



# Modernity and Disenchantment: Charles Taylor on the Identity of the Modern Self

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## Abstract

In his magnum opus, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (1989), Charles Taylor gives an exhaustive and teleologically interpretive history of the modern self. He, in fact, is in search of the core of the modern identity. By 'identity', Taylor means the ensemble of the understanding of what *is* to be a 'human agent', a 'person', a 'self'. Taylor in generating the ontology of the self, is greatly inspired by the understanding of *Dasein* in Heidegger. This paper also focuses on how Taylor uses Heidegger's hermeneutics of the self in several ways to give modernity a base that is not Cartesian. Taylor's central argument is 'how the assertion of the modern individual has spawned an erroneous understanding (identity) of the self', where one experiences a loss of horizon. He has turned our attention, more than anyone else, towards the communitarian constitution of the self, and pointed out the limitations of insights within liberal individualism. For Taylor, as for early Heidegger, the self is not neutral or atomic. The self exists only in terms of questions and constitutive concerns, and it is not amenable to arbitrary determination, but can be made sense of only in terms of its life as a whole at any moment.

**Keywords:** Modernity, Disenchantment, Communitarianism, Self, Identity, Taylor, Heidegger.

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## Introduction

Philosophical tradition, right from its inception, revolves around the issues of the self. Be it the Greek, Christian, Renaissance or Modern thought, 'self' claims primacy over all other issues. Charles Taylor engages with the issues of the self in a variety of ways. In his magnum opus, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (1989), Taylor gives an exhaustive and teleologically interpretive history of the modern self. He, in fact, is in search of the core of the modern identity. By 'identity,' Taylor means the ensemble of the understanding of what it is to be a 'human agent', a 'person', a 'self'. He aims to show how the ideals and interdicts of this identity shape our philosophical thought, our epistemology, and our philosophy of language largely without our awareness. The *Sources of the Self* discusses three major factors of the identity of the person: (i) modern 'inwardness', the sense of ourselves as beings with 'inner depths', and the connected notion that 'we are selves' or, in short, authenticity, (ii) the affirmation of ordinary life which develops from the early modern period, and (iii) the expressivist notion of nature as an inner moral source (Taylor, 1989: x).

Engaging closely with Taylor's oeuvre, one can find that he is not a system builder, rather, he intends to streamline and complicate various issues pertaining to the 'self' - a modern self. His approach to selfhood remains steadily within the framework of the changing self-interpretations and mostly the way it is swayed by the various cultures. However, in spite of this view, he still holds on to the understanding that there is a certain universal understanding of personhood which might undergo change depending on the groups and cultures (Abbey, 2000: 4). In his view the modern self is a result of Enlightenment and Romanticism and has a long history to unfurl. Taylor's understanding of personhood arises from his conviction that human beings are self-interpreting animals. This, in fact, places him within the tradition of a hermeneutic thinker as well. Taylor was greatly influenced by Heidegger in understanding the hermeneutics of the self; in fact for Heidegger, the ontology of the self is hermeneutically constructed. Taylor's notion that human knowledge is produced from engaged or embodied agency puts him within the hermeneutic tradition as well.

In this paper, I will closely examine the ontology of the self in Taylor, focussing on its specific capacities like moral orientation, self-interpretation, the primacy of language, the dialogical nature, and above all, the self in its embodied existence. The ontology of the self in Taylor is largely fashioned by his historical conceptions of the self. Modernity, technology, cosmopolitanism, globalization, consumerism, and a plethora of such events have shaped the historical understanding of the self to its present-day understanding of it, and Taylor would see them, in their turn, triggering homelessness and a 'loss of horizon.' The final stretch of the paper focuses on communitarianism. For Taylor, the identity of the individual is formed within a community and a society at large. This means that we are not alone but with 'significant others' who matter to us.

### **The Ontology of Self**

Taylor's conception of the self in the modern world has arrived after a thorough examination of the history of the self, which he elaborately worked out in *Sources of the Self*. In envisaging the identity of the self, Taylor follows the cultural method.<sup>1</sup> In Taylor's view, self-interpretation is culturally constituted. Every individual is born into certain cultures where one finds her identity and belonging. In this section, I will focus on ontology of self-highlighting, the importance of embodiment, language, and temporality, and try to show the primacy of the 'other' in shaping one's own identity within a cultural background.

### **Embodiment**

Taking inspiration from three continental thinkers - Martin Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Wittgenstein - Taylor works out the identity of the person giving primacy to the engaged-embodied agency with precise background structures. Taylor's attempt to envisage agency in these forms comes as a critique to the modern scientific way of understanding the self, which is better known in Thomas Nagel's famous phrase "The view from nowhere" (Nagel, 1986). One of the sources Taylor uses to good effect, in his interpretation of the self and the critique of modernity, is Martin Heidegger. Taylor calls Heidegger's characterizing of Dasein's 'worldly' existence 'engaged agency', the view that "the world of the

agent is shaped by his or her form of life, or history, or bodily existence” (Taylor, 2006: 203).

Identity for Taylor consists amidst a person’s embodied existence and experiences gained thereafter. This is similar to the ontology of the self in Heidegger as well. Our knowledge of the world is cognitively construed by our embodied existence. Embodiment proves that we are engaged agents and not a Cartesian disengaged ego cogito. Our embodiment also proves that we are in a world, with meaningful contexts and amidst other individuals who act, interact, and pursue their purposes (Abbey, 2004: 3). In Taylor’s view, the identity of the self is envisaged not from any encapsulated view. There is a multitude of instances through which my identity is formed, as Taylor argues: “We are selves only in that certain issues matter for us. What I am as a self, my identity, is essentially defined by the way things have significance for me” (Taylor, 1989: 34). In the contemporary world the self acquires its identity through a whole host of predicaments, society and culture are an intrinsic part of it. In this line, Taylor argues that: “to have an identity is to know ‘where you are coming from’ when it comes to questions of value, or issues of importance. Your identity defines the background against which you know where you stand on such matters” (Taylor, 1991: 305-6).

Our embodied existence gives us a diverse understanding of the self as against the Cartesian disengaged interpretations. Taylor reiterates that an individual who is able to access a world is not merely a Cartesian ego cogito but rather an entity who is shaped by his or her “*form of life, history, and bodily existence*” (Taylor, 2006: 203). This “world shaping” nature of the agent is possible only within an embodied existence. In Taylor’s view the embodied agent is one “who acts to maintain equilibrium upright, who can deal with things close up immediately and has to move to get to things farther away, who can grasp certain kinds of things easily and others not, can remove certain obstacles and others not, can move to make a scene more perspicuous, and so on” (Taylor, 2006: 203). Taylor continues, “To say that this world is essentially that of this agent is to say that the terms in which we describe this experience... make sense only against the background of this kind of embodiment” (Taylor, 2006: 204). Embodied existence always happens within a given world, and being in a world essentially means that one creates a history and

meaning. This is the most crucial argument that Taylor makes. In Heidegger's view, the whole manifold of perception is possible because we are embodied entities. Disclosedness (*Erschlossenheit*) in Heidegger's view is possible because we are engaged with the world of objects.

## Language

Linguistic abilities characterize human beings in a unique realm. One of the fundamental ontological features of selfhood is language. Taylor comments that: "Man is above all the language animal." (Taylor, 1985: 216) Self-interpretation is possible only within a linguistic framework. In Taylor's oeuvre, the primacy of language is considered with reference to its cultural and communitarian framework. He argues that the language that I use is never something of my own creation, rather, it is provided by my society and culture. Taylor put it this way:

...language as the locus of disclosure is not an activity of the individual primarily, but of the language community. Being a person cannot be understood simply as exercising a set of capacities I have as an individual, on all fours with my capacity to breathe, walk, and the like. On the contrary, I only acquire this capacity in conversation, to use this as a term of art for human linguistic interchange in general; I acquire it in a certain form within this conversation, that of my culture; and I only maintain it through continued interchange. We could put it this way: I become a person and remain one only as an interlocutor (Taylor, 1999: 276).

Our linguistic ability makes us dialogical, which always highlights the primacy of the other. "...my discovering of my own identity doesn't mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others.... My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relation with others" (Taylor 1995b: 231). Language throws us into a world with others. Language helps for self-understanding and self-interpretation, but the most primordial factor of language is that it makes us a dialogical self. Taylor's argument of the "fusion of horizons" (Taylor, 1985a: 281) is well comprehended within the framework of language. It goes well with what Wittgenstein argues: "To imagine a language

means to imagine a form of life” (Wittgenstein, 2009: argument 19). We remain no longer a ‘detached observer’ with our language-wielding character. Language makes apprehending reality possible, and for Heidegger, the hermeneutical disclosedness of Dasein takes place within the horizon of language. For Heidegger, language discloses reality. Though every individual has her own specific culture and way of being, language works as a medium of unifying distant individuals. Taylor argues: “...once we understand that language is about the relation of public space and that public space has participants..., then we can see that there cannot be a totally non-participatory learning of language” (Taylor, 1985a: 282). Our language-wielding character shows that we are not unaccompanied entities, but rather entities within a world of significant others. Taylor holds that it is our ability to be dialogical that guarantees the possibility of morality. It is through language that we understand others and their being.

### **Temporality**

These ontological structures of the self are closely connected with the notion of temporality. For Taylor, temporality plays a prominent place since he understands the self as a *narration*. One of Taylor’s important preoccupations is to show how history is moving teleologically and morally, and how the true moral potential hidden in the modern identity is not exploited, how it is hijacked for wrong uses by its most zealous defenders. In the first part of *Sources of the Self*, in ‘Identity and the Good’, Taylor makes the tall claim that modern identity/selfhood is inextricably tied to a sense of the good. At any point in time, a human life is continuously referring to a past and a future. We make sense of our life in terms of the ‘good’, of ‘qualitative discrimination’, of ‘the incomparably higher’. For this, Taylor tells us, we understand our lives in terms of a narrative, an unfolding story, and so, in order to have a ‘sense of who we are’, ‘we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going’ (Heidegger, 1973: 188-95). Here, Taylor is definitely referring to Heidegger’s notion of temporality. “Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, described the inescapable temporal structure of being in the world: that from a sense of what we have become, among a range of present possibilities, we project our future being. This is the structure of any situated action, of course, however trivial” (Taylor, 1989: 47). This

notion of time is a definitive way for Taylor to break from modernity's mechanistic view of time, and its technologization in general. He writes:

This is the point of attack for many of the most influential reaction to mechanism. They protest in the name of lived time. Bergson is the earliest. But Heidegger makes time the crucial issue of his early work. He rebels against a view of time in which the present is the dominant dimension, in other words, the specialized view, in favour of one which is founded on the "three ek-stases", and which gives primacy, if it gives any at all, to the future. Heidegger's time is lived time, organized by a sense of the past as the source of a given situation, and the future as what my action must co-determine (Taylor, 1989: 463-4).<sup>2</sup>

Taylor makes the 'engaged self' argument in reference to Heidegger's notion of *ecstases*.<sup>3</sup> His whole argument is 'how the assertion of the modern individual has spawned an erroneous understanding of the self' (Taylor, 1989: 49). He calls the disengaged self, the 'punctual' or 'neutral' self. It is defined in abstraction from its constitutive concerns, from its identity, as objects in space. But, for Taylor, as for Heidegger, the self is not a neutral, punctual object. The self exists only in terms of questions and constitutive concerns, in terms of the 'good', and the self is not amenable to arbitrary determination but can be made sense of only in terms of its life as a whole at any moment. "I don't have a sense of where/what I am... without some understanding of how I have got there or become so... My self-understanding necessarily has temporal depth and incorporates narrative" (Taylor, 1989: 50).

According to Taylor, the modern self is characterized by inwardness, freedom, individuality, and being embedded in nature. "Affirmation of ordinary life" is seen as a normal way of manifesting selfhood. In Taylor's view, the affirmation of ordinary life, that is, "the sense that the life of production and reproduction, of work and the family, is what is important for us" (Taylor, 2003: 104, Taylor, 1989: 211), contributes substantially for the discovery of one's meaning and everyday existence. Aristotle argued that we have to distinguish the maintenance of these activities from the pursuit of a good life. But Taylor's contention is that "You can't pursue the good life without

pursuing life” (Taylor, 1989: 211). Taylor’s emphasis on ordinary life is not to trivialize the importance of science and technology, but rather to highlight certain forgotten aspects of our existence which actually contribute to our identity.

This is the point where Taylor praises the contribution of Marxism towards the affirmation of ordinary life. Marxism looks at life and being formerly in a secular way. It focuses on production as pivotal to human identity and is largely concerned with the quality of human work and the accomplishment derived from there. According to Marxism, the significance of human labor is characterized not “rationally” or “worshipfully”, but rather “freely”, “creatively,” and “expressively”. For Marx, the way human beings live their material life can generate their own authentic identity.

I believe that this affirmation of ordinary life, although not uncontested and frequently appearing in secularized form, has become one of the most powerful ideas in modern civilization. It underlies our contemporary “bourgeois” politics, so much concerned with issues of welfare, and at the same time powers the most influential revolutionary ideology of our century, Marxism, with its apotheosis of man the producer. This sense of the importance of the everyday in human life, along with its corollary about the importance of suffering, colours our whole understanding of what it is truly to respect human life and integrity (Taylor, 1989: 14).

Hence, these issues, viz., embodiment, language, temporality, and a culmination of them into affirmative everyday living, create an ontology of the self in its everyday life. Though they may look insignificant in the face of fast-growing technology, yet they cannot be trivialized. It is only through affirming our existence through these factors that we construct our own identity. For Heidegger existential analytic (analysis of the everyday existence of a person) is the way to apprehend Dasein. Both for Heidegger and Taylor human person is always already an engaged agent. It has to be envisioned from a cultural setting, located in space and time, being involved with daily issues and with other human beings. In the next section, we will discuss how the onslaught of modernity creates disenchantment and whereby pushes a person towards a loss of horizon.

## Loss of Horizon

The previous section mostly focused on the understanding of the self from various ontological structures. However, to grasp the meaning of selfhood in the present-day context is to analyze the self from its present-day context of being in the modern world. Hence, the meaning of self-identity needs much attention and evaluation as it takes a diverse route in understanding itself with the onslaught of modernity.

Antony Giddens explains modernity in his *Consequences of Modernity*, thus: ““modernity” refers to modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence” (Giddens, 1996: 1). Modernity here refers to a historical and geographical unfolding, but what I would be focussing on is how the self is vulnerable to certain malaises and falls into what Heidegger calls *Gestell* (enframing). The “enframed” self fails to make sense of other ways of being, or rather too late to think of other ways as it is already ensnared and fascinated by the so-called modernity.

Today, modernity has become a crucial issue. Every form of life has a mix of modernity. Whether one wants it or not it is an unprecedented predicament that we naturally choose to fall into. Modernity affects individuals and societies in various ways. Taylor’s first-hand understanding of modernity has three immediate effects on the individual and society. In his version the first-hand understanding of modernity is “that historically unprecedented amalgam of new practices and institutional forms (science, technology, industrial production, urbanization), of new ways of living (individualism, secularization, instrumental rationality); and of new forms of malaise (alienation, meaninglessness, a sense of impending social dissolution)” (Taylor, 2004: 1).

With the advent of modernity, there is a paradigm shift in the understanding of the self. One of the major factors of modernity is that it is considered a disenchanted one (as Weber phrases it), and for Taylor, the dominance of meaninglessness defines our age (Taylor, 1989: 18). Nietzsche’s nihilism, perhaps a century ago, pointed towards human beings’ present condition of being in the modern world and our culture as a “loss of horizon”.

The modern self is a disengaged one. In Taylor's conception, the modern self has reached a point in which the self thinks that it can properly understand and define itself in the absence of any attachment to any wider reality that surrounds it. However, this disengaged notion is widely celebrated in the writings of Rene Descartes, Francis Bacon and John Locke. The disengagement that is crucial in the modern age has come from the understanding that the self is rational. The disengaged-rational-self is an invention of Descartes. Taylor says that:

The new model of rational mastery which Descartes offers presents it as a matter of instrumental control. To be free from the illusion which mingles mind with matter is to have an understanding of the latter which facilitates its control. Similarly, to free oneself from passions and obey reason is to get the passions under instrumental direction. The hegemony of reason is defined no longer as that of a dominant vision but rather in terms of a directing agency subordinating a functional domain (Taylor, 1989: 149).

According to Taylor, the modern rational-self is characterized by certain malaises, which, for him are the underlying framework of the self in contemporary culture and society. Taylor names three of them in his book *Ethics of Authenticity*, viz. individualism, instrumental reason, and a culmination of these two into a sense of loss of freedom. According to Taylor, modern civilization is: "We live in a world where people have a right to choose for themselves their own patterns of life, to decide in conscience what convictions to espouse, to determine to shape their lives in a whole host of ways that their ancestors couldn't control" (Taylor, 2003: 2). Today, modern would also mean that one is breaking away from the traditional restrictions such as the economic arrangements, patterns of family life, traditional notions of hierarchy and so on. Modern individualism also has resulted in breaking away from the older "moral horizons". The older moral horizons clubbed us into a "great chain of being", in which humans lived as part of the larger cosmic order. However modern freedom and individualism have discredited these orders (Taylor, 2003: 2-3). Taylor continues to argue that "individualism involves a centering on the self and a concomitant shutting out, or even unawareness, of the greater issues or concerns that transcend

the self, be they religious, political, historical. As a result, life is narrowed or flattened" (Taylor, 2003: 14).

For Taylor, there are several issues, events, and relations that connect an individual in a society, which he sometimes refers to as the "great chain of being." Modernity, with its various features, comes as a threat to this "chain", and propels a break away from it. The breaking away from the "great chain of being" has placed us into looking at nature and other entities as mere resources for human use and manipulation. This disengaging from the 'world of chain' into an individualistic domain is what Taylor calls the "disenchantment" of the world (Taylor, 2003: 3). This disenchantment comes into the life of the individual as a worry that she has lost something important within a larger social and cosmic horizon of action. This view of disenchantment has been foreshadowed by many philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, prominent among them is Nietzsche. Nietzsche's "last man" which he argued in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, is the culmination of the absolute human decline. In his view the "last man" has lost all fragrance for life and seeks only comfort and individual/personal security.

Along with individualism, Taylor argues that instrumental reason is the second major malaise that the present humans confront. In Taylor's view, instrumental reason is "the kind of rationality we draw on when we calculate the most economical application of means to a given end. Maximum efficiency, the best cost-output ratio, is its measure of success" (Taylor, 2003: 5). Instrumental reason fortifies individuality by actually erasing all the 'old orders' of family, society, and belongingness, which indeed created bonding between humans. By erasing the 'old orders' we see nature and surroundings only as a means for our selfish ends, and we treat them, including other humans, as raw materials or instruments for our mean projects.

Instrumental rationality, without a doubt, is advantageous. But Taylor's deep concern is that "instrumental reason not only has enlarged its scope but also threatened to take over our lives" (Taylor, 2003: 5). While instrumental rationality has its course, we tend to value things, people, and to a large extent relationships only in terms of their efficiency or "cost-benefit" analysis. The major crisis of instrumental reason is that it devalues human beings. Other human

beings are looked at as mere means for our limitless satisfactions. Taylor holds that even the services that we render to other humans also turn out to be a result of our extreme engineering skills, he argues it with the examples of nurses, who actually are meant to give humanly sensitive caring, but turn out to be specialists with “high-tech knowledge” (Taylor, 2003: 6). It is in this sense of extreme desperation that Marx argued in *Communist Manifesto*, “All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind” (Marx and Engels, 2008: 38).

The third malaise is ‘loss of freedom. This is the most important and the culmination of the first two. Today, an individual’s life is greatly affected by social, political, and economic factors. Taylor, along with Heidegger, argues for the loss of freedom, primarily focusing on the modern scenario of relentless production and objectification. Modernity, with its mechanized machinery, is manifested by relentless production and objectification. Why is this scenario a loss of freedom? Firstly, human life and all other life forms are sucked up into the ceaseless productive machination of technology in terms of ‘commercial breeding and exploitation’ while at the same time, life itself is being threatened by a human product/discovery – the atomic energy. This is the most gigantic case of takeover of free humanity (that is, the ‘mastery of technological representation’) because “people today in all seriousness find, in the results and the standpoint of atomic physics, possibilities of showing human freedom and setting up a new theory of value” (Heidegger, 2002: 217). Secondly, for Heidegger, the mastery of technology has matured over the centuries so much that it has been “far removed from the precinct of individuals’ personal views and opinions” (Heidegger, 2002: 217). The technological civilization is so entrenched that every manner of thinking and being is imagined in relation to and in obeisance to it. Human life is itself technicized. Hence, every solution, even solutions to technological enframing, is itself technical.

This loss of freedom that we experience today with the technological manifestation is also nihilistic because certain fundamentally meaningful stuff in the existential radar of the human person is taken off by technological existence; they continuously fail in the

calculative measure of technology and gradually disappear from view, plunging human existence into uncanny angst, a deep sense of homelessness and the eerie inability to find meaning in existence. Heidegger says that the desire for an authoritative directive for human behavior or ethics arises for modern humans “as the obvious no less than the hidden perplexity of human beings soars to immeasurable heights.” This perplexity arises because “technological human beings, delivered over to mass society, can attain reliable constancy only by gathering and ordering all their plans and activities in a way that corresponds to technology” (Heidegger, 1998: 268). Alienation, homelessness, and nihilism, for Heidegger, arise out of the self-assertive productionism of the modern subject, the ‘representing-producing humanity’, swayed most primordially in the modern essence of the human being by the technological understanding of Being. Once everything is reduced to technocratic calculation and measurement, it has come to be impossible for the modern subject to withhold certain privileged aspects of human life – say, religion, ethics, and art – from such calculation and quantification. In fact, under the scanner of efficiency and the logic of order, these are the aspects of human existence that have so far been the bedrock of the deepest significance, that would most easily fall prey to disparagement, vulgarization, and ultimately rejection. These are some of the ways where Taylor and Heidegger point out the loss of freedom for letting beings be and ultimately plunging into nihilism.

### **The Politics of the Communitarian Self**

Taylor’s critique of modern self-identity begins with his view of the community and society from a communitarian perspective. It is here that Taylor highlights how our own very identity is largely formed by the other. His critique of modern atomism and negative freedom covers his basic notions of modern-self-predicament. Communitarianism generally focuses on the bonds between communities and their importance, creation, maintenance, and reproduction. It also highlights the importance of other persons in our life, as Taylor argues: “We all need a long period of development and tutelage by others in order to become fully adult persons” (Taylor, 1999: 257).

Taylor's immediate attack on atomism starts from his insistence that the self is always socially situated and points beyond itself to its social relationships (Abbey, 2000: 103). According to Taylor, modern atomism began in the seventeenth century with the rise of social contract theories, mostly championed by Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. For Taylor, what characterized this tradition was its overemphasis on individualism. Indeed, it was individualism and selfishness that ultimately led to the creation of social contract (Taylor, 1990: 187-8). Taylor's communitarian view of the self is radically different from the atomistic one, as Taylor argues:

...a social view of man is one which holds that an essential constitutive condition of seeking the human good is bound up with being in society. Thus if I argue that man cannot even be a moral subject, and thus a candidate for the realization of the human good, outside of a community of language and mutual discourse about the good and bad, just and unjust, I am rejecting all atomist views; since what man derives from society is not some aid in realizing his good, but the very possibility of being an agent seeking that good (Taylor, 1990: 292).

This clearly puts Taylor in a stand where he forcefully agrees that the authentic meaning of personhood can be achieved only within a wider cultural background. Here, the primacy of the community comes prior to the primacy of the individual. In order to achieve a fuller, wider meaning of personhood, the other is an unavoidable predicament. The self that is socially constructed is always in a mode of engagement. Most prominently, in a society, the person acquires their ontological identity from being engaged in a society and community with others. Based on this, Taylor argues that: "...man is not just that men cannot physically survive alone, but much more than that they only develop their characteristically human capacities in society. The claim is that living in society is a necessary condition of the development of rationality, in some sense of this property, or of becoming a moral agent in the full sense of the term, or of becoming a fully responsible, autonomous being" (Taylor, 1990: 190-191). This argument further testifies that being disengaged from society, the development of the individual would be narrowed down, and holistic growth would be untenable.

Taylor's contention in highlighting the primacy of the community is not to jeopardize the autonomy of the individual but rather to show the social forces that help construct the identity of the individual. Community living is essential to form the identity of the individual. Taylor views that certain 'good' and conceptions of the individual, for that matter, the identity of the self, are available to the individual only within a culture in which she belongs. It is only in the society in which she belongs that she has a place in placing her political norms, values, and practices (Taylor, 1990: 209).

The crux of Taylor's communitarian self-identity is that "one is a self only among other selves" (Taylor, 1989: 35). This crucially puts the self within a closely-knit society in creating her identity. This is what Taylor calls a "self among interlocutors" (Taylor, 1989: 29). Taylor continues to argue that "...our identities, as defined by whatever gives us our fundamental orientation, are in fact complex and many-tiered" (Taylor, 1989: 28-9). The sources of our identity are often many-sided, and most importantly, there are significant *others* in the process. A person always lives within a society of interlocutors. Living within a web of interlocutors places us fundamentally in a dialogical character. Taylor argues: "We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression" (Taylor, 1995b: 230). Our dialogical nature continues throughout our life, and they continue to nurture our life. "We define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us. Even after we outgrow some of these others - our parents, for instance - and they disappear from our lives, the conversation with them continues within us as long as we live" (Taylor, 1995b: 230).

Thinking about a person's identity, within a world of *significant others* proves that there are others who matter to us in our life. Taylor argues that: "interlocutors who are essential to me achieving my self-definition and who are now critical to my continuing grasp of language of self-understanding, and my relationship to both can overlap" (Taylor, 1989: 36). The engaged communitarian self naturally falls in a "moral space", which highlights that the cluster of self-identity is fundamentally moral: "To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about

what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary” (Taylor, 1989: 28). It justifies that our identity is understood within a horizon, in which we understand ourselves and how things matter for us. Without a moral framework or a moral horizon, a self will suffer disorientation and identity crisis.

## **Conclusion**

Taylor has indeed closely diagnosed the modern self with its various ways of being. Taylor’s greatness lies in the fact that he pinpoints clearly those issues that bother us in our everyday life. His intention is not proposing a radical change, rather he tries to retrieve a number of neglected values, “an attempt to uncover buried goods through re-articulation – and thereby to make these sources again empower, to bring the air back again into the half-collapsed lungs of the spirit” (Taylor, 1989: 520). The neglect that is rampant today is a form of enframing which is resulted from the onslaught of modernity.

Taylor contends that the modern self is a result of the Enlightenment and romantic movements of the past centuries. Enlightenment has caused the self to be individualistic and atomistic, while romanticism made it turn inward to explore its inborn nature and capabilities. However, today, there is a greater need to turn back towards oneself, because, as Taylor suggests, the moral sources lie there. Taylor is not hopeless about our present condition caused by decadent modernity. His emphasis on affirmative everyday life and being in a community or society with significant others strongly suggests that we still are able to recover those lost values and find meaning and authenticity in our existence. He recalls the ‘epiphanic’ powers of art and literature, which should help us get out of our disengaged-enframed selves towards a more meaningful existence.

## **End Notes**

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1 Taylor distinguishes two theories of modernity: cultural and acultural. Cultural theories, according to Taylor, refer to a broad set of beliefs and understanding about personhood, nature, society

morality, or the good. On the other hand, an acultural understanding of modernity does not focus on cultural change. In this type of modernity, no importance is given to the understanding of selfhood, nature, or the good because it believes that modernization is primarily about institutions, structures, and processes. Thus, it projects such a view that all societies, some day or other, will undergo the process of modernization.

2 For Heidegger's notion of temporality, see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, the whole of Division II, and for a synoptic treatment of temporality as such, Section 65, pp. 370-380. On p. 374, Heidegger defines temporality as "The character of 'having been' arises from the future, and in such a way that the future which 'has been' (or better, which 'is in the process of having been') releases from itself the Present. This phenomenon has the unity of a future which makes present in the process of having been; we designate it as 'temporality'."

3 Heidegger uses *ecstases* to refer to the three dimensions of time, viz., future, past, and present. Heidegger argues thus in *Being and Time*: "The future, the character of having been, and the Present, show the phenomenal characteristics of the 'towards-oneself', the 'back-to', and the 'letting-oneself-be-encountered-by' ... We, therefore, call the phenomena of the future, the character of having been, and the Present, the 'ecstases' of temporality. Temporality is not, prior to this, an entity which first emerges from *itself*; its essence is a process of temporalizing in the unity of the ecstasies" (Heidegger, 1973: 377).

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