Philosophy & Self-Expression
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When I bumped into Taylor's *Philosophical Papers*,[1] I had been to lectures on and studied texts by Wittgenstein, Foucault, Kuhn, Hegel, Kant, Rawls, Habermas, Walzer, Rorty, MacIntyre, some Heidegger, and I was struck by how these separate strands of thought suddenly formed aspects of a coherent picture. Each of those thinkers had seemed to be saying something important and true, and now Taylor – commenting these thinkers and others – provided a secure view of how it all hangs together; adding new equally important topics of his own. That then inspired me to write a dissertation and some other texts on Taylor's work. One topic on which Charles Taylor's work stands out is that of self-expression. He has captured both the importance of implicit background sense of things, orientation and 'know-how' on the one hand and the role of articulations on the other, showing how the latter aim to be faithful to the implicit grasp and transform it at the same time. Taylor attributes this view to the Expressivists of the Romantic movement and to Hegel, but the most illuminating texts on this topic seem to be by no-one else than Taylor himself. The model of expressive striving is an artist who starts with an inchoate sense of what she wants to achieve. She then struggles with getting a draft done, with "externalizing" the idea in an external medium. In the first draft, she perceives a partial realization of the idea – it falls short of being yet an adequate and faithful rendering of the idea, but on the other hand is more determinate and more detailed than the inchoate initial idea. Perceiving, "taking in" that determinate version is a genuine learning experience, it alters, reshapes the initial grasp. It first of all has aspects which fall short of the original idea and which illuminate some sides of the original idea negatively: the artist can now see some details that will not do. Secondly, some details appear as faithful realizations of the compressed inchoate sense that was the starting point. It had not yet unfolded in any detail, so the draft makes the inchoate sense more determinate and detailed.

Making a new draft will be guided by this altered, more determinate understanding, and may again remain a partial external expression on the one hand but also provide further determination on the other. Ultimately, after rounds of drafts, the artist can finally see her vision expressed in the external medium, "find herself" in the external reality. Note that features of the external medium in which the idea is embodied will necessarily contribute to the determinate shape created. It is part of the excellence in art that the message can be conveyed in ways, which extend the expressive capacities of the medium in question to new levels. Sculptors can make stone "dance", and composers can make movements of air sing glory to the sublime features of the universe, and poets can try to capture in subtler languages the existential predicament of humans.

We are all artists in that sense. We make experiments in life but not blindly, we lead a life guided by an implicit grasp of what is significant. Our sense of ourselves, or self-interpretations do not consist only of our explicit answers to the question "who am I" but also of our implicit orientations in life. One's identity encompasses the implicit level of emotional responses, practical orientation and implicit know-how and the explicit level of linguistic articulations. Even before the question "what kind of person am I" is explicitly raised, we are living one answer or another. We can strive to put it in words, or form an explicit message. While the explicit articulation is dependent on the implicit level, the implicit level is also altered by our explicit formulations:

> "Our attempts to formulate what we hold important must, like descriptions, strive to be faithful to something. But what they strive to be faithful to is not an independent object […], but rather a largely inarticulate sense of what is of decisive importance. An articulation of this 'object' tends to make it something different from what it was before."[2]

First of all, our identity is a matter of *orientations*, which may remain totally implicit. Secondly, we can explicate our implicit sense of who we are, or what is of importance to us. There can be rival explications and rival answers to the question "who am I" or "where do I stand". One criterion of a successful answer is how true the explications are of our implicit orientations, or how well they avoid distorted pictures of ourselves. But even the best explications can be further weighed and re-evaluated from the viewpoint of moral ideals and imaginative identifications: perhaps the conception we finally identify with is not the one, which is truest to what we have been so far. Our implicit views may have been one-sided. It may well be that facts about our past, imaginative identifications and evaluative elements all pull in different directions in our personal reflection. At this explicit level, there is a plurality of media of expression in which the implicit sense of self and of importance can be expressed: not only spoken language, but different arts or even body language will do. Narratives are one form of articulation. There is always an element of creativity in the linguistic articulation. The third phase then is the appropriation of the explications, or the internalization of the expressions. We can assess these articulations: which of them capture that which really resonates with us? Which is most faithful to what we aspire to say or achieve? Which articulations bring us closer to sources of motivation? And, like an artist's sense is reshaped in the process, our sense of ourselves is reshaped. For Taylor, *philosophy* alongside art, religion and practical projects, is one form that the expression of things of importance and one's orientation can take. Fichte's view that the kind of person one is affects the kind of philosophical system one supports, and that one's philosophy is "animated by one's soul" fits nicely here. Philosophical thought is then, among other functions it has, a medium of self-expression and self-clarification. What stone is for a sculptor, pre-existing philosophical texts, concepts and doctrines are for philosophers.

In addition to being an exemplary philosopher of self-expression, Taylor's personal blend of philosophical texts, making philosophical thought "sing" his own personal vision, provides us with an exemplary model of self-expression *through* philosophy.

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[1] Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 1 & 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[2] Charles Taylor, 'What is Human Agency?', in *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 38.