

MODERNITY, SELF AND ETHICS

**EXPLORING CONTEMPORARY MORAL SELFHOOD
THROUGH CHARLES TAYLOR AND A. S. BYATT**

by

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Modernity, Self and Ethics: Exploring contemporary moral selfhood through Charles Taylor and A. S. Byatt

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Abstract

In the short stories, *Art Work* and *The Chinese Lobster*, A. S. Byatt considers two important contemporary issues: *Art Work* questions the relevance of modernity's abstract and rational self to today's society and *The Chinese Lobster* raises the problem of resolving moral conflicts where a plurality of ethical positions vie for precedence. Charles Taylor, in *Sources of the Self*, provides an historical overview of the self casting light on the modernist sensibility described in *Art Work*. He also demonstrates how self and morality are linked and points to an understanding of the self as deriving meaning from its relationships and environment and resonance in self-reflexivity. A relational ethical system, an ethics of care, when applied to the moral dilemma presented in *The Chinese Lobster*, suggests the need for a conception of self that places greater emphasis than Taylor on other-connectedness, empathy, and interdependence as well as attendance to concrete situations. Taylor's understanding of self, in turn, enhances and grounds the relational, "second-person" self suited to an ethics of care.

Dedication

For my mother, Laara Rayne, who first taught me about care, and for my daughters, Morgan and Lauren, from whom I continue to learn.

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INTRODUCTION

Milan Kundera has said of the novel that it is “the fascinating imaginative realm where no one owns the truth and everyone has the right to be understood.”¹ Because fiction is the realm in which one may freely explore contexts, persons (characters), relationships, and how empathy and understanding can operate in a moral world, subjects which are integral to the subject of this paper, it is appropriate that two short stories, *Art Work* and *The Chinese Lobster*, contained in the collection, *The Matisse Stories* by A. S. Byatt, will serve as exemplars of the issues to be discussed. In *Art Work* Byatt demonstrates that the self of modernity is still alive in our culture and offers an alternative self more suited to address contemporary social, political, and ethical concerns. *The Chinese Lobster* provides an opportunity to explore what demands are made on the self in a situation where conflicting moral positions need to be accommodated. How will the self need to be re-imagined in the arenas of moral deliberation and action in order to respond to the reality of contemporary society where a variety of individual notions of the good exist?

Byatt’s deceptively simple short stories provide a rich narrative realm out of which to explore the historical context for current considerations of moral issues and contemporary alternatives in moral

¹ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, London: Penguin Books, 1999, p. 20

deliberation and action. *Art Work*, while not dealing directly with a moral question, although several are implied, may be read as an allegory of the failure of modernity. To the extent that both modernity and modernism's² response to it raise issues around subjectivity and the broadly moral question of what makes a life meaningful, it will allow a consideration of how this "failure" has introduced serious questions regarding moral agency. But, if *Art Work* introduces concerns about the continued influence of values associated with modernity in the story's male protagonist, it also provides a promissory note in the form of the "success" of contemporary social and political projects, here specifically, feminism. Byatt offers the reader, in the story's female character, a viable and dynamic alternative self to that of modernity's legacy. She may yet be emerging as an artistic and social force but, in Byatt's presentation, she offers a more relevant interpretation of and relationship with contemporary life. Byatt's concerns with modernity and her presentation of the promises implied in the feminine perspective, presented through the medium of aesthetic considerations, are paralleled in ethics by feminism's exploration of an "ethics of care" which provides an

² For the purposes of this paper, I understand modernity to be the ideas that emerged from the period of profound intellectual and social transformations that took place in Western Europe from approximately the 17th century to the Enlightenment period and through to the Industrial Revolution. Modernity is characterized by faith in instrumental rationality and science, application of universal laws, belief in objectivity and the achievement of freedom, the rise of liberal democracy, and the notion of individual equality. Modernism is understood here as "actualized" modernity which stands both as an affirmation and an ongoing critique of the thought of that period.

alternative or complement³ to traditional moral models. What aspects of feminism's concerns in this regard offer special promise in our considerations of self and morality? While *Art Work* provides a context for this discussion, *The Chinese Lobster* addresses a specific moral dilemma and the complexities of modern moral deliberation. In this story, competing moral positions vie for precedence. The protagonists must find a solution to their moral conflict and this they do in a dialogical fashion, emphasizing their interdependency and commonalities, and employing empathy and care. This story will allow a discussion of an ethics of care as it is exemplified in the story.

An ethics of care addresses both the issue of the relevance of inherited models of the self in today's society, as well as the problem of how ethics can accommodate and function in a pluralistic community. The concern raised there suggests that, in moral deliberation, values associated with the male such as reason, autonomy, and individuality have long been accorded primacy. Feminists have been exploring this new moral paradigm asking that values associated with the female such as care, interdependency, and empathy be applied to moral questions

³ Many feminist philosophers argue that the "female" perspective has not been given adequate emphasis in moral theory. They have raised this issue in order to draw attention to the limitations of the "male" moral model, not to suggest that it be replaced by a "female" moral model. Rather, the "caring perspective," many argue, should be accorded equal value with the "justice perspective" to enhance our entire moral world. Some, like Virginia Held, recognizing that different models are appropriate in different contexts, advocate "a pluralistic view of ethics" or "a division of moral labour" (Virginia Held, *Feminist Morality, Transforming Culture, Society, and Politics*, Chicago and London:

along with values associated with the male. An ethics of care shifts the emphasis from adherence to impersonal principles to attention to particular relational circumstances; demands a revised vision of and place for community; recognizes the importance of cooperation, accommodation, and reciprocity; and emphasizes feeling over detached rationality. Will a revisioning of the way in which we approach moral issues, which takes into consideration feminists' concerns, introduce new demands on or a revised conception of the self as moral agent?

Charles Taylor explores the relationship of self and morality exhaustively in *Sources of the Self*. This text, then, will provide an historical overview and a full consideration of the constituents of the self from which we will be able to determine if new or modified demands on the self will be required in a relational ethical system. I will argue that, in placing moral authority firmly in the self, Taylor provides a credible base out of which to operate in the contemporary moral world and that this will be useful in addressing the limitations of and concerns with an ethics that emphasizes interdependence and relationships. I will also argue that placing a greater emphasis on interdependency, reciprocity, attendance to points of commonality in human experience, and concern for specific others will enhance Taylor's self-governed, potentially inflexible moral self and make it more suited to a moral system such as

The University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 76) where the justice perspective and the care perspective are each applied according to the situation.

an ethics of care. A synthesis of the self which is defined by the high degree of importance it places on relationships and Taylor's "substantive" self provides a strong, individual basis out of which a relational self can operate, thus offsetting concerns regarding the potential relativism of an ethics of care.

ART WORK: MODERNITY'S FAILURE AND AN ALTERNATIVE SELF

Byatt uses the work of modernist painter, Henri Matisse, to thematically link the stories in *The Matisse Stories*. By so doing, she alerts the reader to her interest in the issues raised by modernism, the intellectual and artistic movement that "turned its gaze upon"⁴ modernity. *Art Work* begins with a description of the painting, *Le silence habité des maisons*, in which a child and adult of indeterminate sex sit at a table on which a large, white book and a vase of flowers are placed. They read together, their blank, oval faces turned away from a window that dominates the canvas. The vibrant outdoor scene visible through the frame is juxtaposed to the dark, quiet, domestic interior space. A strange, totemic figure in the upper corner of the canvas inclines slightly toward the reading figures below, a quiet witness to their activity. We, the readers, replicate its regard as we observe the "inhabited silence"⁵ of 49 Alma

⁴ Mada Sarap, *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World*, Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996, p. 50

⁵ A. S. Byatt, *The Matisse Stories*, London: Vintage, 1993, p. 32

Road where the action of the story takes place. However, the silence of Alma Road is the illusion of the “unconcerned ear,”⁶ for while there are no voices immediately audible, there is a cacophony of domestic, technological sound: the Hoover, the washing machine, the dryer, the TV, and the telephone. Clearly, the *luxe et calme* of the Matisse painting bears no relation to the reality of contemporary domestic life. The reader is being asked to consider modernity’s relevance to contemporary life.

In a discussion of modernist art, Charles Taylor asserts that it sought the “recovery of lived experience;”⁷ in depicting ordinary life it celebrated the mystery of the experience itself and revealed what may have been hidden to the viewer. In this way, everyday images, interpreted in revised languages of space and colour, were given new meaning and revitalized resonance and, as such, provided an antidote to the mechanistic, post-Enlightenment world.

The world seen just as mechanism, as a field for instrumental reason, seemed ... shallow and debased. By the twentieth century the encroachments of instrumental reason were incomparably greater, and we find the modernist writers and artists in protest against a world dominated by technology, standardization, the decay of community, mass society, and vulgarization.⁸

⁶ Ibid., p. 32

⁷ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 468

⁸ Ibid., p. 456

Matisse, in his depiction of a tranquil, domestic space, not only sought to restore meaning to everyday existence but took the anti-mechanism task a step further by transfiguring this reality into “harmonious quietness ... the independent, abstract recreation of ideal conditions of existence.”⁹ In comparing the modernist painting, *Le silence habité des maisons*, directly to the setting of the story, Byatt is clearly suggesting that Matisse’s view fails to depict reality as it exists perhaps particularly for women.¹⁰ The putative transcendent function of the painting, from a female perspective, comes closer to romanticizing everyday existence than recovering reality.

Modernism, however, does provide a view of the subject that contests that of the coherent, rational, detached self of the Enlightenment’s legacy. The figures in this painting are not isolated selves but are obviously in intimate relationship with each other; they share a common contemplative purpose, the reading of the book. However, modernism “remained aware of inescapable duality, and uncollapsible distance between agent and world, between thinker and instinctual depths.”¹¹ The figures are aligned with but separated from

⁹ Lawrence Gowing, *Henri Matisse 64 Paintings*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966, p. 11

¹⁰ Byatt echoes this perspective on Matisse’s paintings in *The Chinese Lobster* by pointing to feminist criticism which describes his work, particularly as it relates to the depiction of women, as creating “whole placid panoramas of well-being.” (Byatt, 1993, p. 122)

¹¹ Charles Taylor, 1989, p. 472

the vivid outdoor landscape representing the world and, as the Romantic movement and others have argued, the redemptive properties of nature, which is behind them. The flattened surface of the painting, however, and its limited perspectival space is an attempt to bring about an alignment of agent and world. Byatt's use of this painting demonstrates the dualities that Taylor associates with modernism which she develops in the story. She explores the dualities but locates the discussion in a contemporary context, one which recognizes a female perspective and offers an alternative account. By relating a modernist painter's canvas to a depiction of a contemporary family and in situating its main character firmly in modernity, she suggests the continued influence of modernity on our culture. In that the painting provides an inadequate description of life as she understands it and in that the male protagonist in her story fails, *Art Work* demonstrates that we need a revised vision and more meaningful interpretation of ordinary life and an alternative conception of the self.

If modernity is characterized by “order, certainty, harmony, humanity, pure art, [and] absolute truth” and is “sustained by design, manipulation, management and engineering”¹² then Robin, *Art Work*'s man of the house, is thoroughly modern. At a time of experimentation and abstraction in art practice, Robin is a neo-realist. His paintings are

¹² Mada Sarap, 1996, p. 50

repetitive explorations of colour and a series of attempts to work out problems of light in his work. His traditional artmaking gives him a sense of order: "With his brushes in his hand he could see ... without them, he was grey fog in a world of grey fog."¹³ His wife, Debbie, who in his eyes is "beautiful and clean and represents order,"¹⁴ supports him, perhaps reluctantly and sometimes with suppressed anger, in his quest for certainty. She recognizes there are "rules, complementary colours and things"¹⁵ to which he is compelled to adhere, representing as they do his reverence for the science of colour and his capacity for its manipulation, but she also "does not need to think about it anymore."¹⁶

In his isolated studio on the third floor of the house, separated from the life of the family, Robin keeps his "fetishes," bright, solid, semi-religious objects that he holds up as icons and that he displays and protects on a white, altar-like table. It is observed that he "has ritualized his life dangerously."¹⁷ These brightly solid objects, in fact, are shadow figures which he uses, sometimes literally as shadows, in his paintings as the objects through which he explores and manipulates colour. The fetishes are imbued with unconscious meaning, representing both his

¹³ A. S. Byatt, 1993, p. 56

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 58

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 60

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 48

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 57

desire for order and potential release from it which he is allowed because he has “dutifully and accurately and even beautifully painted the null and neutral tones.”¹⁸ But he resists change and release. A plump, heart-shaped, red pincushion, which has the potential to “sing out or be loved,”¹⁹ presents an opportunity for him to invest his painting with emotion and feeling and to go beyond making an object fit the overly conceived colour-schemes of his paintings. But this value-laden object has “too much meaning”²⁰ for him. In its connection to the everyday and its obvious sensuousness, it confronts and contests his attachment to the ideals of modernity. He wants it desperately but he is aware that, when stuck with his grandmother’s hat pins, it is too surrealistic which “*might* be interesting, but it worries him.”²¹ Surrealism, in its alignment of unlike objects and words and its re-configuring of everyday realities we take for granted, breaks down control and this is something Robin desperately wants to avoid. Robin is resolutely seeking meaning in his work but there is a sense that in his “faithfulness to a vision he had, a long time ago,”²² in working in a tradition out of tune with contemporary concerns, he comes absurdly close to nostalgia. He speaks to Debbie of

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 73

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 64

²⁰ Ibid., p. 65

²¹ Ibid., p. 65

²² Ibid., p. 55

the sensuousness of Matisse's paintings as a religious power but not of "softness...[but of] *power*, calm power."²³ He tries to replicate this in his work, to embrace modernism's critique of modernity, but it is a dismal failure - as is his attempt to have a show of his work. He perhaps understands that modernism can only bring him partially into alignment with the contemporary world. He remains rooted in the sensibilities of modernity.

Into this world enters Mrs. Brown, the cleaning lady. She is, in Robin's eyes, wild and chaotic. She dresses flamboyantly in multi-coloured jumpers paired with extravagantly embroidered trousers and she does not seem to understand his particular version of order or the reverence with which she should approach the painted bowls or the artificial birds. Patronizingly, Robin tries to explain to Mrs. Brown an obscure aspect of colour theory in which a combination of red and green create a "dancing yellow line,"²⁴ but, she observes defiantly, red and green in a geranium don't make yellow.²⁵ For her, colours are connected to life and to her notion of the spiritual, not to some scientific principle: "God made `em all in His creatures," she says, "what exists goes together

²³ Ibid., p. 56

²⁴ Ibid., p. 67

²⁵ Matisse, in fact, played with this surprising effect in his paintings of 1905 which were all red and green and reflect the origins of his interest in the properties of colour and his first movement away from naturalism. Lawrence Gowing, 1966, p. 9.

somehow or other... .”²⁶ She isn’t interested in the mechanics of painting; she is interested in art as life, in the play of textures and colours in her clothing or the construction of insanely coloured knitted jumpers for the children. But there is more to Mrs. Brown’s vision. When Debbie, a magazine writer and designer, is sent to cover a feminist installation work following a previously written article about women’s art as a celebration of “the amorphous things that women make that do not claim the ‘authority’ of ‘artworks’, the undignified things that women ‘frame’ that male artists have never noticed,”²⁷ she is shocked to discover that the woman who is currently ‘hoovering’ her carpets is the artist.

With the revelation of Sheba Brown’s secret artmaking now made public in her successful exhibition and with Robin’s failure to secure a show and his subsequent but misguided attempt to break out of his artistic prison by turning, not unexpectedly given his lack of but desire for symbolic meaning in his work, to the painting of mandalas, an art form arguably as controlled and prescriptive as neo-realism, Byatt’s allegory of the failure of modernity is complete.

The attributes of modernity: the glorification of science as an exemplar of right reasoning; the desire for order in the face of chaos; the solitary, rational individual isolated from the life of the community are manifest in Robin himself and in his artmaking. In art and life Robin is

²⁶ A. S. Byatt, 1993, p. 60

unsuccessful. In contrast, Mrs. Brown's work, created out of the detritus of female life and engagement with community life: cleaning implements, cufflinks, balls of wool, cast-offs, jumble sale remnants, is a work of relationships, of everyday contemporary life, of practicalities. Her installation is an "Aladdin's Cave" of fabric, furniture, underwear, and knitting. It is overwhelmingly female apart from miniature representations of male roles: a knight on a horse, a toy soldier mangled by the washing machine. There are no fixed rules to Mrs. Brown's work, although there are historical references including one to Botticelli's *Venus*, an interpretation of which she creates out of an embroidery frame. In form and vacancy this *Venus* is the manifestation of the totemic figure of *Le silence...* but, broken and chained to a Hoover dragon figure, it demands liberation. In its celebratory nature and personal and material presence, Sheba Brown's art exemplifies the promise of a fresh new personal view.

Byatt's choice to explore modernity and modernism through the medium of artistic endeavour is an appropriate one. Taylor suggests that in the contemporary world the artist is particularly esteemed, "It depends on that modern sense ... that what meaning there is for us depends in part on our powers of expression, that discovering a framework is

²⁷ Ibid., p. 68

interwoven with inventing.”²⁸ By framework, Taylor means those things that have significance for us and by which we judge or act. In other words, they are subjective in that they emerge from a sense of what is of personal value and they have moral components in that they inform our deliberation and action. In *Art Work*, two vastly different frameworks are presented and the tension between these two contemporary subjects is explored. Contemporary Western culture’s continued allegiance to the promise of modernity, on the one hand, and the suggestion, on the other hand, that we try something new are presented here in literary form. The two protagonists are continuously embattled throughout the narrative, though Mrs. Brown triumphs modestly at the close. Robin, somewhat tenuously, upholds the tradition of modernity. His realistic art work follows established organizing principles and represents truths which he feels are fixed and are universally accepted constituents of proper artistic endeavour. These, he maintains, though he evidently has doubts, are real and unchanging. In his colour theory, knowledge is governed by scientific principles. Out of the rational ordering of his life and studio will come the realization of his art work and in his self-centred isolation he represents the detached self of rational man.

When Robin begins to incorporate into his work images of Kali, the goddess whose job it is to remind us that order is only temporary, Byatt

²⁸ Charles Taylor, 1989, p. 22

directs the reader to the unsustainability of his position and points us to a radical alternative in Mrs. Brown. She makes art that has as, Taylor points out about twentieth-century art, “gone more inward, has tended to explore, even to celebrate subjectivity.”²⁹ In her chaotic, exuberant installations, she celebrates the particularity of her work and its relational nature. Both in the materials used and in its evocation of the “twisted” and “broken” body of the female, it is a representation of her own life, a life out of which she has risen with dignity and spirit. In calling on everyday reality, her work also exemplifies the “affirmation of ordinary life” which Taylor states is, along with subjectivity, “one of the most powerful ideas in modern civilization”³⁰ in that it provides the self with meaning and value. Mrs. Brown’s work is deeply personal: it is an expression of her inner being and utterly connected to herself as mother, wife, and member of her community, that is, it is an expression of herself as she is in relationship.

CHARLES TAYLOR: REDEEMING THE MORAL AGENT

The two very different views of the self exemplified by Robin and Mrs. Brown indicate how the self has become a locus of contention in the contemporary world. The question of identity can no longer be

²⁹ Charles Taylor, 1989, p. 456

³⁰ Ibid., p. 14

understood in terms of a generalized human nature or the subject of rational control but rather is formed, as we have seen in *Art Work*, from a multitude of perspectives: identification with culture, race, gender or religion; formed by individual psychology; constructed by sociological factors; and understood as unstable and evolving. “The search for identity can be seen as the search for what I essentially am,” Charles Taylor contends,

But this can no longer be sufficiently defined in terms of some universal description of human agency as such, as soul, reason, or will. There still remains a question about me, and that is why I think of myself as a self. This word now circumscribes an area of questioning. It designates the kind of being of which this question of identity can be asked.³¹

This area of questioning has particular relevance for the self as moral agent for, as Taylor demonstrates, “Selfhood and the good, or in another way selfhood and morality, turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes.”³² But there may be reasons to proceed cautiously in this regard.

Alasdair MacIntyre, in examining the predicament of contemporary moral debate and agency in *After Virtue*, suggests that the self, separated from “inherited modes both of thought and practice in the course of a single and unified history” in the post-Enlightenment period, reinvented itself in a multiplicity of ways. “When the distinctively modern self was

³¹ Ibid., p. 184

³² Ibid., p. 3

invented, its invention required not only a largely new social setting, but one defined by a variety of not always coherent beliefs and concepts. What was then invented was the *individual ...*”³³ The Enlightenment had freed the moral agent, which some philosophers of the period saw as liberating in that it established the rightful autonomy of the agent, but, as MacIntyre points out, the Enlightenment project failed to provide a secular, rational justification for a moral position. He argues, therefore, that “the rules of morality have to be found some new status which will make appeal to them rational.” The problem, he asserts, is that if this is not undertaken, “appeal to them will indeed appear as a mere instrument of individual desire and will.”³⁴ The criterionless moral agent thus described, MacIntyre calls emotivist: “Each moral agent now spoke unrestrained by the externalities of divine law, natural teleology or hierarchical authority.”³⁵ This, he laments, has led to a particularly contemporary expression of the self as moral agent in which there are no allegiances to criteria or principles but only to “expressions of attitudes, preferences and choices.”³⁶

³³ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd edition, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984, p. 61

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 62

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 68

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33

It is perhaps for this reason that Charles Taylor has attempted to redeem the moral agent in *Sources of the Self* by affirming its orientation to the good. As well, he endeavours to provide standards for moral positions in the absence of an outside authority and an orienting framework for how we treat others. His project is “the exploration of order through personal resonance.”³⁷ Taylor attempts to go beyond pure subjectivism which, as MacIntyre has suggested in calling attention to emotivism, can manifest as arbitrary personal choice, to “make crucial human goods alive to us”³⁸ through personal resonance. This, he believes, is critically important as we lose “affiliations to family, ecology, and even polis,”³⁹ for it is in understanding ourselves to be part of a “deeply resonant human environment ... and to have affiliations with some depth in time and commitment”⁴⁰ that we find moral sources. He seeks to restore “moral sources *outside* the subject through languages which resonate *within* him or her ...”⁴¹ and in this way to foster a commitment and sense of responsibility to various affiliations: family, environment, state. Taylor’s daunting project provides an exhaustive historical survey as well as a thorough exploration of the modern identity

³⁷ Ibid., p. 511

³⁸ Ibid., p. 513

³⁹ Ibid., p. 513

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 513

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 510

which will be useful in a consideration of the kind of self required of an ethics that seeks to accommodate the concerns of specific persons and their individual notions of the good.

Charles Taylor doesn't so much provide a definition of the self in the contemporary context as a portrait of the self as it has evolved over time, a tracing, as he says, of the various strands of what it is to be a person. Taylor identifies three components of the self that comprise modern individualism and continue to inform our understanding of the contemporary self. These are self-responsible independence, recognized particularity, and the individualism of personal commitment.⁴² Taylor describes the genesis of the radical reflexivity of our age as arising first out of a sense that self-knowledge is essential to an understanding of the truth or a higher condition related to the soul as elucidated by Augustine, to a conception of the subject that is knowable to itself, as initially conceived in Descartes' *cogito* and given further emphasis by Locke. The Lockean 'punctual'⁴³ self, as Taylor calls it, stands outside itself, objectifies itself with a view to re-making and re-building. Combined with an account of science as valid knowledge, Locke's "ideal of rational self-responsibility"⁴⁴ has had a powerful and enduring legacy. Through rational thought the self, thus, effects a movement away from

⁴² Ibid., p. 185

⁴³ Ibid., p. 171

passion, custom, or authority. The disengagement of the self, the development of the primacy of rationality, and the related assumption of responsibility for one's self, point away from the self as innately attuned to the truth or to the good,⁴⁵ to the sense that knowledge and, subsequently, moral sources are created or built by the self.⁴⁶

This sense of self as responsible for itself, as acquiring dignity through self-reflexivity explains, Taylor asserts, the modern predisposition to go inward for self-knowledge but doesn't explain our modern sense of the self as having "inner depths."⁴⁷ It is a recognition that the rational, Lockean 'punctual' self is not a whole person, that what is left out of this conception is the 'mattering' or feeling component which may be found through nature. "Nature that can move us and awaken our feelings is no longer tied to us by a notion of substantive reason. It is no longer seen as the order which defines our rationality. Rather we are defined by purposes and capacities which we discover within ourselves. What nature can now do is awaken these... ." ⁴⁸ The Romantic Movement, which embraced this notion, sees nature as both being the source of and having the power to release the good that is within us. Expressivism

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 174

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 169

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 130

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 211

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 301

emerging out of this Romantic idea is the realization of what is in our inner depth, the articulation of this potential. “This is the idea ... that each individual is different and original, and that this originality determines how he or she ought to live ... each one of us has an original path which we ought to tread; [it] lay[s] an obligation on each of us to live up to our originality.”⁴⁹ Nature as a source demands that our individual, unique selves find expression. Art becomes the manifestation of what resides in nature and points us to the source of what resides within the self. It resonates for us and has transformative potential; it has what Taylor calls an “epiphanic” quality, that is, it reveals something that is otherwise inaccessible, in a moral or spiritual sense, and in so doing defines or completes it.⁵⁰ Romanticism and the Expressivist movement which emerged from it moved the locus of moral claims more clearly to the self as situated in nature and as the seat of feelings and emotions unique to the individual.

The attempt to redeem the self in nature by incorporating sensibility with controlled reasoning still relied on a unitary notion of the self. The reflexive turn and the recognition that we are beings with inner depth, however, laid the groundwork for the notion embraced in the contemporary period that we operate on a multiplicity of levels, that all of us are, in fact, selves. Taylor argues that the “recognition that we live on

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 375

many levels has to be won against the presumptions of the unified self, controlling or expressive. And this means a reflexive turn, something that intensifies our sense of inwardness and depth... .”⁵¹ In his view, subjectivism, as opposed to the fragmented, decentred self of postmodernism, has not been rejected in the contemporary period; in fact, the reflexive turn is revealed in our evocation of the power of language in constituting the self and our interest in the mythic and archetypal. The shift in interest is toward the transpersonal but remains rooted in the subjective.⁵²

Taylor’s definition of self is necessarily concerned with the massive inward turn of modern humanism. This self-reflectivity heralded “new conceptions of the good and new locations of moral sources: an ideal of self-responsibility, with the new definitions of freedom and reason which accompany it, and the connected sense of dignity.”⁵³ Taylor recognizes that we incorporate into our current notion of the self remnants of these previous conceptions of self and that these inform the ongoing conversation. “To trace the development of our modern visions of the good, ... is also to follow the evolution of unprecedented new

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 419

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 480

⁵² Ibid., p. 481

⁵³ Ibid., p. 177

understandings of agency and selfhood.”⁵⁴ It is Taylor’s contention that in order to be a self one must have an orientation to the good. His project, then, is to map out the way in which identity and morals are connected; to focus attention not simply on what it is good to do, but what it is good to be.⁵⁵ To be moral, in his view, is constricted if it is merely seen as a guide to action. To be moral is not to act simply on the basis of obligation or duty. What provides the reasons for our moral beliefs are, what he calls, “qualitative distinctions.” They are definitions of the good that emanate not from the exercise of practical reason or from obligations to right action, but from an articulation of “what underlies our ethical choices, leanings, intuitions. ... [of] the moral point of our actions... .”⁵⁶ Qualitative discriminations “function as an orienting sense of what is important, valuable, or commanding, which emerges in our particulate intuitions about how we should act, feel, respond on different occasions, and on which we draw when we deliberate about ethical matters.”⁵⁷

Since the good is intrinsically related to the self, it will be useful to look briefly at what the good is in Taylor’s view. Respect for life in the sense of what makes a full, meaningful life; justice; and well-being,

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 105

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 79

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 77

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 77-78

including the impulse to alleviate suffering; and dignity in regards to ourselves and others are, in Taylor's view, deeply rooted concerns that he refers to as instinctual or arising out of moral intuition. Other moral concerns are the consequence of education and upbringing. Taylor places great emphasis on what makes our own lives meaningful; the fear of meaninglessness (as opposed to moral condemnation), he claims, defines our age,⁵⁸ and the search for meaning is what underlies our own dignity. These are crucial aspects of our capacity for moral judgment along with what Taylor calls 'strong evaluation'.

Strong evaluation "involve[s] discriminations of right or wrong, better or worse, higher or lower which are not rendered valid by our desire, inclinations, or choices, but rather stand independent of these and offer standards by which they can be judged."⁵⁹ Strong evaluation is self-interpretive, the result of reflexivity and reasoning, which enable the self to modify, embrace, or reject various options offered by specific situations. "Strong evaluation provides the environment for implanting certain goods in particular practices."⁶⁰ There is a sense in Taylor's use of strong evaluation that it is a constituent of what makes a person a person.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 18

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.. 4

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 61

Our identity is what allows us to define what is important to us and what is not. It is what makes possible these discriminations, including those which turn on strong evaluations. The notion of an identity defined by some mere de facto, not strongly valued preference is incoherent. ...The condition of there being such a thing as an identity crisis is precisely that our identities define the space of qualitative distinctions within which we live and choose.⁶¹

One's identity, in fact, is worked out in relation to those things that have significance to us; a process which is ongoing. Strong evaluation is a form of self-evaluation necessary for goodness.

Issues of strong evaluation are given more power by what Taylor calls the "affirmation of ordinary life." Out of productive labour, families, relationship, and communities, those things that bring meaning to our lives, emerge central references which govern the way in which we act toward others. These 'life goods' constitute who we are as persons. The necessary ordering of what is important to us as humans is provided by these goods and defines us. But Taylor refers to these goods as 'constitutive goods' because they are not simply the content of our moral lives but they are dear to us and, therefore, motivate us to take action. "The constitutive good is a moral source ... it is a something the love of which empowers us to do and be good."⁶² The constitutive good emerges out of what is meaningful for us, personally and culturally, rather than from what is imposed by external sources. In that the good is constituted

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 30

⁶² Ibid., p. 93

within and has meaning for us, it motivates in a way that measuring up to outside social standards does not. The agent is motivated in the moral sphere by a deep, personal relationship to the good. Our constitutive goods are a reflection of what is important to us and point the way, are signposts if you will, in our moral landscape. Because they emerge from a deep, inner source, and because it is the love of them that is motivational, there is in Taylor a sense that constitutive goods have a numinous quality -- what he refers to as “mattering”--, that is, the self is not the ‘punctual’ Lockean self that is conscious to itself, a “disengaged subject of rational control,”⁶³ but a self that is aware of its constitutive concerns. It is in this mattering that the self orients to the good; it both informs and motivates. A turning inward, self-reflexivity, to discover in ourselves what matters, is an aspect of our capacity for moral reflection and action and is essential to our identity: “To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space... .”⁶⁴ Arising out of this notion is the understanding that recognizing one’s own moral autonomy is also to recognize the individual moral autonomy of others.

Taylor states that an orientation to the good is essential to an understanding of the self and that this self is realized through self-reflection. However, Taylor also understands that making best sense of our lives requires an acknowledgment that we exist in a community of

⁶³ Ibid., p. 49

selves and that our identity is created in relation to them. “One is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it.”⁶⁵ The references are made, according to Taylor, primarily through language, what he calls ‘webs of interlocution’.⁶⁶ It is through conversation that we share experiences, test our opinions, clarify positions, and innovate. “I define who I am by defining where I speak from, in the family tree, in social space, in the geography of social statuses and functions, in my intimate relations to the ones I love, and also crucially in the space of moral and spiritual orientation with which my most important defining relations are lived out.”⁶⁷ This interaction with other selves makes changes possible within ourselves and points to the state of the self as always ‘becoming’. The modern self sees itself as a narrative dependent on states of beforehand to define what is at present and what will in turn inform the direction of one’s life: its judgments, intentions, and ambitions. In this sense the self is a quest.

In summary, while the contemporary self may incorporate qualities such as independence, particularity, rationality, and autonomy - the legacies of the Enlightenment project - Taylor also emphasizes the self as

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 28

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 35

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 36

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 35

a being with inner depths. He provides a framework definition of the self as oriented to the good and situated in and affirmed by ordinary life which both provides meaning and constitutes the self as a moral being. What matters to us is inherent in these constitutive goods and motivates the self to take action in the moral world. It is through language that the self understands itself and changes; it is the vehicle through which the self is created as it evolves over time. Also, as a being with inner depths, which may be expressed and realized through art, the self is understood as original and imaginative. At the same time, this self-reflexive being, by virtue of its originality and autonomy, must recognize the equally valid moral autonomy of other selves. What constitutes the good for me may not constitute the good for you. There will, therefore, be inevitable conflicts of constitutive goods.

In providing a credible notion of the self as moral agent, in situating moral authority firmly in the self, and in recognizing the plurality of visions of the good in other selves, Taylor makes possible consideration of new ethical models. He sees the liberation from outside authority in the moral realm as an “epistemic gain”⁶⁸ in that it makes available a variety of moral sources realizable through agentic practices. This liberation might also be seen as a moral gain, situating responsibility as it does more clearly “in” the agent. An “internalizing of

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 313

moral sources”⁶⁹ opens the door to a wide range of personal criteria, including, but not necessarily, the choice of moral sources situated in theistic practices or other external sources. What is important here is that a personal relationship to the sources is emphasized. The contemporary notion of what it is to be moral “give[s] a crucial place to our own inner powers of constructing or transfiguring or interpreting the world, as essential to the efficacy of the external sources. Our powers must be deployed if these are to empower us. And in this sense the moral sources have been at least partly internalized.”⁷⁰ ⁷¹ There are questions as to whether these more amorphous principles will assuage MacIntyre’s concerns regarding subjectivism, which, as we have seen, result in “assertion and counter-assertion”⁷² of preference in moral argument with an attendant inability to secure rational agreement.

To some degree both Byatt and Taylor seek to bridge the “uncollapsible distance between agent and the world,” which is the modern condition. Taylor, for his part, emphasizes the uniqueness of the individual agent but affirms the agent’s connection to ordinary life where personal meaning is located. In addition, he recognizes that the self is

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 454

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 455

⁷¹ This interpretation is supported by Michael Walzer who states that authority can reside in “principles internal to existence itself ... including the capacity for reflection and criticism.” Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987, p. 21

created in relation to other selves. He offers a new understanding of the self as a being with inner depths, who through self-reflexivity, is oriented to the good and who finds subjective fulfillment as “part of a ‘package’, to be sought within a life which is also aimed at other goods.”⁷³ These other goods - dignity, well-being, respect for life, and justice - provide principles beyond the self, with resonance within the self. They prevent the self from descending into pure subjectivism in the moral sphere. What constitutes my well-being is dependent on ensuring the well-being of others. Taylor’s concern to re-establish morality as what it is right to be rather than what it is right to do, while aimed at moving moral thinking from obligatory action⁷⁴ and procedural justification,⁷⁵ affirms an independent, particular, self-reflective, though not detached, being in whom moral claims are firmly situated. Byatt, on the other hand, attempts to bridge the distance by questioning the relevance of modernity’s detached, independent, rational self to the contemporary world. In the character of Mrs. Brown, she presents an alternative in a self defined by its deep connection with those with whom she is in immediate as well as broad association. This other-connected self has an

⁷² Alasdair MacIntyre, 1984, p. 8

⁷³ Charles Taylor, 1989, p. 511

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 79

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 86

“urge to construct”⁷⁶ but not to control. She is accommodating and flexible. In a sense, Taylor seeks to fulfill the promise of modernity while Byatt, it can be argued, suggests we need something new.

AN ETHICS OF CARE: THE RELATIONAL MORAL AGENT

In order to determine how these conceptions of the self will be useful in the contemporary moral world, we will turn to an ethics of care, a moral model about which there is considerable discussion in feminist circles and beyond. The “Robin self,” detached defender of rational principles, will not serve in an ethical system that emphasizes relationships and specific contexts. The self exemplified in Mrs. Brown, one who is deeply embedded in the community and formed out of her relationship with it and it with her, provides a more appropriate model. What is required is not a moral agent motivated by abstract principles but one energized by attention to “the very specific and concrete individuals for whom we care.”⁷⁷ Nor could it be said that a “Mrs. Brown self,” constituted by relations, is less equipped as a moral agent than an isolated, impartial self. In many circumstances her interconnectedness and interdependency arguably provide more salient criteria than adherence to abstract principles.

⁷⁶ A. S. Byatt, 1993, p. 84

But the argument for principles of some kind is a strong one if an ethics of care, operating as it does in specific situations with concrete individuals, is not to descend into situational relativism. Taylor's self functioning within an order "inseparably indexed to a personal vision"⁷⁸ and on qualitative discriminations that stand as claims to right action will augment the notion of the relational self required of an ethics of care. It is also possible that Taylor's substantive self requires a fuller articulation of the importance of relationships in constituting the self in light of the new demands required of an ethics that is constituted in, through, and by interconnection and which, as such, shifts the perspective from the self to relationship. Taylor's substantive self is not at all incompatible with the relational self but there are tensions that an ethics of care raises in regards to the independent self that constitute interesting new ways of conceiving of a moral agent.

An ethics of care developed out of Carol Gilligan's examination of male bias in psychological theories of moral development, which called into question women's moral maturity, and out of Nel Noddings's exploration of the notion of caring. The tests of moral reasoning that Lawrence Kohlberg conducted, and with which Gilligan takes issue, lay out several stages of moral development. The system considers rights

⁷⁷ Sheila Mullett, "Shifting Perspectives: a new approach to ethics" in *Feminist Perspectives: Philosophical Essays on Method and Morals*, Lorraine Code, Sheila Mullett, and Christine Overall, eds. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988, p. 113

and societal standards as high-level areas of reasoning which culminate at a stage of reasoning which is characterized by individual, self-chosen, universal principles of justice. Gilligan questions founding moral progress in the “justice perspective,”⁷⁹ which emphasizes independence, formal reasoning, and universality and which is supported by an ethics of rights. Her studies indicate that women speak “in a different voice”⁸⁰ in the moral realm, one that they describe as a “network of connection, a web of relationship that is sustained by a process of communication.”⁸¹ In addition, it appeared in her studies that women needed to know more about specific situations when assessing moral dilemmas and placed greater emphasis on responsibility and on maintaining ties with other persons in addressing moral issues. Noddings’s work draws attention to similar concerns: “Women,” she claims, “enter the practical domain of moral action through a different door.” She suggests that to “arrange principles hierarchically and to derive conclusions logically”⁸² is of peripheral concern in the moral realm. Rather, moral deliberation and

⁷⁸ Charles Taylor, 1989, p. 510

⁷⁹ Carol Gilligan, “Moral Orientation and Moral Development” in *Women and Moral Theory*, Eva Feder Kittay and Diana T. Meyers, eds., Totowa: Rowman & Littlefield, 1987, p.20

⁸⁰ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982, p. 2

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33

⁸² Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, p. 2

action is motivated, she claims, by affection and regard and is founded on caring or the memory of caring. In an ethics of care the way that women reason about moral issues is “marked by a concern for maintaining and nurturing relationships rather than a concern for protecting individual rights or obeying abstract ethical principles.”⁸³

Out of the original concerns raised by Gilligan and Noddings and subsequent feminist theorizing, an ethics has emerged that Ruth Groenhout describes as one that: “... rejects absolutes....in favour of particularized, concrete moral responsibilities generated by relationships; ... considers the emotions or passions to be central to any understanding of morality; [and] turns to the study of relationships, frequently the relationship between mother and child, in order to better understand moral responsibilities.”⁸⁴ Rather than following fixed, abstract rules for moral practice, agents, in an ethics of care model, respond to particular situations employing, not deduction, but what Nel Noddings terms “engrossment”⁸⁵ in relation to the cared-for, that is, an empathetic capacity that recognizes the other’s desires and needs. Responding to particular others with varied needs and truths through a

⁸³ Ruth Groenhout, “The Virtue of Care: Aristotelian Ethics and Contemporary Ethics of Care” in *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle*, Cynthia A. Freeland, ed., University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998, p. 184

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 172

⁸⁵ Nel Noddings, 1984, p. 24

relational process and approaching moral problems from a care rather than justice perspective, requires a shift in focus and places new⁸⁶ demands on, or perhaps more accurately, restores hitherto undervalued aspects of the self.

Along with incorporating connectivity, responsibility, specificity, feeling, and empathy, an ethics of care model is also defined by its mutuality, that is by the capacity to engender in the cared-for equal concern for the one-caring (to use Noddings's terminology) and for others. In fact, in Noddings's definition, the caring is not complete until it is completed in the other. In this regard, reciprocity is a measure of its success. This ability to reproduce caring in another is, some theorists

⁸⁶ Some feminists point out that the concerns about the self raised in relation to an ethics of care are not radically new but have been raised by male philosophers in other contexts. For example, Annette Baier advocates a second look at Hume's moral theories which she finds amenable to feminist concerns. The question of a relational, sympathetic self operating in a cooperative moral model, Baier points out was proposed by Hume. The Humean perspective, she claims, is useful in addressing concerns regarding the potential for domineering or capricious one-caring or self-serving cared-for. She proposes "Corrected (sometimes rule-corrected) sympathy, not law-discerning reason, [as] the fundamental moral capacity." (Annette C. Baier, "Hume, The Women's Moral Theorist?" in *Women and Moral Theory*, Eva Feder Kittay and Diana T. Meyers, eds., Totowa: Rowman & Littlefield, 1987, p. 40) Ruth Groenhout argues that creating a place for the emotions or a consideration of ties to particular persons as they relate to friendship may be found in the Aristotelian ethical framework. His model, she contends, provides criteria for judging right or wrong which may prevent the relational, concretized moral model in an ethics of care from drifting into "relativistic situationalism." (Ruth Groenhout, "The Virtue of Care: Aristotelian Ethics and Contemporary Ethics of Care" in *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle*, Cynthia A. Freeland, ed., University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998, p. 191) In addition, Gilligan's studies of moral deliberation and action show that one third of women follow a care perspective, one third a justice perspective and one third a combination of the two. If most women are already operating in the moral sphere from a care perspective or a combination of care and justice perspectives, then, it could hardly be said that there may be new demands on the self but, more accurately, certain attributes of the self need to be restored and revalued.

argue,⁸⁷ what defines caring. The person who cares enables the development of the virtue of caring in the other; it is not just in concern for and action directed to the good of the other but in the fostering of a caring perspective in the other that caring takes place.

Integral to an ethics of care is its procedural nature. In that one of its objectives is to ensure maintenance of relationships, it promotes interconnection. In that it operates in specific situations generally in relation to concrete persons, it requires the responsiveness of dialogue. In that it is defined by mutuality or reciprocity, it promotes interdependence. The moral realm is a “network or web”⁸⁸ of interconnecting selves in which the agent and the procedure are inextricably tied. “As a framework for moral decision, care is grounded in the assumption that self and other are interdependent, an assumption reflected in a view of action as responsive and, therefore, as arising in relationship rather than the view of action as emanating from within the self and, therefore, ‘self-governed’.”⁸⁹ The idea that, at least to the extent that moral action, as Taylor asserts, is motivated by deep personal, meaningful goods which, in the case of care, would emphasize empathy and connection to the cared-for, the agent cannot be separated out from the procedure. In addition, if the care perspective is to be a viable

⁸⁷ Ruth Groenhout, 1998, p. 192

⁸⁸ Carol Gilligan, 1987, p.22

alternative or complement to the justice perspective, cooperation between agents, which Annette Baier suggests has not been fostered or given adequate emphasis in the moral realm,⁹⁰ will be required along with a willingness to accept that moral agreement will emerge as a function of particular, socially constructed situations: “Best moral solutions may be found by a process of compromise and accommodation that is sensitive to the needs and interests of the people involved”⁹¹ These shifts in perspective “open up whole new areas of ambiguity and uncertainty.”⁹² We are being invited to re-imagine and then reconstruct ethics from a different point of view, one which assigns value to character traits hitherto devalued and one in which accommodation is a measure of success. And, since the self required of an ethics of care is inextricably tied to the procedure in which it operates, we are being asked to re-imagine what this “other-connected”⁹³ self, defined by her relationship to others, looks like.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 24

⁹⁰ Annette Baier, “Doing Without Moral Theory?” in *Postures of the Mind: Essays on Mind and Morals*, Annette Baier, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985, p. 230

⁹¹ Eva Feder Kittay and Diana T. Meyers, “Introduction,” in *Women and Moral Theory*, Totowa: Rowman & Littlefield, 1987, p. 12

⁹² Sheila Mullett, “Shifting Perspectives: a new approach to ethics” in *Feminist Perspectives: Philosophical Essays on Method and Morals*, 1988, p. 115

⁹³ Kathryn Pauly Morgan, “Women and moral madness” in *Feminist Perspectives*, 1988, p. 162

As Gilligan states, in an ethics of care the concept of identity needs to expand “to include the experience of interconnexion.”⁹⁴ Baier describes this interconnected self as “one who was long enough dependent upon other persons to acquire the essential arts of personhood. Persons essentially are *second* persons, who grow up with other persons.”⁹⁵ The shift in emphasis from “I” to “you” or to “we” denotes a self that continually sees itself in reference to others and is affirmed and formed by those relationships. Second-persons are “heirs”⁹⁶ to persons who cared for them and on whom they depended or, indeed, recognizing the reciprocal aspect of caring, are future providers of such care. They are also receivers or providers of cultural values. This second-self is conscious to itself, then, not in detachment or in going inward, but in interconnection. Baier further elucidates,

My first concept of myself is as the referent of “you,” spoken by someone whom I will address as “you.”... The correct use of the second person pronoun is the test for that grasp of the concept of a person which is essential to persons ... This grasp of the second person pronoun is vital for self-conscious action as well as for self-conscious thought.⁹⁷

This idea of second personhood is in many respects similar to the self Taylor describes, at least insofar as he acknowledges the importance of

⁹⁴ Carol Gilligan, 1982, p. 172

⁹⁵ Annette Baier, “Cartesian Persons” in *Postures of the Mind*, 1985, p. 84

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 85

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 89-90

relationship and community. There are certainly points of intersection between the two or matters of degree of emphasis in regards to the development of the self in relationship. Taylor sees the other as a means of understanding the self, for it is, in part, in community and through communication that one defines oneself. For second-persons, however, understanding the other, receiving from the other, and reciprocating care are primary to an understanding of self. It is in this transformative process, activated by empathy and responsibility to others, and they to us, a process that synthesizes self to other, that second-persons are defined. Second-persons can never be conceived except in reference to and in relationship with another person. Is this a coherent concept? Can a relational self exist without descending into an inchoate muddle of alliances and dependencies? Baier seems to think so. Her claim to second personhood is, as Lorraine Code suggests, a “repudiation of individualism both in its ethical and its epistemological manifestations,”⁹⁸ but this is not to say that it is a “renunciation of individuality, so long as ‘individuality’ is not equated with ‘individualism’.”⁹⁹ Baier’s premise is that individuals are formed out of their interdependence but are still separate and unique selves capable of self-conscious action and thought. Indeed, self-realization in the sense of

⁹⁸ Lorraine Code, “Second Persons” in *Science, Morality & Feminist Theory*, Canadian Journal of Philosophy, Supplementary Volume 13, 1987, p. 361

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 361

reflective activity, is a laudable and maybe even essential moral goal, but it should be understood, in Baier's view, as "an outgrowth of fundamentally interactional moral activity."¹⁰⁰

ENHANCING THE SUBSTANTIVE AND RELATIONAL SELVES

While Taylor doesn't place the same degree of emphasis on interdependence or interconnectivity in self-reflective activity as does Baier, he does recognize the importance of situating moral claims in the self through this practice. As we have seen, he considers this to be an essential component of understanding oneself: it is what makes a person a person. This highly realized conception of self is particularly useful for an ethics of care for two reasons. Firstly, there is in care, as we have seen, a transformative aspect; that is, through the process of caring the self is constituted over time. However, as Bonnelle Strickling points out, "we cannot transcend ourselves without first becoming somebody."¹⁰¹ Taylor provides in his substantive self a correction to the potentially muddled relational self. It is important, if the transformation is to be affected, that the caring self be aware of its constitutive concerns. Secondly and practically, an ethics of care, especially as practised by women who have been socialized to nurture and sacrifice themselves for

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 361

¹⁰¹ Bonnelle Lewis Strickling, "Self-Abnegation" in *Feminist Perspectives*, 1988, p. 200

the benefit of others, could profit from a healthy conception of self such as Taylor provides. Self-abnegation, somewhat inherent in some aspects of the concept of care, will at least, then, be self-chosen self-abnegation.

The question of a strongly realized self, however, does not come without its own set of issues. Taylor views the self as one that exists in a space of questions that have to do with constitutive concerns: “When a given constellation of self, moral sources, and localization is *ours*, that means it is the one from *within* which we experience and deliberate about our moral situation. It cannot but come to feel fixed and unchallengeable”¹⁰² Taylor acknowledges this as a potential problem. Since “being a self is inseparable from existing in a space of moral issues, to do with identity and how one ought to be,” one must “find one’s standpoint in this space, ... occupy [and] ... *be* a perspective in it.”¹⁰³ But how does one *be* a perspective and *be* a self, in his terms, at the same time? Does this put the relevance of the self itself in question? In the moral realm, resolving the tension inherent in this notion has been addressed by, among others, asserting universal principles or affirming right reasoning over passion. An ethics of care offers another point of view on the subject which bears on the kind of self that can be a perspective without relinquishing one’s identity entirely which, as we have seen, can be detrimental if care is realized in an unhealthy manner.

¹⁰² Charles Taylor, 1989, p. 111

It also provides a solution to the problem of conflicting constitutive concerns. Strickling speaks of transcendence of self. Noddings speaks of “stepping out of one’s own frame of reference into the other’s”¹⁰⁴ or “allowing ourselves to be transformed.”¹⁰⁵ Baier speaks of “an imaginative realization of the lives of persons other than oneself.”¹⁰⁶ The common thread here is a movement away from the self, to a self conceived in relationship. Since we have already seen how this movement away from the self can be realized without abdicating the creativity and uniqueness of the self, we can imagine a self not fixed and unchanging but flexible and adaptable and able to accommodate the moral autonomy of other selves. Taylor’s notion of strong evaluation may be helpful in this regard. Strong evaluation offers standards by which discriminations may be judged, as well, strong evaluation arises out of a contemplation of what makes one’s life meaningful which is given power by the “affirmation of ordinary life.” Second-persons will make central those aspects of ordinary life such as the care of children or the importance of community that make their lives meaningful. Second-persons, strong evaluators, will assess moral questions on the basis of the importance of

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 112

¹⁰⁴ Nel Noddings, 1984, p. 24

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 34

¹⁰⁶ Annette Baier, “Frankena and Hume on Points of View” in *Postures of the Mind*, 1985, p. 159

care. This will allow them to modify or embrace positions dependent on the particulars of each situation and in regard to concrete others for whom they care.

Along with the shift in emphasis from self to relationship, the situational and relational nature of an ethics of care requires further significantly new or re-valued demands of the self beyond new levels of accommodation and flexibility. This “risky adventure of interdependence,”¹⁰⁷ in its ambiguity and uncertainty, will require a trust in the less definitive process itself - a challenge for the orderly, rational, autonomous “Robin self” but possibly a lesser challenge for the Taylor self, and an even lesser challenge for the “Mrs. Brown self.” The potential arbitrariness of such a system points to the usefulness of both the strong substantive self in which moral authority resides and confidence in our moral intuitions, out of which, as Taylor identifies, the moral principles of dignity, justice, and well-being for others and ourselves are affirmed. Self-governed, responsible moral deliberation would appear to be a necessity in a relational ethics and doesn’t in any way deny the importance accorded connectivity. Strong second-persons defined in their relationships and motivated by connectivity and mutuality can be assured that relationship-governed action arising from self-governed deliberation is as effective in the moral realm as self-

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 222

governed action. What will be required, however, are “principles concerning relationships, not only concerning the actions of individuals.”¹⁰⁸ Caring’s capacity to propagate itself in the other or others, though a significant contribution to the moral world, may not be entirely re-assuring to the vulnerable cared-for or ensure protection against arbitrary decisions. Furthermore, principles regarding obligations would guide both the cared-for and the one-caring in cases where the former cannot be physically present or is prevented for psychological or other reasons from participating. In the absence of principles governing relational ethics, Taylor offers an interim solution:

What better measure of reality do we have in human affairs than those terms which on critical reflection and after correction of the errors we can detect make the best sense of our lives? ‘Making the best sense’ here includes not only offering the best, most realistic orientation about the good but also allowing us best to understand and make sense of the actions and feelings of ourselves and others.¹⁰⁹

THE CHINESE LOBSTER: A RELATIONAL ETHICS AT WORK

In *The Chinese Lobster*, A. S. Byatt provides an excellent lens through which to explore how the protagonists struggle to “make the best sense” of their own and others’ histories, moral orientations, and motivations as they address a moral dilemma and how they use the care perspective to

¹⁰⁸ Virginia Held, *Feminist Morality, Transforming Culture, Society, and Politics*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 76-77

¹⁰⁹ Charles Taylor, 1989, p. 57

find a resolution. The two main characters, representing different moral points of view, respectively shift positions in the course of the narrative from a utilitarian perspective and what we have called a justice perspective, to a care perspective. In the story they demonstrate how, in an ethics of care, it is possible to find a shared moral vision. The story also affords an opportunity to explore the demands that are made of the self to realize this objective. An absent third party provides an opportunity to observe how care accommodates those incapable of participating in the process.

The action in *The Chinese Lobster* takes place in a Chinese restaurant. As Professor Peregrine Diss enters the establishment he nods at the lumbering, black lobster flanked by two crabs in a display case in the entranceway to the dining area. Gerda Himmelblau, the Dean of Women Students, with whom he is lunching, has already observed at her earlier arrival the contorted movements of the larger crustacean as it “moves slowly in this unbreathable element.”¹¹⁰ Himmelblau has also remarked on the smaller crab’s movements as it rocks from side to side and has felt their joint “painful life in the thin air.”¹¹¹ In a brilliant metaphor, Byatt provides the reader with a beautiful but disturbing image of the psychologically difficult and seemingly irresolvable situation in which the characters find themselves and the roles, one initially

¹¹⁰ A. S. Byatt, 1993, p. 95

intractable, the other moving between positions, that they will take as they move toward a resolution. The slow-moving lobster is the object of their attention.

In her position as Dean of Women Students, Gerda Himmelblau is faced with an accusation of sexual harassment from one of her art students, Peggi Nollett, directed at her advisor, Peregrine Diss, a Matisse scholar. Himmelblau and Diss are meeting to “discuss [the charge] informally and in an unofficial context.”¹¹² The credibility of the two academics is quickly established: Diss is “always talking about something, not about nothing;” Himmelblau works with “acerbic accuracy.”¹¹³ Absent Peggi is known to us largely through her badly written letters and a statement of her rather unresolved theoretical position. However, her allegation is grave and demands attention. As the meal is consumed, Diss and Himmelblau address the moral issues that arise out of the charge.

Peggi Nollett, an anorexic and suicidal student, positions sexual harassment as the issue to be addressed but interestingly never asks in either of her letters to Himmelblau for specific action to be taken in its regard. Her plea is really for help and respect. The specific allegation is a mask, in effect, for recognition of her work and by extension herself. She,

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 96

¹¹² Ibid., p. 109

in fact, ties the two clearly together in her letter: first she defends her theoretical position, then she puts forward her charge.

My project is ahistorical and *need not involve* any description of the so-called development of Matisse's so-called style or approach, since what I wish to state is essentially *critical*, and presented from a *theoretical* viewpoint with insights provided from contemporary critical methods to which the chronology of Matisse's life or the order in which he committed his 'paintings' is *totally irrelevant*.¹¹⁴

Diss, she complains is "completely out of sympathy with [her work's] feminist project... ." ¹¹⁵ She then goes on to describe the alleged kissing and fondling that took place in her studio. Peggi's work, which partly consists of defacing Matisse's paintings, is an act of protest but without a strong critical, historical, or contextual basis. In conflating her art with her identity, the work becomes largely about self-expression. She suggests that it can only be understood by those who share the discourse: the feminist project, thus marginalizing herself further. She calls for tolerance and understanding of her artistic position and, by extension, herself, and demands, rights in their regard, but, in fact, she forecloses discussion and criticism, and in Diss's mind, at least, commands little respect. The dialogue, then, literally takes place without her. In addition, in Peggi's suicidal state, "imagining others becomes

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 98

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 101

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 100

unimaginable”¹¹⁶ which makes her unqualified to take part in a moral endeavour requiring a relational perspective. Peggi’s fragile psychological state also precludes her capacity for Taylor’s strong evaluation, which, he argues, allows persons to determine right and wrong and, as such, defines a fully self-reflexive person. This highly realized self, I have argued, is useful in assuring the success of an intersubjective ethical procedure. Can an ethics of care function without full participation of all claimants? As the story unfolds we will see how the Dean and Peggi’s advisor interpret her position and find a resolution of the problem without her input. But first we must understand the role each protagonist takes.

Diss presents his position in terms of maintaining artistic integrity and upholding academic standards: “I do not see how she can *possibly* be given a degree - she is ignorant and lazy and pigheadedly misdirected - and I felt it my duty to tell her so,”¹¹⁷ he says. The “*great swastikas of shit*”¹¹⁸ that she applies to Matisse’s paintings are to him a profanity. Her lack of understanding of “the blues, and the pinks, and the whites, and the oranges, yes, and the blacks too” in his terms render her unqualified to “savage them”¹¹⁹ and preclude his respect for her work. Peggi’s project

¹¹⁶ A. S. Byatt, 1993, p. 125

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 110

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 112

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 113

to “rearrange” Matisse, to address what she considers distortions of the female body in his work is, in his view, an irrelevant critique of the paintings. Though obviously aware of current theoretical art discourses, Diss presents his views as though they are universally accepted and binding. In sum, he won’t give in to what he sees as “lies and blackmail. And because that women *isn’t an artist*, and *doesn’t work*, and *can’t see*, and should not have a degree. And because of Matisse.”¹²⁰

To Diss’s self-righteous indignation at Peggi’s smeared and defaced Matisse images which he finds appalling and pathetic, Himmelblau observes that they contain an element of protest “meant to disgust and desecrate,”¹²¹ a perfectly legitimate artistic position which it seems was effective. “It was meant to disturb you. It disturbed you,”¹²² she says, noting that Matisse took similarly provocative positions. “What I dream of,” Matisse stated, “is an art of balance, of purity and serenity devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter ... an art ... something like a good armchair in which to rest from physical fatigue.”¹²³ This statement, Himmelblau reminds Diss, incensed artists and intellectuals. To Diss’s accusation that Peggi’s work is dashed off and ill-considered,

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 117

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 112

¹²² Ibid., p. 114

¹²³ Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Matisse: His Art and His Public*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1951, p. 122

Himmelblau counters that “Matisse would sometimes make a mark, and consider, and put the canvas away for weeks, months until he knew where to put the next mark. ... the shit spreading may have required the same considerations.”¹²⁴ Utilizing a care perspective, Himmelblau compensates for Peggi’s inability to argue on her own behalf. She takes Peggi’s position and makes the intellectual and moral arguments on her behalf. But Himmelblau herself has other utilitarian concerns. She knows that failure to resolve the conflict could have serious consequences for the department and, because of the unique nature of their program, a negative impact on future students. But Himmelblau is not on anyone’s side. She is a mediator and arbitrator. Her knowledge of artistic concerns, her connection to the community they share, her willingness to consider Peggi’s point of view, and her empathy for Peggi’s clearly disturbed state, along with her acknowledgement of and even agreement with Diss’s reservations about Peggi’s ability to successfully complete the requirements of her degree move the dialogue along and introduce a caring perspective into the conversation. Combined with her personal stake in the outcome of their moral debate, the deliberators move forward to a point of intersection in their common experiences.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ A. S. Byatt, 1993, p. 113

¹²⁵ In this regard, Himmelblau has the characteristics of Michael Walzer’s “connected critic.” She is neither a dispassionate stranger or a marginalized insider. She has inside knowledge and understanding to bring to the discussion and a stake in its outcome. She “seeks the success of their common enterprise.” (Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987, p. 39)

Himmelblau must engage Diss in an interpretive exercise regarding the moral issues confronting them. Diss, a representative of a more traditional justice perspective, must move with Himmelblau beyond the universalizing criteria of this perspective to the specific case of Peggi. Both must recover the existing morality embedded in their culture and in themselves. The inner powers, which Taylor claims provide us with the capacity to construct, transfigure, or interpret the world, are the basis out of which they deliberate on the moral issue. But it is in the dialogue and in a recognition of their responsibility to Peggi and her particular situation, an empathy for her in her disturbed state of mind, and in the understanding of their interconnection that they can take action. Byatt describes what occurs within participants in the conversation as a

dark river of unconnected thought, of secret fear, or violence, or bliss, hoped-for or lost, which keeps pace with the flow of talk and is neither seen nor heard. And at times, one or both of the two will catch sight or sound of this movement, in himself or herself, or, more rarely, in the other. ... The pace changes...¹²⁶

In caring for self and other, persons cooperate in a reflective, imaginative, and transformative exercise whose goal is transcendence not victory.

When Himmelblau and Diss can imagine Peggi's anorexia and her suicidal tendencies, the moral issue becomes clear and its resolution possible. In this story they not only imagine it but they know it. It is on discovering their shared knowledge of the "white room" representing their

¹²⁶ A. S. Byatt, 1993, p. 126

own attempts to commit suicide, that they become linked to Peggi. “[Diss] has used her secret image, the white room, accurately; they have shared it.” Himmelblau reflects, “*He knows that she knows*, and what is more, she knows that he knows.”¹²⁷ It is on this point that the story turns.

Out of Himmelblau’s reflection on the death by suicide of her closest friend and her recognition that she could be “next in line”¹²⁸ in the suicide chain and in Diss’s acknowledgment that “he carries inside himself some chamber of ice inside which sits his figure of pain” the evidence of which is demonstrated in the “well-made, *efficient* scars, on his wrists,”¹²⁹ comes an understanding of their shared history and interconnection with Peggi and a greater capacity to empathize with her situation. Framed in this way, the moral rights demanded by Peggi can be seen for what they really are, a cry for help to which they must respond employing empathy and accommodation rather than detachment and adherence to abstract principles. As second-persons, they understand themselves in the other and from this they determine what they have to do. Himmelblau and Diss arrive at a simple solution: a sympathetic advisor for Peggi, someone who shares her beliefs but under whose direction they both allow, Peggi may prosper artistically and intellectually. They may not have resolved the issue definitively; it may,

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 129

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 129

in fact, be a defeat in Diss's terms; but the question they pose is "how much it matters."¹³⁰ What does matter is that through care they arrive at a resolution to the moral dilemma which recognizes Peggi's immediate and serious needs but which can also accommodate their own concerns regarding the future of the academic community that was jeopardized and the integrity of their disciplines.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that the rational, detached self of modernity as exemplified in Byatt's *Art Work* is not suited to respond to certain contemporary issues in ethics which have emerged with the development of the autonomous, independent, and original self as described by Taylor. Byatt offers an alternative, relational self more appropriate to an ethics of care which seeks to address, among other issues, the problem of conflicting notions of the good. An ethics of care recognizes the importance of interdependence and connectivity and the role of accommodation and reciprocity. I have also argued that the second-person self, as described by Baier, which is suited to a relational ethics, requires grounding to avoid descent into inchoate relativism and situationalism, and finds it in Taylor's substantive self. In turn, his highly realized, reflexive self

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 130

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 133

benefits from the correction of a second-person self in its emphasis on other-connection. This ensures flexibility and accommodation in moral deliberation and action. As well, a synthesis of Taylor's substantive self with an other-connected self alleviates the ambiguity and potential arbitrariness of an ethics of care.

To take the care perspective as seriously as the justice perspective and prepare competent second-persons to participate in it, Baier suggests, will require a "faith in the human community and its evolving procedures -- in the prospects for many-handed cognitive ambitions and moral hopes."¹³¹ As we saw in *The Chinese Lobster*, a shift from self to relationship, adoption of second personhood, and trust in the procedure itself can result in successful accommodation in the moral sphere.

¹³¹ Annette Baier, 1985, p. 293

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