A Conception of Self-Formation

Grounded in the Work of Charles Taylor, Alasdair Macintyre, and David L. Norton

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Contents

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This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the candidate's dissertation advisor, Dr. Richard M. Shusterman, Dorothy F. Schmidt Eminent Scholar Chair in the Humanities and Professor of Philosophy and English, Florida Atlantic University, and has been approved by the members of his supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

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This dissertation addresses the following questions and concerns related to the formation of the moral self: (1) The relationship between certain moral choices and a person's sense of personal or moral identity: specifically, how is it that certain choices, actions, character traits, or goods come to be interpreted as either constituting, or as being inseparable from, one's conscience, one's moral identity, or one's moral self? (2) The relationship between the conception of the good with which one identifies and the conception of the good of one's community of origin: how does one develop a conception of the good, how does one understand one's relationship to that conception, and how does one conception relate to one's origins? (3) The fact that a person's moral identity and capacity for moral judgment must develop over time: if the capacity to make moral judgments develops over time, how are changes in one's conception of the good and of oneself to be reconciled with moral accountability or responsibility?

Drawing on Alasdair MacIntyre's conception of "practice" and his discussion of narrative, on Charles Taylor's conception of "articulation," and on David L. Norton's conceptions of "participatory enactment" and "emulation," I argue that self-formation is a practice, the primary activity of which consists in an interpretive analysis and articulation of one's self-understanding in the form of a narrative. That narrative is based in one's evolving and experientially based conception of the good and is critically informed by one's imaginative projection of oneself into the positions of others or of possible future selves and by one's emulation of moral exemplars. I suggest that, in Western societies, the primary good internal to the practice of self-formation is authenticity and that the virtue most conducive to the pursuit of authenticity is a specific form of integrity. Self-formation as a practice requires an on-going commitment to exercising integrity in the pursuit of authenticity.

Introduction

As human beings we begin our lives as small, wholly dependent bundles of vulnerability. We rely on others to recognize and interpret what our needs and wants are. As those others go about responding to us — one hopes by meeting our needs and fulfilling at least some of our wants — they teach us to associate names with people and words with actions. As they go about their activities, they tell us what they are doing; they express to us their interpretations of our needs, wants, and feelings: "You must be hungry. You seem angry. Oh, you haven't had your nap, and you're feeling cranky. That must be frustrating. I'm going to get you a clean diaper. *Etc."* From the moment we begin interacting with others, we are initiated into an intricate system of practices and an intricate framework for understanding, identifying, and differentiating the various subjects, objects, relationships, situations, feelings, *etc.* that comprise our lifeworld. We learn how to "make sense" of the world, how to identify our own wants, needs, feelings, and behaviors and those of others.

Because we are socialized in that way, our conceptions of ourselves are at least partially socially constructed. That is to say, our initial interpretations of who we are, of what it means to be a good person in a good society, and of who we may aspire to become: in short, our initial conceptions of ourselves and of the good — are shaped by, and, in fact, largely determined by, our communities of origin. Of course, we do not remain passive inheritors of interpretive frameworks; slowly, over time, we come to master language ourselves; we come to recognize that we may have been misidentified by others; we come to imagine different ways of being, different ways of life. We develop to a point at which we are capable of critically examining and altering the conceptions of the good that were initially provided to us by our community of origin. Moreover, we come to recognize our capacity not only to reform our conception of the good for ourselves as individuals, but to re-form our conception of the good for the society in which we have (or will) become participating members. We also come to recognize our capacity to form and re-form our conception of what the good consists in for human beings in general, for humanity as a whole, consists in. Those three conceptions of the good (for oneself, for one's community, and for humanity) are, of course, interrelated, and each of us develops each of those conceptions through actual and/or imagined hypothetical dialogues with actual others or with imagined representatives of other perspectives — sometimes those imagined perspectives may represent our imagined possible future selves.

Some people identify so strongly with their conceptions of the good that they believe that to renounce certain beliefs, to act in certain ways, would be to renounce, violate, or betray their very selves. They identify with a belief, or a set or system of beliefs, so thoroughly that they stake their very lives on it. How do people come to identify with a position, a stand, or a conception of the good so strongly that they will not renounce that commitment even in the face of mortal danger?

While the following essay does not directly address that specific question, it does address a number of questions related to it, namely, questions concerning the sources and natures of our conceptions of the good and the natures of our relationships to

those conceptions. In the process of examining those questions, I hope: (1) to explore the ways in which individuals' conceptions of the good — and, therewith, conceptions of their own moral identities — arise both *within* and *in opposition to* the dominant conceptions of the good in their communities of origin; (2) to explore the sources and means of incorporation and resistance that individuals use to form and articulate their identities, *i.e.,* to examine the practice of self-formation; (3) to present a number of reasons that conceptions of the good are necessarily pluralistic, *i.e.,* they do not necessarily lend themselves to reduction to, or unification in, a single "best" conception of the good; and (4) to argue for a systematic, respectful stance toward persons and toward the variety of conceptions of the good that is based in a robust understanding of moral agency.

For reasons that should become apparent as we proceed, this investigation will begin with an examination of developed moral agency, tracing it through its communal development back to the developmental story of the individual with which this introduction began. I begin this investigation by critically reviewing Charles Taylor's conception of moral agency, which is based in his understanding of the importance of "strong evaluation" and "articulation." Strong evaluation entails the identification of certain ways of life, states of character, or activities as inherently and necessarily more morally valuable than others. While, in our ordinary lives, we may not ever encounter a situation that would demand us to renounce our deepest commitments under threat of harm or death, Taylor would contend that full moral agents are capable of imagining being in such situations and feeling the temptation to abandon our beliefs in order to protect our lives or the lives of others.

On Taylor's view, full moral agency will sometimes entail strong evaluation. While full moral agency does not require that all of one's evaluations be "strong" (i.e., judged against something other than the strength of one's other wants or desires) , according to Taylor, it would be impossible to imagine a fully moral agent who did not feel that some behavior was contemptible, inhumane, unworthy of moral agents and that other behavior was morally praiseworthy, exceedingly humane, or perhaps even supererogatory. Without strong evaluation, without reference to some conception of what constitutes being a good person, Taylor suggests, we cannot adequately morally evaluate or assess accountability or responsibility for our own or anyone else's activities.

Taylor argues that to account for our behavior, to be able to respond to questions concerning why we engaged in some activity, to be able to interpret our own behavior, we will, at some point, have to make reference to our conception of the good, which serves as the standard for our strong evaluations. To be accepted as a reasonable account or response (to count as taking adequate responseability) to a challenge or an interrogation, that conception will have to be intelligible to others; it will have to make reference to the lifeworld we share with our fellow human beings, which Taylor captures in his metaphor of "moral space."

We make our conceptions of the good — and, thereby, our moral choices — intelligible both to ourselves and to others by *articulating* their place in the shared interpretive framework and narrative that we use to identify ourselves. According to Taylor, the very act of articulation, of making more explicit our (tripartite) conception of the good, can affect or alter that conception because that conception (and, thereby, the identity of the individual who is articulating that conception) is ineffable: in this sense, Taylor argues that human beings are "interpretation all the way down." We are never fully transparent to ourselves, and our attempt to make ourselves more transparent (or, alternatively, more visible or "substantial") either to ourselves or to others in an act of articulation simultaneously clarifies portions of our identities while obfuscating other portions. To pull at a string in the fabric of identity is to pull at the strings with which it is interwoven; and the fabric of the individual is interwoven with the fabric of his or her originating society. Our individual narratives are embedded in the narratives of our originating societies — *i.e.,* the collective narratives of our culture, community, or society's quest for the good. Taylor explicitly appeals to Alasdair MacIntyre's conception of a narrative quest — which I will relate to the metaphor of "moral time" — to explain the ways in which narrative makes conceptions of the good intelligible, so MacIntyre serves as the focus of my second chapter.

The second chapter focuses the ways in which one's society influences one's moral self-identity (or conception of the good). Taylor relies on MacIntyre to explicate the ways in which our ability to interpret human agency is embedded in the narrative structure of human deliberation. An individual's choices and identity are made intelligible not only by appeal to a systematic understanding of our shared physical environment that is embedded in our use of language, but also by appealing to the interpretation of the meaning of events that is embedded in one's narrative — which is necessarily related to (either by affirming or by denying) one's society's narrative. An act of articulation (in Taylor's sense) of one's identity and one's conception of the good is, therefore, always embedded in a narrative, a storied understanding of what one conceives to be the good and of how one came to affirm that particular conception as an appropriate guide to moral action.

As does Charles Taylor, MacIntyre also focuses his attention on social goods — goods that are made available to individuals through "practices." In the chapter on MacIntyre, I review his complex and nuanced understanding of a "practice" and will argue that self-formation is a practice. To engage fruitfully and well in that practice, one must exhibit certain virtues and one must learn how to properly exercise certain capabilities — two of which would be articulation and narrative integration. As Taylor and MacIntyre suggest, narration is a form of "reasoning in transitions," and I turn to David L. Norton to lay out a map of personal moral identificational development that highlights the types of transitions moral agents must reason their way through.

While I will not fully endorse Norton's rigidly structured stage-developmental theory of identity development, Norton does offer examples of the types of transitions that individuals must confront in their attempt to identify themselves with respect to their

societies as a whole and to their individual fellow social constituents. I will argue that regardless of whether the various types of transitions in personal development though which individuals must pass are confronted in exactly the way or at the exact periods in a person's life that Norton suggests, everyone will confront situations in which he has to affirm, deny, or clarify his relationship to dominant social conceptions of the good. Those confrontations will necessitate articulation, which is the central constitutive activity of self-formation.

In the final chapter, building on the work of the three philosophers on whom I have focused, I will argue that the various activities and elements of self-formation are best realized by an acceptance of moral pluralism. I show that each philosopher suggests one or more sources of or reasons to accept moral pluralism. Moral pluralism is implicit in Taylor's conception of the moral agent as "interpretation all the way down" and in the impossibility of fully articulating the nature of the moral sources. A limited pluralism is also suggested in MacIntyre's conception of a tradition as an extended argument over the proper way to conceive of the good for individuals, for communities, and for humanity as a whole. Finally, moral pluralism is inherent in David Norton's conception of each individual's possessing a unique *daimon,* even an understanding of the self as primarily socially constructed will suggest the appropriateness of moral pluralism.

Essentially, I am looking for ways to articulate a vision of moral agency that explains and justifies a belief in a form of moral pluralism that would resist collapse into either cultural relativism or value subjectivism. In other words, ultimately, I want to build support for the belief that there are a variety of ways for moral agents to conceive of, and to live, good lives. I hope that support for that thesis will shore up support for both moral toleration and, perhaps insofar as it is supportive of pluralism, political liberalism. I believe the views of the three philosophers on whom I focus can be synthesized and expanded in such as way as to support a robust and functional conception of a moral agent who would best thrive in a condition of moral pluralism. I suggest that there are three points at which one may be tempted to appeal to some form of moral pluralism as an appropriate stance with respect to moral practices: at the point at which individuals attempt to articulate and live out their conceptions of the good for themselves, which may conflict with the conceptions of the good that are dominant in their society; the point at which individuals become active participants in their societies and seek to influence the conceptions of the good that are dominant in their societies; and the point at which societies attempt to articulate their collective conceptions of the good and to reconcile their behavior based in those conceptions with alternate conceptions of the good with which other societies identify themselves and on which they base their decisions to act. My work focuses on the first point of intersection, namely, the way in which individuals form their identities with respect to their societies. I hope to focus on the second and third points of intersection *(i.e.,* the arena of social and political philosophy) in future work.

Methodological Discursus

In *Looser Ends: The Practice of Philosophy* (1989), Ermanno Bencivenga argues that there are two ways of "doing philosophy" (1989: 41), which he labels the philosophy of necessity and the philosophy of possibility. The philosophy of necessity proceeds by elimination, attempting to demonstrate the irrationality of a certain position by arguing that our affirming that position would entail our having to deny some other proposition that we find even more convincing than the new one: "The main instrument of a philosophy of necessity is an argument or proof from a set of (assertorie) premises to a(n assertorie) conclusion." (1989: 42) In contrast...,

> ... [t]he main instrument of the philosophy of possibility is a story, or, described more respectfully, a theory or model, which tries to show that a certain avenue of thought is coherent by articulating it in a plausible way... [W]e can see such a story as an argument, not, however, one with an assertorie conclusion, but one with a problematic conclusion of the form 'It is possible that p.' (1989:42)

It is the latter sort of argument that this study is pursuing,[1] and it does so in the way Bencivenga suggests is most appropriate — if not absolutely necessary — to such an approach, *i.e.,* by "straining words and phrases outside their ordinary contexts, which is a first step toward a mixing of the contexts and ultimately the creation of new linguistic practices." (1989:106)

The general understanding of human experience and its interpretation presupposed by this study is one informed particularly by phenomenologists like John Russon (2003) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2002 [1945]) . On this view, as in the views of the three subjects of this study, one comes to understand oneself through experience, that is, through one's interactions and inter-relationships with the world in which one lives — particularly, in the interactions and relationships one has with one's environment and the subjects and objects that subsist within it *(i.e.,* one's "lifeworld"). Such interactions are always interactions between one's body and one's lifeworld, and, thus, they consist in a behavioral adaptation to one's lived environment. As various behavioral habits are acquired, they become "naturalized" or second nature to the individual; that is to say, they are internalized to such an extent as to no longer need self-conscious effort

[1] I would also claim that, despite the way in which Charles Taylor's argument for the necessity of "strong evaluation" and for the existence of something like "moral space," his argument is best seen as an argument for the *plausibility* of such claims. *Cf.* Chapter One below.

in order to be exercised. Perhaps one of the most significant acquisitions of behavioral adaptation is the acquisition of language.

Russon (2003), in fact, uses language to illustrate the way in which interpretation is naturalized. He likens our witnessing of others' using a language with which we are not familiar to "hear[ing] uninterpretable music with magical effects." (2003:14) However, the native speakers of that language hear it as intelligible communication — as do we when we hear our own native tongue:

> In fact, in listening to speech, I usually do not hear "sounds" at all, but am offered instead an intelligible world. Indeed, the "raw sounds" of my own language are for me a kind of aural "blind spot." ...Indeed, far from having to make sense of the sounds that I hear, the meaningfulness of my language holds me in a context where I have no option besides hearing the meanings. In other words, I am not capable of not understanding what meanings are being presented when I hear another speaking. (2003: 15)

The point here is that human beings develop by assimilating a variety of complex practices (such as language acquisition and use) into their everyday ways of interacting with the world. Those practices become second nature to them and are then interwoven into even more complex practices or activities, such as the practice of articulating justifications for our actions.

Our acquisition of habits and interpretive practices is not necessarily something of which we are self-consciously aware. Even when we are in distressing situations, we may not necessarily engage in reflection to determine how to act — especially if we are in a situation which requires an immediate reaction. Moreover, rather than engaging in a detached, unemotional, impartial act of reflection — which on Russon's view is simply an impossible stance to actually occupy, so that attempting to do so will merely make one even more neurotic than one might have been otherwise — our ordinary way of acting in the world is one of reaction based on the self-understanding that we have at that particular moment.

But, if we are fortunate (that is, if our experiences have been fortunate), there will be moments when we can reflect on our experiences and attempt to interpret the reasons we acted as we did — and, perhaps, to consider how we might resolve to act in the future. Rather than passively allow our identities thicken and solidify, building up in us like sedimentation, we, instead, become dynamic centers of moral and interpretive gravity: reflecting upon, interpreting, and articulating the meaning of our experiences, our choices, and our identity, we selfconsciously affirm or deny, synthesize or reject, various understandings of who we are, what we desire, who we want to become, and what we find meaningful.

Guiding Metaphors

On this view, moral practices — like all other practices, including the use of language — are complex responses and adaptations elicited by various encounters with our fellow human beings and with our environment intended to facilitate future interactions. As we coordinate or to cooperatively adapt our behaviors with one another, we develop ever more complex habituations and adaptations, which become second nature to us. The process of integrating and incorporating additional and increasingly complex behaviors is continuous. Since our interpretations and reactions are deep, complex, and multilayered habituations to moral phenomena that arise from the human condition, we should not be surprised that our attempts to fully rationalize those interpretations into one system — or even multiple systems — of ethics may be difficult and, perhaps, even impossible.

Nevertheless, insofar as our moral reactions are responses to our interactions with the human lifeworld, critical examination and analysis of morality are appropriate, and potentially salubrious, activities. They are the focus of ethical reflection and theory. By better understanding our own interpretive schemes and the ways in which those schemes or frameworks shape our desires, we may better adapt and coordinate our behavior to both discover and achieve the ends we most desire.

One way in which we might attempt to envision and more closely examine those schemes or frameworks is by appealing to metaphors that seem to reflect the way in which we experience our moral lifeworlds. This essay examines and analyzes the moral metaphors explicitly or implicitly employed in three interlocking systematic reflections on morality in order to better articulate our understanding of common morality as well as its structure(s) and ground(s). I contend that the process (or practice) of attempting to clarify our moral interpretations and reasoning by appealing to analogical reasoning or metaphorical comparison is what Charles Taylor means when he argues that one of the primary modes of moral philosophy or moral interpretation is "articulation" What we are doing when we articulate our moral self-understandings (both in this essay and in our everyday practice of articulation) is attempting to excavate or mine the layers of habituation that have served to guide our interpretation of moral situations and relationships in order to establish a more nuanced understanding of them, that is, to extend our understanding as widely and deeply as possible. It is to Charles Taylor's theory concerning the "sources" of the self and his use of the metaphor of "moral space" that I now turn.

Chapter 2: Charles Taylor on Strong Evaluation and the Transcendental Conditions of Moral Agency

Charles Taylor provides a way to understand both the way in which agency functions, which he calls "strong evaluation," and the preconditions for its operation, which he calls the "transcendental conditions" of moral agency.

Strong Evaluation

Charles Taylor's conception of the self is built upon his recognition of a distinctive feature of the self — its capacity for "strong evaluation" — which he believes to be the hallmark of moral agency. Taylor's account builds upon Harry Frankfurt's (1971) distinction between first- and second-order desires — *i.e.,* between our immediate, first- order desires (or wants) and our second-order desires, the objects of which are our first-order desires. That distinction serves as a first step in distinguishing moral from the non-moral agency that we share with other creatures *(Cf.* Taylor 1985a, 16). Taylor develops a conception of what that second-order reflection consists in, which he calls "strong evaluation."

Taylor argues that there is something more to a human agent's evaluation of desires than a hierarchical ordering of desires, a need to decide between conflicting desires or between desires that cannot be simultaneously pursued, or a calculation of how to attain maximal satisfaction of a maximum number of desires or of a system of desires. According to Taylor, human agency is distinguished by its qualitative evaluation of our first-order desires in terms of criteria that are external to those desires: we judge certain desires not merely by (the frequently quantifiable) strength of the "pull" that they have on us, but also by our strong evaluation of the "modes of life" (1985a, *passim)* of which they are a part and the kinds of person we believe would aspire to them. We judge our desires and character traits not merely against one another or against some system by which we would organize them, but against standards external to them. We are concerned not only with balancing or systematizing our desires or with calculating the most expeditious and efficient ways in which we might fulfill them, but also with the "quality of our motivations"(Taylor 1985a,16). We are concerned with what our actions reflect about our character and about the modes of life we find noble or base, admirable or contemptible, humane or brutal, profound or shallow, etc.

Strong evaluation "...is bound up with our power of self-evaluation, which in turn is an essential feature of the mode of agency we recognize as human." (Taylor 1985a, 16) It consists in an attempt to interpret the *meaning* that our motivations and desires have for us and to determine whether we want to be the "kind of person" who would live the "mode of life" (Taylor 1985a, 16 *& passim)* characterized by such desires or motivations. Through strong evaluation, one attempts to determine how one's first-order desires relate to the kind of person one desires to be. To strongly evaluate a desire

or motivation is to evaluate it in terms of a standard external[1] to it, to understand it in terms of its relationship to a particular interpretative framework, to evaluate in terms of its potential role in a particular way of conceiving what it is to live a meaningful human life.

On Taylor's view, an evaluative term may only be understood "contrastively," by which he means that its meaning or significance can be understood only in relation to other terms with which it may be compared. He uses an analogy to color (HA19) to illustrate the way in which understanding an evaluative term is predicated on our understanding of the relationship in which it stands to other evaluative terms:

> ...No one can have an idea what courage is unless he knows what cowardice is, just as no one can have a notion of 'red', say, without some other colour terms with which it contrasts. It is essential both to 'red' and 'courage' that we understand with what they are contrasted. And of course with evaluative terms, as with colour terms, the contrast may not just be with one other, but with several. And indeed, refining an evaluative vocabulary by introducing new terms would alter the sense of the existing terms, even as it would with our colour vocabulary. (Taylor 1985a, 19)[2]

The vocabulary of strong evaluation is a "vocabulary of worth" (1985a, 24), and a familiarity with evaluative terms enables the strong evaluator to form an interpretative framework in order to better reflect on his or her desires, to better understand and articulate the cohesiveness of his or her preferences, and to better articulate the modes of life represented in various choices. Strong evaluation adds a dimension to deliberation that is absent in a mere clash of first-order desires; it is the existence of that "added dimension" that we try to capture when we use the metaphor of "depth" in describing character: familiarity with evaluative terms enables one to articulate one's sense of oneself, one's identity among other strong evaluators, in a variety of nuanced terms that are reflective of both the breadth of the various systems of contrastive terms and the variety of interpretative frameworks available to moral agents.

[1] I want to explore the nature of the "externality" of these standards. I would argue (contra Taylor) that the best way to make sense of such standards is not to conceive of them as given ex *nihilo* by a moral source, nor as *merely* projected by human beings, but as arising out of practices based in a moral psychology similar to that proposed by Adam Smith: a dialectic of self-understanding and sympathy which leads to the development of personal and social ideals.

[2] In this quotation, Taylor seems to suggest that one must conceive of the self as embedded in a *systematic* conception of the good. If evaluative terms have meaning only contrastively, they have meaning only by virtue of their place (contrasted with other terms and places) in a systematic vision or conception of the good.

The Transcendental Conditions of Moral Agency

A. A Necessary Orientation to the Good in Moral Space

Strong evaluation allows us to understand our motivations and desires as meaningful because it allows us to articulate our interpretation of those motivations in terms of standards that are external to us. Those standards are understood contrastively and are descriptive of the human agent at a "deep" level. In order to engage in strong evaluation, we have to possess what Taylor calls an "orientation to the good;" that is, we have to interpret our desires, behavior, *etc.* in terms of an interpretative framework, vision, or perspective. Strongly evaluative terms allow us to stake out our position in moral space in the same way that landmarks allow us to determine out position in physical space.[1] An orientation to the good is as necessary for our moral self-identification as an orientation in physical space is necessary for our physical identification. Just as we require some sense of orientation in physical space in order to move about purposely from one location to another, so we require some sense of where we are in moral space in order' to exercise our moral agency, to pursue our moral purposes. Taylor argues from the existence of strong evaluation as a feature of human experience to an orientation to the good as a necessary precondition of our selfconception in the same way that Kant argues that one must possess a spatiotemporal framework, an orientation is space and time, in order to discern and discriminate between various empirical sensations and thereby make one's way about in the world meaningfully.

Taylor thereby offers what he labels a "transcendental argument" for an orientation to the good. A transcendental argument "...proves a conclusion [*e.g.,* the necessity of an orientation to the good] by showing that unless it were true, experience itself [*e.g.,* the experience of strong evaluation] would be impossible."(Blackburn 1994, 380) It must be the case that we identify ourselves in terms of our having orientation to the good,

[1] A particularly interesting contrasting view of spatial orientation is suggested by a Native American tribe described in Rebecca Solnit's *Field Guide to Getting Lost* the members of which oriented themselves (their bodies) in space not by reference to themselves as spatial centers but by reference to the land, so that one would not refer to one's right hand but to one's eastern hand (assuming one were facing north) or one's western hand (if one were facing south). Interpretive systems like those call into question the way in which one sets one's frame of reference with respect to the "externality" standards.

and orientation in moral space, or we could not engage in strong evaluation. The fact that we identify our location in space in terms of east or west, above or below, to the right or to the left of some landmark requires that we have a sense of physical space. In the same way, the fact that we identify ourselves as righteous or unscrupulous, fair or biased, forthright or evasive requires that we have a sense of moral space, with "the good" serving as something like a magnetic north.

Kant argues that the fact that we must conceive of ourselves as existing in space, as being oriented in space, does not justify the conclusion that "space" is part of the ontological structure of existence: we can only say that we would be incapable of having sensory experience as we know it — and that we are incapable of conceiving of having sensory experience in any other way — if it were not structured in a spacio-temporal way. Beings who have perception such as ours must conceive of themselves in space; it is possible that there is an underlying reality that would explain our perceptions' being arranged in spacio-temporal frameworks which reality would make our conception of space seem naive. Nevertheless, we would be incapable of perceiving such a reality (since our perceiving requires our perceptions' being arranged spacio-temporally), and such a reality would not vitiate the reality of time and space as necessary preconditions for beings such as ourselves, beings who live in a phenomenal world such as ours. Just as our experience of existing in space and time is a precondition of our being the physical being that we are, so our sense of moral space is a precondition of our awareness of ourselves as moral beings, a precondition of our being the moral being that we are. Just as any account of what it is to be a physical human being will have to take into account the fact that we must conceive of ourselves as located in time and space, so any account of what it is to be a moral agent will have to take into account that we must conceive of ourselves as oriented in moral space and — as we shall eventually see — in moral time as well.

B. Surveying Moral Space: The Role of Language

Our orientation to the good is conditioned upon our having an understanding of moral space. Just as, physically, at this moment, I am the being occupying a particular location in space which I can only describe relative to the various subjects and objects that exist in an area of ambient space, so, morally, I can articulate my identity only by referring to where I stand in relationship to various ambient subjects, goods, and strong evaluations from which I distinguish or distance myself or with the proximity to which I identify myself. Physically, one may be in an office downtown standing next to a colleague; morally, one may be an animal rights activist who finds vivisection and the consumption of meat unconscionable but who is not as strict as one's colleague who also finds the consumption of eggs and dairy products objectionable.

We survey and map out moral space with language. Language, understood broadly to include the various forms of expressive activity through which people communi-

cate, plays a complex role in the formation and expression of human identity. Taylor explores...

> ...three things that get done in language: making articulations, and hence bringing about explicit awareness; putting things in public space, thereby constituting public space; and making the discriminations which are foundational to human concerns, and hence opening us to these concerns. These are functions for which language seems indispensable. (1985a, 263)

Let us look more closely at each of these functions:

Articulation

When we seek to articulate something — whether an emotion, a behavior, a desire — we attempt to focus on it more clearly, to identify its defining features and their relationship to one another, to attend to its contours and its boundaries, to distinguish it from, and contrast it to, other objects of our attention with which it could potentially be mistaken. Articulation involves contrast, distinction, boundedness, interpretation, evaluation, and selective attention. Because articulation is based in differentiation and contrast, language involves "...a capacity to apply a web of terms, and never [merely] the ability just to use a single term." (Taylor 1985a, 258).

When we attempt to articulate our own identities, our views or perspectives on the good with respect to which we identity ourselves, we seek to articulate the boundaries of our selves with respect to the boundaries of the various goods that comprise moral space. We seek to describe our position relative to the various goods and the various modes of life available to us. Language is, therefore, another "transcendental condition" of moral agency, another condition that must obtain if we are to be capable of engaging in "strong evaluation."

The dependence of strong evaluation and, thereby, moral agency on language carries with it a dependence on the acquisition of language, which is a social activity. If we are to express ourselves properly in language, we must have an understanding of the meaning of the terms we would use, and that, in turn, requires that we acquire an inventory of terms of strong evaluation — terms that are contrastively, or systematically, inter-related. We are introduced to that lexicon by our originating linguistic community.

We are initiated into moral space and oriented therein by our originating linguistic community. Through its various practices — e.g., the physical proximity within which people stand in relationship to each other, the way people treat one another, the use of intimidation or violence, the tone of voice, and, of course, the words spoken — our moral identities begin to take shape. Just as we learn to recognize the differences between our bodies, the bodies of other persons, and objects in space, so we learn to recognize differences between family, friends, and strangers, and we recognize the

different ways in which people interact with each other depending on their relationships, the contexts in which they find themselves, *etc.* One comes to understand the way in which people differentiate themselves from one another, and that differentiation is articulated in language.

Public Space

On Taylor's view, language can serve not merely to articulate and establish boundaries, but it serves to establish rapport and connections as well. Simply greeting someone and affirming acknowledgement of his or her presence — or commenting on a shared situation, a current event, or even the weather — can serve to draw people into "public space." A sense of occupying a common space, of sharing in a common event, or of sharing a common identity for at least a short period of time can serve to realign people's attention, causing them to question whether the ways in which they differentiate themselves from one another are actually expressive of the modes of life in which they wish to engage and with which they identify. *Language and public space call* us to reexamine our lexicons to consider alternate ways of describing ourselves, alternate ways of conceiving our identities and our boundaries.

Public Concerns

Taylor draws our attention to language's ability to shape people's concerns, views, and perspectives. Taylor offers as an example "...certain concerns which could not conceivably be concerns of a non-linguistic animal... For example, the contrast between anger and indignation." (TM, 261) While we may conceive of non-linguistic animals becoming angered, we cannot conceive of non-linguistic animals feeling indignation. The latter requires the recognition of some conception of "justice" and an acknowledgement of standards of justice to which we hold human persons accountable. Concepts like shame, dignity, pride, and integrity are similarly dependent on a complex understanding of standards of behavior, on moral concepts, and on an orientation to the good, all of which rely on language for their expression and for making intelligible the distinctions between various modes of life.

C. Moral Time

As we navigate our way in moral space, basing Our navigation on the landmarks or goods that are differentiated from each other by our exploration and articulation of their boundaries through language, we recognize that our identity, our location in moral space, can only be understood by its relationship to the history of our arriving at our current location: our understanding of where we are in moral space is dependent on our understanding of that which occupies moral space (goods as discerned in language),

but that understanding develops over time, and the history of our interpretations, the history of the development of our identity, is part of what makes us who we are. One aspect of my current (physical) identity is where I am now; another aspect is who I have been over time, where I have been, how I arrived at this location. Insofar as our location in moral space defines us, defines what we believe is meaningful, what our perspective on the good is, the history of how we arrived at this location is crucial in making that perspective intelligible, in placing that meaning in context, in explaining how we have come to be situated in the moral space we currently occupy:

> ...The issue of our condition can never be exhausted for us by what [or where] we *are,* because we are always also changing and *becoming.* It is only slowly that we grow through infancy and childhood to be autonomous agents who have something like our own place relative to the good at all. And even then, that place is constantly challenged by the new events in our lives, as well as constantly under potential revision, as we experience more and mature... [My] sense of the good has to be woven into my understanding of my life as an unfolding story... 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... Orientation in moral space turns out again to be similar to orientation in physical space. We know where we are through a mixture of recognition of landmarks before us and a sense of how we have traveled to get here... (Taylor 1989, 47–48)

Hence, the narrative structure of our lives is a fourth transcendental condition of moral agency. In order to engage in strong evaluation we have to have an orientation to the good, and that orientation is *intelligible* only in terms of contrastive distinctions between various goods, which require language, and *meaningful* only if we can trace the history of our perspectives and how each vision or perspective made our next position in moral space appear attractive to us. (The importance of narrative will become more evident when we discuss the way in which the self interprets itself, thereby moving through moral time and space, in the next section.)

D. Summary

Beginning with an account of strong evaluation as a necessary feature of moral agency, Taylor argues for four transcendental features of the moral agent. Together, those features and the activity of strong evaluation provide a skeletal conception of moral agents and the context in which we find ourselves: We are oriented in moral space by means of our identifying with, or distancing ourselves from, the various goods that comprise or occupy that space. Those goods are recognizable because our originating linguistic community identifies them for us by articulating the distinctions between them — of course, eventually we become members of that community and participate

in the articulation of and development of our community's understanding of those distinctions. Those goods are recognized contrastively, that is, by our recognizing the proximity or distance between them in language. Our identities consist of our narrative understanding of the development of our orientation in moral space comprised by goods identified by linguistic communities.

The Self

A. Self-Interpretation in a "Space of Questions" and a "Web of Interlocutors"

Moral space is not empty space. If we are to orient ourselves in it, moral space must have contents. We label those contents "goods." As we have seen, goods must be conceptually and linguistically differentiated from one another if they are to provide a framework or structure, that is, if we are to identify ourselves in terms of our relationship to them. We have also seen that those distinctions are contrastive, that goods are discernable and comprehensible in virtue of their relationships to other goods. Finally, we have seen that the various contrastive sets of interpretations allow for a variety of interpretative perspectives or visions.

The variety of standards or interpretative frameworks with respect to which we can interpret and judge our motivations opens a plurality of ways in which we might characterize our lives. The plurality of evaluative frameworks and standards is evident in the variety of contrastive lexicons associated with strong evaluation — noble/base, humble/egotistical, courageous/cowardly, integral/alienated, benevolent/malicious, etc. Each "vision" or "perspective" (HA, *passim)* offers an alternate way to interpret and evaluate our desires, and each may provide reasons to prefer it to others. That such perspectives compete for our allegiance, for our employing them, for our identification with them, is part of the human predicament. That each vision or perspective offers us a different — and potentially incommensurable, incompatible, or "incompossible" — way to understand ourselves and the meaning of our desires is part of the human predicament — as well as part of what is entailed in strong evaluation. The struggle to determine how to best describe what we feel or desire is a struggle for self-interpretation, and the question then arises as to "...which is the truer, more authentic, more illusion-free interpretation, and which, on the other hand, involves a distortion of the meanings things have for me." (Taylor 1985a, 27)

On Taylor's view, the fact that there are a variety of interpretative stances or "visions" available to us does not mean that we are free to "choose" whichever interpretation of our current desires that would permit us — for example — to be the least critical of ourselves. "Our evaluations are not chosen." (Taylor 1985a, 35) Instead, we find that particular descriptive schemes, particular interpretative stances, draw us to them because they make our motivations, desires, relationships, and conceptions of ourselves more comprehensible to us: we are attracted to particular interpretative

stances, particular ways of articulating our self-interpretations, because they allow us to see our lives as meaningful. They "fit" our experience, and we come to identify with them — that is we both *use* them to express the meaning we have found in them, and we *attach* our identities to them. When that identification with a self-interpretation occurs, "...description and experience are bound together in [a] constitutive relation [that] admits of causal influences in both directions." (Taylor 1985a, 37) Therein lies an essential experience — and an essential activity — of selfhood: the self is experienced in (1) the activity of framing and articulating an understanding of one's experience (one's motivation, one's interaction with others) in terms of an inter-locking set of contrastive terms, which (2) reshapes one's understanding of the experience one is trying to interpret, which, in turn, may call for (3) a reframing and rearticulating of one's self-understanding and the way in which that experience may be integrated therein. Even as that interpretative wheel is spinning, we are making our way in the world, bringing to the mixture a series of new experiences, new desires, and new motivations to be interpreted and integrated.[1]

We are "thrown" (as it were) into a "space of questions about the good" (Taylor 1989, 33 *& passim).* That space is at the center of our identities, and that interpretative activity is at the center of what it is to be a self. That constant activity is constitutive of the self because the self cannot be fully identified, fully captured, fully described by any particular articulation of a selfinterpretation. "Full articulacy is an impossibility," (SS34) not only because we are always "changing and becoming" — our narrative constantly pushing us into the future (as noted earlier) — but also because "...articulation can by its very nature never be completed. We clarify one language with another, which in turn can be further unpacked, and so on..." (Taylor 1989, 34)[2] Such an "unpacking" is not a viciously circular or meaningless spiraling; it is a exploration of our "inner depths" and an attempt to better understand ourselves. It is an attempt to better articulate our self-interpretation, or, if an experience challenges us at a very deep level, it is a call to reassess our current identity, our current framework, our current selfunderstanding in order to accommodate an undeniable experience that could not otherwise be accommodated.[3]

Our response to the questions posed to us in moral space (which is intelligible only through language and through the history of our experience) *is* our identity:

> My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse

[1] Of course, "we" cannot lose sight of the fact that "we" who are interpreting are doing so in a social space which others may conceptualize completely differently. The matter of critical reflection, its ineliminability and crucial importance in moral thought must be addressed in the section on reflectivity.

[2] This is where the deconstructive element is internalized in identification — in the constant attempt to reincorporate the difference/deferrai in one's self- interpretation.

[3] This would be a "conversion experience."

> or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand. (Taylor 1989, 27)

The question that then arises is: How deep is that identity? How deeply can it be questioned or challenged? Is there an inescapable identificational framework, an insuperable identificational horizon?

B. Moral Horizons

At his most radical, Taylor allows that all boundaries, horizons, or frameworks may be questioned so long as doing so does not violate the transcendental conditions of the questioner; that is, so long as any revision of the boundaries respects the boundaries of the self — the transcendental conditions of moral agency and the fact of strong evaluation. On Taylor's view, altogether abandoning all horizons, wholly "...doing without frameworks[,] is utterly impossible for us; ...living within... strongly qualified horizons is constitutive of human agency:" (Taylor 1989, 27)

> Otherwise put, I can define my identity only against the background of things that matter. But to bracket out history, nature, society, the demands of solidarity, everything but what I find in myself, would be to eliminate all candidates for what matters... (Taylor 1992, 40)

We cannot imagine a "view from nowhere" or what it would be like to take that view. Nevertheless, all frameworks and all interpretations of what constitutes an insuperable horizon are challengeable, and that "...applies with the greatest force to our most fundamental evaluations... These deepest evaluations are the ones which are least clear, least articulated, most easily subject to illusion and distortion." (Taylor 1985a, 39–40)

Our deepest evaluations, those goods with which we identify so closely that to break them down would be to break down our own identity, require a radical questioning – not in the sense that our judgment of them appeals to no criteria, but in the sense that such questioning must be...

> ...carried on in the formulae available but with a stance of attention, as it were, to what these formulae are meant to articulate and with a readiness to receive any gestalt shift in our view of the situation, any quite innovative set of categories in which to see our predicament that might come our way in inspiration... This stance of openness is very difficult. It may take discipline and time. [It calls for judgment based on one's] ... deepest unstructured sense of what is important, which is as yet inchoate, and which [one is] trying to bring to definition. (Taylor 1985a, 41–42)

Taylor argues that this type of radical self-reflection is definitive of another sense in which we ascribe "depth" to people, for those who engage in this radical self-reflection directly confront the possibility of their discovering their deepest distortions, repressions, compulsions, and prejudices. It engages the self at the deepest level possible, and when it is accomplished...,

> ...we can be called responsible for ourselves; and because it is within limits always up to us to do it, even when we do not — indeed, the nature of our deepest evaluations constantly raises the question of whether we have them right — we can be called responsible in another sense for ourselves, whether we undertake this radical evaluation or not. (Taylor 1985a, 42)

C. Social Structures

As one is engaged in the activity of selfinterpretation, so are other members of one's community — as is one's community, itself. Insofar as they are expressed in language (again, broadly interpreted), those self- interpretations in public space contribute to the growth of the moral lexicon of the community. We come to understand ourselves as selves through our learning language, through the structure it provides in shared meanings. When we question, when we articulate, we identify ourselves with contrastively defined webs of terminology and with contrastively understood interpersonal relationships with the other members of our linguistic community. We come to acknowledge ourselves as selves by interpreting ourselves through language, by seeing ourselves as interlocutors, by identifying with — or distinguishing ourselves from — others in our community.

Of course, as our linguistic communities make the distinctions between various contrastive terms, like the individuals that comprise it, the community forms a particular orientation in moral space as well; the community establishes a communal identity in moral space through social and political institutions. The distinctions articulated politically by the community as it seeks to identify itself in relation to other communities are offered to the individuals that comprise it as ways of interpreting their lives. Insofar as it links two kinds of goods in Taylor's taxonomy of goods, the fact of communal identity and the way in which it links individuals through its interpretations of moral goods is particularly important.

Goods

Having looked at the definitive phenomenon of moral agency, strong evaluation, and at the transcendental conditions that must obtain if we are to engage in it, let us look at the constituents of moral space.

Moral space is constituted by goods. In general, a good is "anything considered valuable, worthy, admirable, of whatever kind or category" (Taylor 1989, 92). Some goods are merely goods in the vernacular sense of the word, *i.e.,* items that one may possess and dispose of in a variety of ways. However, other goods are more important. The latter provide the standards by which we evaluate our motivations and the motivations of other moral agents, and they serve as guideposts or landmarks in moral space. Taylor provides a taxonomy of the latter goods by analyzing the history of moral terms used in Western cultures. They are three: constitutive goods (which term he uses interchangeably with "moral sources"), life goods, and hypergoods.

A. Constitutive Goods

Constitutive goods are goods that draw us to them by commanding our respect or awe. They "define the content of moral theory" (Taylor 1989, 93). Their attraction, our love and respect for them, empowers or motivates us to do and to be good (Taylor 1989, 93) Our relationship to constitutive goods "...makes certain of our actions good, ...constitutes the goodness of those actions or motives" (Taylor 1989, 92). Constitutive goods are those foundational goods that serve as our primary beacons or landmarks in moral space and interpretations of them serve as the horizons beyond which that space is unimaginable.

Constitutive goods or moral sources are the goods that constitute a "cosmic reality." They inspire a view of what the good life consists in, the components of which are "life goods." Life goods are goods in virtue of "some feature of the way things are" (Taylor 1989, 93) — that is to say, in virtue of their relationship to constitutive goods: constitutive goods constitute the goodness of life goods. Taylor identifies three constitutive goods that have been traditionally recognized by Western cultures: God, Reason, and Nature. Taylor argues that it has been the case, historically, that people in the West have articulated their moral identities in terms of their understandings of those goods and their relationships to them. The constitutive goods of God, Reason, and Na-

ture have served as the primary means by which Westerners have oriented themselves in moral space, although modern and contemporary theories have supplanted those sources with others, *e.g.,* the "courageous disengagement" of the person who faces a disenchanted universe, or, "[i]n Kant's theory, rational agency is the constitutive good" (Taylor 1989, 94). Those anomalies aside, the bulk of *Sources of the Self* is an historical exegesis of those three historical constitutive goods.

Those constitutive goods have been so central to our orientation, to our identities, that we identify with them and through them. They have been incorporated into our self- conceptions at a very deep level. Just as we orient ourselves in space by means of our bodies and their orientation in space — recognizing objects in space not merely as being north of us, or immediately next to us, but also in front of us, immediately to our right, or on top of us — so have these moral sources or constitutive goods been so closely linked to our orientation that they have become background assumptions to us, serving as the horizons of our moral interpretations. We have fashioned our moral frameworks from our interpretations of them. Just as our senses and our "embodied-ness" shapes our perception of objects in space and time as well as the way in which we conceive of space and time, so our moral identity has a starting point, a deep and largely unarticulated source, and those moral sources or constitutive goods are so central to that starting point that they often reside in the background of our identification, frequently unacknowledged, unquestioned, undifferentiated from our very selves. Just as our proprioceptive sense of ourselves — our internal sense of our bodies' being upright, our internal sense of being still rather than spinning, *etc.* — is taken for granted and is so much a part of who we are that it is not seen to be a part of our sense of space and time, the constitutive goods or moral sources are so closely related to our sense of who we are morally that they are frequently not distinguished from ourselves. They are intimately linked to what Taylor calls our framework or background; they inform our frameworks, which are built on our interpretation of them. Our understanding of them and of the demand they place on us by virtue of their commanding our awe and respect, our interpretation of them, shapes our understanding of what it is to be moral agent.

To say that constitutive goods or moral sources *form* our frameworks is somewhat misleading: the concerns to which our interpretation of them gives rise form the "axes of moral thinking" (Taylor 1989, 15) which are the axes of our moral frameworks. Those axes are: "our sense of respect for, and obligations to, others; ...our understanding of what makes a full life; ...and our sense of ourselves as [having dignity,] of commanding (attitudinal) respect" (Taylor 1989, 15). Those axes are the fundamental concerns that frame or structure our orientation in moral space. Our specific understanding of them is provided by our understanding of the constitutive goods we recognize and the demands their recognition place on us. Our community's interpretation of the good life that would arise from adherence to the constitutive goods generates what Taylor calls "life goods."

B. Life Soods

Life goods are "facets or components of a good life... [e.g.,] ...freedom, altruism, universal justice" (Taylor 1989, 93) They are goods that are generated by a culture's interpretation of constitutive goods or moral sources; they are the goods that are required to live a good life as understood in light of our particular community's interpretation of the constitutive goods or moral sources. In fact, it is the relationship of life goods to constitutive goods that *constitutes* life goods as goods, which is why constitutive goods are so named. While a community may identify particular life goods and make them available to its constituents via its social institutions and practices, some individuals (and communities) reject particular constitutive goods while remaining committed to the life goods generated thereby. Such is the case of utilitarians who reject the Deist conceptions of God and nature which gave rise to the life good of "universal and impartial beneficence," while remaining committed to the conception of the good life and the life goods that Deism generates (Taylor 1989, 322). So, while life goods are dependent for their genesis on constitutive goods, the connection may be severed — although not without a cost.[1]

Insofar as we live in a particular community, certain life goods rather than others will be more readily available to us, and our initial orientation will inevitably (unless we are raised in a minority community within a larger community) be formed in terms of those life goods (although that orientation will change insofar as we identify with other life goods over time).

C. Hypergoods

Taylor distinguishes a third type of good, the "hypergood." Hypergoods are...

> ...goods which not only are incomparably more important than others, but provide the standpoint from which these must be weighed, judged, decided about..., goods on the basis of which we discriminate among other goods, attribute differential worth or importance to them, or determine when and how to follow them. (Taylor 1989, 53)

The recognition of a hypergood serves to *order* the other goods in our lives. It does so because it serves as *the* pivotal concept in a set of contrastive terms by reference to which all other terms are understood. As such, when one commits to or identifies with a hypergood such that it serves as the frame or horizon of one's identity, that hypergood will strongly shape one's self-evaluations and self— interpretations, will

[1] According to Taylor, the cost for utilitarians is the incoherence of their moral theory: they deny the existence of strong evaluation and of moral sources even while arguing that a particular life good (beneficence) ought to serve as a moral source.

guide one's commitments to life goods, and may even shape the "stance" one takes toward one's selfidentity — making one less likely to achieve the "open stance" Taylor seems to advocate, unless, of course, such a stance, itself, can serve as a hypergood or as a life good as generated by a particular hypergood.

On Taylor's view, allegiance to a hypergood is not a precondition to engaging in strong evaluation; an orientation to a hypergood is, therefore, not a transcendental condition of moral agency. While he admits that "...[m]ost of us not only live with many goods but find that we have to rank them..." (Taylor 1989, 62), he does not believe that such ranking necessitates allegiance to a hypergood; one's identity need not be so strongly tied to any particular good, although the constitutive goods are so closely linked to most people's identities that they are indistinguishable from a person's background, framework, or horizon — and there is good reason to believe that hypergoods are particular interpretations of constitutive goods. *(Cf.* DeGioia 1995, 26). The strongest reason to interpret hypergoods as interpretations of constitutive goods is that, as is true of constitutive goods, "...our acceptance of any hypergood is connected in a complex way with our being *moved* by it."(Taylor 1989, 73)

There are two ways in which a hypergood can structure our pursuit of other goods — the "revisionist" and "comprehensive" strategies, represented in Taylor (1989, 65- 66) by Plato and Aristotle respectively: For the Platonic "revisionist," the acknowledgement of a hypergood displaces or depreciates other goods. The guardians in Plato's *Republic,* for example, give up the goods of family and ownership of property in order to pursue the hypergood of social harmony. The Aristotelian "comprehensivist," on the other hand, sees the *"whole* good life, *i.e.,* all the goods together in their proper proportions,"(1989, 66) as playing the role of a hypergood.[2]

Regardless of which strategy is used, there are some characteristics common to all hypergoods. First, once we are moved by a hypergood, that good dictates our understanding of the other goods in our life. Sometimes such alteration will make it impossible to recognize or acknowledge life goods that are not contrastively identified in relationship to the hypergood. That is the case because "[h]ypergoods are understood by those who espouse them as a step to a higher moral consciousness."(1989, 64) Those who are not committed to a hypergood are often seen as unenlightened; their visions or perspectives, naive.

Once one has come under the influence of a hypergood, one may continue to identify with the same life goods yet reinterpret the meaning and place of those life goods. Examples of hypergoods which alter one's interpretation of life goods include the hypergood of equal respect, which originally negated a hierarchical or aristocratic ordering of society, but which has also been extended to our understandings of relations among ethnicities, races, and genders. Once we have seen equal respect as a hypergood, we are unable to return to previous ways of relating, and that may be a benefit. There is also the danger that those who espouse a hypergood will be intolerant and threatening

[2] I believe that the ideal of authenticity may be seen as a "comprehensivist" hypergood.

to those who do not recognize that good — *e.g.,* political or religious zealots. Such adherents are tempted to a totalizing view of the hypergood which may blind them to other virtues that are associated with other constitutive goods.

D. Concepts, Conceptions, and the "Systematization" of Goods

Taylor's division of goods into constitutive, life, and hyper-goods does not lead us to the recognition of any necessary systematic relationship that connects the various goods. While life goods are elements of a good life, the goodness of which life is constituted by its relationship to constitutive goods or moral sources, on Taylor's view, we are capable of recognizing life goods as goods even if we renounce, or fail to recognize, the constitutive goods from which those life goods were derived. Moreover, while the identity of certain goods (with reference to which we make our strong evaluations) is dependent on their contrastive relationships to other goods or concepts, Taylor does not suggest that there is a systematic relationship among the various contrastively defined goods that belong to different contrastive "clusters." In short, Taylor does not offer a unified conception of the good.

In fact, despite the fact that Taylor, himself, often refers to "the good" — to a person's orientation to "the good", to our existence in a space of questions about "the good", *etc.* — it is not clear that Taylor believes that there is a best, single, unified conception of the good. Rather, it seems that Taylor tries to remain an agnostic with respect to the nature of the good. At times, Taylor seems to be a moral pluralist, conceiving of the world as consisting of a diversity of goods which may be incapable of coordination with each other, and which may, ultimately, prove to be incompatible with each other:

> ...We could easily decide — a view which I would defend — that the universal attribution of moral personality is valid, and lays obligations on us which we cannot ignore; but that there are also other moral ideals and goals — *e.g.,* of less than universal solidarity, or of personal excellence — which cannot be easily coordinated with universalism, and can even enter into conflict with it. [It would be]... a big illusion...[to believe] ... that there is a single consistent domain of the "moral", that there is one set of considerations, or mode of calculation, which determines what we ought "morally" to do (1985b, 233) .

While that statement may seem to suggest Taylor's support of moral pluralism, it is actually a form of agnosticism or withholding from a position on the unity or diversity of the good:

> ... To decide a *priori* what the bounds or the moral are is just to obfuscate the question whether and to what degree this is so, and to make it incapable of being coherently stated. [T]he boundaries of the moral are an open question...(1985b, 233).

Ultimately, we can be justified *neither* in declaring that there is only one way of properly conceiving the good and that there is only one unified conception of the good that would fully explain and properly balance all of our moral interests, *nor* in concluding that none of the multitude of conceptions of the good would fully explain and properly balance all of our moral interests better than any of the others. Taylor calls us to recognize the fundamental tension, and perhaps even paradox, that lies at the center of moral inquiry: "it belongs to human agency to exist in a space of questions about strongly valued goods, prior to all choice or adventitious cultural change." (Taylor 1989, 31) But those goods may not be inter-related. It is the task of moral inquiry to examine and explore that space as carefully as possible in order to become as articulate and as knowledgeable about that space as possible. It is the task of moral inquiry to attempt to arrive at the "best account" we are capable of articulating of the nature of human existence, of the good, and of the relationship between the two.

A Moral Space Odyssey

Charles Taylor's use of the metaphor of moral space is both provocative and problematic. I would like to draw out some of the more provocative elements of the metaphor before turning to the role of narrative, which Taylor claims makes moral space and moral choices intelligible. I will return to the problematic nature of the metaphor in Chapter 4 when we will have more tools with which to address the problems.

What I find most provocative in Taylor's metaphor is that it allows us to imagine a number of ways in which to structure our thoughts about goods, their interrelationships, and our relationships to them.

The metaphor of moral space encourages us to recognize that people may pursue different moral projects or examinations on different moral "levels." It may be the case not only that different goods lend themselves to different methods of distribution and pursuit as argued in, *e.g.,* Michael Walzer's (1984) *Spheres of Justice,* but it may also be the case that different foci encourage different moral methods. Or, it may be the case that goods cluster themselves in different moral (solar) systems with multiple systems in a single universe. The distinction between public health concerns and concerns about physician-patient relationships and/or issues of health insurance coverage may have different "centers of moral gravity."

Different goods may also lend themselves to different types of measurement, exploration, and representation. Just as there are topographical maps, so there may be ways in which "moral depth" is meaningful; just as there is more than one way to represent the earth in a two-dimensional representation — *i.e.,* the Gall-Peters versus Mercator projection maps *(cf.* Monmonier 1996), so there may be genuine attempts to map the same moral space that arrive at different representations.

As representations, maps are also static; they cannot represent or capture movement or time. Even film cannot capture, for example, the rapid, wide, and incredibly forceful gyres/currents that move beneath the oceans across the planet. Those gyres cannot be seen even from space because the oceans' surface does not reflect the current's motion. *{Cf.* Hohn 2007) For that reason, Taylor's metaphor can encourage us to consider the "moral motion" that may be taking place even when there is little to no indication of change within a person's or a people's demeanor or comportment.

The metaphor that relates goods to objects in space also provokes us to consider different ways we may relate to goods. Taylor suggests that goods attract and empower us, that they have a type of gravity, but our relationship to goods — and their relationships to each other — may be more complicated. It is unclear whether the act of articulation merely draws us closer to already existent goods that are merely in need

of closer examination in order to be more clearly understood, or whether our reflection on them, which may cause us to change our conception of them and of ourselves, "moves" them. While Taylor may argue that moral axes and moral horizons are not created by (individual) choice, certainly they must be susceptible to reinterpretation and, perhaps, reconfiguration and reconceptualization. If one clarifies one's focus and understanding of a particular good, perhaps other goods will come more clearly into focus as well — which may entail our coming to see interrelationships among goods differently.

The metaphor of moral space raises those questions and others — for example, do certain goods lose their importance or even cease to exist over time? Do moral maps become outdated over time? Can one be a moral tourist or take a moral holiday? What is the relationship of moral space to physical space? Do we need an active community to maintain access to goods? Presumably, one can determine that one's moral understanding and moral map are becoming more accurate by their "fit" with one's experience, but what standard can one appeal to when one's conception or map clashes with someone else's?

One way in which Taylor attempts to address questions about orientation in moral space is by appealing to the narrative structure of our explorations. Taylor suggests that there are (at least) two ways in which we can become lost or disoriented in moral space: "I can be ignorant of the lie of the land around me..., [ori I can be lost in another way if I don't know how to place myself on the map." (Taylor 1989, 42) On this view, one can recognize the various goods that are available to one, but fail to understand the interrelationships among those goods; on the other hand, one may have an understanding of the ways in which various goods are related to one another without having a clear vision of where one stands with respect to the various goods. Joel Anderson (1996, 26) suggests that the first type of confusion is overcome by doing exactly what Taylor does in *Sources of the Self* (1989), *i.e.,* establishing the reality of certain goods by providing the "best account" of our responses to them. On Taylor's view, the second confusion is to be overcome through dialogue and articulation, that is, by- discussing and comparing our stands with those of others and determining our positions in comparison to one another. To do that, we must trace the ways in which we arrive at our positions in moral space.

Moral Space and Narrative Time

The view of the self that arises in Taylor's work is very complex. First, the self is self-interpreting; that is to say, the vision or perspective with which it identifies itself places it in complex matrices of contrastively identifiable terms. Those terms and that perspective constitute a self-interpretation that is always capable of articulation at deeper levels, and any articulation, any entrance into the multiple matrices of contrastively identifiable terms, will change the way in which the self interprets itself, its motivations, and its actions. The self is always open to re-evaluation, reinterpretation, or rearticulation for at least two reasons: (1) any set of linguistic terms is subject to further explication or articulation in terms of another deeper set of terms, and (2) the self exists in moral time; it is always projecting itself into the future, always changing, always becoming, always subject to new experiences that challenge any given interpretation — sometimes challenging the entire structure; sometimes merely pushing the self to articulate its present identity more deeply.

At the deepest of all levels, Taylor contends that the self is capable of maintaining a "stance of openness," which may be interpreted as a willingness to exchange altogether its current moral framework for another, even at the risk of an identity crisis — although it may be interpreted as a willingness to exchange not the entire framework *all at once* but to reinterpret the constituent axes of that framework, which axes may be unchallengeable insofar as they are so closely linked to the background or horizon of moral agency.

To be "true to oneself," one must have some conception of what that self is. On Taylor's view, the self is forever unfolding in a quest for meaning, that is, in a quest for an ever deeper understanding of itself and the good (the two of which are interdependent). That quest takes the form of a narrative which is the history of one's attempt to articulate ever more clearly and to integrate ever more fully one's understandings of one's experience with one's conception of oneself and of the good. That articulation takes place dialogically though language within a linguistic community in which one participates and through which one conceives of oneself as one self among others, one interlocutor among many. That community of interlocutors has a narrative as well, a narrative of its communal experience of the pursuit of its identity and an ever clearer conception of the good.

It is to Alasdair MacIntyre's examination of narrative time that we now turn.

Chapter 3: Alasdair MacIntyre on Practices, Narrative, and Conceiving the Good

Alasdair MacIntyre's reflections on the nature of moral theory and moral discourse offer several ways to clarify, illuminate, structure, and systematize the concepts this essay seeks to explore — the self, authenticity, and articulation.

A Clarification of Terms

A. Goods, The Good, and Conceptions of the Good

I wish to distinguish and define some terms, some of which are not explicitly defined or distinguished from one another in either Taylor's or MacIntyre's work but which are central to an exploration of the self and which will facilitate the bridging of the two theories. First, I wish to distinguish between "goods," "the good," and "a conception of the good." Taylor (1989, 92) defines a good as "anything considered valuable, worthy, admirable, of whatever kind or category." "The good" refers to a perfect state of affairs, a state in which everything is properly related to everything else and everything is as it should be; "the good" of a particular human being would be that meaningful, fulfilling, and perfected state of affairs in which a person fulfills his or her full potential, living in proper relationship to other- human beings and to the various goods life makes available to him or her. The good for human beings in general would refer to a state of affairs in which each and every person has attained the good for himself or herself. A good life is a life in which one is aware of the constitution of one's good and is empowered to approach that state of affairs ever more closely as one's life unfolds.

The *concept* of the good is to be distinguished from various *conceptions* of the good. One's conception of the good for oneself — of one's *telos* — is one's particular vision of what would constitute the good for oneself: such a conception would span the type of character one would like to possess, the set of dispositions one would like to exhibit, the activities in which one would like to engage, the ways in which one would like to relate to other persons and to the various goods available to one, etc. Likewise, a general conception of the good — one not focused on a particular person — would be a particular vision of what the good would be in general.

One's conception of the good for oneself is one's conception of one's *telos,* one's conception of the state of affairs (including the state of one's mind, one's emotions, and one's general attitude toward the various goods life affords one) that one believes would fulfill one's potential. As such, it is at the core of one's identity.

B. Conceptions of the Good and Narrative

One's conception of the good for oneself, of one's *telos,* is what provides unity to one's life and guides one in choosing and ordering the various goods that one comes to desire. At the core of one's being, one finds oneself with a question: what would

constitute a good life for me? That question leads to a quest for an answer, a quest to determine what the good consists in for oneself, a quest which begins by positing a hypothetical, tentative conception of the good for oneself: "...without some at least partly determinate conception of the final *telos* there could not be any beginning to a quest."(MacIntyre 1984, 219) Of course, that quest and its object will be intricately and inexorably intertwined with what might constitute the good *simpliciter* and the good for human beings in general, and — of course — one s conception of the good for oneself will be informed by our interactions with others and by our emulating those whom we admire; nevertheless, every one of us must begin that quest in our own "moral particularity" (1984, 220) which resides in the roles we play in the practices in which we participate. We will examine MacIntyre's conception of a practice in a moment, but first let us examine his view of the nature of our conceptions of the good more closely.

It is clear that one's conception of the good for oneself presupposes something of one's conception of the good for human beings and of the good *simpliciter.* That is the case because if one believes the conception of the good one is pursuing is good, then one believes it is worthy of human pursuit and that it is consonant with, and reflective of, the good in general. Nevertheless, MacIntyre contends that one cannot conceive of the good in wholly generic terms and determine which goods one is to pursue or how to rank them based on that generic conception. That is the case because we come to conceive of the good as occupants of particular social roles, as bearers of particular social and historical identities which structure our experience and shape our conceptions. Like Taylor, MacIntyre will contend that we will not be able to articulate and live by a purely universal conception of the good:

> The notion of escaping from [our particularity] into a realm of entirely universal maxims which belong to man as such, whether in its eighteenthcentury Kantian form or in the presentation of some modern analytical moral philosophies, is an illusion and an illusion with painful consequences. When men and women identify what are in fact their partial and particular causes too easily and too completely with the cause of some universal principle, they usually behave worse than they would otherwise...(MacIntyre 1984, 221).

MacIntyre claims that although we cannot articulate a wholly universal conception of the good, we do move forward, and "... it is in moving forward from such particularity that the search for the good, for the universal, consists."(AV221) We hunger for that universality and seek to articulate what the good consists in:

> To ask "What is the good for me?" is to ask how best I might live out [the unity of my narrative embodied in my single life] and bring it to completion. To ask, "What is the good for man?" is to ask what all answers to the former question must have in common(MacIntyre 1984, 218–219)

The hunger for universality remains, even though it can never be fully attained: "...particularity can never be simply left behind or obliterated."(1984, 221)

Without leaving one's particularity behind or obliterating it, everyone seeks to clarify and expand one's initial "partly determinate conception" of the good for oneself. The clarification and alteration of one's conception of the good over time in response to one's experiences highlights the importance of narrative to one's identity. Our narrative is what makes the history of our conception of the good intelligible. Only by appealing to the history of our conception and our quest can we explain the changes that inevitably occur in our conception of the good and, thereby, in our conception of the person we believe we would be if we fulfilled our potential. Only by pointing to the harms done or advantages gained by our pursuing a particular conception of the good can we explain why and how our conception of the good, our ordering or ranking of our goods, or our way of relating to others has changed: since our conception of the good is at the core of our identity, a quest for the good is always simultaneously a quest for selfunderstanding. (MacIntyre 1984, 219)

C. Identity, Intentions, and Conceptions of the Good

One's conception of the good manifests itself in one's "intentions." One explains one's reasons for acting in a particular way or for carrying oneself in a particular way by referring to one's intentions — those ends for the sake of which one engaged in an activity or behaved in a particular manner. While any given activity may be aimed at a variety of ends, MacIntyre distinguishes between primary intentions — — those which, had they been different, the agent would have acted otherwise — and secondary intentions — those which might have been realized in some other way, but happened to accompany the activity in which one engaged for other (primary) reasons. Intentions may also be differentiated by reference to the period of time one holds them — long-term versus short-term intentions — which often indicates the central or subordinate status of a particular good in one's the ordering of goods that characterizes one's conception of the good. The more primary and the longer-standing an intention and the good(s) that it entails are in one's conception, the more likely it is that such an intention (and its concomitant goods) is central to one's identity; that is, the more likely it is that one takes that intention and good(s) as essential to who one identifies as oneself.

One's conception of the good changes over time as one discovers which goods (including which activities, which roles, which dispositions) one finds meaningful and consonant with the best person one believes one is capable of becoming. But some aspects of one's conception may retain a particular place of high regard in one's conception. One may find, for example, that one is deeply attracted and attached to

activities that allow one to assist others. Such activities make one feel that one's life is more meaningful when one is engaged in them; they make one feel more alive and more fulfilled. One might refer to an intention to assist others as a primary and long-standing intention that explains a variety of activities in which one has engaged over time. Such intentions, and the activities (or "practices" as we will discuss in the next section) to which they give rise, reflect aspects of one's conception of the good that are central to who one conceives oneself to be.

One's conception of the good, of what would constitute a good life for oneself, motivates a person to engage in particular activities and to pursue particular goods. To appeal to one's intentions, those purposes for the sake of which one engages in particular activities, is to invoke some aspect of one's conception of the good in order to explain or make intelligible one's activity. Appealing to intentions and to a conception of the good to explain one's activity is explanatory because the basic structure of human activity is intelligible only in such terms. This is MacIntyre's way of acknowledging an orientation to the good as a transcendental condition of human personhood; it is also a transcendental condition of meaningful human activity and particularly of the human activity known as taking responsibility or accountability, of explaining oneself to others. Explanations of the reasons for one's choices are often complex, appealing to a variety of intentions, of goods pursued, of interpretations of the communication of others, etc. That is the case because our conceptions of the good are complex, partially indeterminate, not always fully integrated or systematized, and always in the process of being explored, revised, and articulated. Nevertheless, some aspects of one's conception, some commitments one makes, are recognizable as central aspects of one's conception of the good and, therefore, of one's self-identity.

Some of MacIntyre's most interesting and illuminating reflections occur when he discusses the activities through which we express our allegiance to a particular conception of the good. One type of activity which allows us to express that allegiance is our participation in what he calls "practices."

Practices, Internal Goods, and Virtues

The notion of "practice" is central to MacIntyre's systematic moral vision. By practice, he means...

> ...any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence, which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended (1984, 187) .

Practices link human agents to a particular type of good, an *internal* good, which is unattainable and not capable of being fully appreciated without some form of engagement in the practice which gives rise to it. Engaging in practices is the means by which we seek, attain, and achieve internal goods. "...[T]he range of practices is wide: arts, sciences, games, politics in the Aristotelian sense, the making and sustaining of family life, all fall under the concept."(MacIntyre 1984, 188)

The more deeply we engage in a practice is, the more profound will be our capacity for appreciating the goods internal to it. For example, almost anyone can appreciate a variety of forms of music, but trained musicians will have a richer and deeper understanding and appreciation of a particular work insofar as they understand the theory, technique, history, and style that contributed to its composition and performance. In this way, meaningful interactions among participants in a practice may occur at a variety of levels. Our ability to appreciate and understand — and the level and degree of our appreciation and understanding of — a practice and its goods will depend upon the mount of time, discipline, and attention we devote to learning about the practice and its standards, the way in which we were initiated into the practice, our proficiency and level of maturity, etc.

Although some portion of our initiation into a practice may occur in the company of other novices — e.g., our initiation into the practice of friendship may be guided by adults even while our initial engagement in the practice may occur primarily with others who are also just beginning to learn the practices — we are usually initiated into practices by experienced practitioners. They teach us the nature and structure of the practice, help us to acquire the skills necessary to engage in the practice, teach

us the way to apply those skills, teach us the standards that must be met in order to successfully engage in the practice, and teach us something of the history of the practice's development so that we understand why the practice takes the form that it does. Frequently, they also serve as mentors, models, or persons whom we may emulate for their gracefulness, wisdom, and embodiment of the virtues or excellences of a practice. Insofar as a practice reflects an individual's long-standing primary intentions and a occupies a central place in a master practitioner's conception of the good, the master practitioner will demonstrate the way in which a practice and its attendant virtues can be ever more fully integrated into one's daily life and one's identity. Once one becomes become proficient in the fundamentals of a practice, and understands and appreciates the nature of the goods that guide and animate it, one may come to develop a unique "style," or way of engaging in the practice. At that point, one may be capable of introducing innovative ways of engaging in the practice, develop alternate forms of the practice, or originate alternate practices that complement or compete with the original practice.

Even while master practitioner may introduce innovative ways of practicing, a practice is never merely the exercise of a set of technical skills:

> What is distinctive in a practice is in part the way in which conceptions of the relevant goods and ends which the technical skills serve — and every practice does require the exercise of technical skills — are transformed and enriched by these extensions of human powers and by that regard for its own internal goods which are partially definitive of each particular practice or type of practice... (1984, 193) .

Practices provide opportunities for human beings not only to express their unique proficiencies, skills, and abilities, but insofar as a person's long-standing, primary intentions and core aspects of his or her conception of the good are embodied in and expressed by a practice, that practice will allow the person to amplify and reaffirm his or her identity in a meaningful social context and to explore at deeper levels of understanding the person's conception of the good. Because practices take place in what Taylor calls "social space," engagement in a practice links participants not only to the good (or goods) internal to that practice, but also to the other participants: practices allow us to see the commonalities in our conceptions of the good and allow an intimate and meaningful cooperative exploration of the good as it is embodied and revealed in those common activities.

MacIntyre (1984, 191) recognizes three virtues, or dispositions to act in ways appropriate to a practice, that are necessary components of any practice — justice, courage, and honesty. These are necessary not only because they are preconditions for sustaining all interpersonal cooperative activities, but also because practices will always involve a recognition of where we stand with respect to the knowledge or proficiency of other practitioners. Recognizing our status and proficiency entails that we defer in some matters to those who are more knowledgeable of the standards of excellence than are we

and that we charitable in our treatment of those who are less proficient or knowledgeable than we. Justice requires that we acknowledge the status of other practitioners and treat them according to that status. In some practices, such as friendship, the status is one of equality; in others, such as education, the status of the practitioners may be unequal.

Truthfulness and trust are also essential for the maintenance of a practice. If one is evasive or duplicitous about the goods one is pursuing or the ways in which one is pursuing them, one undermines the trust of others and, thereby, the social basis of the practice in which one is engaged; one erodes, diminishes, or eradicates the satisfaction that one would achieve from the exercise of the virtues in pursuit of the good of the practice; and one undermines one's own development, proficiency, and status within the practice, itself. Courage is necessary to maintain one's honesty since no one wishes to admit that he is less proficient than he may appear. Courage is also necessary when one is called upon to defend either a practice or the way in which one is engaged in it, or when one has become proficient in a practice and believes one can offer non-traditional approaches that would improve the practice.

Traditions and Our Relationships to Them

One's conception of the good for oneself orders the various goods that one encounters in one's life — both the goods internal to the practices in which one participates and external goods, i.e., those goods that are only contingently attached (MacIntyre 1984, 188) to practices which are the "characteristic objects of human desire" (1984, 196) such as fame, material goods, power, and physical well-being. Our conception of the good is a systematic vision of the relationships between those various goods which we believe reflects the optimal balance of those goods to permit us to lead fulfilling and meaningful lives. Our conception of the good is therefore initially informed by the practices into which we were inducted from birth, but that conception eventually moves us to choose, to the extent we are free to choose, those practices in which we will participate, those practices which we believe embody and are expressive of the core of our conception of the good for us.

We find ourselves engaged in a variety of practices into some of which we were initiated from the moment of our birth. Our initiation or induction into those practices was not by choice. At least initially, we do not choose the practices in which we take part, nor do we choose the roles we play in those practices:

> ...I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. These constitute the given of my life, my moral starting point. This is in part what gives my life its own moral particularity. (1984, 220)

One comes to understand oneself in virtue of the roles in which one has been cast and the practices into which one has been initiated. It is through those practices, the internal goods which they make available, and the virtues one learns to exercise in pursuit of those goods, that one comes initially to formulate one's conception of the good for oneself, one's conception of that state which one believes would allow one to fully realize one's potential, to lead the most meaningful and fulfilling live that one is capable of living.

But what does it mean to lead a "meaningful" life? Meaning or intelligibility, on MacIntyre's view, derives from our understanding of the types of being we are: "...The concept of good, then, has application only for beings insofar as they are members of some species or kind..."(MacIntyre 1991, 134). There is a symbiotic relationship

between the good of any individual and the good of the species of which that individual is a member; the good for a person is linked to the good for persons; each person's quest for an ever more complete and fulfilling conception of the good for himself or herself is intricately linked to that person's conception of what is good for persons in general, and that conception is explored both on the individual level in each of our quests for our individual goods as well as on the aggregate level in the practices that are, themselves, symbiotically related to the traditions of inquiry into the nature of the good for humanity in which they are embedded.

Insofar as one's conception of the good for oneself is inseparable from a conception of the good for one's fellow human beings, one is accountable to one's fellows for one's conception and the activities that would issue from it. That "accountability" refers to one's responsibility to articulate the conception of the good which gave rise to one's intentions and to convince one's fellows that such a conception is consistent with the concept of goodness and is, therefore, intelligible, meaningful, and permissible.

It is important to note that despite the social genesis of the self — that is, despite the fact that an individual comes to understand herself in relationship to an inherited set of frameworks and practices — at some point, one becomes a practitioner, and one participates in the on-going discussion of what it is to be a good person and what it is to be a good community or society. In fact, while there are "founding narratives" for all cultures and societies, those narratives are always subject to nontraditional reinterpretation and criticism:

> A living tradition then is an historically extended, socially embedded argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition... (1984, 222), ...Indeed, when a tradition becomes Burkean, it is always dying or dead... (1984, 222).

Like Taylor, MacIntyre argues that we cannot do without frameworks (traditions or narratives) altogether. However, while our identities and our interpretive frameworks have their roots in our communities of origin, "...rebellion against my [conferred] identity is always one possible mode of expressing... [my identity as I understand it]."(MacIntyre 1984, 221)

Hilde Lindemann Nelson (2001) offers ways in which narrative resistance and the telling of "counter-stories" can bring about "narrative repair." In the process of doing so, she questions MacIntyre's contention that a unitary narrative is necessary (or necessarily desirable) to live a good life.

She cites Margaret Urban Walker (1998,148): "There is just no plausible move in general from making sense of an action in some narrative context to needing to see it against the backcloth of an entire life, " and argues that...

> ...the greater the unity of an identity, the more *precarious* it is, because any stray or recalcitrant element that can't be made to conform to the unified whole destabilizes it (Nelson 2001, 90).

Nelson is concerned here with oppressive "master narratives" to which cultures or traditions may appeal to in order to justify oppressive practices. In response to such treatment, the oppressed must proffer counter-stories that are neither merely amended versions of the master narratives nor simple "alternative" narratives, but stories that resist and reframe the original narratives and relationships among the peoples involved.

Nelson's and Walker's points are well taken; however, they can be accommodated in MacIntyre's view at three points: first, the articulation of a resistance narrative or counternarrative is a form of rebellion. If a culture's conception of the good as embodied in its narrative does not recognize a good such as equal respect, then the narrative and the conception need to be challenged and revised; if it does contain a recognition of a good that would prohibit oppressive treatment of minority groups, at element must be brought to the fore, re-evaluated, and reinforced.

Walker and Nelson's concern about making narrative sense of an action within a context smaller than that of an entire life is somewhat more challenging, but, can be accommodated to some extent by MacIntyre's theory: not all intentions or actions must be directly and fully integrated into a person's overarching life story. Ordinarily, we do not compare or test every action we might consider taking against our strong evaluations as embodied in our current life plans or narratives; however, when we make important life decisions, decisions concerning what Taylor would call our general orientation to the good, or decisions that call into question either our settled intuitions, our moral frameworks, or our moral horizons, we would be best served to critically analyze our decisions and to compare them to our standing commitments to our conception of the good. There is a mean of proper moral attention that lies between scrupulousness and carelessness.

Finally, with respect to the unity of an identity or a narrative, certainly some "compartmentalized" narratives are innocuous *(e.g.,* not telling one's employer of one's fascination with on-line fantasy gaming); others are perhaps necessary (*e.g.,* seeing oneself as a survivor of sexual assault and not allowing that assault to destroy one's life); but some acts of narrative compartmentalization may stabilize identity at the expense of morality *{e.g.,* the soldier who torture prisoners who see himself as a devoted warrior and family member). Certainly, there are different ways of composing one's life, and unity of life narrative may not be necessary or sufficient for living a good life, but holding oneself responsible or accountable for one's behavior — or, when one has been coerced, oppressed, or otherwise forced to violate one's conscience or judgment, holding oneself excused and one's oppressors responsible — by integrating them into one coherent and unified story is, I would contend, consistent with pursuing the good.

I believe that Nelson's strongest critique of MacIntyre (which, again, draws on Walker (1998, 147)), suggests that rather than being analogous to a single continuous thread, and thereby a single story, a person's life might be better likened to "...a yarn...spun like Wittgenstein's thread, twisting fiber on fiber so that no one fiber runs through the whole length, but the strength is in the overlapping of many." Again, I

would contend that this conception of the self is compatible with MacIntyre's view on several grounds.

First, MacIntyre does not claim that the self or an individual's conception of the good is static and unalterable. New experiences, new circumstances, new interpretations of what the good consists introduce new fibers that are intertwined into the thread, of one's life. Likewise, conceptions that no longer inform one's identity or relationships and goods that are no longer central to one's life may no longer be spun or intertwined into one's identificational scheme. Moreover, to argue that the pursuit of a coherent and unified narrative for one's life is a good is not necessarily to argue that people are incapable of imagining, pursuing, or, at the very least, remaining open to several alternative prospective plotlines; nor are they incapable of reclaiming alternate plotlines that they may have initially set aside or rejected; nor, finally, are they incapable of reinterpreting their lives based on a retrospective review of the way in which they arrived at their current identity. Events do not always occur as we plan, circumstances and/or other agents may force us to alter our plans, and goods that we are pursuing are not compatible with each other. To some extent, our lives are open to reinterpretation and redirection. There may well be identificational or interpretive fibers running parallel to both our past and future conceptions of ourselves that we may need to claim in order to make sense of our lives. There may also be "invisible" fibers running through our identities of which we are not aware: Nelson (2001, 91) alludes to that possibility when she refers to Oedipus, who was (initially, figuratively) blind as to how to interpret his actions.

To acknowledge the (both prospectively and retrospectively) open-ended nature of a person's moral identity and/or conception of the good is not necessarily to deny the value of a unitary identity and narrative: when one makes a life-altering choice or an interpretation that alters one's conception of oneself or of the good, one ought to be able to articulate the reasons for those choices, changes, or actions — be they based on a recognition that one had erred in one's original interpretation, on a recognition that one had had an epiphany of some sort, on a recognition of the fact that one had not fully understood the relationship of various goods within one's conception of the good, *etc.* To attempt to excuse oneself for one's choices or actions by claiming that one was "not oneself" or was acting out as an alternative personality would be to exhibit either a moral or a psychological pathology. To fail to consider oneself as one individual person is to undermine the possibility of morality altogether: to tell a story that explains why one believes one is *not* to be held completely responsible for one's actions, why one believes one is to be exculpated for one's actions or choices, is to take responsibility for one's story and oneself. To demonstrate that the responsibility for one's behavior lies with someone else, to express remorse or regret, to perform some service, to suffer some form of punishment, or to submit to some combination of those acts is to begin to attempt to repair the moral harm that may have been (falsely or legitimately) attributed to one and to begin to attempt to restore one's standing in moral space. Of course, it is always best to critically analyze one's conception of

the good and one's conception of one's moral identity when one is in a situation that appears to call for one to compromise. Before one acts is the best time to attempt to determine whether a particular circumstance requires compromise and whether such compromise is appropriate.

Moral Space, Narrative Time, and the Practice of Self- Identification

Both Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor attempt in their moral theories to mitigate, resolve, or dissolve the tension that is frequently experienced between moral subjectivity and objectivity — *i.e.,* the tension between desires, values, identities, or ways of life that differ from subject to subject and the belief that moral values are at least somewhat objective, impartial, and universal. As Joel Anderson (1996, 17) points out, most contemporary moral theories tend either to argue for the primacy of one over the other or they attempt to establish some sort of "détente" between the two extremes by dividing morality into two realms — public and private. Like Taylor, MacIntyre argues that subjectivity and objectivity are "intertwined in the realm of value, " such that...

> ...what supports our most basic evaluative positions is not an underlying principle of reason or even an overarching value or set of values that trumps all others but rather an understanding of how the world is (Anderson 1996, 22).

Our best explanation of "how the world is" includes our recognition of the various goods that exist in moral space and the fact that those goods call upon us to engage in strong evaluation. Our understanding of those goods is structured by our communities of origin by our induction into their social practices, which are interconnected and made intelligible by their being embedded in a narrative.

Both the narratives of individual agents and the narratives of the collectives to which those individuals belong are dynamic, multilayered, and "multi-storied" or "multi-narrated." Just as it is difficult — if not impossible — to lay out one map of moral space, so it is impossible to determine one (or even several) master narrative for human beings in general or for specific communities. If rebellion against one's conferred identity is one form of relating to one's community, and if traditions are extended arguments, then we ought to expect a plurality of stories as well as contestations concerning authority/ authorship.

Despite its being complex and somewhat unfixed, narrative time helps us to somewhat better understand moral space and the contrasting orientations, frameworks, maps, and conceptions that exist in it. There are frequent points at which narratives may realign themselves in their orientations either to the future or to the past.

Reinterpretation and rearticulation of one's understanding of one's location in moral space is frequently a possibility. As much as narrative time, with its tentacles and phantom-tentacles reaching both back and forward in chronological time, serves to help us understand moral space, it also serves to complicate that space, for we can see the ways in which one's orientation in moral space is at least partially determined by one's community of origin, one's lived experience, and one's interpretations of both one's own narrative and the narratives of one's companions.

The practice of self-identification is therefore one of triangulation and surveillance. We identify ourselves, our narratives and our conceptions of the good, both *with* and *against* the narratives and conceptions of others. We seek to capture and re-present in words our self-interpretations, our interpretations of what the good consists in for ourselves as individual, as members of particular communities, and as members of the human race. That act of interpretation frequently takes the form of examining our ordinary and habitual ways of living and attempting to analyze how those activities and practices relate to our conceptions of the good. On this view, interpretation and articulation are attempts to demystify or to make transparent the meaning of our habits and intuitions. On this view, an intuition is a judgment based in one's habitual way of interpreting the world, and articulation and interpretation are attempts to see how that judgment relates to our more systematic representations (or conceptions) of the way the world (morally) is. Articulation, interpretation, and narration are all forms of bringing our habituated, embodied, pre- reflective understanding of the world into dialogue with our conceptions of the good in an attempt to allow each to inform and enrich the other.

Chapter 4: David L. Norton on Moral Development and Identificational Inertia

> Knowledge of ideal goods is wisdom and must be acquired by education, both formal and experimental. Knowledge of the particular ideal good that represents the fulfillment of the given individual is self-knowledge... Self-knowledge begins in the discovery of the course of living... that affords intrinsic rewards to the particular individual... The proper aim is worthy living of a particular kind, realizing the particular values that constitute the individual's *daimon* [ideal personhood or potential excellence]. (Norton 1995, 3)

Whereas Charles Taylor sets forth the transcendental conditions of moral identity, David L. Norton provides a phenomenological and theoretical account of the *development* of moral identity, an account of the way in which those transcendental conditions are met and give rise to, shape, and support one's conception of oneself. Norton's account examines the background conditions and practices that undergird the practice of self-formation.

Norton's conception of the nature of personal development focuses on how individuals are inducted into, and how they become adept at, the practice of self-formation. While, ultimately, I will suggest that Norton's particular structuring of the trajectory of self-formation is not as flexible as it could and should be, his conception of the process of learning the practice of self-formation will allow us to draw several conclusions about that practice and its implications for moral theory.

Stages of Personal Development

Norton identifies four stages of personal development — childhood, adolescence, adulthood (which he labels maturity), and maturity (which he calls old age). Each stage is characterized by a particular *telos* or end, and each has a corresponding virtue or set of virtues. On Norton's view, one stage is "exchanged" for another. When one exchanges one stage for another, one undergoes a radical reassessment and re-envisioning of what would constitute a good life. To use Taylor's terminology, each stage requires a "remapping" of moral space and a corresponding reorientation and reidentification by the individual. To exchange one stage for another is to reconfigure one's conception of the good and one's orientation in moral space, but it is not to do without a framework altogether. On Norton's view, there is a natural logic intrinsic to stage developmental theory that guides the exchange without harming the continuity of the individual's narrative. We will discuss this view further and the reasons that Norton believes stage exchange is necessary after we examine the nature of each of the four stages of personal development.

A. Childhood

Childhood is the span of time during which one becomes aware of oneself as one human being among other human beings. One learns to identify and categorize one's feelings and emotions, to use language, to recognize and to be recognized by others, and to interact and communicate with others. The child learns to identify his own internal states by having an adult infer and identify those states for him — telling him that the loss he feels at the death of a beloved pet is "sadness" or that he is feeling "anger" at the person who stole his toy. Such lessons teach the proper use of language and the ability to identify feelings. They also teach the child something about the art of inference and the nature and value of empathy.

Childhood is the period during which one becomes acculturated and learns communication and interpersonal skills. The child learns how to fulfill many of her needs in socially acceptable ways. The primary virtue of this stage is "receptivity." (Norton 1977, 172) Receptivity is a virtue rather than a natural state for children because children are naturally pulled in a variety of directions by a variety of impulses and feelings. Children must be taught to focus their attention and direct their behavior over a wide range of activities — from toilet-training to eating with utensils to dressing themselves

to meeting and greeting other people. Once a child is introduced to those practices, she will eventually come to see their usefulness, but the child is not naturally drawn to self-discipline. For that reason, the child must trust that the adults responsible for them are teaching them those habits, skills, and ways of conduct for her own good. Indeed, the child looks to the adult to define what goodness consists in, and the child naturally seeks parental approval and love.

Those entrusted to care for a child, including her parents, older siblings, and to some extent, all others who are in contact with the child, have a responsibility to justify the child's trusting them, to merit the child's trust. Edmund D. Pellegrino and David C. Thomasma (1988, 51- 60) refer to that duty as one of "beneficence in trust." It requires the adult to act "...on behalf of the persons their children shall one day become," (Norton 1988, 171) to prepare the child for independence. The child's dependence on adults even to identify and label the child's own feelings for her makes her incapable of determining for herself standards of excellence or guiding principles for living her life. Adults must supply that structure to allow for proper social interaction and, to borrow Taylor's phrase and metaphor, to provide the child with an initial or "original orientation" in "moral space."

Childhood as a stage is characterized by several essential features. First, the child's conception of the world that surrounds him is a mixture of imagination and reality as he learns to recognize the difference between the world of his imagination and the social world he inhabits, and will continue to share, with others. Because he learns to recognize and categorize the world during this phase of his life, the child is an apprentice to the adult in learning the way in which people interact with one another and the ways in which they relate to their surroundings. The receptivity that is a virtue for this phase is a particular type of receptivity: future forms of receptivity in later stages will be of a very different form, not one that takes another's assessment of the good uncritically as one's own. For that reason, and because of the particular *telos* of this phase — that of becoming acculturated or socialized — children have qualitatively different conceptions of love, justice, freedom, and death than do persons in later stages of life — and it is appropriate that they do. To require children to be responsible in the way that adolescents, adults, or mature persons are would be to require of them skills and understandings that they do not possess and insights they are incapable of having. Likewise, it would be inappropriate to ask that they love others in a self-effacing way, that they make commitments to the ways in which they will live their lives in the future, that they judge what is right or wrong without reference to the authority of adult authorities, *etc.*

B. Adolescence

One leaves childhood and enters adolescence when one has the experience more and more frequently that one has been misidentified, particularly by her parents, on whose

identification of her she had been dependent. Adolescence's defining characteristic is the awakening of a sense of independence, a sense that one is alive and is confronted with a world filled with possibilities that beckon one to explore. That sense is not traceable merely to the adolescent's sexual awakening — although surely it is reasonable to assume that such a stirring of previously unknown desires, particularly a desire to relate to certain others in a way previously unimaginable, plays a role in the adolescent's sense of being misunderstood or of having her feelings misidentified. Rather, that sense of independence presents itself as the discovery of being more and other than who one's parents and one's companions had conceived one to be. Discovering and defining who that "more and other than" is, is the problem and task of adolescence: if "childhood as the period in the life of the individual when he is a problem strictly for others...; adolescence begins with the moment at which the individual... becomes a problem to himself." (PD180)

Norton points out that an adolescent's conclusion that he has been misidentified comes as a discovery (PD110); more specifically, he discovers that his parents' heretofore privileged identification of him is no longer accurate. He is aware of impulses, desires, and understandings to which his parents are not privy. One leaves childhood and enters adolescence not by *choice,* not by *deciding* that one must become an independent person or by radically willing *ex nihilo* to take responsibility for oneself. Rather, one senses that the identity conferred upon one by one's parents does not correspond to one's interior sense of oneself. One no longer identifies oneself as a child, but neither is one an adult, for one's identity in this stage is indeterminate; a sense of who one is or who one might become beckons the adolescent, but precisely what is beckoning is mysterious to the adolescent, himself, and presents itself with little, if any, identifiable positive content. The adolescent's identity is almost exclusively a negation of any identity that others would confer upon him. In an odd and almost paradoxical way, the adolescent identifies himself with the discovery of a desire to discover himself.

Having acquired a rudimentary lexicon, an understanding of the nature of interpersonal communication and relations, a set of basic normative principles to guide activity — in short, the skills necessary to engage in social activities and to be acknowledged and recognized as a participant in those activities — the adolescent sets herself to testing her "original orientation," her original conferred identity, with her newly discovered skepticism and sense of independence to determine whether that orientation should be reaffirmed, altered, or foresworn and reconstructed in light of her discoveries about herself. Having recognized the split between who she conceives herself to be and who others (sometimes erroneously) conceive her to be, the adolescent seeks to discover who she is by throwing herself into various roles, exploring various ways of behaving, engaging in various activities, imaginatively exploring various possible career paths, forms of expression, and forms of social interaction. She does so with an adamant demand that she be taken completely seriously in each of her decisions as an adult even while she denies responsibility and claims the innocence and naiveté of a child. She wants the irresponsibility of childhood with the respectability of adulthood.

Nevertheless, the adolescent longs for the sense of "effortless belonging" that characterized childhood. She recognizes, however, that the sense of belonging she seeks cannot be found in regressing to a childish way of thinking or interacting, to an unreflective and unquestioning obedience of her parents' commands or acquiescence to the identity they would confer on her. She *cannot* accept that identity because something within her calls her to recognize it as an internal source of identity and authority. She feels compelled to search for an understanding of what that internal authority would demand, of what a fulfilling life would entail, how it would look and feel "from the inside":

> ...The world [adolescence] sets about so voraciously to discover is in no sense the in- itself world of objective knowledge. By enactment of the actual alternatives the world offers, adolescence actualizes possibilities within itself one by one, rendering them available to introspection and susceptible of reflective judgment... [E]xploration is adolescence itself." (Norton 1977, 180–181)

Adolescence is the period during which a person tests herself in an attempt to determine which activities she finds intrinsically rewarding and to determine her own preferences, skills, and talents as well as their limits and limitations. It is a period of practicing being an adult, without the responsibility that attends the adult who has discovered a sense of who she is and what she stands for. According to Norton, the virtues of adolescence are hopefulness and daring. These qualities are necessary to sustain the adolescent in his explorations of various modes of life. They are necessarily complemented and sustained by a restless impatience and a failure to acknowledge his own mortality or to fully acknowledge the consequences of his actions. A certain amount of irresponsibility is to be expected of and accepted in adolescents. To hold them unduly responsible is to hold them to an adult standard of behavior and, thereby, to discourage them from the exploratory task of adolescence. Adolescence necessarily gives way to adulthood when a young person becomes aware of his own finitude. At some point in a person's life, he becomes aware of the fact that there are certain activities or certain modes of life and of human interaction that he finds most fulfilling. Indeed that awareness may arise early in adolescence and inklings or signs of it may arise even in childhood.

C. Adulthood

When the adolescent becomes cognizant of her own mortality, when she is truly aware that her time is limited, those modes of life, ways of comportment, activities, and practices and the goods internal to them discovered in adolescence that provided the person with a sense of "fit," with an intrinsic sense of fulfillment and meaning,

beckon her to engage in them while there is time to do so. They become the goods with reference to which she identifies herself, and her relationship to them allows her to fulfill an intrinsic obligation to become herself (Norton 1977, 188. Her adolescent explorations have provided her with knowledge of the practices and goods with which she identifies herself:

> ...The individual's choice of what is to be done by himself is the choice of his ultimate possibility, a possibility that is *himself* as a fulfilled person. This choice can be made either explicitly or implicitly. To choose explicitly is to identify, amid alternatives, that end or final consummation (in form, a perfected person) that will henceforth be served by all of one's acts, and that will, in turn, serve them by giving them their meaning. To choose implicitly is to resolve to fulfill the implications of a given concrete activity, thereby adhering to the implicit principle of the given activity ("keeping one's promises") and advancing toward the ultimate possibility from which the principle derives (Norton 1977, 189).

Such a choice is not arbitrary. One chooses to attempt to be the perfected self that is inherent in oneself. One believes that, in a sense, that perfected self, or *daimon* (to use the Greek term selected by Norton to designate that potentiality that grounds a person) *already exists* within oneself and is seeking to manifest itself in the world. When it does manifest itself, when it expresses itself in one's activities, one feels attuned to oneself, true to oneself, fulfilled. In another sense, that *daimon* is the self that one wishes to *actualize* — hence, one wishes to become, and to be, oneself. The *daimon* represents the fulfillment of one's *potential.* It motivates one to go into the world and actualize it. The force that it uses to motivate is love or *eros:*

> In this meaning, love is aspiration to the good — not, however, to the universal and indeterminate Good, nor to one good or another indiscriminately, but to the determinate good that will fulfill and complete the given individual *qua* individual (Norton 1977, 190)

To choose to live such a life is to choose to attempt to identify ever more clearly, and pursue ever more closely, that particular course of life that will allow one to perfect one's distinctive abilities, exercise one's distinctive faculties, and engage one's distinctive constellation of passions.

The choice of committing oneself to attempt to actualize one's potential is one's attempt to offer an intelligible, meaningful, and personal response to the "problem of the self" that arose in adolescence. That choice is a choice to be and to become oneself, to actualize that unique potentiality that characterizes oneself as an individual. The fundamental virtue of adulthood is integrity (Norton 1977, 197) which consists in a commitment to remain faithful to one's *daimon* and its demands. Norton claims

that this "duty to oneself" is "the ground of every interpersonal, *social, and objective* duty."(Norton 1997, 197) On this view, if a person is truly moral, her commitment to actualize her potential, to manifest her *daimon,* becomes the guiding principle and purpose of her adult life.

D. Maturity or Old Age

The final stage of a person's development begins when one has the sudden perception that death is imminent, that one's future is foreclosed. He no longer feels the internal compulsion to pursue the actualization of an ideal self; instead, he finds himself moved to focus more fully on the self that he has become by virtue of his pursuit of that ideal. On Norton's view, maturity is a time of gathering the wisdom of the journey and of reflecting in thought, word, and activity a generous acceptance of reality as it is both within oneself and outside of oneself, in others and in the world as a whole:

> ...Old age is the stage of... universal "letting be." Its loss of a future is loss of the principle of individuation, and this loss is the occasion for the re-discovery within the individual of his common humanity (Norton 1977, 209).

On Norton's view, maturity, or a good old age, is marked by a generous sharing of the wisdom gained in the pursuit of one's ideal and by an increased ability to acknowledge and both express an appreciation for, and offer guidance regarding, the efforts of those who are just beginning to find themselves or are in pursuit of their ideals. Having labored and practiced, old age is the time to contemplate, enjoy, and bond with the next generation. If generosity is the virtue of this stage, its hallmark activity and *telos* might best be labeled contemplation.

The Significance of Developmental Stages

Norton's recognition of developmental stages allows him to develop a conception of the self that recognizes the roles of history and culture, of innate personality, of selfdisciplined choice, and of self-relinquishing in the formation of self-identity. Norton's view allows for a balance of these various forces, with each having ascendancy during a particular period of a person's life.

The social, historical, and cultural influences on the formation of the self are most prominent in childhood. As Taylor points out, the acquisition of a language is the acquisition of an entire classificatory scheme with or through which one interprets one's world. The structure that language provides will surely influence the way in which one interprets the world and one's place in it. Moreover, if we conceive of language in a broad sense as the means by which people communicate with each other, it is clear that, especially in childhood (though it is true throughout one's life), a person comes to recognize herself by the way in which she is recognized by others. So at least a part of one's conception of who one is derives from one's interactions with others.

The language, the structure, the relationships, the *identity* that is conferred upon one in childhood does not necessarily serve as the foundation for one's adolescent and adult identities. The way of classifying the world, the structure, the conception of what would constitute a good life for the child; all of these are as likely to serve as foils against which to work off or as structures against which to rebel as they are to serve as foundations or Archimedean points. Nevertheless, while the conferred identity of childhood may or may not serve as a foundation for the adolescent-becoming-an-adult's self-identity, the remnants of the shattered conferred identity and the language acquired in childhood will provide the media through which the adult's discovered identity will be expressed.

If childhood is the period during which the sociocultural-historical influences on a person's identity are most strongly exerted, adolescence is that period when — despite the appearance of reactionary conformity with her contemporaries behind which the adolescent attempts to hide her confusion and insecurity — a oerson seeks to explore the multitude of human possibilities in search of that one particular set of possibilities that would constitute her potential, the actualization of which will bring her a sense of satisfaction and of *eudaimonia* – a term that describes both the state of living in conformity to one's unique set of excellences or ideals and the feeling of fulfillment, contentment, or deep satisfaction that accompanies such a state. The conformity of

adolescence is a cocoon in which the adolescent hides while preparing to respond to the simultaneously liberating and discomforting array of possibilities with and against which she considers identifying herself. The adolescent seeks to re-attain the comfort that comes from having a more solid identity; she seeks to know who she really is, since who she had believed herself to be — the identity conferred upon her in childhood — does not do her justice, does not express her as she encounters herself when she attempts to articulate her beliefs, her desires, her anticipated future.

But the adolescent does not consciously set out on the quest for himself in order to achieve *eudaimonia.* He is motivated both by a recognition of the fact that his previous (conferred) identity did not fully fit him or reflect him and by a more general recognition of the world of possibilities that are to be explored. While he is aware of human mortality, there is a strange way in which he is in denial of his own. He has not had what might be termed an "existential recognition" of his own mortality: he may understand that all humans are mortal, but knowledge of his own limitations does not pervade his thinking. Ideally, the adolescent, while incredibly conscious of how others might identify him, is free of internal restrictions on who he may consider himself to be or who he may wish to become.

If there were no interior sense to guide the adolescent *toward a particular way of life, then the existentialist* conception of the self would be correct: any choice of who to be and how to live would be as acceptable to the individual as any other. Like Taylor (1985a, 29) and MacIntyre (1984, 214ff) , Norton points out that the choice of a way of living (like that faced by Sartre's young man who must decide between caring for his mother or joining the French Resistance), is not a matter on which one is indifferent and which is to be resolved by a criterion-free throwing of oneself in one direction or another. Instead, having discovered in adolescence certain activities, ways of comportment, etc. that seemed appropriate to oneself, and having been catalyzed by an existential recognition of one's own. finitude into understanding that one has but one life and a limited time in which to live it, an individual discovers a way of life that is his own, that "fits", that guides his life with a sense of moral necessity.

That sense of moral necessity, of being drawn to lead one's life in a particular way, is the definitive mark of adulthood. It marks adulthood as a period of positive freedom, of self-determination, a period in which a person attempts to fulfill the promise that is her potential, and to embody that promise, that principle, ever more fully in her every act. Indeed, according to Norton, once a person discovers her true self, her life is made intelligible by reference to her commitment (or lack thereof) to living in accord with that self: *"Sensu stricto* the life of the individual thus become a single act, manifesting itself over a span of time" (Norton 1997, 153). We will return to the nature of this activity in the next section of this essay. The point to be made here is that adulthood is a period in which a person seeks to articulate and elaborate on that self that has been discovered in adolescence and quickened with the existential insight into the fact of one's own mortality.

Integrity and the Choice to Be Oneself

To recapitulate, within each person, there is an innate capacity and an innate desire to achieve a unique, intersubjactively recognizable and appreciable form of human excellence; the proper cultivation, engagement, and manifestation of that capacity (otherwise stated as the actualization of that person's potential) will provide the individual with a deep sense of satisfaction and will enrich human society as a whole. The wholehearted attempt to actualize one's potential is what we call integrity, and it is the virtue of the adult stage of moral development. Let us look a little more deeply into the assumptions and arguments Norton uses to arrive at that conclusion.

A. Possible, Potential, and Actual Selves

On Norton's view, each person, as a member of the human race, is endowed with a genetic heritage that enables her to engage to some degree (perhaps only in her imagination due to her physical, intellectual, socio-political, or other limitations) in any conceivable human activity. Each person is capable of imagining having any conceivable state of mind available to human beings. To paraphrase Terence (as quoted in Norton 1997, 25): nothing human is alien to any other human; the whole spectrum of possible human meanings and frames of mind is available to each human being. We are capable of innumerable frames of mind or perspectives, of pursuing innumerable paths of life. The possibilities open to us are innumerable.

But we are also finite individuals. Although we are all capable at some level of conceiving and appreciating the universe of human possibilities, each person's time, resources, abilities, capacities, skills, talents, etc. are limited. Even within our individual limitations, however, the possibilities of life choices are overwhelming (Sartre would say nauseatingly so) and choosing among them is a daunting task. It is, however, a task we cannot refuse to undertake, for refusing to choose is, itself, a choice.

On a eudaimonist view, we are not without guidance in making our life choices, for while, on this view, "...each person comprises the totality of human possibilities, only one [set of possibilities] ... is actual as his unique potentiality or destiny;" (Norton 1997, 108) that is to say that only by actualizing — by acting upon and manifesting in the world — one set of these possibilities will the person actualize his true self, be the best person that he can be, and achieve the fulfilling state known as *eudaimonia.*

That potentiality differentiates each individual from every other at the very core of his or her being. Regardless of the fact that we share a world of possibilities with every other human being, and regardless of the fact that we share the capacity to engage and enact many of those possibilities with varying degrees of success, on Norton's view, each person has one set of possibilities that is uniquely his or her own. That set of possibilities constitutes the person's potential. While the manifestation and development of that potential will be affected by environmental factors — just as the manifestation and development of one's physical genetic potential is affected by environmental factors — one's potential self has an abiding form that remains intact and which is always present to some degree and in some manner in each of one's actions.

Norton contends that there is only one set of potentialities, one constellation of aptitudes, affinities, talents, skills, deep desires, etc. that constitutes an individual's true potential. Assuming that one has progressed through adolescence properly, one has some sense of what that set consists in, of what one's potential is. One also has some sense of who one is in actuality — a sense of one's weaknesses, limitations, and current state of development. One's actuality and one's potentiality are irreducible and inextricable aspects of one's identity, one's self, and it is they that one wishes to bring into accord with each other in order to achieve *eudaimonia.* To have knowledge of one's potentiality is to have attained some degree of self- knowledge, and, to have that knowledge, on Norton's view, is to be aware of the obligation one has to oneself to live in accordance with that knowledge, an obligation to actualize one's potential and to achieve the finite perfection that attends that actualization.

Reason is the capacity that allows the individual to bridge the gap between the person she *is* in actuality — with her current needs, desires, weaknesses, *etc.,* and in her current state of development — and her *daimon* – the person she *is* in potentiality. But it is unclear exactly how practical reasoning works on his view. How accurately can we predict whether a particular course of activity will lead to *eudaimonia?* Assuming, with Norton, that we can distinguish the love that characterizes *eudaimonic* living from living motivated by competing inappropriate motivations such as "...need, desire, (including the desire for 'pleasure' [which accompanies the fulfillment of a desire] or 'happiness' [which accompanies the fulfillment of numerous desires over a sustained period of time]) vanity, guilt, shame or extrinsically imposed 'duty'" (Norton 1997, 190), how can we know whether a particular activity will actually fulfill us in a *eudaimonic* way?

On Norton's view, one response would be that if a person is living in integrity, then her experience is suffused with a sense of appropriateness, of moral necessity, a sense that she is doing what she ought to be doing. The actions she finds most important to her will be motivated and/or informed by her knowledge of her *daimon* which draws her to act out of love for the perfection inherent in her. When she is motivated by love in that way, she will achieve *eudaimonia.* Norton suggests that the knowledge one attains in one's search for oneself in adolescence coupled with the existential recognition of

one's own mortality drive the person to choose what she is to do, how she is to live. As we noted earlier, that choice is "...a choice of ultimate possibility, a possibility that *is himself* as a fulfilled person..." (Norton 1977, 189). It constitutes a promise to become a particular type of person, and it "...renders his every action promissory" as well (Norton 1977, 192). It marks the person's assumption of responsibility to strive to meet her potential, to live up to her promise. Only by committing to a particular ultimate possibility will one have any chance of attaining it. Subsequent experience may prove that choice to be less conducive to *eudaimonia* than one had anticipated its being. In such an instance, one needs to recognize one's error and to commit to a new promise — both to oneself and to those who rely upon one in the pursuit of their own lives. Those who have relied upon one's promise must either have their reasonable expectations met or must be compensated by the new promise which more accurately embodies the person's *daimon.*

In cases such as this, the person has an insight which guides her to a richer and more accurate sense of her *daimon* and, thereby, a richer and more encompassing integrity. Such a shift is, and should be, rare because self-actualization is progressive, and a restructuring of one's choice and of the focal point of one's integrity is not to be taken lightly since it indicates one had misunderstood oneself. Nevertheless, such a misunderstanding may have been a necessary stepping-stone to one's deeper and truer understanding of one's potential.

It is important to emphasize that what one commits to wholeheartedly in one's choice of ultimate possibility is...

> ...nothing actual, being instead a pure possible that certain actualities in the world deficiently express... [T]he object of wholehearted commitment is not the world but oneself, as the moral task of self-actualization... What one chooses wholeheartedly is the self one shall strive to become, a becoming that contributes actual worth to the world (Norton 1977, 194–195).

One commits oneself to be faithful to the self one discovers in the course of her responding to the "problem" she saw as herself when she entered the search for identity that was adolescence. One's choosing to acknowledge and fulfill one's duty to oneself is, on Norton's construal of *eudaimonism,* "the ground of every interpersonal, social, and objective duty."(Norton 1977, 197) That is the case because faithfulness to that initial promise provides the criterion for one's future choices.

But that promise is not to a static, fully revealed entity: while a person's *daimon* is apparent to the individual, herself, at all times to the degree her development allows her to be aware of it; one's *daimon* reveals itself gradually to the person in the course of that person's development. Each stage of development allows more of that *daimon* to reveal itself to the individual. What is revealed to an individual at any given time is not a complete and detailed conception of what would constitute the consummately fulfilling life along with a perfect guide to bringing that conception to fruition. Norton

claims that, while the *daimon* is present in its entirety in the individual from the moment of that person's coming into existence, it usually reveals itself to the individual slowly, but ever more fully, over time. We may see flashes of it in children (though, sometimes, in the case of child prodigies, we may see more than a "flash"), and we experience its revelation, ourselves, when we experience moments of deep fulfillment, meaningfulness, and *eudaimonia* in our own lives, but we cannot have a complete grasp of it. It is never fully revealed to us, but our innate curiosity and longing for completeness draw us to attempt to approach, comprehend, and actualize it as best we can. While it is plausible that proper moral development resulting in a proper, mature commitment to the principle that would allow one to actualize one's potential would result in an individual's own *eudaimonia,* how does that achievement contribute to social well-being?

Ethical Individualism and Ethical Sociality

> ... [T]he goal of a human individual is the perfection of his own unique finitude, and the goal of humanity is the community of complementary, perfected individuals... The "goal of humanity" is approachable only by means of the selffulfillment of individuals, finding its meaning in the objective (social) value of individual excellence... (Norton 1977, 143).

The self-actualizing, self-perfecting individual is the cornerstone of a flourishing community. He recognizes the limits of his own perfectibility and recognizes that even if he were able to actualize momentarily his finite perfectibility as an individual, he would still rely upon the self-actualizing efforts of his fellows to supplement, complement, and make meaningful his own. Each person, in his finitude, is responsible for his own part of the universe, for actualizing his chosen pattern of ultimate possibility. That means that he is responsible for making it worthy and capable of being interconnected with the other finite perfections for which other persons are responsible.

Self-actualizing individuals are interdependent in a variety of ways: first, the manifestation of principled devotion to self-truth "activates like inclinations" in others. (Norton 1977, 13) Each of us learns how to pursue self-actualization by emulating others. That is particularly the case when the adolescent is searching for a way to relate to others, to comport herself, and to engage in activities and practices that allow her to be in touch with and manifest her potential self. She looks to others to see how they actualize and manifest their potentiality and emulates their pursuit of self-actualization. Adults and mature persons also emulate each other when they recognize particular activities or modes of activity that are adaptable and conducive to their own pursuits.

It is important to note the distinction Norton (*cf.* Norton 1977, 13ff.) draws between emulating and imitating or mimicking: to emulate someone is to attempt to discern the principle that animates that person's pursuit of her selfactualization and apply it to one's own pursuit. Emulation requires a capacity to understand what motivates and guides a person's behavior rather than a capacity merely to attempt to duplicate specific behaviors. That distinction is important because while imitation may represent an initial attempt to "be like" the person one admires, emulation represents the more appropriate effort and demonstrates an understanding of the practice of self-formation. Initially, one learns by copying, but once one understands the practice on a deeper level, one engages in the practice at a deeper and more appropriate level.

A self-actualizing adult also recognizes the fact that her individual commitment to her ultimate possibility leaves other valuable possibilities to be actualized by others — possibilities upon which her own pursuit may rely or possibilities that she can appreciate even if she herself cannot attend to their actualization. Hence, the person specializing in Continental philosophy relies upon others to explore and share insights from Analytical philosophy; criminal lasers rely on civil lawyers to specialize in areas of the law for which they are unable to assume responsibility; and each of us relies on others to be responsible for the personal truths, bodies of knowledge, artistic talents, etc. that enrich, sustain, and complement our lives. In those ways, self-actualized individuals complement one another; some directly, as when people are working in the same field, and some indirectly, as when people are engaged in altogether unrelated fields which serve to enrich the lives of others and to help fulfill the needs — — physical, emotional, aesthetic, *etc.* — for which they have taken responsibility.

Finally, there is another form of mutual support that self-actualizing individuals provide one another which derives from the capacity, developed during adolescence, to engage in what Norton calls "participatory enactment," which might also be called imaginative projection. When one engages in participatory enactment as an adolescent, he imaginatively projects himself into the world replete with possibilities that are not his own but which may become his if he chooses to commit to a life which pursues them. Such projection entails a temporary setting aside of one's own worldview and the taking on of another's — an imaginative enterprise that engages one at as existential a level as possible, imagining what it would be like, what it would feel like, to be committed to values different from one's own, to comport oneself differently, to occupy an altogether alien portion of moral space. As mentioned earlier, no human feeling or desire is completely alien to another human being; however, the worldviews which supply a person's desires with their meaning are enacted or constructed over a long period of time and cannot be fully understood or entered by an outsider. Insofar as each human being has some conception of what it is like to explore possibilities other than those to which he eventually commits himself, the self-actualizing individual can appreciate and affirm the dedication of others to truths that are not his own. He can do so if those truths can be made intelligible to him and if they do not contravene against the recognition of the equal worth of each human life by virtue of its relationship to the unique potentiality that informs it.

To be capable of participatory enactment or imaginative projection into the worldview of another, certain preconditions must be met: first, the person must have a cohesive worldview and must be able to communicate the principles that undergird that worldview. In other words, she must be capable of making her worldview intelligible in terms that are comprehensible by another. To do that, she must be pursuing a course of self-actualization; otherwise, her fragmentary, incoherent worldview will be unintelligible to others. A commitment to self-actualization is therefore a prerequisite for meaningful sociality, edifying communication, and mutual support in self-actualization.

Dysdaimonia and the Problem of Evil

Thus far, we have been treating the achievement of integrity as though it were the usual outcome of moral development. Experience tells us, however, that integrity is not nearly as commonplace as one would hope. *Dysdaimonia* consists in one's acting against her *daimon,* acting in a way that does not lead to the fulfillment of her potential, acting on truths that are not one's own. *Eudaimonia* recognizes several possible sources of *dysdaimonia,* which, on a eudaimonist view, is the source of moral evil.

One source of *dysdaimonia* is an attachment to possibilities that are not commensurate or consistent with one's own potentiality: one allows one's attention to be occupied by a variety of foci that cannot be subsumed into a single project. The symptoms of *dysdaimonia* are distraction, an inability to commit, a constant disidentification with one's own station, accomplishments, or activities. *Dysdaimonia* occurs because one either has not found or refuses to commit to a way of life that one believes expresses and embodies one's *daimon,* one's inner self. One may refuse or may fail to recognize the path to one's fulfillment because: (1) she is insecure or cowardly and has clung to the identity conferred on her by others, or has allowed the image she believes others have of her to dictate the way in which she will live even while she recognizes that such a life is a lie and is ultimately unsatisfying; (2) she believes that to commit to a particular path would mean a loss of freedom, misunderstanding freedom to consist in indeterminateness rather than in the fulfillment of one's potential by focused, meaningful activity; (3) recognizing the fulfillment and *eudaimonia* of another, she has confused imitation with emulation and is pursuing a way of life that is not her own, mistaking a particular activity for a particular way of focusing and living one's life; (4) she has been seduced by pleasures that are incommensurate with her life-choice, allowing them to distract her, falsely coming to believe that pleasures are objective and intrinsically valuable rather than attaining their value by their relationship to the overall life-choice a person makes; (5) she has come to see her perfection not as lying in the activity that is characteristic of the unfolding of her potential, but in a ceaseless striving for perfection and has failed to balance her idealism with a realistic acknowledgement of her limits.

The *dysdaimonic* conditions listed above are harmful primarily to the *dysdaimonic* individual. Norton recognizes two forms of *dysdaimonia* that are harmful to others: one which confuses self-truth for complete truth, which fails to acknowledge the fact that other people have truths to which they must attest and which they must pursue, which

is known as egoism or fanaticism; the second form of harmful *dysdaimonia* arises when a person encounters internally or externally originating psychological problems that do not allow her to recognize her own potential and its value. This form of *dysdaimonia* becomes evil when it gives rise to resentment and a sense that the only worth one is capable of attaining is one attained by the degradation of others. The only way to prevent moral evil of this sort is through proper moral education (which Russon (2003, 125ff) suggests is actually both a form of therapy and a form of philosophy), the proper institutionalization of structures that encourage self-respect and self-actualization, and the constant and consistent examples of those who are actualizing themselves.

Broadening and Refining Norton's Conception of Self-Formation

Before synthesizing Norton's insights with those of Taylor and MacIntyre, I would like to suggest ways in which to refine some of Norton's claims and to broaden others.

A. Potentiality

While it is not difficult to see the attractiveness of imagining that each individual has a single, unique potential — since each person is indexed to a single body surviving in a particular series of spaces over a finite period of time — nevertheless, it is also possible to imagine that as adaptive, imaginative beings, human agents may be — to borrow a term from embryology — multipotent. That is to say that it is possible that there are multiple ways in which one could fulfill one's potential to a sufficient degree, *i.e.,* to a degree that would provide both personal and, to use Norton's phrase, universal fulfillment. Indeed, given that one both discovers and forms oneself over time, and that those processes occur simultaneously and interactively, there is always a question as to how one can or should express one's *daimon* in one's actions and activities. Sometimes, it is only in retrospect that we can assess what our spontaneous actions indicated about our identities. For that reason, the analogy to embryonic multipotent cells (those that have the limited ability to develop into cells of the same general type within and adult body, *e.g.,* nerve cells, muscle cells, retinal cells) is more appropriate than would be pluripotent (blastocyst or embryonic stem cells that can be coaxed into developing into any cell of the human body) or totipotent cells (the initial zygotic and "pre-embryonic" cells that have the potential to develop into human beings).

One's *daimon* seems helpful to understanding the conception of the practice of self-formation we are articulating insofar as it provides us with an identificational anchor or a source of identificational *inertia* - inertia being both an object's resistance to motion when it is at rest and its tendency to continue in the direction of its current motion once it is set in motion. I would contend that Norton's explication of ethical individualism could be interpreted as an attempt to establish a sense of moral inertia (which could help make more intelligible both Taylor's sense of moral space and MacIntyre's sense of moral, or narrative, time).

The difficulty, of course, lies in attempting to articulate the effects and the limits of that inertia. One way to attempt to articulate the nature of identificational inertia would be to allude to one's physical genesis as providing a certain form of inertia with one's "social genesis", the set of interpretive frameworks and practices into which one is inducted by one's community of origin, providing a second form of inertia. But such a methodology seems to divide the self into a duality of mind and body, of dynamic social interpretive practice and of seemingly static physicality, a dualism that is antithetical to the conception we are articulating. Moreover, we readily recognize that our living bodies are not static. Our bodies change even as our interpretive skills and understandings develop.

Perhaps moral or identificational inertia may be best understood by appealing to John Russon's (2003, 10–14) example of the way in which human beings understand or appreciate music. On Russon's view,

> ...musicality is a form of our general ability to comprehend the integration or unitary sense of a temporally extended, experiential diversity. This power to comprehend an inherently temporal, varied, single experience we can call (following the practice of Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason),* "synthesis," meaning the ability to recognize things in their togetherness (Russon 2003, 13).

If human agency is like music, it is the process, practice, and pattern of self-formation that provides the inertia, the anchor, the axis point, from which our interpretations unfold. There is no separating the way in which the various elements of the pattern fit together from the elements, themselves; there is no separating relationship from the relata or the practice of self-formation from the human being. The musical pattern limits in direction in which a particular melody can develop from one moment to the next by establishing a certain baseline rhythm and harmony with which creative improvisation may take place. Certainly there are different movements or compositions that can blend with a particular melody (e.g., the various melodies in a musical show), but there is a particular style and range that ties them together.

The unfolding of one's potential on this view is not fully predictable because one's potentiality is, itself, dynamic but not infinitely so. If that is the case, then it is at least possible for one *daimon* to be multipotent, capable of actualization in a number of ways depending upon one's history and one's interpretation of that history. It is also possible for one to have multiple melodic lines that can cohere and interweave themselves with *(i.e.,* synthesize themselves with) a given original melody, taking it in new directions. On this view, to have a conversion experience, one which radically revises one's previous self-interpretation, would require that the experience make use of identificational fibers or "phantom threads" that had previously existed in a person's self understanding. One does not simply become another person all at once, identificational changes build up and require a catalyst to move them from one pattern to another or one stage to another.

B. Stages

A second way in which I would expand (or perhaps "problematize") Norton's conception of moral development would be to suggest that its division into discrete stages is perhaps overstated or overly structured. While Norton certainly captures a number of processes that perhaps ideally would occur over time in stages in the way he describes, I would contend that it is possible that stages may overlap or intertwine, or one may find oneself incapable of transferring the lessons of one stage into another and, therefore, needs to revisit previous experiences and interpetations. One may find that different cultures encourage one to pass through the stages in a different way or at a different pace. Nevertheless, the skills, virtues, and activities the Norton describes are appropriate to the practice of self-formation: induction into the practice as it is practiced by one's community of origin; the ability to negate or reject; apprenticeship, imitation, emulation, and imaginative exploration of possibilities; identification and differentiation with other; empathy and imaginative projection/participatory enactment of alternate ways of envisioning one's life; integration; and dissolution. The act of synthesizing parallel or alternate identificational structures or stages is complex, but recognizing the possibility of "crossovers" is something Norton's theory can accommodate insofar as its conception of the *daimon* recognizes its dynamic nature.[1] While my understanding of both physics and music theory is incredibly limited, I believe both of these analogies are accurate and understandable by laypersons.

C. Summary

With the two caveats above, Norton's theory is certainly complementary to the conception of the practice of self-formation we have been developing. While, for the sake of simplicity, it would be tempting to accept Norton's vision without alteration, I believe that our refinements are necessary if we are to be true to human experience. The refined version of Norton's conception will still provide us with an integral element of our overall conception, to which we will now turn.

[1] [Footnote missing from source PDF]

Chapter 5: Synthesis and Refinement

In this final portion of this essay, I will reflect on each of the philosophers we have examined in light of the others and will argue that a synthesis of their positions will lead to stronger conceptions of the self, of the practice of self-formation, and of moral pluralism (and its importance) than any one of their philosophies does on its own.

Remodeling Moral Space: A Change in Metaphor

Charles Taylor's appeal to the metaphor of "moral space" is an attempt to capture and explain the human experience of discovering and being moved by goods by likening it to our experience of encountering objects in physical space. There seem to be similarities, especially since we are inducted into the practices of moral and physical experiential interpretation simultaneously. That is to say, we make sense of both our moral and our physical experience by learning to place them in an interpretive framework, and those frameworks overlap in the same way that our various senses overlap and must be coordinated.[1]

Taylor's metaphor is problematic, however, insofar as he seems to suggest that goods are "fixed" in moral space. When Taylor suggests that goods move us, draw us near, and empower us by drawing us into their presence, he seems to imply that goods are like mountains or canyons: we move around them, but they remain relatively static. But, if articulation is at least partially constitutive of the good — insofar as our articulating our conception of the good not only draws us closer to it but actually *changes* it in some way, then a more accurate understanding of the nature of goods, including hypergoods or moral sources, would see them as both dynamic and as being distributed throughout various interdependent human systems, including — importantly — the system that constitutes the human individual. Moral space is both *shared among* agents and, to some extent, simultaneously located *within* agents.

While being morally moved *may* mean that we are drawn more closely to our extant conception of the good, it does not necessarily entail that, and, to the extent that our articulation of the good alters our conception, it will probably not entail that. To be moved by the good may move us to interpret the world in a different way or reconfigure our conception of the good. It may require us to reallocate or reapportion our time, attention, and activities in order to more fully enact and embody the good. To be moved by the good may very entail our having to rearrange the goods in our lives. That is particularly the case as we develop in the ways that Norton discusses, but it is also the case whenever we are inspired to change. If that is the case, then our

[1] Cf. Oliver Sacks's (2003) article on a man, blind from early childhood, whose sight is restored as an adult. The man could not distinguish between his dog and cat without touching them, nor could he deduce that the corner of a table would be sharp to the touch merely by having seen it: Even those senses we believe are unmediated require contextualization with respect to a system of interpretation before we can correlate them with our other senses.

experience of "moral space" is more complex than our ordinary experience of physical space: sometimes, when we come to a better understanding of where we are, not only do we reorient ourselves with respect to moral space, but the configuration of moral space, itself, changes for us. It is as though once we have traveled a certain way, not only are we blocked from going back, but both the route we followed and the route we are embarking on have changed.

If moral space differs from physical space in that way, moral time (or narrative time) also differs from chronological time. Certain characteristics of current circumstances may be linked in our narrative understanding to characteristics of events that occurred long ago — or, perhaps more disconcertingly, characteristics of current circumstances may bring about a revision of our understanding of previous events and their role in our narratives. We may come to understand, for example, that we had misinterpreted our own or someone else's actions in the past; we may come to believe that we reacted inappropriately in the past, or that we had been mistaken about what our conception of the good actually entailed.

I believe that these differences between physical time and space and moral time and space can be accommodated in a conception of morality that appeals to a slightly different metaphor. On my view, conceiving the good and narrating the history of that conception is best likened to a photocollage. A particularly useful example is a photo-collage by David Hockney comprised of photographs of his mother (Figure 1).

I contend that our conceptions of the good are almost never clear, focused, and perfectly integrated. Instead, we have a general conception of the ways in which various goods relate to one another and of the general place and proportion that various goods hold within our conceptions of the good. As we live our lives, our circumstances, our relationships, our needs, and our desires change, and as they do, we focus on the presence or absence, the attainability or unattainability, the desire or lack of desire for particular goods — *e.g.,* love, friendship, material well-being, meaningful work, physical challenge, or bodily needs. Each of those goods (and the contours of our desires for them) has a history of its own, which will be tied to some degree to the history of our other desires for other goods. Just as the various photographs overlap in Hockney's photo-collage, our desires for various goods, and our understanding of their connectedness to our desires for other goods, have their own histories and relationships.

As Hilde Nelson points out, our circumstances may not even permit us to acknowledge or recognize our own desires and needs: a part of our identity, a set of goods that we desire, may be withheld or taken from us by oppressive others or by oppressive states of affairs. We may not be permitted to move smoothly through the stages of development that Norton explicates for us, or we may not pass through them in the way he believes is appropriate.

We may find that some aspect of our experience causes us to recall some good that we once desired, some potentiality that we had once wanted to actualize but were unable to do so. We may find that our conception of the good needs reconfiguring to accommodate newly discovered (or rediscovered) potentialities and that we are drawn

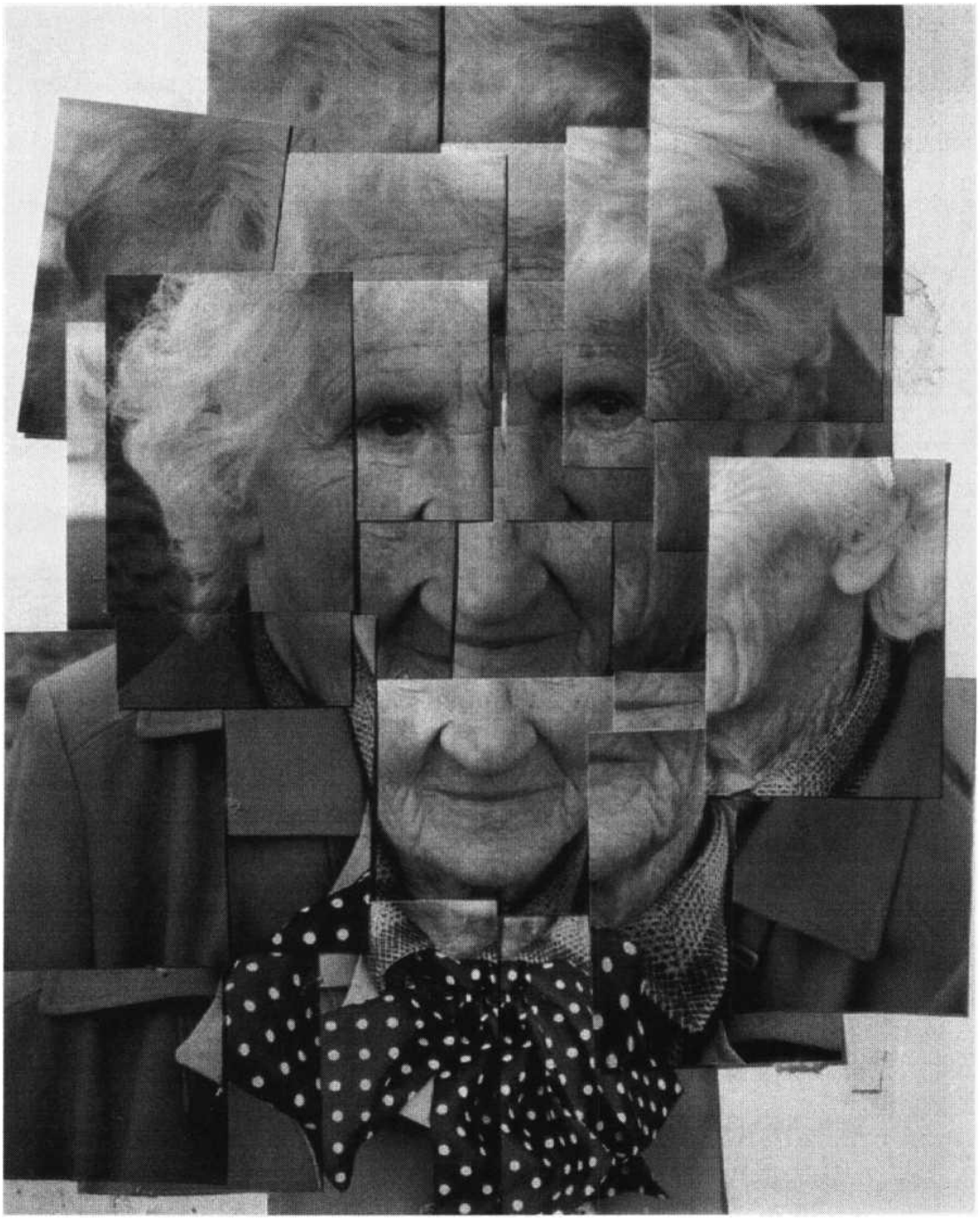

Figure 1: David Hockney (b.1937 —), 'Mother I, Yorkshire Moors, August 1985 #1' Photographic collage 18 1/2 x 13 in (47 x 33 cm) — Collection David Hockney

to focus on goods that we had neglected (by choice, by chance, or by force) in the past. We may find that we had poorly focused on certain goods or misinterpreted their place in our lives, and so we have to change our actions and the nature of our quest.

To some degree, Taylor, MacIntyre, and Norton all recognize that we human beings need room to reinterpret, reconfigure, and reorient ourselves to the good based on our experience. On Taylor's view, we obtain "space" to reorient ourselves from the transcendental nature of moral sources. On MacIntyre's view, our central project is a "quest" and while a quest teaches us about ourselves and about the good we seek, it also redirects us as we learn. On Norton's view, our quest is one that focuses on finding what is unique in ourselves so that we may bring that to fruition to the benefit of all.

The metaphor of a photo-collage in which each picture represents a particular good, a particular portion of our identity, with a history of photos stacked upon one another captures the simultaneous continuity/cohesion and discontinuity/disconnection among the various goods that constitute our identities and between those goods and the overall picture that they create. This allows us to recognize, with Nelson, the ways in which our identities are fractured, while also recognizing that there are portions of those identities that survive in the background and can be redeployed to re-constitute ourselves. The historical record of the development of those conceptions captures Norton's concern with moral development, and the narrative that explains the various transitions and changes in focus captures MacIntyre and Taylor's concerns about the need for an explainable continuity of the self over time.

All of these thinkers call us to push beyond the ordinary and to pursue our desires in order to live better lives. I believe that, moderately amended, they help establish a foundation for thinking about the practice of self-formation that is copacetic for contemporary Western cultures. In the following sections of this chapter, I will examine further implications of this way of envisioning self-formation .

Practicing Self-Responsibility

I would like to explore in more detail the idea of selfformation as a practice. I have already discussed one of the central activities of self-formation: articulation. But to be able to engage in articulation, one must have reached a certain level of development. We must have come to recognize ourselves as individual persons among other individuals. We must have developed a minimal moral lexicon. We also must have developed some capacity for critical thinking.

The latter two capacities require us to discipline ourselves, to focus our attention, and to learn certain conventions of our linguistic communities. Those activities, among others, help, us to acquire the virtues necessary for the practice of self-formation. As MacIntyre (1991, 60–61) puts it:

> ... the enquirer has to learn how to make him or herself into a particular kind of person if he or she is to move towards a knowledge of the truth about his or her good and about the human good.

Conceiving of what the good consists in for ourselves and attempting to verify or perfect that conception by exploring what experience teaches us about that conception requires a disciplined focus of attention. By guiding and focusing our attention and showing us the benefits of discipline, the virtues assist us in our pursuit of an ever more appropriate or fitting conceptions of the good: "We have to begin [our quest for the good] by acquiring enough of the virtues to order our passions aright, so that we are neither distracted nor misled by the multiplicity of the goods which they seem to propose to us..."(MacIntyre 1991, 130):

> The virtues, therefore, are to be understood as those dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices, but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which we encounter, and which will furnish us with increasing self- knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good... We have then arrived at a provisional conclusion about the good life for man: the good life for man is the life spent in seeking the good life for man, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is (MacIntyre, 1991, 219).

It is in the practice of self-formation that the virtues are most necessary.

David L. Norton (1996, 81) describes one particular virtue that he argues is central to the self-formation of people today — not merely those in liberal democratic social unions, but all people — and that is the virtue of "liberality, " which he defines as "...the cultivated disposition to recognize and appreciate truths and values other than one's own." We cultivate that disposition by cultivating our ability to empathize with and imagine ourselves in the place of others. Norton refers to "transcendental imagination" to refer to our attempt not merely to imagine ourselves in the situation faced by another but our attempt to understand how the other actually experiences and interprets the situation. This deep empathy allows us to enter into a more deeply respectful dialogue with the other than we would have been able to attain without it.

I would contend that this activity is called upon not only in our interaction with other people but in our interactions with our possible future selves. In that sense, I believe Taylor's conception of openness, which we discussed earlier, calls for a similar imaginative capacity. Let us recall Taylor's view of openness: Openness entails a deep questioning of oneself...

> ...carried on in the formulae available but with a stance of attention, as it were, to what these formulae are meant to articulate and with a readiness to receive any gestalt shift in our view of the situation, any quite innovative set of categories in which to see our predicament that might come our way in inspiration... This stance of openness is very difficult. It may take discipline and time. [It calls for judgment based on one's]...deepest unstructured sense of what is important, which is as yet inchoate, and which [one is] trying to bring to definition. (Taylor 1985a, 41–42)

According to Norton, we need to cultivate our imaginative powers in order to truly respect and enter into dialogue with others. According to Taylor, we need to cultivate an imaginative openness to our own interpretive framework in order to better understand ourselves.

On this view, our freedom, our capacity for respect, and our very selves are all dependent upon the imagination. That does not mean that they are easily accomplished. They all require that we discipline our imagination and attune it to the moral dimension of life by committing ourselves to engage in the practice of self-formation. The danger here is that our contemporary conception of the imagination is one that is spontaneous, fanciful, and frivolous, and while we may use our imaginations playfully in the process of imagining alternate possible futures, moral imagination requires discipline and focus. A focused and disciplined imagination is a prerequisite for critical thinking and analysis, because critical thinking requires that we be able to imagine holding positions other than our own, and that we imagine the worldviews or conceptions of the good that would give rise to such positions. In other words, we need to be able to enter into an engaged and open-minded dialogue — a cooperative effort to arrive

at a more robust understanding of the truth of a particular issue or situation — with actual or imagined representatives of alternate views.

Often, today, rather than being prepared for dialogical engagement by being well informed, well versed, and well disposed to careful and serious examination of the various paths that lie before us, many people see moral judgment as something to be guided either by appealing to opinion polls or by appealing to an authoritative text, institution, or individual the judgment of whom (or which) needs no interpretation. Rather than conceive of the practices of moral reflection, moral engagement, and moral seif—formation as activities essential to living a fulfilling life, many are tempted either to generate thoughtless and careless opinions, to invoke an authoritative or authoritarian text, or to leave such activity to "experts."

It frequently appears that our culture believes that "having good morals" means either that one was indoctrinated as a child with a set unquestionable rules (so that one can appeal to those rules as an adult), or that one was allowed to choose as one pleased as a child (so that one has naturally developed responsibility), or that one has been raised in and participates in a "tradition" (though not the "living" tradition described by MacIntyre as a on-going argument about what constitutes the good life). On this view, debate is merely the deployment of rote rules, of personal opinion and wild speculation, or of strategic attempts to manipulate the opinions of others.

I believe we face several dangers today that arise from several sources. One danger is the belief that morality is nothing more than the maintenance of a tradition, where "tradition" is seen as a divinely delivered set of proclamations which are either literally self-evident — hence, beyond need of interpretation — or which have been so narrowly construed or interpreted by the tradition that they do not appear to permit dissention or further interpretation. Morality and self-formation on this view are processes through which people are indoctrinated, rather than social practices based in dialogue, argumentation, critical thinking, and imaginative projection.

A second danger is born of the recognition of the developmental nature of the self. However, rather than recognize the responsibility of adults to assist children and adolescents in developing the linguistic, conceptual, and practical skills necessary for the exercise of critical thinking, such skills are believed either to be innate or to develop naturally as one ages so that no induction into the practice of self-formation is necessary. Rather than understanding authenticity as a good internal to the practice of self-formation that is attained and sustained by engaging in the activities of emulation, articulation/interpretation, reflection, imaginative projection, etc., authenticity is presented as a natural state that arises from acting spontaneously and un—se1f—consciously.

Our investigation thus far has already shown us why those two approaches to self-formation are erroneous: they fail to recognize the fact that our conceptions of the good and of ourselves are in need of continuous interpretation for their full actualization, which actualization is necessary for both our individual and our communal well-being.

There is a third danger, the fear of which, I believe, tempts people to either of the first two dangers, *i.e.,* the comfort of adherence to a petrified and "pre-intepreted" tradition or of a romantic belief in natural goodness and rightness of Western culture. James C. Edwards (1997) labels this third danger "normal nihilism," and John Russon (2003, 83 and *passim)* labels it "the normal self of civilized culture." It is to "normal nihilism" that we now turn our attention.

Dysdaimonia and "Normal Nihilism"

Norton's work highlights the normative importance of individuality: "from the moment of birth, each human being is a unique and determinate something in the mode of a potential" (Norton 1977, 114), and there is moral worth in that uniqueness and determinacy as well as in our common humanity. On his view, each of us, at birth has innate and inalienable potentialities that give rise to moral interests that cannot be reduced to a set of generic rules of interaction or a "least common denominator" morality of rights. It is to our detriment as individuals and as members of communities if we fail to acknowledge and encourage the development of those aspects in ourselves. To fail to attend to them is to diminish our individual flourishing and, thereby, human flourishing and the actualization of goodness in the world.

But to come to recognize and to develop those aspects of ourselves, we must learn how to form ourselves, and one element of self-formation is imaginative projection. Imaginative projection requires that we imaginatively separate ourselves, temporarily, from our own particular point of view, and attempt to take up the worldviews of others. We do that in order to better understand others and in order to better emulate those of their ways of exercising the virtues and pursuing the good that we find appealing. Clearly, we are capable of doing this to some extent. We may "get it wrong," we may come intellectually (but not experientially or existentially) to understand alternate positions, and our enactments or projections may be overly influenced by elements of our own actual worldviews, but, with good will and assistance, we can accomplish some degree of deeper empathy and understanding.

Imaginative projection is also necessary if we are to critically analyze our own conceptions of the good. Even though we are socially constituted beings, we are free to imagine alternate ways of being in the world. Indeed, Norton contends that such activity is the essence of adolescence. Nevertheless, the skills that allow us to temporarily imaginatively detach ourselves from our own actual worldviews in order to critically analyze them or to imagine alternate scenarios, when linked with both an economic system that encourages its members to think of everything (including themselves) as commodities and a justice system that is supposed to protect members' rights while remaining neutral with respect to particular conceptions of the good, there is a danger that the skill of imaginative projection can become reified and regarded as the *sine qua non* of morality.

The inordinate valuation of imaginative projection as *the* method of morality, or as *the* perspective from which all moral evaluation must take place, is what Russon (2003) and Edwards (1997) refer to, respectively, as "the neurosis of normalcy" or "normal nihilism." It is also what Alasdair MacIntyre claims characterizes contemporary Western conceptions of morality: just as a certain level of detachment, impartiality, or disinterest characterizes the scientific method which has led to so many practical and technological advances in the sciences, so it seems that if a critical stance toward one's conception of the good is, itself, a good thing, then perhaps one might be best served by attempting to occupy that stance permanently. Russon (2003) contends that individuals in contemporary Western cultures see that stance as the ideal of normality to which they should aspire.

Whether the overvaluation of self-control which divorces the self from its actual embeddedness in practices that permeate its own embodied-ness is the result of a dualistic division of mind and body or is the source of that dualism, all of the thinkers we have been examining would reject that vision as unhealthy and unattainable. Indeed, the attempt to ground one's identity in that disengaged conception of self- control can only lead to frustration since it fails to recognize the ways in which our identities are socially grounded and socially embedded.

Nevertheless, as Alisa Carse (1994) points out, even those who see the self as strongly socially constituted must admit that imaginative projection into what is conceived of as a "noumenal stance" is not only possible but required if we are to be capable of criticizing our own conceptions of the good, of imagining alternate conceptions of the good, and of imagining, understanding, and assessing others' conceptions of the good. To contend that our genesis as social beings must fully determine our conceptions of the good is to engage in a genetic fallacy: simply because our capacity for self-formation has its genesis in our social development does not mean that the outcomes of our engaging in that practice are socially determined. It is here that we must reaffirm the dynamism of the practice of conceptualization of the good (and of one's own identity), the inertia of those aspects of the self that allow one to resist complete social determination of one's character, and the unique capacity of the moral agent to imagine alternate conceptualizations of the good.

While "normal nihilism" — the feeling that one's identity, one's conception of the good, one's capacities and skills are all radically contingent and, therefore, meaningless — is a genuine threat to eudaimonia, the resources with which we must fight it are not to be found in an appeal to a monolithic and fully pre-interpreted (and, as MacIntyre (1984, 222) would argue, dead) tradition but exactly the practices that engage what George Santayana (1923) called our "animal faith," our lived engagement with our moral ecosystem.

To become habituated to engaging only one tool of selfformation (e.g. , negation, differentiation, or assertion of control) is to suffer a neurosis. Russon's work, not unlike that of Jurgen Habermas, suggests that, due to the scientific and economic advances that are attributable to the detached, technical, instrumental use of reason, the West

has developed an unhealthy, neurotic notion of normality. I suggest that Taylor, MacIntyre, and Norton contribute ways to help us to recognize and reconceptualize morality in order to understand how best to combat that neurotic tendency.

Collage and Proportionality

I believe that one of the reasons Taylor appeals to the metaphor of moral space is that that metaphor seems to allow for a plurality of perspectives of morality while suggesting that there are "fixed points" that would keep those perspectives from falling into complete relativism. Unfortunately, if understood in a way that establishes the permanent fixity of those goods, such a conception seems not to allow for the dynamism and differentiation that is also central to Taylor's vision. That is why I appeal to the metaphor of a developmental "collage." It allows us to account for the developmental nature of moral understanding as described by Norton, without holding us to a particular patter of moral development, since changes in our moral constitutions need not take place in a set pattern and may require several cycles to set themselves in our identities. Nevertheless, moral self-formation and moral community-formation do take place in a "space of reasons" which calls us to be responsible to one another in articulating our developmental journey by offering reasons for paths taken and paths rejected.

Ultimately, I believe that the practice of moral selfformation is best conceived as a practice that involves an attempt to integrate our ever-developing conceptions of the various goods that constitute "the good" for us. As a social practice, self-formation appeals to our shared lived experience as human beings and to our ability to articulate and justify to one another our particular conceptions and the ways in which we have arrived at them. Self-formation requires a commitment to recognizing that our conceptions of the good are revisable, and they differ from one person to another. Our conceptions of the various goods that constitute our conception of The Good develop just as that higher order conception does, and our understandings of those constitutive goods have their own histories that layer themselves in our identities.

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