production, alienation would be abolished, and all social conflict would disappear (p. 550). In the reconciliation of the oppositions between humanity and nature, individual and society, and the aspiration to integral expression, Marx was showing his philosophical roots in Hegel.

The fact is, that from the beginning his position was a synthesis between the radical enlightenment, which sees [humanity] as capable of objectifying nature and society in order to master it, and the expressive aspiration to wholeness. Expressive fulfilment comes when [humanity] dominates nature and can express its free design on it. But at the same time he dominates nature by objectifying it in scientific practice (pp. 551-552).
Marxism and the dialectics of modernity

Marx never changed his basic position from his early to late years, Taylor states, but in later years the “scientific” aspects of his work were the ones that people understood and remembered (p. 552). The social engineering side of Marxism was also what dominated when Marxism took upon the role of a “modernising ideology” in Russia which was technologically and socially backward, so that socialism could equal soviet power and electrification in Lenin’s famous phrase. The Bolshevik party was simply unequipped to deal with these problems, and this was one of the reasons for its descent into totalitarianism. They justified themselves by their knowledge of the “iron laws of necessity”, Taylor argued, yet contradicted themselves in their active “social engineering”, even though if these laws were true they would not be manipulable by human beings (p. 556). Stalin’s crushing of the independent kulaks was simply a matter of “the economic infrastructure of power”, where the “iron laws of history” were simply just “an alibi for a decision imposed on events” (p. 556). The “blood spilt” in these measures was regretful but necessary “in the inescapable forward march of humanity to a higher civilisation” (p. 556).

The difficulty was that Marxism claimed to both possess the laws of bourgeois society, and also to be able to transcend them (p. 553). “Thus at the revolutionary border between two eras there must be a jump, as it were, a shift in the laws which apply to society (p. 553). This makes good sense in the Hegelian scheme, Taylor argues, but is incomprehensible in the terms of the “established tradition of science rooted in the enlightenment,” which “makes no allowance for its laws being ‘aufgehoben’” (p. 553). Marx himself never speculated on this problem, Taylor states, because he was engaged in more urgent and practical needs (p. 554). He simply seemed to think that “the laws of bourgeois society would fall away with the abolition of this society the way the technology of carburettors would fall into irrelevance it we got rid of the internal combustion engine” (p. 554). Likewise, the Bolshevik party held an “incredibly simple view” about life after the revolution as merely a bureaucratic administration of people (p. 555). He simply seems to have envisaged that all would live in idyllic harmony after the revolution, not realising that conflict between individuals would continue after the revolution. Marx, Taylor states, “seemed to have been oblivious to the inescapable opacity and indirectness of communication and decision in large bodies of [people],” which is difficult enough to get to grips with in
"small and simple societies, let alone those organised around a large and complex productive system" (p. 554). How would the human condition have changed after the revolution, Taylor demanded; "what constraints, divisions, tensions, dilemmas, struggles and estrangements will replace those we know today [?](p. 558).

Marx had developed an "empty" conception of freedom without situation, Taylor concluded, one which matched Hegel's divination of the Terror of the French revolution (p. 557). "Marx's variant of 'absolute freedom' is at the base of the Bolshevik voluntarism which, strong with the final justification of history, has crushed all obstacles in its path with extraordinary ruthlessness, and has spawned again that Terror which Hegel described with uncanny insight" (p. 558).

**Summary and conclusion**

Taylor argued that Marxism had fallen prey to the allure of science which it used in its self-justifications of acting according to the "scientific laws" of society which were little different to the conception of immutable laws of classical economics. Yet this resulted in the complete destruction of an existing society in the name of an empty ideal which could never be developed into practical politics. The next chapter argues that Taylor developed an alternative to a "science" of society.
A Critical Theory

In 1971, Taylor published an article in the *Review of Metaphysics* entitled “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man”.¹ What was Taylor reviewing here? In the opening paragraph we find that Taylor is referring to Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* (p. 15, n. 1), Ricoeur’s *On Interpretation* (p. 15, n. 2), and Habermas’s *Knowledge and Human Interests* (p. 15, n. 3), all of which were recent developments in continental philosophy and which were as yet untranslated into English. In this chapter, I seek to argue that Taylor was attempting to develop a critical theory for Anglo-American philosophy. In the following discussion of Taylor’s critical theory, I adopt the broad framework of Garbis Kortian’s analysis of Jurgen Habermas, which Taylor helped introduce to the English-speaking world.²

Broadly speaking, critical theory is a redevelopment of Marxist theory from a positive science of society to a permanent critique of society. It is largely associated with the Frankfurt School of Sociology, which is a loose collection of individuals grouped around the Institute for Social Research, associated by their disparate readings of Hegel and his demise at the hands of Marx (p. 27). There are three defining features of critical theory according to Kortian. First, critical theory has its basis in the critique of epistemology. This critique attempts to “deconstruct” the structure of presuppositions that underlie and support the production of “positive” science (p. 27). Second, critical theory offers a “metacritique” of the critical thinking above (p. 28). That is, it analyses

the assumptions on which critical thinking itself rests. This is the study of the
experience of consciousness. Third, critical theory tends to explain the production of
scientific knowledge as a social phenomenon. Positive science itself is seen as a
phenomenon of a certain society or civilisation. Three more steps of Habermas’
critical theory are of particular interest to this study. First, Habermas re-interprets
Hegelianism in the light of psychoanalysis. Second, Habermas understands modern
society as a split between instrumental (scientific and technological) reason and
communicative action. I want to briefly compare Taylor and Habermas on each of
these issues.

*The critique of epistemology.* Epistemology is the study of knowledge, and is largely
derived from the Kantian critiques (Habermas 1971, p. 3). This is a puzzling for a
radical Marxist critique of society to begin, so it takes some explaining. The basic
issue is that we live in a technologically advanced society. For most people, our lives
and our work are shaped by science and technology, and by bureaucratic rationality
and efficiency developed using methods of thinking that derive their authority from
their basis in “scientific” rationality. For both Taylor and Habermas, science and
reason are the dominant forces of modern society, and so it we are to criticise society,
we must do this by attacking the dominance of scientific thinking. For Habermas,
therefore, the most important issue of the modern era is how we can judge the claims
of scientific thinking.

This critique, however, is restrained by the perception, however justified, that there is
no current debate whatsoever on the nature of scientific knowledge because the
philosophy of science only focuses on the issue of the correct *method*. Positive science
has been so successful in altering the world for better or worse that it is simply taken
for granted. In this situation, both Taylor and Habermas revive the critique of
epistemology – that is, the philosophy of knowledge – which has fallen into obscurity
since the mid-nineteenth century (Habermas 1971, p. 3). Any revival of epistemology,
however, has to account for why it went into decline in the first place. For both Taylor
and Habermas, epistemology suffered its deathblow at the hand of Hegel. Thus, the
critique of epistemology is deployed within the Hegelian metacritique of critical
thinking itself.
When Taylor issued his revised (1979) edition of *Hegel and Modern Society*, it was with a foreword by Alan Montefiore that placed it as a full-scale attack on Anglo-American analytical philosophy. Taylor's critique was somewhat different from that of the continental version because he had a different beast to contend with. First, the critique of epistemology, based on Hegel's criticisms of Kant, was largely unknown and unappreciated in the English-speaking world (Taylor and Montefiore, 1981). Second, the analytical logic of Russell and Moore was developed in opposition to the Hegelian influence of T. H. Green. This meant that the starting point for Taylor's critique was on very different grounds from the continental theorists where philosophy had been decisively shaped by the Hegelian system. Furthermore, where analytical philosophy had come under attack in Britain and America, this was under the influence of Wittgenstein, not Hegel. Thus, the subject of the critique, and the tools available to pursue it were different for Taylor.

*The metacritique of knowledge.* Kant's critique of sensationalism had attempted to replace the foundations of science with a more secure foundation, that of the theory of knowledge. Hegel, however, demonstrated that this foundation was no more secure than any other, for it does not even question the understanding of knowledge. If we conceive this understanding as pure consciousness, then we face the problem of attempting to study consciousness by consciousness.

*The Social Critique.* Any resurrection of Hegel's philosophy must address the problem not only that it is long dead, but also that the principle blow was delivered by Marx. Hegelianism is seen as the product of a specific socio-economic system bounded in time, and not of the universal spirit as Hegel himself had claimed. The Marxian reformulation of the Hegelian system, however, is not without its problems. Marx seemed to have thought that once the critique of epistemology had been accepted, one could develop a new positive science of society, provided that one did not revisit the ground of the previous critique. Critical theory, however, rejects the possibility of any positive science that has not been refuted by the critique of epistemology. Marxism is seen as a crude and unworkable amalgam of dialectical and positive thinking. This leads to the social critique, which explains positive science as the product of a certain social framework.
Taylor, for instance, argues that the scientific control of society (e.g. government according to a utilitarian political science) is only plausible in a society where people are understood as atomic individuals, “self-determined but essentially interchangeable” and who cannot comprehend the social labour of scientific production (Taylor & Montefiore 1980, p. 11). Taylor argues that demonstrating the contradictions in these conceptions requires tracking their roots in social reality and developing more adequate conceptions requires changing this social reality (Taylor & Montefiore 1980, p. 12). Taylor and Habermas both argue that the scientific and technological control of society is monological and imposed on passive recipients. Both seek to develop a dialogical form of society, where politics is treated as a conversation between equals.

I turn now to examine the article in question.

The critique of positivism in social science

Like his former mentor, Isaiah Berlin, Taylor also attacked positivism in social science using the same tools as the critique of Marxism. At the root of the problem of whether the study of politics in particular or of human life in general is a scientific or technical matter essentially comes down to a question of whether human behaviour is predictable and can be codified in general laws or not. Both Taylor and Berlin argued that Stalinism and the social sciences of the 1950s avoided this question altogether. There was a conservative aspect to the new “social sciences”, which emerges in part in the “end of ideology” thesis. That is, political sociologists like Bell and Lipset claimed to study society as it really is, and anyone who did not agree with society as it is was simply an ideologue, or a malcontent. Thus there was an innate conservatism in the social sciences that ruled out the possibility of social change, or at least of planned social change. Taylor provides one example of the positions he was attacking in this article:

science and scientific, then, are word that relate to only one kind of knowledge, i.e. to knowledge of what is observable, and not to any other kinds of knowledge that may exist. They do not relate to alleged knowledge of the normative –
knowledge of what ought to be. Science concerns what has been, is, or will be, regardless of the "oughts" of the situation.\(^3\)

Berlin argued that the "sciences" consist of those domains of enquiry in which we have arrived at sure methods of deciding problems.\(^4\) Berlin argued that the "sciences" consist of those domains of enquiry in which we have arrived at sure methods of deciding problems. There are, he stated, two areas in which we are sure that we know the best methods of answering questions: the first are those that can be answered by observation and by inference from observational data; the second are those formal questions in mathematics and formal logic which can be answered by calculation alone. These two methods, Berlin states, are generally described as the empirical and the formal, and they are characterised by the fact that although we may not know the answer to a particular question, we do know what kinds of methods we should adopt to reach an answer. Berlin pointed out, however, that there is a third class of questions which is distinguished from the first two in that we do not know how to go about answering them, nor even what would count as a "correct" answer. It is this third class of unanswered questions that Berlin as irreducibly philosophical, and they were those that – for the present time at least – involve inescapable questions of value judgement.

Berlin's approach was adopted five years later by Taylor when he dismissed the claims of political science to "scientific neutrality".\(^5\)

It was the claim of a "scientific" political sociology to know what is that Taylor challenged directly. The problem was the impossibility of separating fact from value or of fact from explanatory framework. Taylor used a transcendental argument of sorts, for he pointed out that political science cannot rest content with "brute facts" such as "French workers tend to vote Communist" because a collection of random facts can be interpreted in an infinite variety of ways, few of which have any


explanatory value whatsoever (p. 61). Thus, the major task for any scientific study of politics is the development of relevant theoretical frameworks by which we might explain these "facts" (p. 62). Theoretical frameworks, however, can never be "neutral", Taylor argued, because they actively state what is acceptable as "fact" and what should be excluded, and in doing so they create or exclude alternative ways of viewing and questioning the world. For example, Taylor pointed out that once physics adopted the principle of inertia, the Aristotelian and Scholastic conceptions of physical bodies and their related modes of questioning, suddenly became "beyond the pale", as "fruitless" as "the search for what kept the cannon-ball moving in pre-Galilean physics" (p. 63).

Thus, Taylor argues, when Lipset rules in *Political Man* that stable democracy requires a delicate balance between conflict and consensus – that there be enough opposing political parties and philosophies to guarantee genuine competition for office, but that this antagonism does not go so far as to break down into civil war – Lipset excludes tout court such possible alternative viewpoints as Hegel's (and Machiavelli's) that "violence was morally necessary from time to time for the well-being of the state" (pp. 66-71). The theoretical frameworks of political science, therefore, may be dispassionate and calculating, but no construction and interpretation of what counts as "fact" and what counts as acceptable explanation can ever be value-neutral.

Taylor extended this argument in his later article on "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man", where he argued that political sociology sought scientific creditability by an appeal to behaviouralism, where human action was stripped of meaning and regarded simply as "brute facts" (pp. 28-29). This "behaviouralism," however, was not as thoroughgoing as that in psychology, because the subject matter – such as why people vote for parties in elections – was infinitely more complex than describing a rat moving through a maze, for example. Taylor argued that behaviouralist social science simply did not have the conceptual categories to explain the student rebellions and counter-culture of the 1950s and 60s:

A Critical Theory

It is forced to look on extremism either as a bargaining gambit of the desperate, deliberately raising the ante in order to force a hearing. Or, alternatively, it can recognise the novelty of the rebellion by accepting that heightened demands are being made on the system owing to a revolution of "expectations", or else the eruption of new desires or aspirations which hitherto had no place in the bargaining process. But these new desires or aspirations must be in the domain of individual psychology, that is, they must be ... understood in terms of states of individuals rather than in terms of their inter-subjective meanings in which they live (p. 48).

It is these inter-subjective meanings, the subject matter of a social "psycho-history" that Taylor seeks to describe (p. 49, n. 24), adding that "we may doubt whether we can understand the cohesion of modern societies or their present crisis if we leave these out of account" (p. 45). In the "atomistic" theories of political science, however, common meanings are dismissed as "ideology", because they cannot comprehend the existence of anything other than individuals, dismissing outright any claims of a collective consciousness (p. 46).

Taylor pointed out that predicting human behaviour could only possible if all events in the past and future could be integrated in the same "conceptual net", so that future events could be understood as a "function" of former events. Yet this could only be possible, Taylor argued, if we could determine a fixed nature of human beings in such a way as to eliminate "all cultural innovation and transformation"(p. 57). If, however, cultural innovation and transformation is impossible to eliminate, then we face the very real possibility that "The very terms in which the future will have to be characterised if we are to understand it properly are not available to us at present" (p. 56). Who could have predicted, he demanded, the social and political upheavals of the 1950s and 60s, the Reformation, or even the development of Soviet Society? (p. 56). The understanding of social change can only ever occur long after the fact.

In a redeployment of his arguments about the "atomism" the scientific enlightenment, Taylor argued that the study of human beings is inextricably hermeneutical or concerned with the holistic explanation (gestalt) of meaning. Taylor developed a

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7 Taylor, "Interpretation", Philosophical Papers 2, ch. 1, p. 56.
linguistic conception of society in terms of the contemporary debate on hermeneutics or the question of approach to literary and textual interpretation. "Hermeneutics" literally means to interpret the word of God, for Hermes was the Greek messenger of the gods, and this method was adapted by biblical scholars to interpret the meaning of God's message in the bible. Thus, as Taylor puts it, such a textual interpretation "makes clear the meaning originally present in a confused, fragmentary cloudy form". A hermeneutic interpretation determines the meaning of an uncertain word or phrase by looking at the meaning of the surrounding sentence or text. This gestalt or contextual understanding of an uncertain word etc by looking at place within the wider whole is known as a hermeneutic circle. As Taylor puts it:

What we are trying to establish is a certain reading of text or expressions, and what we appeal to as our grounds for this reading can only be other readings. The circle can also be put in terms of part-whole relations: we are trying to establish a reading for the whole text, and for this we appeal to readings of its partial expressions; and yet because we are dealing with meaning, with making sense, where expressions only make sense or not in relation to others, the readings of partial expressions depend on those of others, and ultimately of the whole (p. 18).

Taylor attended Oxford University at the height of linguistic philosophy, and he explains the holistic interpretation of meaning in linguistic terms. The hermeneutic circle, for instance, becomes explained in terms of one of Wittgenstein's language games. Wittgenstein had pointed out that our understanding of each other rests on mutual understanding of a common way of life. We could not in isolation, for example, teach another person to follow a rule of counting in a series "0, 1, 2, 3, 4, ..., " and so on. Our interlocutor may perfectly well follow our rule up to the number 100, when she continues, counting "100, 110, 120, 130, 140 ...." We might argue with her, saying that the rule was to keep following the series "0, 1, 2, 3, 4, ..." upwards without stopping, but the interlocutor says that she thought the rule was to add one up to one hundred, then ten, and so on. Unless she has the same common understandings as we do, there is nothing that we can do or say to make her follow the

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8 Taylor, "Interpretation", Philosophical Papers 2, ch. 1, p. 17.
rule as we intend it. Taylor uses this example to show that our interpretation of
meaning also rests on the use of a common language:

What if someone does not 'see' the adequacy of our interpretation, does not
accept our reading? We try to show him how it makes sense of the original
nonsense or partial sense. But for him to follow us he must read the original
language as we do, he must recognise these expressions as puzzling in a certain
way, and hence be looking to a solution to our problem. If he does not, what can
we do? We have to show him through the reading of other expressions why this
expression must be read in the way we propose. But success here requires that
he follows us in these other readings, and so on, it would seem, potentially
forever. We cannot escape an ultimate appeal to a common understanding of the
expressions, of the 'language' involved (p. 17).

In this "holistic" conception of language, the meaning of a word is determined by its
position in a "semantic field," so that "there is no such thing as a single, unrelated
meaningful element," and, since meanings are identified by their relations to other
meanings with which they contrast, any changes in the other meanings in the field of
contrast can change the meaning of the particular element being studied (pp. 22-23).
Taylor offers a rather more poetic rendering of this conception of language when he
writes that "In touching one part of language (a word), the whole is present," so that
"To speak is to touch a bit of the web and this is to make the whole resonate."9

One of the features of Wittgenstinian philosophy in Taylor's time at Oxford was that
language came to be conceived as part of an entire way-of-life. Thus, when Taylor
talks about language, he does not mean language alone, but the life of society as well,
which Taylor developed in terms of the "common meanings" first developed in the
writings of the New Left.

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9 Taylor, Charles, "Language and Human Nature," (the Alan B. Plaunt Memorial Lecture, University of
Carleton, Ottawa, April 1978, a shorter version was first published as "Theories of Meaning,"
*Man and World*, vol. 13, nos. 3-4, 1980, pp. 218-302), in *Philosophical Papers 1*, ch. 9, p. 231.
Taylor observes that we can only view individuals in isolation from the community if we think of them solely as physical bodies, but this perspective is incapable of explaining the most basic non-corporeal aspects of human existence such as language or consciousness. When we think of a human being, he declares, “we do not simply mean a living organism, but a being who can think, feel, decide, be moved, respond, enter into relations with each others; and all this implies a language, a related set of way of experiencing the world, of interpreting his [or her] feelings, understanding his [or her] relations to others, to the past, the future, the absolute, and so on.” This situatedness within a “cultural world” is what we call a person’s “identity”, Taylor concludes.

“Identity” is an important concept within the Hegelian conception of things. It is best known (or misunderstood) through the dialectical method of the synthesis of thesis and antithesis. The “heads” and “tails of a coin, for example, are diametrical opposites yet their mutual antagonism also constitutes the unity which we recognise as a “coin.” We can also develop other, similarly related antinomies: finite and infinite, universal and particular, eternal and temporal, body and soul, individual and society, language and the word. Taylor interprets Hegel as holding a doctrine of “necessary embodiment” to develop a philosophy of the individual and society through linguistic structuralism. The advantage of this analogy for Taylor is that like society, language is something that we all experience and participate in, but it is not a physical body that we can observe in the same way that a geologist may observe a rock.

While language may not have a physical body, we can observe some “petrified” evidence of its existence. Various forms of linguistic structuralism, for instance, hold that there are such things as grammatical rules or langue that when codified can act as the “key” for deciphering a language. The spoken word or parole is another such piece of evidence that points to the possibility that language might exist without being a physical body that we might take hold of. One aspect that emerges from this approach is that while the rules of grammar may be firmly set at any particular point in time, the active nature of the spoken word is such that language becomes corrupted, reinvented, or revitalised through individual “speech acts.” Taylor extends this
understanding to society, for in his view our linguistic inheritance consists not only of words and concepts, but also of "such crucial features of social life as roles, laws, offices, statuses." In this way, Taylor argues, playing the role of a "father" is not simply a biological act of conception, but also consists of fulfilling the role of what it means to be a father. These roles are not invented anew, but exist in the set of social practices and institutions that we inherit, although particular innovation or dereliction in our performance of these social duties can alter the content of these practices and institutions as they are transmitted to future generations.

For Taylor, language and its associated linguistic institutions are society, for language is the medium of a shared social consciousness that is shared by all, so that many of the experiences a language communicates are social experiences. "Such are, for instance," Taylor elaborates, "the experience of participating in a rite or of taking part in the political life of society, or of rejoicing at the victory of the home team, or of national mourning of a dead hero, and so on." It is part of the meaning of these common aspirations, beliefs and celebrations, Taylor argues that they are part of a "common reference world," so that their being shared is a "collective act", a "consciousness which is communally sustained." "Common meanings are the basis of community," he declares. "These are the objects in the world that everybody shares. This is what makes community" (p. 39).

In this sense we can think of the institutions and practices of a society as a kind of language in which its fundamental ideas are expressed. But what is "said" in this language is not ideas which could be in the minds of certain individuals only, they are rather common to a society, because embedded in its collective life, in practices and institutions which are of society indivisibly.

In this way, Taylor comes to rehabilitate a Hegelian conception of the Volksgeist or spirit of the people using linguistic philosophy as the structure of the common practices and institutions of a people, similar to Montesquieu's mores or "spirit of the

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11 Taylor, Hegel, p. 381.
13 Taylor, Hegel, p. 382.
laws" (p. 387). "In these the spirit of a society is in a sense objectified," he declares. "They are, to use Hegel's term, "objective spirit" (p. 382). Hegel is important, Taylor argues, because he "can be placed in the line of development" of "the contemporary ways of understanding language" (p. 567). The importance of this "way of understanding language", he states, is that once we see language as "the vehicle of a certain kind of consciousness" then it is only a short step to understanding language as society "by situating language in the matrix of our concerns, practices and activities, in short by relating it to our 'form of life'" (p. 566).

Taylor takes the linguistic idea of common understandings to argue that different societies (i.e. language groups) are distinct: "the conceptual mutations in human history can and frequently do produce conceptual webs which are incommensurable," he states. Ideas in modern and primitive societies, he states, will be experienced in terms of practices and institutions in each society "which have nothing corresponding to them in the other" (p. 55). What Taylor is actually doing here is developing Gadamer's conception of incommensurable historical epochs (p. 15, n. 2).

Gadamer's conception of hermeneutics is not a question of method as such, rather it is an application of phenomenology derived from Heidegger. The point of such a "phenomenology" of history is that we do not approach a text in vacuo, but rather that we approach it already constituted by our cultural "horizons", and the text itself is constituted by the cultural "horizons" in which it has arisen. The question, therefore, is of a "fusion of horizons", or a mediation between two different historical periods. Thus, for instance, Taylor declares in his later article on "Comparison, History, Truth," that "The aim of understanding should not be to surmount or escape our own point of view, in order to 'get inside' another". Taylor points out that the understanding of another can only come through comparing the differences between one's own position and the other's (p. 149). This comparison and contrast can only be achieved, Taylor states, by articulating our culturally ingrained assumptions and

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14 Taylor, "Interpretation", Philosophical Papers 2, ch. 1, p. 55.
comparing them with those of other people, cultures, and historical epochs (p. 149). “That is why other-understanding changes self-understanding”, Taylor states, “and in particular prizes us loose from some of the fixed contours of our former culture” (p. 149). Ultimately, what we seek to do here is not so much obtain knowledge of the other, but widen our understanding of ourselves to the point at which our self-understanding becomes broad enough to recognise the self-understandings of the other.

The novelty of Taylor’s approach was that he then applied this to the problem of comparative politics. The issue of a comparative science of politics had first been broached by Alasdair MacIntyre, and Taylor provided similar arguments to show that cross-cultural comparison of terms is all but impossible.

Taylor argued that while physical objects exist regardless of the language we use to describe them, social practices do not exist outside of the language we use to “describe them, or invoke them, or carry them out”. Taylor develops this concept using Searle’s notion of a constitutive rule. A constitutive rule is one in which the behaviour in question cannot be separated from the rule that makes it that particular behaviour. For example, following the rules of chess is what makes such behaviour playing chess. If we do not follow the rules, we may be “pushing a wooden piece around on a board made of eight squares by eight”, but we would not be playing chess (p. 34). Taylor suggests that social practices can be understood as wider examples of constitutive rules.

Certain actions only have the meaning that they do, Taylor continued, because of their place within the wider field of social practices, like concepts in a semantic field. It is because of certain common meanings that “marking and counting pieces or paper, raising hands, or walking out into lobbies amounts to voting” [emphasis added] (p. 35). For this behaviour to be voting, there must be the possibilities of choices between candidates, motions being carried or defeated, for instance, and that the choices made

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be truly autonomous, not forced (p. 35). By contrast, Taylor argues, none of the above actions could ever count as *voting* in a traditional Japanese village (p. 36). The foundation of social life in this society was consensual, Taylor states, which revolved around discussions and mutual adjustment to reach a unanimous decision (pp. 32-33). For Taylor there was no common meaning existing in village life in traditional Japanese society where raising hands or dividing into opposing factions could be understood as “voting”. These are “inter-subjective meanings” because the understanding of what is to count as voting, bargaining, or breaking off negotiations, etc, can not rest in an individual alone, but exist only in social practices (p. 37).

We have demonstrated so far that Taylor developed hermeneutics or textual interpretation as a distinctive way of operation of the “human sciences”. Taylor followed Gadamer’s more radical Hegelian approach as to the incommensurability of historical periods. The novelty of Taylor’s approach was to broaden this to the issue of ethnocentricity in cross-cultural comparison, where we do not attempt to overcome our ethnocentricity but rather use this as our starting point as a basis for comparison of other cultures. Taylor, however, was not content to rest with this, and further developed his conception of the interpretive “human sciences” using the concepts of psychoanalysis.

*The psychotherapy of modern society*

Taylor’s juxtaposition of the sciences of humanity and nature is clearly derived from the German division between the *Geisteswissenschaften* and the *Naturwissenschaften*. The German term “wissenschaften” which Taylor translates as “science” is simply a general term for rigorous study, and Taylor tends to use the term “science” in a loose sense like this. The interpretation of the term “Geist”, however, is pivotal to Taylor’s development of a psychoanalytic human science. “Geist” is perhaps translatable through the Latin “psyche”, or through the French “esprit”, and is thus usually rendered in English as “mind” or “spirit.” Vincent Descombes has pointed out, however, the general nature of *Geist* or *esprit*, which in French is divided into *philosophie de l’esprit subjectif*, the philosophy of mind or even the scientific study of psychology, and *philosophie de l’esprit objectif*, the philosophy of law or of social
and political theory. Taylor plays on the tension between the interpretive status of psychoanalysis and the scientific status of psychology, and also between the "subjective" and "objective" status of the philosophy of mind and society in order to develop a conception of the human sciences as interpreting historical or cultural changes in the social psyche.

What ever psychoanalysis is, it rapidly became apparent that it certainly was not a "science." Alasdair MacIntyre, for instance, had reached the "inescapable conclusion" in his article "Psychoanalysis: the Future of an Illusion," that the experimental "proofs" of psychoanalytic theory were not science "in any recognisable sense" of the term. This, for Taylor (among others) was actually one of the strengths of psychoanalysis, for "depth psychology" is nothing if not the interpretation of the psyche. Thus, developing his contrast between science and interpretation, Taylor argued in one memorable article for "Peaceful Co-existence in Psychology" – the coexistence being between scientific psychology and interpretive psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis was also involved in the revision of Marxism, in Jürgen Habermas' Knowledge and Interests, and in Paul Ricoeur's Freud and Philosophy. The link, as Ricoeur explained, was Marxism's role in stripping away the mask of false consciousness or ideology, and psychoanalysis's role in stripping away the false consciousness of the adult.

Taylor, however, was not content to rest with Freudianism, but turned rather to the revisionists, and to Erik Erikson in particular. MacIntyre, for instance, pointed out that Erikson, did not use Freud's theoretical system, but rather his "techniques of

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21 See Taylor, "Interpretation", Philosophical Papers 2, ch. 1, p. 15, n. 3.
observation” in *Childhood and Society* and *Young Man Luther.* Taylor sought to use Erikson to understand the problems of the social and political upheavals of the 1950s and 60s in terms of “psycho-history”, a subject-matter, Taylor argues, which studies the interconnections between “psychological conflict and inter-subjective meanings.”

The notion of “identity” as I am using it here somewhat Eriksonianly, can be understood in this way. To define my identity is to define what I must be in contact with in order to function fully as a human agent, and specifically to be able to judge and discriminate and recognise what is really of worth or importance, both in general and for me. To say that something is part of my identity is to say that without it, I should be at a loss in making those discriminations which are characteristically human. I shouldn’t know where I stood, I should lose the sense of what constituted beauty, what nobility, what truly worthwhile fulfilment, and so on. It helps constitute the horizon within which these discriminations have meaning for me.

Erikson developed the concept of identity from Freud’s oedipal complex. Freud had argued that when growing up, the male child comes to see his father as a competitor for his mother’s love. The male child goes through some crisis as he is forced to separate from his mother and find his own identity. Erickson draws on the oedipal complex to focus on the “identity crisis” of adolescence, where the young person must struggle to form their own identity as they make the transition from the womb-like security of childhood to finding their place in the harsh realities of the adult world. Erikson argues that in some times and places this crisis may be short and soon completed, while in other times and places this crisis may be understood as a critical phase of life. Most important of all is how this identity crisis is resolved, for some unfortunates collapse into neurotic or delinquent behaviour, while others – such as Martin Luther – find their identity in “ideological movements” such as religion, politics, nature, or art. (Erikson uses the term “ideological” because in his system adolescents have an excess capacity and desire to think in abstract ideas) (pp. 19-20).

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23 MacIntyre, “Psychoanalysis”, *Self-Images*, ch. 3, p. 36.


The origins of Erikson’s theory in the oedipal complex are best demonstrated by his case study of an American Marine, who had suffered a nervous breakdown in the Second World War while participating in a beach assault in the Pacific. The Marine was a medic who never smoked or swore, or carried a weapon. In the assault on a pacific island, of which the Marine was a part, the assaulting forces suffered heavy losses and by nightfall were still trapped by the high tide mark. The assaulting forces were so badly in need of reinforcements that even the medics and wounded were pressed into service to defend against an anticipated counter-attack. The medic in question suffered a nervous breakdown when a rifle was forced into his hands, and had to be evacuated off the island in a state of catatonic shock, with effects lasting for years afterwards. After prolonged questioning, Erikson traced the medic’s collapse to his abandonment by his mother while still a child. The boy’s foster-father, to whom he developed a strong attachment, had taught him to never drink, smoke, swear, or use a gun, on pain of being abandoned again. It was the unwilling breaking of such a deeply ingrained prohibition under such traumatic conditions, Erikson argued, that brought about this tragic breakdown. (Erikson does not mention whether the man was any better after undergoing his therapy).

Taylor had earlier explained his use of the concept of “identification” in his article “From Marxism to the Dialogue Society”.

The growing child overcomes the pure desire to have, possess the libidinal object, by another relation, that of identification with a parent. But as a really mature relationship, this must be seen as more than the replacement of a desire to be like; it is not simply the imitation of a model, this is too childish. In a mature form (which of course comes to fruition well after the oedipal stage) it is the coming to terms with another from whom one has received a great deal, including a good part of one’s self-identity and to whom one will be giving more and more in return as time goes by.\(^{27}\)

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\(^{26}\) Erikson, *Martin Luther*, p. 12.

\(^{27}\) Taylor, “From Marxism to the Dialogue Society”, *From Culture to Revolution*, p. 159.
We see here some of the moral force of Taylor’s conception of the *Sittlich* identity. Society is like a mother, and we owe her “a great deal”, which we must repay by “giving more and more in return”.

In his study of Martin Luther, Erikson combined his psychological investigation of the adolescent identity crisis with the study of historical periods. Erikson argued that it is impossible to understand the individual human personality without also understanding the social milieu that provides the reference points for the formation of this identity. Thus, what was an “identity crisis” requiring psychoanalytic intervention in Erikson’s terms, was understood by Luther himself in terms of “possession” by the devil, which required exorcism of evil spirits.²⁸

Erikson’s work is also broadly comparable to that of Erich Fromm, who was more important to the formation of the New Left. In his war-time essay on *The Fear of Freedom*, Fromm argued for a “social psychology” that would understand the changes in human character between historical epochs.²⁹ “Why is the spirit of the Renaissance different from that of the Middle Ages,” (pp. 9-10) and “Why is the character structure of man in [twentieth-century] monopolistic capitalism different from that in the nineteenth century,” Fromm queried (p. 10). Despite this emphasis on historical location, however, Fromm was not willing to accept that humans were thus historically determined beings: “man is not only made by history,” he declared, for “history is made by man” (p. 10). The task of a historical and social psychology, therefore, must be to demonstrate “not only how passions, desires, anxieties change as a result of the social process, but also how man’s energies thus shaped into specific forms in their turn become productive forces, moulding the social process” (p. 10).

Taylor uses the concept of personal identity and social milieu in several ways. In his essay “Interpretation and the sciences of man”, Taylor writes that inter-subjective meanings “are constitutive of the social matrix in which individuals find themselves and act”, and calls for “a genuine historical psychology” to understand the changes in

²⁸ Erikson, *Martin Luther*, p.

these meanings over time.\textsuperscript{30} The originality of Taylor's approach was to adopt Erikson and Fromm's psychoanalytic interpretation of Weber's \textit{The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism}, using the model of the social upheavals of the Reformation and the development of Puritanism, and applying them as models for explaining the social and political upheavals of the 1950s and 1960s.

Following Weber, Taylor argues that one of the most important common meanings of modern western societies is that they form a "civilisation of work" (p. 47). It is the dominance of this "ideology", Taylor argues, that led to the incorporation of the working classes into the industrial democracies: this ideology of work was initially directed against the "unproductive" classes who did not conform to the new morality, placing them in the workhouses, but this ideology of the importance of work later became a "shared meaning", helping to assimilate the working poor and encouraging a unified sense of social cohesion and solidarity (p. 46).

All industrial civilisation have required a huge wrench from the traditional peasant populations on which they have been imposed; for they require an entirely unprecedented level of disciplined, sustained, monotonous effort; long hours unpunctuated by any meaningful rhythm, such as that of seasons or festivals. In the end this way of life can only be accepted when the idea of making a living is endowed with more significance than that of just avoiding starvation; and this it is in the civilisation of labour (pp. 46-47).

It was this ideology of work, that had legitimated our current industrial system, Taylor argued, that had gone stale and could no longer be believed in by hippies, "drop-outs", or young revolutionaries. "Plainly the discipline which was integral to the civilisation of work and bargaining is beginning to fail", noted Taylor. "The structures of this civilisation, independent work, bargaining, mutual adjustment of individual ends, are beginning to change their meaning for many, and are beginning to be felt not as normal and as best suited to [the human condition], but as hateful or empty" (p. 49).

Taylor returned to this theme three years later in his \textit{Hegel}. Here Taylor argued that the youth rebellion against the "civilisation of work" revealed the "central ideology of

\textsuperscript{30} Taylor, "Interpretation", \textit{Philosophical Papers 2}, ch. 1, pp. 36, 48.
liberalism” for what is was, he argued. A whole generation had lost its allegiance to “the goal of conquering nature and affirming [humanity] through work and production”, and the resulting social “crisis” revealed that liberal society (like any other) could not just consist merely of “the satisfaction of its member’s needs and interests” – as, say, had been envisaged by the Political Scientists of the 1950s – but also needed to be held together by “a common, or at least widespread set of beliefs which link its structure and practices with what its members see as of ultimate significance” (p. 459).

Why had these common meanings lost their hold on us? Taylor argues that for a long time, the “civilisation of work” gained its moral importance for ordinary people by having “broken with a millennial past of justice and hardship in order to create qualitatively different conditions for their children”. But, Taylor argues, this drive for the future could not continue, for sooner or later, the contented children growing up in this secure haven could no longer possess the drive to escape a poverty that they had never experienced (p. 50). One might think that Taylor is here talking of the story of immigrant America, of families that had left the blinding poverty, famine, feudalism, prejudice and pogroms of the old world for the freedom and promise of the new, but in his earlier article, Taylor was clearly talking about the children of those who had “climbed” from the working class “into the affluent middle class.” The father, Taylor stated, had a determined goal such as seeking to escape from “the Irish, Italian or Polish ghetto”, but this goal cannot apply to the children who are isolated in the “privatised” life of their middle-class parents, which “provides no windows to the broader world” (p. 169). This identity crisis does not seem to strike the children of the families of the already-established middle classes, he said, because they tend to have access and inculcation to “a higher level of personal culture” (p. 169). The problem was simply that there was no guarantee that the “mass of the new affluent” would be inducted into this middle-class culture (p. 170). “How”, he demanded, “will those with unresolved identity crises bring up their children?” [emphasis added] (p. 170).

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Summary

This chapter has argued that Taylor developed an alternative to the idea of a positive “science” of society which he discerned in the theories both of orthodox Marxism and of the social sciences of the 1950s. Taylor turned from a conception of the working class as defined economically, but rather in social ones of working class solidarity and traditions of shared meanings. Taylor came to analyse the social upheavals of the 1950s and 60s in terms of an identity crisis, in which the children of the new middle class found themselves without recourse to the working class culture (however financially impoverished) that had shaped and given meaning to their parent’s lives, even if only in terms of rejection and escape from the impoverishment of their childhood. Not only did Taylor adapt the Hegelian conception of identity in psychoanalytic terms, he also appropriated some of the conceptions of linguistic philosophy, also stated in terms of access to common meanings. The next chapter turns to demonstrate that Taylor then used these same concepts to rehabilitate the Hegelian conception of the spirit of society.
A post-industrial Sittlichkeit

The utilitarian and revolutionary conceptions of society, we have seen, assumed an inherent conflict between the individual and society. The attempt to overcome this conflict by viewing all as part of a collective group or general will, Taylor argued, simply sacrificed individual persons in the name of group freedom. Yet these attempts were inescapably “atomist” in that they replaced a single individual body with a larger social body, “one and indivisible.” Taylor argues that Hegel offers a “holist-individualist” conception of the individual as embedded in society, so that a person’s identity can extend to encompass society (or even the universe) as a whole, rendering defunct the traditional opposition between individual freedom and social necessity. This is to occur through a republican participationary politics.

Taylor argues that when the individual person actively participates in the public life of a society, he or she is no longer simply subject to the dictates of others but actively participates in the deliberation process, thereby incorporating him or herself “in a larger goal which is the ground of his [or her] identity”.1 Citizen’s “deliberating about what will be binding on all of them is an essential part of the exercise of freedom,” Taylor declared. “A society in which such deliberation was public and involved everyone else would realise a freedom not available anywhere else or in any other mode”.2 Taylor argues that Hegel’s model for this conception of freedom was Aristotle’s example of the sittlich life of the polis, “where – it was believed – men had seen the collective life of the city as the essence and meaning of their own lives, had sought their glory in its public life, their rewards in power and reputation within it,

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1 Taylor, Hegel, p. 380.
and immortality in its memory". Sittlichkeit was, Taylor explained, Hegel’s expression for that “vertu” which Montesquieu had seen as the mainspring of republics,” an “expressive unity” that had been lost with the decline of the Greek world, but which Hegel sought to see “reborn in a new way” to suit the individualism of the modern world (p. 378).

The importance for Taylor of Hegel’s Sittlichkeit is that it is a culturally derived system of morality, not an abstract system of formal ethics. As taught in most schools of philosophy, ethics is the question of what it is right to do. This, however, begs the question of what basis we have for our standards of right and wrong. For Taylor, the importance of Hegel’s Sittlichkeit is that it derives a system of practical ethics from an overarching system of morality which debates what is good. For a Christian, this ultimate system of morality might be dictated by the incontrovertible word of God; for a philosopher, this may be derived from our heritage of European thought; for Taylor’s Hegel this may be derived from the structure of rational necessity arising from the fusion in European civilisation of Augustinian theology with Platonic philosophy.

Taylor argues that this conception of the individual as embedded in the cultural world of society, as made the person that they are by their social and cultural inheritance, confers powerful moral obligations or “Sittlichkeit” (p. 376). Some debts that one incurs to ones parents or teachers, we might say, may be so great that we can only honour them by doing the same thing for one’s own children or pupils. “Sittlichkeit,” Taylor declares, consists of the moral obligations I incur by virtue of my development and education within the moral standards of the society that I was born into: “it is in virtue of its being an ongoing affair that I have these obligations; and my fulfilment of these obligations is what keeps it in being.” For Taylor, the link between cultural identity and morality is that by fulfilling our obligations to past and future generations, we bring about the common life that already is, so that “there is no gap between what ought to be and what is” - the gap between Kantian ethics and Hegelian morality, in other words.

3 Taylor, Hegel, p. 378.
A Post-Industrial Sittlichkeit

As it stands, Taylor’s statement that the real world of Hegelian morality brings about “what is” as opposed to Kant’s ethical ideals of “what should be” is a little disingenuous and actually obscures some of the metaphysical force of Taylor’s critique of ‘atomism’. In the Hegelian scheme of things, the task of philosophy is to recognise the development of universal consciousness through the development of human culture. When we couple together Taylor’s statement that Sittlichkeit “enjoins us to bring about that which already is” (p. 376), and Hegel’s famous statement in the Philosophy of Right that “what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational” (p. 422), we can understand that Taylor’s Hegel does not advocate Burkean conservatism but the recognition of the rational necessity of social and political development, even to the point of revolution. This point is underscored, for example, in Daniel Bell’s recounting of the life of the Russian revolutionary Vissarion Belinsky. When Belinsky first read Hegel, Bell informs us, he immediately became convinced of the formula “what is, is what ought to be”, he became a conservative supporter of the Russian autocracy. When, however, it was eventually pointed out to Belinsky that “dialectically the ‘is’ evolves into different forms”, he became a revolutionary.

The development of the modern individual

The basis for Taylor’s theory of the development of the modern identity lies in his interpretation of Hegel’s Philosophy of History which Taylor recounts not once but twice: the first time in his own terms as the development of the modern identity, the second as a straight paraphrase of Hegel’s doctrine. Although the Reformation and the Enlightenment are the pivotal points of the development of the modern identity in Hegel, this is for Taylor a gradual process that began in Ancient Greece.

In the sittlich life of the Greeks, Taylor relates, people understood themselves as part of the polis, yet this was an insular and parochial existence, deriving its standards from customs and not reason; it could not long survive Socrates’ demand for a state based on universal reason (p. 385). The development of Socratic philosophy was the

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4 Bell, The End of Ideology, p. 400.
beginning of the dissolution of the unreflecting group existence of the polis and the beginning of the long development of the self-conscious individual, Taylor argues, for with Plato “a new [person] arises who cannot identify with this public life” and who “begins to relate principally not to the public life but to his [or her] own grasp of universal reason” (p. 385).

Individualism comes, as Hegel puts it in the VG, when men [and women] cease to identify with the community’s life, when they “reflect”, that is, turn back on themselves and see themselves more importantly as individuals with individual goals. This is the moment of dissolution of a Volk and its life. […] what happens here is that the individual ceases to define his [or her] identity principally by the public experience of the society. On the contrary, the most meaningful experience, which seems to him [or her] most vital, to touch the core of his [or her] being, is private. Public experience seems […] secondary, narrow, and parochial, merely touching a part of himself. Should that experience try to make good its claim to centrality as before, the individual enters into conflict with it and has to fight it (p. 384).

Now in a curious twist, Taylor or at least Taylor’s Hegel sees the mores of the Roman Empire not the rise of a different cultural system, but the disintegration of the public life of the polis into the alienated citizenship of the “universal empire”, where public life is dominated by those on top of the social “heap” and the individual citizens identify themselves in isolation from the wider life of the community (p. 397). “Thus”, Taylor argues, “Roman society is the place of origin of the idea of the Person, an individual defined as a subject of rights in abstraction from his relation to the substance of Sittlichkeit”. The persona, Taylor continues, “is the bearer of ‘abstract’ right, right unconnected to social or political role; he [or she] is the bearer of right as property” (p. 397). The development of the legal persona is one of the basic foundations of the modern state, Taylor concludes.

The Stoics, Taylor continued, are examples of the “unhappy consciousness”, for they define themselves in terms of universal reason while in reality they were subject to the arbitrary whims of despotic rulers (p. 387). Saint Augustine’s doctrine of the separation of the City of God from the City of Man was similarly alienated, Taylor
relates, for the “community of the wise” identified themselves with something other than the real historical community in which they existed (p. 385). Christianity does offer the promise of reconciling the finite subject with absolute spirit, Taylor continues, but this unity only exists as a possibility for this integral life is not yet realised in the world. “The task of history” Taylor states, “is to make this reconciliation externally, politically real; to make the church community in a sense one with society” (p. 397).

This historical mission is achieved in the Hegelian scheme by the barbarian hordes that conquered and dismembered the whole of Europe, the British Isles and parts of North Africa in the centuries following the collapse of the Roman Empire (p. 398). Over the course of centuries, these Germanic peoples developed a European civilisation founded on individual freedom. This is because the warriors that emerged from the dark forests of the north were wild and independent, rarely submitting to authority. “Hegel”, Taylor relates, “pictures the early German as being loosely under leaders who, like Agamemnon, were barely primus inter pares” (p. 398). The Germanic origins of the feudal system is why the mediaeval state is really just a complex network of personal loyalties (p. 398).

As the mediaeval state gradually developed the institutions of monarchy, estates (Parliament) and bureaucracy, the church was also developing (p. 399). In order to convert the barbarians, the church had clothed many of the pagan feasts and ceremonies with Christian cloth. Eventually, with the Reformation, the northern countries rose again to resurrect a pure conception of spirituality, freed from the mediaeval restrictions of Catholicism. “Thus from the Reformed Europe”, Taylor’s Hegel states triumphantly, “comes the attempt to realise the rational state, to overcome the opposition of church and state. The Protestant religion is at the foundation of this state” (p. 400).

A Sittlichkeit for the modern individual

The question is how to develop this spiritual community of the individual with society. It must be the product of “human will and decision”, in which all participate
The direct democracy of the ancient polis, however, cannot be the simple model for the modern state, because they were narrow and parochial, they attained their homogeneity of will only by excluding women, slaves, and metics from political decision-making, and they saw themselves as part of the group, whereas we moderns see ourselves as individuals (p. 407). The modern state is simply too large for political participation in the direct sense. Representative democracy is often touted as the solution, but here only certain members actively participate in making the decisions, which means that it breaks the demand that all participate (p. 406). Alternatively, the conception of a laissez-faire liberal polity where each individual is left to make their own decision, creates the situation where no-one has participated in the life of the polis at all (p. 404). Neither is the total participation of the “general will” possible because it assumes the “maximum homogeneity” of citizens, in which all are seen as identical, when we know that there is an intrinsic diversity of interests (p. 406).

The modern economy, in Hegel’s view, divided people into different “estates”, which brought with them both social and economic differences (p. 408). If each estate was different, then they must each relate differently to government. An educated, “administrative” class that existed to be engaged in the conduct of bureaucracy is not easily identifiable with the entrepreneurs engaged in the conduct of their private business (pp. 407-409). Differentiation is unavoidable and each estate requires “a certain measure of autonomous life within each estate” (p. 409).

Hegel’s solution of estates has disappeared, Taylor argued, along with the last vestiges of the feudal society that went with it. The traditional societies that were “founded on differentiation” as part of the “hierarchical order of things”, and which “were the ground of [people’s] identification with the society in which they lived” have been destroyed by the development of modern mass society (p. 410). A truly homogenous society has grown up out of the modern “massive concentrations of population and economic interdependence”, and has eliminated the “partial communities” which once might have formed the basis of a “decentralised federation” (p. 414).

“Modern democracy,” Taylor concludes, “is in a bind”, because people need to “define themselves” in terms of “their partial community”, whether “cultural, linguistic, [or] confessional, etc”, but what differences remain “no longer have
meaning and value for those who lack them” (p. 412). One of the most common solutions to this anomie is nationalism, Taylor argues, but this is actually just another version of the absolute freedom of the Jacobins, creating artificially “homogenous” states by “suppressing dissent and diversity and falling over into a narrow and irrational chauvinism” (pp. 414-415). The modern national state, Taylor argues, cannot provide “a ground for differentiation, meaningful to the people concerned, but which at the same time does not set the partial communities against each other, but rather knits them together in a larger whole” (p. 415).

The issue for modern democracy, Taylor concludes, is “What kind of differentiation can society admit of?” (p. 410). Although the semi-feudal society Hegel discussed has long since vanished into the mists of time, Taylor finds this question in Hegel’s contemporary, Alexis de Tocqueville (p. 415). The link between the two, Taylor states, is that both were “deeply influenced by Montesquieu” (p. 416). De Tocqueville, in Taylor’s eyes, clearly saw the modern dilemma, “when he saw the immense importance to a democratic polity of vigorous constituent communities in a decentralised structure of power, while at the same time the pull of equality tended to take modern society towards uniformity, and perhaps also submission under an omnipotent government” (pp. 415-416). “But whether we take it in Hegel’s reading or in de Tocqueville’s,” Taylor concludes, the underlying need it the same, “to recover a sense of significant differentiation, so that its partial communities, be they geographical, or cultural, or occupational, can again become centres of concern and activity for their members in a way which connects them to the whole” (p. 416).

We are in a dilemma, Taylor concluded, similar to that of “Hegel and the Romantic age” (p. 461). That is, Taylor continued, we need to combine a common sense of a relation to nature which is not purely exploitative with the free, equal individual of modern society. “We need at once freedom and a post-industrial Sittlichkeit” (p. 461).
The philosophy applied to politics

In this final chapter on the development of Taylor's philosophical system, I want to argue that Taylor did, in fact, advance a solution to the "modern dilemma" as he saw it. We have already the conceptual tools available for him to construct this solution. These elements were, first, the knowledge that a work of republican retrieval required translating the Greek ideal into the needs of the modern era. That was, in short that modern society had to be articulated into different estates, each expressing their realisation of cosmic spirit in the community according to their own way. Now Taylor had already translated Hegel's Geist or consciousness into two forms intelligible to the modern world. The first was in terms of post-Freudian psychoanalysis of consciousness, which was explained in terms of the pop-psychology of identity. The second was the Heideggerian reconception of language as the vehicle of consciousness. In the following pages, I seek to argue that Taylor came to understand linguistic communities as the means of integrating the individual in the wider society.

Modernisation and the end of traditional society

Québec society, in a sense, provided Taylor with a case study of modernisation, which he explored in an early paper, "Nationalism and the Political Intelligentsia." Québec had been an "economically backward" province in Canada, defined by the "ultramontanism" of the Catholic Church as it existed there. This was a "defensive"

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1 Taylor, "Nationalism and the Political Intelligentsia: A Case Study," (first published in Queen's Quarterly, vol. 72, Spring 1965), revised and republished in Reconciling the Solitudes, ch. 1, pp. 3-22.
outlook, Taylor argued, in which Québec society had sought to insulate itself from the English conquest (p. 5).

One of the effects of the English conquest had been that it was devoid of the original aristocratic “power elite”, which was shipped back to France, and Quebec was isolated from the development of the modern French state in the French revolution. The church filled many of the functions of the state, and also acted to legitimate an educated “elite” of professional doctors, lawyers, etc, that were educated in the Church’s institutions of higher education (pp. 6-8). This elite of French society covered a very narrow range of positions, and “social mobility was not very great, except of course as concerned the clergy, to which the sons of the poor regularly gained access if they had a vocation. The lay professions were, however, considerably harder to enter for those whose parents were not rich enough to send them to the college classique” (p. 8). The French-Canadian elite, was in a sense a cultural elite, in that business ownership was almost entirely in the hands of British-Canadians (p. 8). “In French-speaking society, therefore, the summit was the professional classes (p. 8).

The aim of “la survivance” also extended to preserving “the traditional French-Canadian way of life”, which was rural, agricultural, and based around the village parish (p. 5). Taylor described how the old defensive society tried to prevent the development of modern industrial society in Québec by instituting “the colonisation movement of the late nineteenth-century which attempted to channel the excess rural population of French Canada towards the agricultural frontier and away from the large cities … and the United States” (p. 5). French-Canada remained an impoverished and peasant-based society, however, because “both figuratively and literally the ground was too stony and infertile” (p. 5).

Between the 1940s and 1960s, however, major changes occurred in this traditional formula. The “regime” of Maurice Duplessis, which presided over this period sought to develop the economic potential of the province by exploitation of its natural resources (particularly in forestry), without allowing the development of the social structures that normally accompanies economic development (p. 5). Social development, however, did occur, and in an unexpected way. The reason lay, he argued, in the development of a new “intelligentsia” or educated middle class that was
radically different from the cultural elite of French-Canada. First, the new middle class received technical training in the Polytechs, not the traditional culture of letters that had been transmitted in the *college classique* (pp. 9, 6). "In the 1940-41 academic session," Taylor related, "the Ecole Polytechnique de Montréal gave only 30 diplomas; in the academic session of 1960-61 it gave 232 diplomas. In 1963 the Corporation of Professional Engineers of Quebec had a membership that was about 50 per cent French-speaking. Thirty years earlier, there was hardly a handful of French engineers in the province" (p. 9). Second, there was an explosion of urbanisation in Quebec. Most of this urbanisation occurred in Montreal city, which was previously the enclave of the English-Canadian business elite (p. 9). "In 1941, Montreal had a population of a little over 1 million in a province of not much more than 4 million. By 1961, its population was more than 2 million in a province of 5.5 million" (p. 9). Almost all of the population growth in French-Canadian society, therefore, was concentrated in the city. Finally, the new middle class was the product of much greater social mobility (p. 9). "It was estimated, for instance, that 31 per cent of the students at the University of Montreal in 1961 were from working-class families, and another 11 percent from peasant families" (p. 9).

The new middle class represented a new break from the old structures of traditional French-Canadian society. "One cannot be an engineer or a television producer or businessman and remain fully committed to the re-creation of pre-industrial modes of life," Taylor noted (p. 10). "In time, therefore, the authoritarian pattern of traditional society was destroyed by mass education, by the development of mass democratic organisations such as the credit unions, and by the spread of state television to all corners of the land" (p. 10). One of the most important of these developments, he stated, was the development of the highly successful, revolutionary, socialist and nationalist review, *Parti pris*" (p. 6). It represented a thorough rejection of the traditional society, the contemplation of which, he observed, "seemed to provoke paroxysms of frenzied iconoclasm in many of the educated youth" (p. 6). In the end, he noted, the last of the old "regime" crumbled virtually overnight with the deaths in quick succession of both Duplessis and his successor (p. 10).
The Philosophy Applied

The politics of identity

The rapid modernisation and industrialisation of French-Canadian society, Taylor argued, created the forces of a new nationalism. In migrating to the English-dominated cities, the French-Canadians found themselves in a position of being “immigrants” in their own country (p. 11). They were in the same position, he observed, as “people who have to conform to another way of life, who have to learn a new language and forget their own background in order to succeed,” but this was intolerable for a population shaped by *la survivance* and who formed a majority in their province (p. 11).

Taylor argued that the development of Québécois nationalism was a problem of the politics of identity (p. 13). The problem was, he clarified, “how individuals or members of a group see themselves” or in other words, “what they identify themselves as” (p. 13). Taylor also cast this as a problem of recognition: “Like everyone else, they expect a normal degree of recognition from those they deal with; and life everyone else, they hope that they compare well with these people in their own eyes” (p. 13). The comparison with their North American counterparts (i.e. American and Canada), Taylor argued, showed that “in the fields of economic achievement and social progress and democratic mores ... French Canada compares ill with the North American norm” (p. 13). This Taylor explained, was not just a general comparison, but also a deeply personal experience of exclusion.

The problem for the new middle classes he explained, was that the *Canadien* modes of behaviour did not fit in well with the cultural presuppositions of the Canadian owners and supervisors, “since the ways in which French employees expressed themselves were often little understood by an English-Canadian superior” (p. 11). In their own eyes they felt excluded from the promise of the new economy, because they were more likely to be overlooked for promotion, etc, “because of a fact about themselves which their whole background had trained them never to give up in any circumstances” (p. 11). Furthermore, working and operating in English society was a strain of “operating in another language in their working lives,” but the difference between them and immigrants who might be expected to adapt to a new life was that it was the English employers who were considered the real immigrants, and that the
strain of working in an alien cultural environment was seen as "a systematic and long
drawn-out insult" to their culture (p. 12). The control of the economy, Taylor
explained, was completely dominated by English-Canadians, who had been operating
the same way for so long, and saw no reason to operated differently from elsewhere in
Canada, "and not much reason to treat French Canadian personnel differently from
Poles or Italians" (p. 12). This was a new and unfamiliar problem because the newly
mobile middle classes did not have the benefit of familiarity with English and the
required social graces that the old elite had obtained in the *college classique* (p. 12).
This difficulty was experienced by those "born in the rural areas, in a working-class or
peasant family, who had very little opportunity to learn English up to the standard
required, and even less experience of operating in another world than [their] own" (p.
12).

Taylor argued that the strains this existence produced – of the desire for economic
improvement hindered by the perception (whether justified or not) that they were
excluded by their nationality from realising this desire – lead to a demand for
modernising reform carried out by a French-Canadian state (pp. 14-15). This required
at a minimum an increase in the strength of the provincial government, or perhaps
even an independent state (p. 15). The difference between separatists and non­
separatist nationalists, Taylor wryly remarked, "is very often only a difference of
degree" (p. 4). Independence became a powerful new symbol, he argued, because of
the decolonisation that was occurring throughout the rest of the world (p. 6). It
"represented the awakening of underdeveloped societies that were determined to take
control of their own history and in doing so to wrest it from both foreign domination
and the dead hand of millennial tradition" (p. 6). The basis of this rabid nationalism,
Taylor contended, was something altogether new. "In its pure form," he stated,
practically the only value it had in common with the old was the French language
itself" (p. 5) Practically everything else of the old Catholic tradition was "anathema"
to a new generation of anticlerical nationalists (p. 6).
I seek to turn now to examine Taylor’s first major statement of his vision for “A Canadian Future”, which was presented in his political manifesto for the New Democratic Party. Taylor argued that the task of creating a dialogue society in Canada could only proceed if the problems of its “unity and ‘identity’” as a country were addressed (pp. 23-24).

One of the great problems of forming a Canadian identity, he argued, was of being overshadowed by the example of the great republic to the south (p. 24). The United States had such a strong conception of itself as a “new … civilisation”, “Lockean liberalism,” and “the American way,” that Canada, by contrast seemed to not have any particular identity at all (pp. 24-25). “A Committee on un-Canadian activities could only be a joke at the expense of our neighbours,” Taylor wryly noted (p. 25). Yet if Canada was not formed on the model of the United States, neither was it formed on the model of a European nation-state either. Once upon a time it may have had a sense of identity and importance as being part of the British Empire, but that identity was only possible by excluding all those Canadians who were not British – i.e. French-Canadians and European immigrants. Nor could its great historical moments unite Canada, for it had never had a decent war against a common enemy, Taylor remarked, since “the Riel rebellion and the two world wars (which brought about two conscription crises) were sources of division and unity”. Canada was obviously a multi-lingual state, but the European examples of such states hardly held out any hope, for Belgium was “ripped by even worse internal conflict than Canada”, and Switzerland only achieved its social harmony “by the device of mutual ignorance in watertight cantons.” Canada’s situation was unique he concluded, and one in which it would have to forge its own model.

Taylor pointed out that Canada was not only diverse in the sense of the bilingual division between French and English Canadians, but English Canada was itself very diverse. Great geographical and historical differences divided the Maritimes,

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Newfoundland, “Upper Canada,” the Prairies, and British Columbia. For “all people east of the Rocky Mountains,” Taylor noted, “British Columbia is a strange place, not quite believable (p. 26). Many of these regions, he argued, had just as strong identities as that of French Canada. The anxiety about the Canadian identity really arose in the first place, he continued, out of “a questioning of what it is that really holds us together.” These differences were really surfacing because of the decline of the old “British Canadian” identity which had simply ignored all those who did not fit the bill.

A united Canada, Taylor explained, could only arise out of a sense of a shared common purpose, “based on a significant common future rather than a [non-existent] shared past” (p. 27). Taylor declared that there were in fact three common goals for a Canada of the future. The first was to build a truly bicultural society, “in the sense of a society … in which both groups can learn from each other and be enriched by living side by side” (p. 27). Canada’s task was to make diversity a source of richness rather than a limitation. The second was to play an effective role in world politics, where its status as a large but dominant power gave it a particular role in international mediation, “which few other powers are as well-equipped to do” (p. 27). The third, and most important role for the future was the creation of a more egalitarian society (p. 28). Taylor did not just mean to attack inequality between individuals or social classes, but to address regional inequalities, a task that would require “a program of regional development and planning the likes of which has not been attempted on this continent” (p. 28).
CONCLUSION
Conclusion: Taylor’s intellectual project

This thesis has traced the development and consolidation of Taylor’s intellectual project through the early period of his work stretching from roughly 1957, with the beginning of the socialist humanism debate, to 1975 with the publication of his Hegel.

This project can be seen as beginning in the “end of ideology” debate which marked the collapse and end of the “old” Left of the 1930s and 40s. It was marked by the seeming domination of social-democracy as there simply did not seem to be any other possible alternatives. One of the particular features of the “end of ideology” debate was that its critics were using the same theoretical concepts as the new left, but for vastly more conservative features. The difference was that the members of the new left used this as the starting point for a new debate over the possibility of socialism. One of the main conclusions that they reached was that the industrial era was over and that a social and cultural framework had to be developed in order to explain the massive social changes that occurred in the period stretching from the post-war years to the 1960s. Charles Taylor adopted and developed many of the features of the new left project, but he was also deeply influenced by the continental philosophers, particularly Heidegger and the Frankfurt School in general. This continental influence in his work is also the reason why his philosophy is so difficult to decipher.

There is a further element in Taylor’s work, however, that separates him from political theory as normally understood in Anglo-American philosophy. That is, Taylor is best viewed as an intellectual rather than a scholar. This is not to deride his work, but to make sense of it. Taylor must really be viewed as an intellectual engagé on the model of Sartre. His vice-presidency of the New Democratic Party and the publishing of his Pattern of Politics show the engagement of his philosophies with political action.
Conclusion

(whether or not this was ultimately successful). Indeed Taylor's *Hegel* and its philosophy of *Sittlichkeit* is really a critique of Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*, and a critique of the Sartrian rebels of 1968. This would be a fruitful avenue for a Sartre scholar to pursue.

Taylor’s sweeping history of the ideas of the age is the project of an intellectual and is not really reducible to whether or not he got his scholarship right. In many ways, Taylor is vulnerable to the same criticisms as Quentin Skinner levelled at C. B. Macpherson. Yet even if his descriptions of Hobbes, his condemnations of the scientific enlightenment, or his sweeping generalisations about liberalism are contradicted by detailed considerations of the evidence, there is a truth in Taylor’s arguments that remains regardless of historical “facts”. That is, his attempt to make sense of the ills of his era. It is really a project of insight and introspection, of thoughtful contemplation of what was happening around him at a time where there seemed no ready answers or explanations. This really emerges in his experience of the social changes in Québec. There is a sense in which the abstract ideas of enlightenment and modernisation came to life in a society which seemed to have been in an arrested development for centuries, and which suddenly experienced all the developments of modern industrial and technological civilisation in the space of twenty years. There is a pathos in his observations on Quebec, which must have changed remarkably in the nearly ten years he spent away at Oxford University. There is a sense in which Hegel’s dialectic of lordship and bondage becomes a very profound insight for Taylor in the way in which Québécois identity was formed in the new middle class.

What is really remarkable in Taylor is his continued determination not to give up trying to heal the wounds of modernity, even though he knew his attempt was near hopeless. This is where he really parts company with Berlin, the old fox. Berlin, in a sense, had given up all hope for humanity after the horror of Auschwitz. Taylor on the other hand, never ceased trying to overcome the development of a scientific and technological civilisation that had produced such inhuman consequences. His intellectual project has to be seen as the fashioning of a philosophical therapy for the crisis of modernity.


Berlin, “The divorce between the sciences and humanities”, Against the Current, ch. 3, p. 81.


References


