



Charles Taylor Narrative on Authentic Self Amidst Malaise of Modernity-A Book Review

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Abstract

This book review is of: Taylor, Charles. *The Ethics of Authenticity*. London, England: Harvard University Press, 2003. Charles Taylor's *The Ethics of Authenticity*, is an excellent work till date that has analyzed the malaises of our modern world. His description is systematic and quite easy to follow. It rings with truth and he ensured that this bitter-truth would not sway us completely off the track of modernization. The book is of philosophical genre that can be read by philosophers, religious scholars; and teachers and students who harbor the interest in aforementioned subjects. This academic review includes a detailed chapter-wise summary of ten chapters, analysis, critique and recommendation of the book.

Keywords: Malaise of Modernity, Authenticity, self-potential, iron cage, subjectivism, fragmentation

Introducing Charles Taylor

Charles Taylor, born on 1931, is a living Canadian philosopher (age 93) as well as a political theorist. He is renowned for his critical study on modern self. His academic career is merged with his political participation in Canadian New Democratic Party (NDP). His splendid works has been appreciated and translated into numerous languages.

He studied at McGill University, Montreal where he completed his bachelor degree in history (1955). He completed his MA and PhD in philosophy from University of Oxford in 1961. He became a professor of social and political theory in Oxford during 1976. In 1982 he went back to McGill University where he taught as a professor in department of political science.

His major works that drew attention of readers are *Hegel* (1975) and *Sources of Self* (1989). Taylor emphasized that apart from self-fulfillment an individual also possess social nature to his



society, he have certain responsibilities that cannot be out casted in the name of modernity and freedom. Taylor was aware that semantics, specifically meanings, are vital for knowing how perspectives change over time, culture and religion. Nonetheless, he contends that morality is not ephemeral or transient but rather absolute. His views have a slight bent towards religion and designated that modern youth is bereft of moral values. His modern self oscillates between extremes posed by boosters and knockers. This notion was more pronounced in his work *A Secular Age* (2007).

Taylor also contributed minor works in diverse areas such as freedom, anthropology, and philosophy of mind, epistemology, morality and comprehending cross cultures.¹ His various works has been collected in second volume of *Philosophical Papers* (1985). He received the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Gold Medal in 2003 and 1.7 million\$ Templeton Prize for his research on Spiritual realities.

His book *The Ethics of Authenticity* was originally titled as *The Malaise of Modernity* (1991).² Taylor's work *Reconciling the Solitudes: Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism* (1993) was his ardent endeavor to defend Canadian federalism.³ The title itself is enough to intrigue readers with philosophical and religious minds.

2. Chapter Wise Discussion

2.1. Chapter I: Three Malaises

The opening of the book is a reflection upon Taylor's entire book. In this chapter, he begins by identifying three major malaises of the modernized world which he perceives to be the decline of humanity and morality. Individualism, priority of instrumental reason and despotism are these malaises that are to be treated in order to uproot minor causes of demoralizing notions as well.

A sneak peek at history will entails that this decline started in either 1950's after World War II or during 17th century. Taylor is extremely aware of the fact that these issues are not newly sermonized; indeed, this thorough acquaintance has made people's mind accustomed to it that now the debate seems utterly futile. The reason behind this is our own lack of understanding.

Individualism is conceived among many as a healthy achievement of modernity.⁴ Men have chosen to live freely at the expense of older moral horizons. However, the sense of loss of meaning and purpose from an individual's life are worst consequences of the 'disenchantment' of the world. The self-centered view not only devalues ones culture and society but also religious norms as well. The wave continues to encompass liberalism⁵ to an extent where non-permissive acts became acceptable (such as homosexuality, fetishism and BDSM⁶).

¹See Ruth Abbev, "Charles Taylor," October 16, 2013. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/939950/Charles-Taylor> (accessed April 24, 2014).

²This is based on his Massey Lecture.

³Karen Grandy, and Thomas Mathien, "Charles Taylor," *The Candian encyclopedia*, June 24, 2007, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/en/article/charles-taylor/> (accessed April 29, 2014).

⁴Zubin Meer, *Individualism: The Cultural Logic of Modernity* (Lexington Books, 2011).

⁵Taylor utilized traits of liberalism as fruits of 'permissive Society,' 'me generation,' and 'narcissism.'

⁶BDSM is an overlapping abbreviation of Bondage and Discipline (BD), Dominance and Submission (DS), Sadism and Masochism (SM).



Another cause associated to ‘disenchantment’ of the world⁷ is dominance of instrumental reason as it invokes a deep sense of materialism in human mind that unequal distribution of wealth and environment crisis are completely ignored. Moreover, the growth of technology is an ever-increasing threat to spiritual and meta-physical aspects. Familial and social bondages became alien in these impersonal mechanisms which Weber (1864-1920) expresses as ‘the iron cage’⁸. In order to rectify it, Taylor suggested that change ought to be brought on both individual and institutional level.

At political level, the adverse effects of individualism and instrumental reasoning make people shallow to actively participate in governmental affairs. It leads to ‘soft despotism’ which was conceived by Alex de Tocqueville (1805- 1859) as opposed to ‘hard despotism’.⁹ In this form of despotism, people behold an illusion of controlling government while in reality they harbor less influence on it. They create fear, uncertainty, doubt and hopelessness in self-absorbed individuals. What humanity requires is a ‘political liberty’ otherwise our dignity as citizens is endangered. Taylor interpreted that: ““The impersonal mechanism mentioned above may reduce our degrees of freedom as a society, but the loss of political liberty would mean that even the choices left would no longer be made by ourselves as citizens, but by irresponsible tutelary power.”¹⁰

Tocqueville suggests that participation ought to be valued in government and voluntary associations. However, Taylor’s strategy is to seek a mid-way solution between boosters and knockers of modernity and to explore how humans can “...steer the developments towards their greatest promise and avoid the slide into debased forms.”¹¹

The rectification of these malaises is the gist of his book as he contributed later chapters to this debate. However, individualism being the chief cause was focused more than the other two.

2.2. Chapter II: The Inarticulate Debate

Taylor chose supportive intellectuals who are critical of modern youth and their outlook upon life. The acceptance of glib relativism was criticized by Alan Bloom, Daniel Bell, Christopher Lasch and Gilles Lipovetsky; although each providing remedy of their own accord.¹² Bloom’s worry was enhanced because it was not merely an epistemological position but also a moral position as well. It resided in the principle of mutual respect and toleration. Thus, relativism too is a by-product of individualism and of self-fulfillment. Taylor is against relativism; he initiates his criticism by seeking what is the moral ideal of self-fulfillment? Hedonism, narcissism, soft-relativism and egoism are the offshoots of the illustration of self-fulfillment as ‘being true to oneself’.¹³ Thus, at a certain level self-fulfillment becomes fallacious and self-contradictory

⁷Donato Loia, “Lights of Disenchantment: A Study of Max Weber’s Thesis on the ‘Disenchantment of the World’ from the Perspective of Visual Studies,” *Visual Studies* 34 (2) (2019): 182–200. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586x.2019.1653224>.

⁸The original term was in German, ‘Stahlhartes Gehäuse’ that was translated as ‘iron Cage.’ Weber depicts through this term that the rapid rationalization embedded in social structure has trapped human beings in an iron cage where everything is based and control on teleological efficiencies.

⁹Paul Anthony Rahe, *Soft Despotism, Democracy’s Drift: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Tocqueville, and the Modern Prospect* (Yale University Press, 2009).

¹⁰Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (London, England: Harvard University Press, 2003), 10.

¹¹Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 12.

¹²Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 13-14.

¹³This was defined by Lionel Trilling.



because the ideal of authenticity loses its moral force. “The ideal sinks to the level of axiom, something one doesn’t challenge but also never expounds.”¹⁴

Once people agree upon this ideal, people of authentic culture starts promoting liberalism of neutrality,¹⁵ moral subjectivism and explain everything in terms of social science. There expounders silenced any debate upon good life. The more one endeavors towards positivity of neutrality and unbiased usage of reason the more inclined he became towards ‘soft relativism.’¹⁶ The prevailing silence among industrialized, urbanized and bureaucratized against these lax morals is due to these factors. The worst part is not just that they coerce human beings off the moral track rather that they explained everything, including freedom and individuality, in a non-moral way.

Finally, he closed the chapter by making his position distinct from boosters, knockers and intermediary approaches on culture of authenticity. “So what we need is neither root-and-branch condemnation nor uncritical praise; and not a carefully balanced trade-off.”¹⁷ Taylor emphasized that the foundation of authenticity should be on moral ideals instead of non-moral ideals. To go along with him, a reader ought to agree upon a controversial-trio: i) authenticity is a valid ideal. It will be regarded as a major criticism of culture of authenticity; ii) one can articulate rational arguments about ideals and their conformity of practices to those ideals. This will enable him to reject subjectivism; iii) these arguments can make a difference. This will entail that humans are not trapped in modern culture or system.

2.3. Chapter III: The Sources of Authenticity

Taylor proceeded with the first ideal of the controversial-trio. The ethics of authenticity was born in late 18th century. It is an offspring of Romantic period pioneered by Descartes’ individualism (each person is responsible to think freely) and Locke’s political individualism (an individual’s will is prior to social obligation). Despite this, they were critical of disengaged rationality and atomism that are immune to the community ties.

This view gain popularity as it was initially proposed against consequentialism. It added appeal to the notion of authenticity that morality is subjective and we need to develop it by listening to our inner voice. Furthermore, it provokes the significance of authenticity that in order to be a real being one ought to follow his or her own hearts (freewill). This is contrary to the traditional view where we need to establish a relation with God or the idea of Good to be our true self. Taylor admitted that at its initial state this inwardness was not an isolation from God but rather a way to form a communion with God (St. Augustine (354-430), was one of its exponent). These theistic or pantheistic views were frequently depicted by J.J. Rousseau (1712-1778) in ‘self-determining freedom’¹⁸ and in Herder’s notion (1744-1803) that everybody possesses an idea within himself to be a true being. This self-reflection which is either away from God or towards God is so complex that they are not easily comprehended. This became another source of deviant forms of authenticity. This idea was thoroughly influential in politics; and modern totalitarianism

¹⁴Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 17.

¹⁵The expounders of this view are Dworkin and Kymlicka.

¹⁶This criticism on liberalism is also shared by MacIntyre.

¹⁷Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 23.

¹⁸This expression was chosen by Taylor by which he inferred that Rousseau’s notion of freedom is a demand to break free from external ties completely.



was one of its descendants. Kant extended his notion of reason and freedom to morality yet his axial point remained to be political.

This is the strongest moral ideal until now which beholds that seeking our own originality is a key to listen our inner voice. Moreover, it renders that there is no moral ideal that could exist or discovered outside oneself. Therefore, the purpose of modern ideal of authenticity is self-realization even if this freedom of choice is at the expense of another person or the entire society.

2.4. Chapter IV: Inescapable Horizons

Taylor endeavors to seek moral principles based on absolute foundations rather than individual choice. In search of those principles, he proposed two questions:

1. What are the conditions of human life that are essential to realize the ideal of authenticity?
2. What does this ideal of authenticity call for?

According to Taylor a dialogical character is essential feature of human nature; yet many people still believe that it is rather a monological ideal that is basic to human life. He tends to prove that although humans relish in reflecting upon themselves in isolation but they possess innate ability to share good things in life with their love ones. This might conceive as barrier to one's freedom for the people of authentic culture. Taylor proceeded further to explain how demands of authenticity annihilate the conditions for self-realization and make their claims self-defeating. This is because when a person endeavors to realize him, he needs to define himself or at least allocates the significant feature that makes him or her unique individual. These features are always subjective which underlies soft relativism and promotes an additional idea of self-determining freedom. In order to mark the significant feature, we need a horizon in which we either suppress or deny things in our personality to make us an authentic being. "Self-choice as an ideal makes sense only because some issues are more significant than others...which issues are significant, I do not determine. If I did, no issue would be significant. But the very idea of self-choosing as a moral ideal would be impossible."¹⁹

At times, self-choice affirms differences, diversity and multiculturalism in culture of authenticity. This often negates that there could be a pre-existing horizon of significance, i.e., that not all options are worthwhile. For e.g., in case of freedom to take sex partner (homosexual or heterosexual) _the belief that all options are equally worthy is fallacious. Moreover, these choices are more out of one's preferences rather than utilizing reason as people of authentic culture claimed earlier. Thus, differences became insignificant in this regard.

This embarks a vital point that there are various significant factors beyond individual's choice. The ideal of authenticity need moral horizons as its backbone in order to signify itself. Bloom agrees in this regard that the self-centered approaches are hollow in their foundations. Concluding this chapter Taylor pronounced that he has proved that reason is not powerless!

2.5. Chapter V: The Need for Recognition

Another doomed feature of authentic culture is that they emphasize on monological character of self-realization. This rendered all ties to community as instrumental, whereas self-realization is valued intrinsically. Again authenticity plays a role of self-centered narcissism where relations are

¹⁹Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 39.



considered secondary. Before articulating a rational argument in this regard Taylor clarifies the two different senses of individualism that are being used today. In first sense, individualism is detached with any moral or social standards; but in the second sense, individualism is utilized as a moral principle. It is in the second sense that requires a vision on how an individual ought to live. The individualist thinkers provided insightful models in this regard, for instance, Locke's model of society based on mutual agreement to gain certain benefits; Cartesian model that provokes every individual to reason for himself; and Romantic individualism which holds self-realization prior to relationships.

Taylor target was most essentially Romantic individualism as this sort of culture emphasizes a great deal on individual's right to be themselves and on their love relationships because these are considered essential for knowing and revealing one's own identity. Nevertheless, he is against the view of giving priority to self over human relations.²⁰ He depicts further that even self-exploration needs recognition of others.²¹ This theme has been intensified by ideal of authenticity and modern version of dignity,²² which also happen to be compatible with democracy. Gradually equal recognition became the foremost part of democratic society. Taylor magnificently illustrates that how 'identity' and 'recognition' were age old concepts; the only difference is that in those times it was never problematic as it is now.

Nowadays recognition and identity run parallel. It is often conceived that a sense of inwardness cannot be developed without recognition. Romantic individualism regards love relationship in high esteems as they enable a being to be recognized by his lover. Taylor rightly inquires that whether using relationships for instrumental gain should be permitted or prohibited in an authentic culture? The answer is in affirmation at a social level but Taylor criticized that "mere differences cannot itself be the ground of equal value."²³ He suggested instead that there are some common properties or standards of value that are of worth among the identities which make them equal.²⁴ Therefore, "some substantive agreement on value is required or else the principle of equality will be empty and a sham."²⁵

Nonetheless, the answer comes forth in denial in case of love relationships for one cannot use others for mere self-gratification. He remarkably discussed such persons in his book that if an authentic being endeavors to define his identity at the expense of merely using others (for instance in temporary relationships) he is in fact enjoying himself rather than exploring his being.

2.6. Chapter VI: The Slide to Subjectivism

Taylor favors modernism and proposed that prevailing authentic culture is ignoble. He contrasted his views with narcissism and egoism that has resided in ideal of authenticity. He further challenges that once we comprehended pros and cons of this culture, it would become evident that various practices are deviated from the very ideal it harbors. Social change has been the partial cause of this deviancy which seems unavoidable in twenty first century. This slides

²⁰Taylor used Durkheim's term *anomie* for debased form of individualism.

²¹Topic of 'recognition has been covered both by Rousseau and Hegel.

²²Taylor contrasted it with pre-modern notion of honor.

²³Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 51.

²⁴This is also Taylor's argument against procedural justice: it follows that certain substantive values are required for differences itself.

²⁵Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 52.



towards social atomism where everything seems instrumental apart from self-fulfillment.²⁶ Urbanization, free-market, bureaucratization and industrialization have nourished this cancerous cell in its womb and wreaking havoc in the minds of people who desire to reach the heights of self-exploration. Another cause is the emphasis of modern society on instrumental reason which is procreating a parasite of anthropocentrism.

An internal reason for this deviation is movement of ‘high culture’ towards Nietzsche’s and postmodernist nihilism.²⁷ This confronts us with the expressivist mode of individualism that interconnects self-discovery and artistic creation. Just like Kant explicated the intrinsic quality of beauty, likewise, authenticity is conceived to be intrinsic. On the other hand, self-definition is contrasted with morality (although Rousseau inter-linked these two) because having worth in itself and being original (in terms of creativity), it is in continuous battle with conventions. Since morality suppresses vile aspect of human nature and crushes our strong desires, it is considered as a convention that ought to be escaped.

Taylor intricates numerous branches of authenticity but he concludes at the end of this chapter that not all offshoots of authenticity are legitimate. The unauthorized form of authenticity could be traced down in Derrida, Foucault and their followers who focused on one set of demands while neglecting the other.

Table 1. Criticism on Modern Doctrines by Taylor

SET A	SET B
i. Involves creativity and discovery	i. Openness to horizons of significance
ii. Uniqueness	ii. Self-definition in dialogue
iii. against norms of society and morality	

Taylor vehemently criticizes modern doctrines because they emphasize on (A i.) while neglecting (B i.); and grasp the amorality in (A iii.) while abandoning community ties (B ii.).²⁸

The leading Set A starts pursuing another direction where creativity cascade a sense of freedom and power together. He re-discusses the rapport of authenticity and self-determining freedom at the end of this chapter. Taylor severely opposed this notion of self-determining freedom which breeds anthropocentrism.

2.7. Chapter VII: *La Lotta Continua*

Taylor titled this chapter as *La Lotta Continua*,²⁹ which is an Italian slogan that entails ‘the struggle continues.’ He put forth his own view that the ongoing debates, both for and against, on authenticity are futile and mistaken. The notion of authenticity is valuable if we properly understood its essence and that authenticity is much more than mere self-gratification. A true self would neither take relationships as secondary and instrumental nor would it ignore moral

²⁶To attain self-fulfillment modern culture neglected history, tradition, society, nature and culture. (radical anthropocentrism)

²⁷This line of thinking could be traced in works of Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), Derrida (1930-2004) and Michel Foucault (1926-1984)

²⁸Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 67.

²⁹*Lotta continua* were an Italian organization which was founded in 1968. (See *la lotta continua*. January 14, 2006. http://www.proz.com/kudoz/English/poetry_literature/1230695-la_lotta_continua.html (accessed May 8, 2014).



demands. Hence, if thinkers want to struggle, they must do so over defining it. His position depends upon following claims:

1. Authenticity is an ideal that ought to be valued,
2. we can be rational about what authenticity requires; and
3. A keen reflection and logical argumentation can make a difference in practicing it.

In illustrating how authenticity is a worthy ideal, Taylor acclaimed that everybody is pulled towards this ideal whether he is a booster or a knocker. Those who regard self-realization or any spiritual endeavor as non-sense tends to explain everything in a scientific mode of thought. Yet it is hard to negate the fact that each one of us is often confronted with alternatives and choices and an urge to develop self in one way or the other. So, we cannot vehemently oppose it and rendered authenticity as speck of dust as some cultural pessimists think.

Moreover, if one tried to knock it down completely, he is in for a shock because this situation will continue and would be worsened in future. Therefore, rather than terminating it our concern is to eradicate narcissistic elements that has been induce in it. This can be only possible if we allocate the real essence of the ideal of authenticity. Taylor forbade us that this fight would continue if we do not change our direction of struggle.

2.8. Chapter VIII: Subtler Languages

One of chief movements of modern culture is “subjectivation” (i.e., things host on some particular subject). It has two aspects: manner and matter (or content of action). These are often confused to the extent that it creates an illusionary thought that if self-referentiality of manner is unavoidable, it is inescapable in matter as well. A similar scenario happened when art shifted from mimesis to creativity.³⁰

The confusion between these two kinds of subjectivation can lead to certain moral consequences.

- A. The subjectivist exponents would embrace that there is nothing beyond self to be explore.
- B. The critics would profusely attack it and in doing so confine us from positive potentialities of self.

Thus, both A and B are at war which seems to last for eternity. Our real essence of self is being suppressed between optimistic and pessimistic debates. Taylor suggested before closing this chapter that the real essence of self is to understand self-realization in holistic perspective. Unconditional relationships are irrevocable and this is what our creative artists and poets has been trying to do in past. The sole difference is that this holistic form of self-exploration requires more things than that has been articulated by its proponents.

2.9. Chapter IX: An Iron Cage

Taylor treated the malaise of instrumental reason the similar way he treated problem of individualism in previous chapters. Those who visualize modern technology as a cause of decline are rightists', whereas who favors it are leftists. However, both extremist views are not only mistaken but they also hold fluctuating stances that leads to contradictions. He describes in detail

³⁰Taylor discussed in detail this artistic shift from Rilke to Wordsworth.



how rightists attack abortion and pornography but economically supports a capitalist approach; and leftists' advocates preserving nature and yet favors abortion.³¹

Nevertheless, these polarized wings overlooked those moral sources which were to be acknowledged to escape atomism and instrumental reason while preserving the soul of authenticity. Taylor suggests that a work of retrieval is required to attain those moral sources that have been lost to mankind in their conflicts. This recovery would be impossible if we do not understand that the place, we have given to instrumental reason is unavoidable in modern culture. Probably because when we remake economy by market force, people are bound to be efficient in order to survive. Such mechanisms are forced to surrender to the upcoming demands of the rationality, even if it is in conflict with our moral considerations. This is the apex where humans banished themselves to the inner exile_ an iron cage where nothing exists apart from this efficient mechanism.³² Taylor undertakes this as a greatest challenge to his argument.

To an extent the picture represented by Weber is right. We are indeed attracted towards atomistic world-view but this is not a hard-core fact that cannot be changed. "Human beings and their societies are much more complex than any simple theory can account for."³³ Taylor, therefore, refuses to sustain the notion of iron cage for eternity. He upholds a notion that although our freedom is restricted, it is still not absolute that we cannot resist this iron cage. Rediscovering our moral sources is the best possible solution to alter our current situation. In order to retrieve these sources, one must allocate those factors from which instrumental reason originates: a) Disengaged rationality, domination and freedom; b) acceptance of ordinary life which emphasis on work and family. Following these principles even practical and universal benevolence gives away place to instrumental reason. "But it is also true that this battle of ideas is inextricably bound up, part source and part result, with political struggles about the modes of social organization."³⁴

Thus, according to Taylor the best remedy to bring forth original moral resources is to dust off all these factors and restore traditional morals.

2.10. Chapter X: Against Fragmentation

Taylor response to the third malaise of 'soft despotism' that he has been mentioned in the opening section of the book. After the demise of Communism free-market and efficiency in industrial society became inevitable. Here Taylor refuses to choose one of the two extremes, "We can't abolish the market, but nor can we organize ourselves exclusively through markets. To restrict them may be costly; not to restrict them at all would be fatal."³⁵

He did not propose any definite solution to eradicate this problem. He starts with Tocqueville problem of modern society that they are somehow being governed by a tutelary power; and ends at one of his own fear of fragmentation (i.e., people are leading meaningless and purposeless life and see themselves atomistically). This fragmentation is not solely produced by individualism and temporary relationships but also via lack of democratic solutions in this regard. He draws attention of political institutes to eradicate these malaises.

³¹Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 95.

³²This has been explained by analysts of modernity, Marx (1818-1883) and Weber (1864-1920).

³³Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 99.

³⁴Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 107.

³⁵Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 111.



People's mistaken notions to defend their right made him ponder that the subject becomes rather difficult where this sort of politics is involved. Therefore, the resulting fragmentation could be resisted only if political attempts are made to accomplish it. "The effective re-enframing of technology requires common political action to reverse the drift that bureaucratic state engenders towards greater atomism and instrumentalism. And this common action requires that we overcome fragmentation and powerlessness."³⁶

He forbade that this task is difficult because we cannot prescribe an absolute solution for it, so, modern society is at multi-level war which is intellectual, spiritual as well as political. At best we could only look with great care and analyze what is modernity grandeur and what are its miseries.

3. Analysis and Commentary

Charles Taylor presented his work schematically. Although there is much to be appreciated in his work, but there are numerous problems that ought to be addressed. Along with my personal analysis, I would also offer views of different philosophers for and against his work.

Taylor offered no new position as numerous spiritual authors such as Oshu, Neale Donald Walsch etc. has already held similar approaches. In addition, he depicted three malaises and accounted them in detail, but when it comes to rectify them, his arguments become either contradictory or at times purely illogical. Legenhausen proclaimed it in similar vein that "This approach seems unrealistic, not because of Weber's iron cage, but because Taylor offers no more general moral framework, ideology, religious outlook or vision that could keep the true ideals on course and prevent the slide he condemns from recurring."³⁷

During last section Taylor introduced role of political agents to rectify certain problems. True that political institution plays a vital role to ingrain good morals among the society. But we cannot expect that from modern institutions for their interest is not to foster peace and moral infrastructure rather their goal is to gain maximum output at the expense of public. The strategy of war has been changed as well; people are being manipulated both through races and religion. The dichotomies are self-generated for personal gains of the ruling class. We are indeed helpless that we cannot rebel against it. This is where 'soft despotism' enters. But Taylor is wrong to assert that those political institutions would help eradicating it that is responsible for creating it.

Even if we suppose that these so-called institutions would help the question would arise that which theory of human rights is acceptable for Taylor? There is not only a fluctuation in market force but also a competition within bureaucratic institution; in these situations, the imbalance of rights ought to be redeemed.³⁸ However, Taylor is right in asserting that we cannot simply wash off these problems from the oceans and thinking it is akin to building castles in the air. We can only endeavor to slow down the factors that are swinging this balance.

Taylor offered solutions at superficial level only, he has ignored the major aspect that could made a real difference in terminating those problems right in the womb of industrial society. This aspect is introducing spiritual or religious studies in educational institutions. It will enable children to bring themselves out of their miseries as well as teach them how to live life. The point is that

³⁶Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 120.

³⁷Hajj Muhammad Legenhausen, "Review" *The Ethics of Authenticity*" (Harvard University Press, 1995), 25.

³⁸See Muhammad Legenhausen, "Review" *The Ethics of Authenticity*," 27.



we cannot alter the past deeds to eradicate or minimize these malaises but we can create a better future through our upcoming generation. Marshall Poe held a similar position where he explained that introducing a spiritual path or religion doesn't mean that we have to ingrain a certain belief system of that particular religion rather it is to give off knowledge on how to lead a spiritual life (life of an authentic being in a real sense).³⁹

It seems to me that not only the solutions he proposed are superficial rather the problems he has identified are over-exaggerated. The first malaise identified in Taylor's book was 'individualism' and the second malaise of 'instrumental reason' was deeply connected to it. My question is that whether reason is the true cause of malaise or its misinterpretation? I will illustrate my point here through Kant's (1724-1804) and Descartes (1596-1650).⁴⁰ In his essay *What is Enlightenment* Kant explained how public reason should be free but private use of reason should be restricted_ only then Enlightenment is possible.⁴¹ This means that somehow reason has been misinterpreted as people emphasized more on private use of reason as opposed to Kant's suggestion. Exhibitionism, moral laxity, lubricity, lewdness and vulgarization are all associated to modern-secular system and instrumental reason. They are further associated to efficient participation in order to meet the market forces by Taylor. There is a translucent difference which he misconceived that where economic demands exceed to vanity no reason could be justified there. For instance, reason values sanctity to life, yet people murder, sell drugs and fake medicines for money. So genuine reason takes its leave where money and power is involved.

It entails that we have perceived demands of reason and probably reason itself on a superficial level. The malaise is not of disenchantment or individualism rather it is of leading a life of artifice.

There were a myriad of problems which conspired to corrupt your reason and rob you of your common sense. Fear got the best of you, and in your panic you turned to the now high chancellor, Adam Sutler. He promised you order, he promised you peace, and all he demanded in return was your silent, obedient consent. Last night, I sought to end that silence. Last night, I destroyed the Old Bailey to remind this country of what it has forgotten. More than four hundred years ago, a great citizen wished to embed the fifth of November forever in our memory. His hope was to remind the world that fairness, justice, and freedom are more than words—they are perspectives.⁴²

It is my understanding that the Creator has integrated rationality and spirituality in appropriate proportion within us and now it is incumbent upon us to harmonize them to progress in domains of modernization as well as to fulfill our spiritual needs. If a person's thoughts are evil_ we cannot accuse reason for it. Rather it is that particular person that ought to be blamed. Thus, denouncing reason is fruitless and futile. It is to be understood that no spirituality leads a person to become ego-centric and to abandon morals; and no reason provokes a person to cease respect for relationships. The misguided and ill-conceived concept of reason and spirituality (individualism) is self-made for attaining power and money.

³⁹See Marshall Poe, "Colleges Should Teach Religion to Their Students," *The Atlantic* March 7, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/03/colleges-should-teach-religion-to-their-students/284296/> (accessed May 10, 2014).

⁴⁰Taylor's major attack was on ideologies and views that originate from Kant's, Descartes' and Nietzsche's (1844-1900) philosophies.

⁴¹See Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?" *Columbia.edu*. December 6, 1784 [2013]. <http://www.columbia.edu/acis/ets/CCREAD/etscc/kant.html> (accessed February 16, 2024).

⁴²Andy achowski, and Lana Wachowski, *V for Vendetta*. Directed by James McTeigue (2005).



Nevertheless, Taylor's work is much to be appreciated. I highly recommend this book, even though it lacks in workable solution it is still one of the excellent books to analyze the malaises of our modern world. His description is systematic and quite easy to follow. It rings with truth and he ensured that this bitter-truth would not sway us completely off the track of modernization. The writer proposes that a middle ground ought to be established so that we can gain benefits without falling into the pit of these malaises.

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