From an Insurmountable Dichotomy to a Creative Tension:

Moral Universals and Cultural Context in Paul Ricœur and Charles Taylor

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Table of Contents

Abstract

This study examines Paul Ricœur's arguments concerning moral universals in Oneself as Another and brings his work into conversation with Charles Taylor's Sources of the Self. In my discussion of these two texts, I focus on two central concepts that shape Ricœur and Taylor's approach to the question of moral universals: (1) Ricœur's notion of "inchoate universals" which he develops though his mediation between Kantian deontology and Aristotelian teleology discussed in the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth studies of Oneself as Another and (2) Taylor's notion of "strong evaluations" which constitutes a central feature of Taylor's conception of human moral agency explored in Sources of the Self. While Taylor and Ricœur adopt slightly different argumentative angles in developing these concepts, both highlight how moral norms are ultimately grounded in conceptions of "the good life" shaped by cultural and historical context. I show how attention to this connection between morality and ethics or between the "right" and the "good" allows the authors to develop an approach to moral universalism that is able to incorporate the "contextualist" critique of moral universals while preserving the goal of moral consensus building across cultural contexts. The blend of commitment to moral universalism with sensitivity to context allows Ricœur and Taylor to refigure the debate between moral universalism and cultural relativism as a creative tension rather than an insurmountable dichotomy. I argue that the perspective on moral universals found in these two important texts in contemporary philosophy thus not only challenges the divide between moral universalism and cultural relativism as one of the major oppositions of 20th century thought but also represents a key point of departure for comparing the two philosophers' ethical frameworks.

Résumé

Cette étude examine les arguments de Paul Ricœur concernant les universaux moraux dans *Soi-même comme un autre* et met son travail en conversation avec *Les sources du moi* de Charles Taylor. Dans ma discussion de ces deux textes, je me concentre sur deux concepts centraux qui façonnent l'approche de Ricœur et de Taylor par rapport à la question des universels en morale: (1) la notion de Ricœur d' « universels inchoatifs » qu'il développe à travers sa médiation entre la déontologie kantienne et la téléologie aristotélicienne discutée dans les septième, huitième et neuvième études de *Soi-même comme un autre* et (2) la notion d' « évaluations fortes » de Taylor qui constitue une caractéristique centrale de la conception de Taylor de l'action morale humaine explorée dans *Les sources du moi*. Bien que Taylor et Ricœur adoptent des angles d'argumentation légèrement différents dans le développement de ces concepts, tous deux soulignent comment les normes morales sont finalement fondées sur des conceptions de la « vie bonne » façonnées par le contexte culturel et historique. Je montre comment l'attention portée à ce lien entre la moralité et l'éthique ou entre le « bien » et le « bon » permet aux auteurs de développer une approche de l'universalisme moral capable d'intégrer la critique « contextualiste » des universaux moraux tout en préservant l'objectif de construction d'un consensus moral à travers les contextes culturels. La combinaison de l'engagement envers l'universalisme moral et de la sensibilité au contexte permet à Ricœur et Taylor de refigurer le débat entre l'universalisme moral et le relativisme culturel comme une tension créative plutôt que comme une dichotomie insurmontable. Je soutiens que la perspective sur les universels en morale que l'on trouve dans ces deux textes importants de la philosophie contemporaine non seulement remet en question le clivage entre l'universalisme moral et le relativisme culturel comme l'une des oppositions majeures de la pensée du 20e siècle, mais représente également un point de départ essentiel pour comparer les cadres éthiques des deux philosophes.

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Introduction

General problematic

In this thesis I discuss the question of "moral universals" while trying to gain insight into the process by which we might work towards a universal moral framework in the context of global pluralism. However, can we really talk about "universal" morality in an such a diverse world? Wouldn't any claim to universality merely be the product of a certain culture and history asserting itself against others? The possibility and desirability of reaching consensus on moral principles across diverse cultures and traditions is a question that has occupied much philosophical debate since the latter part of the 20th century (Bell, 2020). A central feature of this debate, is the question of whether or not the possibility of universal values can be reconciled with the empirical observation that ethical and moral principles vary according to particular cultural and historical contexts. The various responses to this question have given rise to seemingly intractable oppositions such as between a "liberal" universalism and a "communitarian" contextualism or between a reinvigoration of tradition and a narrative of modernity as a radical break with past sources of authority. Some influential attempts to address the problem of moral consensus have been grounded on a sharp distinction between rationally articulated moral norms that claim to transcend cultural boundaries and conceptions of the "good life" which are seen to be grounded in various religious and cultural traditions. This distinction is sometimes described as a separation between the "right" and the "good" or between "morality" and "ethics". The intention underlying such a distinction is to theorize how we might come to agreement on basic moral principles that allow diverse communities to live and act together despite profound differences regarding the ultimate purpose and meaning of life. John Rawls, for example, defends the idea of an "overlapping consensus" where various groups in society reach minimal agreement on basic

normative principles while, at the same time, adhering to mutually incommensurable "comprehensive doctrines" (Rawls, 1993, p. xvi). In a similar vein, Jürgen Habermas has argued for the possibility of a process of rational deliberation that aims at the intersubjective recognition of normative validity claims that transcend the diverse and conflicting "values" found in various cultural groups (Habermas, 1983/1990, p. 104).

The above positions share the assumption that adopting a strong stance towards questions of ultimate value – what it is "good" to be - is a potential source of conflict that prevents rational consensus on the rules, principles and procedures that should structure social relations - what it is "right" to do. Many observers of the various conflicts which have marked human history may, understandably, be tempted to agree with the assessment that conflicting notions of the good should take a back seat in favor of reaching a minimal normative consensus. However, is it possible to separate our aspiration for agreement on universally binding principles from underlying visions of what the ultimate end and purpose of life should be, what it means to live a good life? Indeed, isn't the very idea of "universal" moral norms that transcend various conceptions of the "good" which have emerged across cultures and over time even a possibility? How can we be sure that the universal moral norms which have achieved recognition in the contemporary world such as human rights aren't themselves merely the product of a Western imperialism opaque to its own cultural situatedness?

My thesis seeks to shed light on a possible path beyond the above dilemmas. In the following chapters I aim to show how universalism and contextualism need not be approached as an intractable dichotomy, but can actually be seen in creative tension. I argue that such a perspective can be found in the work of Paul Ricœur and Charles Taylor who represent an overlooked position in the debate between moral universalism and cultural relativism. Both

Ricœur and Taylor defend the idea that our moral conceptions have something "universal" to say and they argue that the associated normative project of reaching consensus on moral universals is something worth pursuing. At the same time, they are acutely conscious of the influence of cultural and historical context on shaping our conceptions of morality. This blend of a commitment to moral universalism with a sensitivity to cultural and historical context can be found in their discussions of human agency and identity in *Oneself as Another* (Ricœur, 1990/1992) and *Sources of the Self* (Taylor, 1989). The perspective on moral universals found in these two important texts in contemporary philosophy not only helps challenge the debate between universalism and contextualism as one of the major oppositions of 20th century thought that continues to exert an influence in the 21st century but also represents an important point of departure for comparing the two philosophers' ethical frameworks.

Sources and Methodology

While both philosophers have written about the role that conceptions of the good life play in human moral agency throughout their various works, this thesis focuses primarily on the arguments found in two major texts from both authors. This is, in part, because Ricœur's most complete formulation of his approach to ethics is developed in *Oneself as Another*, particularly the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth studies which he has referred to as his "little ethics" (Ricœur, 1990/1992, p. 290). Taylor's *Sources of the Self* also contains some of his most influential arguments about human moral agency and it is where he has most extensively developed many of the core concepts which inform his moral philosophy such as "strong evaluations" and "moral sources". Moreover, as will be discussed further below, very little comparative work has been carried out on these texts to date despite their methodological similarities.

While *Oneself as Another* forms the primary focus of my analysis of Ricœur's ethics, I also draw on various other texts such as his collections of essays *The Just* (1994/2000) and *Reflections on the Just* (2001/2007) as well as several secondary souces in order to elaborate on and clarify some of the points most relevant to his position on moral universals and human rights. Likewise, while Taylor explores the question of cross-cultural consensus on moral universals in *Sources of the Self* to some extent, he takes up the question of human rights more directly in a later essay titled "Conditions of an Unforced Consensus on Human Rights" (1999). I therefore draw on both texts from Taylor in order to bring his work into conversation with Ricœur's arguments on the debate surrounding human rights which is identified as a concrete example of the tension between moral universals and cultural context in *Oneself as Another*. I also find that Taylor's position in "An Unforced Consensus" draws on the same ethical framework which he develops in *Sources of the Self* and can thus, in a way, be seen as an extension of his arguments in that book.

I use the theme of moral universals and the relationship between moral norms and conceptions of the good life as my two major points of comparison between Ricœur and Taylor. In doing so, I compare two of the central concepts that figure in Ricœur's and Taylor's work respectively: strong evaluations and inchoate universals. Both concepts combine the aspiration towards moral universalism with the recognition of the cultural and historical situatedness of the languages through which we articulate visions of the good life. I argue that while the two philosophers adopt slightly different emphases in their development of these two concepts, both illuminate complementary dimensions of the relationship between moral norms and conceptions of the good. Attention to these concepts helps us see how both Taylor and Ricœur refigure the debate between moral universalism and cultural relativism as a creative tension rather than an insurmountable dichotomy. I also show how this creative tension between the "universal" and the

"contextual" can be seen in their arguments concerning cross-cultural consensus on universal human rights. My thesis is thus both an exegesis of Ricœur's position on the tension between universalism and contextualism as discussed in *Oneself as Another* and a comparative analysis with Taylor's arguments in *Sources of the Self.*

Research context

Several authors have commented extensively Ricœur's ethical framework and his mediation of the debate between universalism and contextualism as discussed in *Oneself as Another*. David Kaplan (2003) and Boyd Blundell (2010) both include comprehensive analyses of Ricœur's ethics in their books and explore the ways in which his reinterpretation of Aristotelian *phronesis* responds to the opposition between procedural universalism and cultural relativism. Kaplan, in particular, argues that Ricœur's ethics not only attempts to mediate between the philosophical positions of Aristotle and Kant, but also the liberal-communitarian debate that was at its height in the late 20th century (Kaplan, 2003, p. 101). Fred Dallmayr's "Ethics and Public Life: A Critical Tribute to Paul Ricœur" (2002) summarizes and critiques Ricœur's major arguments about ethics *Oneself as Another* and reflects on their applications for contemporary public life "especially in the context of the emerging 'global village' or cosmopolis" (p. 214). He discusses Ricœur's contribution to reconciling disparate trends in late 20th century ethics such as the "liberalism versus communitarianism" debate as well as the "'tradition versus modernity' conundrum" (p. 214). He argues that Ricœur does so by "correlating and carefully calibrating" diverse ethical "legacies" such as Aristotelian and Kantian thought (p. 214). Wall (2005) examines Ricœur's arguments from the perspective of social transformation and eschatological hope. He argues that Ricœur's ethics call for an understanding of moral "universalization" that involves the participation of the "… full diversity of humanity" and the emergence of "shared social

convictions" (p. 153). In particular, Wall sees in Ricœur's work the suggestion that constructing a just and inclusive public sphere must go beyond "applying fixed principles to the messy situation" and move towards the formation of "new principles or convictions themselves" (p. 153). All four of these authors find in Ricœur's ethics a way beyond some of the major intractable debates of 20th century thought, many of which are still ongoing. My thesis focuses primarily on the debate between universalism and contextualism, but in doing so gives considerable attention to Ricœur's dialectic between ethics and morality or between the "right" and the "good" which represents another significant tension in contemporary philosophy.

Several authors have brought Ricœur's ethical framework to bear on other contemporary philosophical issues. Maureen Junker Kenny (2014), for example, discusses how Ricœur's arguments in *Oneself as Another* inform his perspective on religion in the public sphere in her major comparative study of Ricœur, Rawls and Habermas, *Religion and Public Reason: A Comparison of the Positions of John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas and Paul Ricoeur*. In her book *In Response to the Religious Other: Ricoeur and the Fragility of Interreligious Encounters* (2014), Marianne Moyaert discusses the applicability of Ricœur's arguments for interfaith dialogue and the possibility of a global ethic as seen in his debate with Hans Kung. Gary Foster's article "Rawls and Ricœur on Reconciling the Right and the Good: An Overlapping Consensus or an Ethical Aim?" (2007) compares Ricœur's and John Rawls' positions on the relationship between ethics and morality. In doing so, he also discusses how Ricœur's arguments clarify contemporary issues related to the public sphere such as the incorporation of Indigenous perspectives in liberal democratic societies (p. 168). My thesis does not explore further applications of Ricœur's arguments such as these. However, I do argue that their application to human rights – something which Ricœur himself discusses in *Oneself as Another* – represents a unique perspective on the

issue that blends the normative "universalist" project of human rights with the observation that morality is shaped in many ways by cultural and historical context. I argue that a similar perspective can be found in the work of Charles Taylor who also critiques the proceduralist dichotomy between moral norms and ethical visions of the good life while continuing to be open to the possibility of moral universals.

While much has been published on their respective contributions to contemporary philosophy, relatively little comparative work has been carried out on Ricœur and Taylor. Nicholas Smith (1997) has categorized Ricœur and Taylor together (along with Gadamer) as proponents of a similar methodological perspective on hermeneutics (pp. 19-25). However, his book does not include a major comparative analysis between the two philosophers' ethical frameworks. While Junker-Kenny examines some of the ways in which Taylor's arguments figure in Ricœur's position on religion and public ethics, Ricœur's engagement with Taylor is not a major focus of her book. Several shorter studies have, however, been published which focus more directly on comparing Ricœur and Taylor's approach to selfhood. However, no study has, to my knowledge, compared Ricœur and Taylor's positions on moral universals and the question of a cross cultural consensus on human rights. Arto Laitinen (2002) and Meili Steele (2003) compare Taylor's central notion of "strong evaluations" discussed in *Sources of the Self* with Ricœur's arguments about narrative and narrative identity. However, their articles focus on Ricœur's arguments about narrative identity in the Fifth and Sixth Studies of *Oneself as Another* as well as his other arguments such as those found in *Time and Narrative* (1984). [1] While I also draw on Taylor's *Sources of the Self* and bring it into comparison with Ricœur's work, my thesis

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[1] While he does not adopt this as the focus of his article, Steele alludes to the possibility of a "… discussion of Ricœur and Taylor on the Kantian legacy of the right and the good" (p. 483). This discussion is one way of conceptualizing my thesis.

focuses primarily on Ricœur's discussion of the "moral and ethical" dimensions of selfhood in the Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth studies of *Oneself as Another*. [2]

Bernard P. Dauenhauer (1992) has written a short comparative review essay on Ricœur and Taylor's arguments about selfhood that includes a more comprehensive treatment of *Oneself as Another*. He argues that both philosophers articulate similar insights and that *Oneself as Another* and *Sources of the Self* can be seen as complementary texts. However, he finds that the two philosophers adopt different emphases in their investigation into selfhood. He argues that Taylor's *Sources of the Self* - "while never losing sight of the present weight of questions about the self" - approaches the issue of selfhood "diachronically" emphasizing how contemporary questions about the self came to be possible over the course of Western history. Ricœur, on the other hand, "while not forgetting this long, complex history", examines the question of selfhood "synchronically" by focusing primarily on the way we pose the questions in contemporary thought (p. 212). While approaching similar issues from slightly different angles, Dauenhauer considers it clear that neither Ricœur nor Taylor deny the importance of both engaging with contemporary questions about the nature of selfhood as well as articulating the genealogies of such questions. In this regard, he argues that that the two texts differ in terms of emphasis and perspective much more than they do in terms of philosophical positions. For this reason, Dauenhauer finds that both Ricœur's *Oneself as Another* and Taylor's *Sources of the Self* together represent a "… timely 'third way' for us to explore in our efforts to make sense of the self and its identity" (p. 221) that transcends many major oppositions in 20th century philosophy. My arguments in this thesis align with Dauenhauer's position that the two philosophers develop

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[2] The narrative dimension of selfhood is, of course, not unrelated to its moral and ethical dimensions. Indeed, for Ricœur, narrative, ethics and morality are intimately linked. See: Ricœur, 1990/1992, pp. 163-168.

complementary arguments albeit with slightly different emphases. However, I argue that, alongside their arguments about selfhood (or, perhaps, implicit in them), Ricœur and Taylor also articulate an additional "third way" to explore contemporary debates about moral universals that refigures the underlying debate between procedural moral universalism and cultural relativism as a creative tension rather than an insurmountable dichotomy.

Presentation of Chapters

The first part of this thesis is primarily an exegesis of some of Ricœur's core arguments in *Oneself as Another*. As mentioned above, I focus on the Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Studies in which he develops several elements of an ethical framework. Instead of a comprehensive summary of Ricœur's ethics I identify several threads throughout the three studies that, together, inform his position on moral universals and the debate between universalism and contextualism. Chapters 1 and 2 focus on these threads in order to situate Ricœur's arguments about moral universals in the broader context of his ethics while Chapter 3 focuses specifically on his arguments about moral universalism and the contextualist critique. The purpose of this exegesis is to make explicit Ricœur's position on moral universals and human rights in order to compare it with Taylor's arguments in *Sources of the Self*.

The second part of this thesis compares Ricœur's arguments discussed in Part 1 with Taylor's discussion of strong evaluations in *Sources of the Self* and his subsequent arguments about human rights in "Conditions of An Unforced Consensus on Human Rights". Chapter 4 has a twofold focus: (1) to summarize Taylor's major arguments concerning "strong evaluations" and the related concept of "moral sources" as found in *Sources of the Self* and (2) to bring Taylor's work into conversation with Ricœur's arguments discussed in Part 1 in order to show that while they adopt slightly different emphases, both highlight complementary dimensions of the

relationship between moral norms and underlying conceptions of the good. While Ricœur focuses on the essential role that conceptions of the good life play in applying universal moral norms to particular contexts, Taylor concentrates on how responding to fundamental questions concerning "the good" is an inescapable feature of human moral agency.

Chapter 5 likewise aims to reconstruct Taylor's arguments about human rights in "Conditions for An Unforced Consensus on Human Rights" and continues the comparison with Ricœur's position on universalism and contextualism in *Oneself as Another*. In this chapter I also discuss how the perspective that emerges from both Ricœur and Taylor's arguments discussed in Chapter 4 opens space for a middle position that avoids falling into either side of the debate between procedural universalism and cultural relativism. I conclude this thesis with some further remarks on the analytical distinction that both Ricœur and Taylor make between moral norms and "ethical" conceptions of the good and provide some additional thoughts regarding the implications of their arguments for thinking about dialogue across contexts.

Limitations and Focus

While the following chapters try to accomplish the aims set out in the above paragraphs, this thesis is not a comprehensive study of the broader philosophical debate about universalism and contextualism and the issue of a cross-cultural consensus on human rights. For instance, I do not engage with the broader literature on human rights, including some important critiques and genealogies from the past decade (ex Moyn, 2012; Joas, 2011) nor do I discuss the extensive literature on the "communitarian critique of moral universalism" that had gained prominence in the late 1980's and early 1990's (Bell, 2020). This is because my aim is primarily to explicate a philosophical position that I find articulated in the work of Ricœur and Taylor with human rights being one possible field of application. That said, in making this decision I do not deny the need

for future research which applies their arguments to recent debates around human rights and situates their positions in the broader context of the debates which were shaping philosophical discourse at the time both *Oneself as Another* and *Sources of the Self* were written.

While both Ricœur and Taylor draw on the work of other influential philosophers in the Western tradition such as Aristotle and Kant, I focus primarily on Ricœur and Taylor's engagement with these thinkers in the following chapters. The reason behind limiting my focus to Ricœur and Taylor's discussion is, in part, to concentrate on an in depth reading of their approach to ethics and the question of moral universals. In addition, because they both challenge the dichotomy between the "right" and the "good", Ricœur and Taylor's arguments can be read as critiques of proceduralist theories of moral universalism such as those of Rawls, Habermas, and Apel. While I also limit my focus to Ricœur and Taylor's reading of the aforementioned philosophers in this thesis, my goal is not to offer a criticism of their reading of Rawls, Habermas and Apel but to better understand Ricœur and Taylor's thought through their own engagement with these thinkers.

Chapter 1: Ricœur's Ethical Framework in *Oneself as Another*

Introduction

In order to fully appreciate the significance and underlying logic of Ricœur's approach to the question of moral universals it is helpful to situate his arguments in the broader context of his ethics which he develops throughout the 7th, 8th, and 9th studies of *Oneself as Another* (1990/1992). The following chapters aim to do this by outlining several of the core features of Ricœur's ethical framework as discussed in these studies: (1) The grounding of moral norms in 'the ethical aim'; (2) The necessity for the ethical aim to find expression in norms; (3) The role of practical wisdom or *phronesis* in mediating between the ethical and moral levels in situations of ethical conflict that arise when applying moral norms to the complexities of real life. While this brief summary cannot do justice to the richness and complexity of Ricœur's reflections on ethics, it will follow, in some detail, one important thread in his arguments that informs his discussion of moral universals: the dialectical relationship between Aristotelian teleology and Kantian deontology which, for Ricœur, finds expression in a dialectic between the ethical aim and moral norms. After having outlined this aspect of Ricœur's ethics, Chapter 2 will show the role that this mediation between Kant and Aristotle plays in his discussion of the tension between the notion of universal moral norms and the empirical observation that norms and values tend to differ according to cultural and historical context.

The Ethical Aim

The purpose of Ricœur's ethical studies in *Oneself as Another* is to shed light on what he calls the "ethical and moral dimensions of a subject" (Ricœur 1990/1992, p. 18) via an analysis of the "ethical and moral determinations of action" (p. 169). Ricœur argues that a fundamental

feature of being a human 'self' is having the ability to evaluate actions both in terms of being 'good' and also as 'obligatory'. While some philosophical schools have taken the distinction between these two terms to imply a sharp divide between 'facts' and 'values' inasmuch as describing actions as good (facts) differs from saying that something should be obligatory (values), he argues that this assertion is ultimately the result of a false dichotomy. Instead of two mutually exclusive terms, the essential connection between "description and prescription" (p. 170) – or between judgements of fact and judgements of value - is something that becomes evident when we consider the various ways in which moral norms depend on a conception of what Ricœur, following Aristotle, calls 'the good life'. Our laws, codes, regulations, procedures and other forms of moral and legal prescription are all grounded, whether implicitly or explicitly, in a conception of 'the good'. One of the core features of Ricœur's ethics is thus to bring to language the implicit connections between the idea of universal moral norms and the various conceptions of 'the good' towards which we direct our goals and aspirations and against which we judge and assess our progress – our ultimate sources of moral motivation. A major feature of Ricœur's discussion of ethics in *Oneself as Another* is thus an exploration of the complementary relationships between ethics and morality as two levels of moral reflection described in terms of "… the *aim* of an accomplished life and …the articulation of this aim in *norms* characterized at once by the claim to universality and by an effect of constraint" (p. 170).

Concerning the first level, the 'aim of an accomplished life', Ricœur refers to this as the "ethical aim," something which is constitutive of an individual's sense of meaning and purpose and which represents the "…ultimate end of our action" (p. 172). What the idea of an ethical aim draws attention to is the fact that an individual is only able to evaluate their actions and decisions as good with reference to a normative standard represented by the notion of a 'good

life'. Although such a standard may be fuzzy, largely inarticulate, and only gradually understood and clarified through the span of one's life, we cannot separate the basic human capacity of ethical evaluation from the commitment to a "higher finality which would never cease to be internal to human action" (p. 170). In order to bring out the intimate relationship between the individual, the interpersonal and institutional aspects of ethical life, Ricœur proposes a threefold interpretation of the ethical aim, "… aiming at the 'good life' with and for others in just institutions" (p. 172).

Expanding on the above idea of a complementary relationship between ethics and morality, Ricœur discusses how the distinction between the ethical aim and moral norms parallels Aristotelian teleology and Kantian deontology respectively. One of the reasons for this is that while Aristotle's ethics focuses on the development of a virtuous character in pursuit of 'the good' as an object of desire, Kant is concerned with the identification of moral duties which ought to be rationally justified as obligatory and binding without reference to any teleological conception of the good. For Ricœur, a more complete conception of ethics is one which is able to reconcile (though without conflating the two philosophical traditions) Aristotle's emphasis on 'being and desiring' with Kant's emphasis on 'doing' and, once such a connection is established, bring to light their complementary relationships and creative tensions. A major aim of Ricœur's ethical studies in *Oneself as Another* is thus to show the various ways in which moral norms *depend* upon the ethical aim as a vision of the good:

> "… if we are able to show that the deontological viewpoint is subordinate to the teleological perspective, then the gap between ought and is will appear less unbridgeable than in a direct confrontation between description and prescription, or in a related terminology, between judgements of value and judgements of fact." (p. 171)

That said, even though deontology ought to be seen as subordinate to teleology, Ricœur is careful to note that the desire for a good life with and for others in just institutions can only be clearly understood and protected from distortion if expressed in concrete morality which is, in turn, tested against the complexities of real-life situations. For this reason, he argues that, while moral norms can only be made intelligible against the background of some conception of the good life, the ethical aim itself must pass through the deontological "sieve of the norm" in order to find its proper expression (p. 170). However, as will be discussed further below, it is not always clear how moral norms apply to the complexities of real-life situations. For Ricœur this means that reaching a wise decision in situations of moral conflict must therefore come about through a 'return' from the level of moral norms back to the resources of the ethics of a good life. The ethical aim is thus both a source for norms, codes, and laws as well as a necessary resource for gaining clarity in situations where the application of the norm is unclear. Morality is, in this sense, encompassed by ethics.[3] The intimate connection between teleology and deontology therefore enables moral norms, which constitute one of the necessary expressions of teleological ethics, to be responsive to the complexities of concrete situations rather than applied either uniformly or haphazardly. With this in view, Ricœur describes the relationship between ethics and morality as "… involving at once subordination and complementarity, which the final recourse of morality to ethics will ultimately come to reinforce" (p. 170-171). We will see further below how this fundamentally dialectical relationship between ethics and morality is achieved through the exercise of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) as "moral judgement in situation" (239). For now, however, what is important to establish is that Ricœur's 7th, 8th, and 9th studies in *Oneself as Another* aim to illustrate the complex relationships between morality and ethics by

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[3] As Ricœur mentions: "… morality is held to constitute only a limited, although legitimate and even indispensable, actualization of the ethical aim, and ethics in this sense would then encompass morality." (p. 170)

defending three broad points which, respectively, form the major themes of the three chapters devoted to the ethical and moral dimensions of selfhood:

> "(1) the primacy of ethics over morality, (2) the necessity for the ethical aim to pass through the sieve of the norm, and (3) the legitimacy of recourse by the norm to the aim whenever the norm leads to impasses in practice..." (p. 170)

The Moral Norm

Kantian Deontology

While the 7th study introduces the idea of the primacy of ethics over morality, the 8th study further reinforces this argument and, at the same time, discusses the necessity for "…the ethical aim to pass through the sieve of the norm". As mentioned above, Ricœur bases his analysis of moral norms on Kantian deontology and, while not denying the evident differences between the two philosophical traditions, does so in a way which maintains a deep conceptual link with the Aristotelian ethics of a good life. One such link that Ricœur identifies between Kant and Aristotle in this regard concerns the place given to the notion of a 'good will' at the core of Kant's moral philosophy as evident in his statement from the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* quoted by Ricœur: "It is impossible to conceive anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be taken as good without qualification, except a *good will*" (Kant, qtd. 205). Ricœur observes that two points of connection between teleology and deontology can be inferred from this statement. The first is that Kant's use of the predicate 'good' in the notion of a 'good will' preserves a continuity with the Aristotelian tradition's focus on the 'the good' as the *telos* or aim of a good life. The second connection that Ricœur identifies is that because "… that which receives the predicate 'good' is henceforth the *will*," (p. 205-206) Kant's notion of a good

will parallels the Aristotelian notion of rational desire for the good. That is to say, given that a good will implies an intention directed towards that which is good, goodness becomes an aim or *telos* for the deontological process of bringing the will into accord with reason[4] - albeit that, for Kant, a good will is "…recognized through its relation to the law" whereas in Aristotle rational desire is "…recognized through its aim" (p. 206). Ricœur further adds that because the notion of moral *duty* is so intimately linked to the idea of a good will, the two terms are treated interchangeably in Kant's writings (p. 206). While this connection to Aristotelian teleology may have been opaque to Kant himself, for Ricœur, the place occupied by a will that is 'good without qualification' in Kantian thought thus implies that a morality of obligation has, as its motivating core, and animating ideal, the development of a voluntary intention directed towards 'the good' which approximates Aristotle's notion of rational desire. That said, by "anchoring" (p. 205) deontology in teleology in such a way, Ricœur does not want to reduce Kant to Aristotle but, rather, aims to reduce the perceived gap between the two traditions by bringing to light how a Kantian morality of duty cannot bracket out the notion of a *telos* at the core of Aristotelian ethics.

Universalization and Respect

With the above link between teleology and deontology in mind, what does it mean for the ethical aim to pass through the 'sieve of the norm' and why is such a stage necessary in Ricœur's ethics? The argument here largely concerns the role of 'inclination' in Kant's thought with its relationship both to the idea of the ethical aim and to the Kantian concept of 'maxims' as hypothetical rules for moral behaviour that must be 'tested' through a process of

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[4] Elsewhere Ricœur explains that, in Western thought, the concept of 'the will' itself is the "Latin heir of the Greek rational preference." (2001/2007a, p. 50)

universalization. For Kant, desire or 'inclination', while related to the will is not, in itself, good

without qualification. The will may be corrupted by self-love as an inclination that runs contrary

to the demands of reason, resulting in both disobedience to the moral law as well hypocritical

obedience motivated by selfish intentions (p. 216). Due to this ever-present possibility that the

will may be influenced by inclinations contrary to reason, Kant therefore finds it is necessary to

adopt some rational procedure in order to distinguish between actions that are coherent with a

good will and those which are merely expressions of selfish inclination. This process of judging

actions is carried out through reflection on *maxims* that can be potentially recognized as duties

applicable to all. The criterion for testing whether such maxims pass the test of universality is

whether or not they contradict themselves if imagined as a universal law. The connection

between universalizable maxims and moral duties is articulated in Kant's formulation of his

well-known 'categorical imperative': "Act only on that maxim through which you can at the

same time will that it should become a universal law" (Kant *Groundwork*, qtd. p. 208).

While Ricœur agrees with Kant that the will, in order to be truly good, needs to be subject

to the limitations and "constraint" of moral duty and that this involves giving priority to reason

over selfish inclinations, this does not necessarily entail an opposition between reason and desire.

In discussing Kant's apparent rejection of desire as a source of disobedience to morality (p. 209)

Ricœur argues that it is possible to, "… *conceive* of a mode of subjective determination that

would not bear the mark of an antagonism between reason and desire" (p. 207). To demonstrate

this point, he observes that a careful reading of Kant suggests that, instead of a total rejection of

inclination, deontology is concerned with separating self-love as a pathological form of

inclination from *respect* for the moral law as a rational desire or feeling. What is crucial for

Ricœur's interpretation of Kant in this regard is that while the Kantian notion of respect is

distinguished from self-love, it is still an inclination albeit a moral and rational one. Respect for the moral law and one's rational nature, though grounded in the principle of autonomy, is a feeling that powerfully *moves* us to act in obedience to the moral law – it is a "… motive in that it inclines us, in the matter of an affect passively received, 'to make this law itself a maxim'" (p. 214). While respect, as an affect, may appear problematic for Kant's philosophical system given his ideal of an autonomous will that is free from the influence of inclination, Ricœur is careful to point out that what Kant actually does is "[split] affectivity in two" by distinguishing between "pathological desire" (p. 215), which is ultimately an expression of self-love, and "[t]he idea of a feeling imprinted in the human heart by reason alone" (p. 214). It is the latter form of affectivity that is to be prized as the object as well as the motive force of moral reflection, the purpose of such reflection being to purify the will of the influence of 'pathological' but not 'rational' desire:

> "After this [split], everything rests on the division, within the domain of affects, between those that continue to belong to the pathology of desire and those that can be held to constitute the very mark of reason in feeling: namely, in the negative mode, the humiliation of self-love and, in the positive mode, the veneration for the power of reason in us." (p. 214)

In Ricœur's own terminology Kant's split in affectivity represents the difference between the desire for the good expressed in Kantian deontology under the term 'self-respect' and self-love as a *perversion* of the ethical aim (p. 215). And, as mentioned above, it is through the 'test' of universalization that one is able to distinguish between those maxims which arise from *pathological* desire and those which arise out of respect as a *rational* desire that accords with a will that is 'good without qualification'. For Ricœur, Kantian respect is thus an expression of the ethical aim once it has passed the test of universalization (pp. 214-215), the process of

universalization acting to filter genuine expressions of rational desire for the good from those maxims which stem from pathological inclination.

Kant's split in affectivity shows that he does not oppose *all* feeling to rational autonomy. Instead of an opposition between the 'autonomy' of reason and the 'heteronomy' of feeling and desire, moral feeling as respect for the law is something internal to autonomy itself. The role of respect as a moral feeling that motivates obedience to norms thus challenges the idea that true morality involves excluding any and all influences external to reason alone, "…is there not instead concealed beneath the pride of the assertion of autonomy, the avowal of a certain receptivity, to the extent that the law, in determining freedom, *affects* it?" (p. 213). An implication of this that will serve as a basis for Ricœur's discussion in the 9th study concerning the reinterpretation of Kant in the 'proceduralist' theories of Habermas and Apel is that, because of the central role that respect plays in deontological morality, Kantian rational autonomy is no longer as self-sufficient as it may seem:

> "… the most formidable problem posed by respect as a motive is the introduction of a factor of *passivity* at the very heart of the principle of autonomy. This conjunction within respect between self-positing and self-affection authorizes us to question, in the following study, the independence of the principle of autonomy – the flower of the [deontological *sic.*] conception of morality – in relation to the teleological perspective, in other words, to doubt the autonomy of autonomy." (p. 215)

Formalism

One of the key features distinguishing Kantian deontology from Aristotelian teleology is its concern with defining and articulating moral rules and procedures over conceptions of the

good life. Ricœur refers to this aspect of deontological morality as 'formalism' and finds it exemplified in Kant's test of universalization as a procedure for determining whether or not a maxim should be considered an obligatory duty or law (p. 208). The emphasis on following a well-defined procedure to construct moral norms differentiates formalism from a teleological conception of ethics insofar as it is not concerned with what it is *good* to love or desire (or even what it is good to be), but, instead, aims to articulate the proper way to determine the *right* thing to do. It is, of course, clear for Ricœur that deontology has *implicit* and inarticulate affinities with teleology as seen in the above-mentioned parallel between Kantian good will and Aristotelian rational desire as well as the place accorded to respect as a moral feeling. However, due to its *explicit* emphasis on rationally constructed rules and procedures over any pre-existing aim or *telos*, Ricœur finds that formalism to constitute the "greatest gap between the deontological point of view and the teleological perspective" (p. 212).

Despite how different formalism may make the two schools appear on the surface, Ricœur finds that, due to the underlying connections between teleology and deontology discussed above, it is ultimately impossible to separate the notion of moral norms (and, by extension, formal rules, procedures or codes of law) from any reference to the good in terms of a goal of ethical desire and motivating force for moral action. Concern for doing the right thing cannot be artificially separated from the *telos* towards which concrete moral action is directed. As mentioned above, this 'rooting' of the deontological in the teleological can be seen both in Kant's emphasis on attaining a 'good' will as the goal of morality as well as in the affinity between a good will and rational desire for the good. In addition, the status accorded to Kantian *respect* as a motivating affect establishes a further connection with teleological ethics of desire

while also problematizing the 'self-sufficiency' of the deontological notion of the autonomy of reason.

Conflict and Practical Wisdom

Ricœur's 9th study discusses how the relationship between teleology and deontology finds its full expression in the task of navigating the ethical conflicts which arise when applying moral norms to the complexities of concrete situations. As mentioned above, while the ethical aim must be expressed in morality in order to be protected from its various distortions, it is not always evident how moral norms apply in actual practice. In order for norms, and, by extension, the desire for a good life, to find concrete expression, Ricœur argues that moral judgement must involve a "return to the original intuition of ethics" (p. 240) from which norms themselves arise. This can be seen analogically when making difficult legal decision relies not only on the simple application of a rule to a case, but on the judge's sense of justice (2001/2007a, p. 56). It can also be seen in the way that difficult decisions on how best to communicate the severity of an illness to a patient rely more on a doctor's compassion for others than the application of medical codes and procedures however important these may also be (1990/1991, p. 269 – 270). The practical realization of this dialectic between ethics and morality is described by Ricœur as an exercise in *phronesis* or 'practical wisdom' which leads to "moral judgement in situation" (p. 239). Viewed in this light, *phronesis* serves to mediate between the ethical and moral levels resulting in the development of an inner *conviction* about how best to respond to a given situation. Thus understood, *phronesis* does not represent an additional level to be added to teleology and deontology, but rather constitutes the means by which the complex relationship between ethics and morality is manifested in actual practice:

"The passage from general maxims of action to moral judgement in situation requires, in our opinion, simply the reawakening of the resources of singularity inherent in the aim of the true life. If moral judgement develops the dialectic that we shall discuss, conviction remains the only available way out, without ever constituting a third agency that would have to be added to what we have called up to now the ethical aim and the moral norm" (p. 240)

Tragic Wisdom and Practical Wisdom

Among Ricœur's central arguments at this stage in his ethics is that the rigorousness of deontological formalism requires, as its complement, an effort in judgement that remains true to the universality of the norm while also being sensitive to the particularity of context. [5] As mentioned above, one of the characteristics of Kantian deontology is its concern with defining a procedure through which we arrive at abstract formal rules and principles that guide moral action. These rules are held to be universal in the sense that they apply to everyone and not just particular individuals, they are also held to be valid under all circumstances and conditions. In this sense, Kantian moral duties are characterized by a certain rigour that does not easily admit of exceptions. The problem of ethical conflict thus arises for Ricœur when we consider how formally articulated moral duties cannot anticipate the particularities of every possible situation and context.

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[5] Junker-Kenny finds a further link between Aristotle and Kant in Ricœur's reading of practical wisdom in this regard: "A third stage is given the Aristotelian-sounding title of "practical wisdom" and explained as the search for "equity" in the face of inevitably multi-faceted, new and unique cases that the "law can never cover in its generality". Yet it can be equally understood as the faculty of judgement that Kant analysed in his Third Critique, namely the reflective judgement that seeks a rule for a case marked by a set of factors that remain individual." (Junker-Kenny, p. 203 quoting Ricœur *Oneself as Another* p. 172 and *Reflections on the Just* pp. 58-71)

Ricœur argues that it is Kant's focus on the abstract justification of formal moral principles which causes him to overlook the potential for ethical conflict inherent to the process of applying such principles in concrete situations. As discussed above, Kant's test of universalization focuses on the abstract justification of moral duties through testing whether a given maxim can maintain logical coherence if it were taken as a universally applicable law. Passing this test of non-contradiction is, for Kant, passing the test of universalization. For example, he considers it impossible that making false promises in order to obtain some personal benefit could ever be considered a universal moral duty since, if everyone did that, then the act of making a false promise itself would be impossible given that promises themselves would no longer be possible in such a situation. He finds a similar logical contradiction if we posit stealing as a universal law inasmuch as the concept of private property and, by extension, stealing itself, would cease to have any coherent meaning if everyone took it as a duty to steal. Ricœur refers to this process of abstractly testing maxims for logical contradiction as the "path of justification" (p. 280). Ethical conflicts, however, only appear along a second, complementary, path to that of justification: the "path of application to singular situations" (p. 264), something Ricœur also refers to as the "path of actualization" (p. 280). He explains that the process of applying norms to concrete situations thus constitutes a second sort of "test" for Kantian maxims, "… that of circumstances and consequences" (p. 265). The ethical conflicts that Ricœur is referring to can be seen in the feeling that one often encounters where two perfectly reasonable moral duties appear to be in tension when one is trying to make a decision in a complex situation. What is essential for Ricœur's ethics here is that, instead of hastily pitting one moral norm against another or haphazardly applying moral rules without a sensitivity to context, we should clearly recognize the issues at hand in a given ethical conflict and strive to navigate them through the exercise of

moral judgement in situation. By responding to ethical conflicts in this way, *phronesis* not only protects the concrete application of moral norms from the dangers of rigidity but also helps us avoid the pitfall of moral situationism:

> "… this manner of referring morality back to ethics does not mean that the morality of obligation has been disavowed. In addition to the fact that this morality continues to appear to us to be the means of testing our illusions about ourselves and about the meaning of our inclinations that hide the aim of the good life, the very conflicts that are produced by the rigorousness of formalism give moral judgement in situation its true seriousness. If we did not pass through conflicts that shake a practice guided by the principles of morality, we would succumb to the seduction of a moral situationism that would cast us, defenseless, into the realm of the arbitrary." (p. 240)

To illustrate the place of *phronesis* in responding to ethical conflicts, Ricœur draws on the ancient Greek tragedy of *Antigone* which dramatizes the tension that can arise between seemingly irreconcilable moral commitments. The conflict in *Antigone* unfolds through the clash between Antigone and Creon, the play's two main characters. In defiance of the laws of the city that forbid giving funeral rites to enemies, Antigone insists on properly burying her brother who had died in an attempt to take over the city state. Creon, the king, is unyielding in his determination to uphold the laws while Antigone continues in her determination to carry out the burial as a duty to both her family and to the gods. Antigone's dedication to these two principles is thus portrayed as being at odds with Creon's duty to the city. In the end, Antigone kills herself in the tomb of her brother which then leads to the suicide of Creon's son, who is in love with her, and his mother who laments the death of her son. Creon is then left with profound regret after realizing that he failed to judge the situation with wisdom. The conflict between the two

characters in *Antigone* thus ends in mutual despair rather than any form of reconciliation or 'solution', hence the tragic character of the narrative. While Ricœur is careful to note that Greek tragedy should not be treated as having philosophical content itself (pp. 242; 247), nor should it be seen as an exact depiction of the ethical conflicts we experience in real life (p. 243), he explains that there is a "tragic wisdom" (p. 241) expressed in the narrative of *Antigone* that serves to stimulate philosophical reflection on the nature of conflict (p. 243). He refers to this as the, "instruction of ethics by tragedy" (p. 241) arguing that 'tragic wisdom' gives rise to an "ethicopractical aporia" (247) which challenges moral philosophy to reflect on the inevitability of conflict and the role of practical wisdom in responding to it.

Alongside Creon's all too late realization that he should have chosen to "deliberate well" (p. 246), one of the features of *Antigone* that prompts ethical reflection on the place of conflict in moral action is the deliberately narrow conceptions the main characters have of their respective duties. Creon, for instance, understands his duty to the city and its associated virtues in a particularly limited and superficial way:

> "…. the opposition friend-enemy is confined to a narrow political category and admits of no nuance, no exception …. Alone is 'good' that which serves the city, 'bad' that which is harmful to it; the good citizen alone is 'just,' and 'justice' commands only the art of governing and being governed. 'Piety' an important virtue, is reduced to the civic bond, and the gods are called upon to honor only those citizens who have died for their country" (p. 244).

Ricœur observes that while we may rightly side with the character of Antigone, she too displays a narrow conception of her duties to both the gods and her family both of which she sets in opposition to the city (p. 244). The narrative of *Antigone* thus employs an opposition between

"two partial and unilateral visions of justice" (p. 244) as a literary device for expressing intractable conflict. Ricœur argues that the task of moral philosophy is not to replicate tragedy by simply accepting ethical conflict as irresolvable but to *respond* to the challenge raised by tragic wisdom through recognizing the limitations of narrow and superficial interpretations of moral duty. Where tragic wisdom ends with "catharsis" practical wisdom aims at a reaching a "conviction" about what is best to do in a difficult situation:

> "… one of the functions of tragedy in relation to ethics is to create a gap between tragic wisdom and practical wisdom. By refusing to contribute a 'solution' to the conflicts made insoluble by fiction, tragedy, after having disoriented the gaze, condemns the person of praxis to reorient action, at his or her own risk, in the sense of a practical wisdom in situation that best *responds* to tragic wisdom." (p. 247)

What tragedy 'teaches' moral philosophy is that ethical conflict arises when inherently partial or limited conceptions of moral duties are met with the "complexity of life" (p. 249) and that morality ought to become properly sensitive to such complexities. By *responding* to tragic wisdom, practical wisdom thus guards moral action from the kind of rigorism that is insensitive to context as well as a superficial relativism reduces any claim to universal morality to a matter of subjective preference: "From tragic phronein to practical phronesis: this will be the maxim that can shelter moral conviction from the ruinous alternatives of univocity or arbitrariness." (p. 249)

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined Ricœur's dialectic between teleology and deontology as a central feature of his ethical framework. This dialectic brings into view the intimate connection between formal norms, codes, laws and procedures to the "ethical ground against which morality stands

out" (p. 249). An implication of this is that concrete action guided by moral norms cannot be separated from its teleological sources of motivation and inspiration. This chapter has also highlighted the place of practical wisdom in mediating between the moral and the ethical levels in order to arrive at a judgement about how best to respond to the complexities of particular situations thus giving the dialectic practical and concrete expression. The following chapter will explore how Ricœur's discussion of teleology and deontology relates to a broader tension between universalism and contextualism which underlies debates concerning the possibility of moral universals. It will then show how this dialectical conception of morality and ethics culminates in the idea of inchoate universals or "universals in context" (p. 289) as Ricœur's response to the conflict between universalist and contextualist approaches to the question of moral universals.

Chapter 2: The Tension between Universalism and Contextualism

Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed the role that the dialectic between teleology and deontology plays in structuring Ricœur's ethics and how this dialectic finds expression in practical wisdom (*phronesis*). This chapter continues to follow this central thread in Ricœur's work by showing how the same approach to the question of moral norms discussed in the previous chapter addresses the tension between the idea of universal moral norms (universalism) and the empirical observation that norms and values tend to differ according to cultural and historical context (contextualism). To do so, I outline three additional arguments that Ricœur makes in the Ninth Study which build on his initial reading of *phronesis* as mediating between the ethical and the moral: (1) That *phronesis* concerns both the moral judgement of an individual as well as decision making in broader institutional contexts. (2) That the tension between universalism and contextualism underlies the various examples of ethical conflicts discussed throughout the Ninth Study. (3) That by reframing the Kantian "test" of universalization as a process of intersubjective agreement on universal moral norms, Habermas and Apel's communicative action foregrounds the difficulties that the tension between universalism and contextualism presents for any deontological conception of morality. These three arguments set the stage for Ricœur's further reinterpretation of *phronesis* as a practical mediation between moral universals and diverse cultures and traditions.

***Phronesis* in Institutional Contexts**

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, Ricœur interprets Aristotelian *phronesis* as the agency through which we navigate conflicts that arise when attempting to apply moral norms to the complexities of particular situations. The exercise of *phronesis* in these contexts involves a

'return' to the ethical aim as the "…ethical ground against which morality stands out" (Ricœur, 1990/1992, p. 249). Ricœur argues that exercising practical wisdom in this way helps us overcome narrow and rigid applications of morality while also guarding against the arbitrariness of moral situationism. The exercise of moral judgement in situation thus implies a form of adherence to norms that is sensitive to the particularities of context without sacrificing commitment to the universal standard of morality. In his further elaboration of the concept, Ricœur is careful to note that the ethical conflicts which call for the exercise of *phronesis* do not only concern the individual but often require decisions carried out in collective institutional settings. To illustrate this point, he identifies political practice in democratic institutions and decisions made by medical professionals in the health system as two institutional contexts where *phronesis* is exercised.

Concerning political practice, Ricœur argues that political conflicts can be understood in terms of "three levels of radicality" (p. 257) each of which shows how *phronesis* extends to collective life in institutions. The first level of radicality concerns public debate in liberal democratic societies. These debates are concerned with the application of the formal principle of a just distribution to a diversity of "primary social goods" (p. 257). While justice implies a fair distribution of goods, conceptions vary as to what constitutes a "good" as well as the relative priority given to such goods in a scheme of distribution. In this regard, Ricœur argues that democratic debate accompanied by the act of participating in elections constitutes a form of moral judgement in situation insofar as it aims at reaching a tentative decision as to how various social goods ought to be ranked and distributed (p. 258).

At an even deeper level, Ricœur argues that political practice involves deliberation about the "ends of good government" (p. 258). These debates are concerned with clarifying the

meaning of fundamental concepts underlying democratic constitutions such as "'security',
'prosperity', 'liberty', 'equality', 'solidarity'" (p. 259). Ricœur argues that these terms
"dominate political discussion from above" insofar as they serve as the justification for decisions
regarding the very form a democratic state should take (p. 259). Beyond this, he argues that there
is the even more profound question of the legitimation of democracy itself which constitutes a
third level of radicality. Given that there is no explicit agreement as to what constitutes the
ultimate "foundation" and justification of democratic societies, the legitimation of democracy
remains a subject of ongoing deliberation (p. 260). Instead of merely accepting the "fundamental
indeterminacy" (p. 261) of democracy, however, Ricœur argues that people have perfectly valid
reasons for preferring a democratic state to, say, a totalitarian one. These reasons can be
understood as expressions of the ethical desire to live together and thus refer back to the
teleological ground of morality discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis. The diverse
variations of this dimension of the ethical aim can be found in the wide range of philosophical
and religious traditions which provide grounds for the firm conviction that a just society is one
which is tolerant of diversity:[6]

> There is nothing better to offer, in reply to the legitimation crisis … than the memory and
> the intersection in the public space of the appearance of traditions that make room for
> tolerance and pluralism, not out of concessions to external pressures, but out of inner
> conviction… (p. 261)

Teleological notions are thus found at each level of radicality that Ricœur identifies with
political practice: the notion of "goods" at the level of democratic debates about distributive

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[6] Ricœur finds this argument expressed in John Rawls' idea of an 'overlapping consensus' insofar as a public and
plural *phronesis* that draws on the convictions embedded in diverse traditions aims at convergence around a set of
principles which claim a universal status (p. 261).

justice, the teleological conceptions that shape democratic constitutions at the level of debates about the ends of good government, and the ethical convictions which inform the final justification for democratic states themselves. The role played by teleological notions at each level of radicality points to how political practice parallels the basic features of *phronesis* described earlier by Ricœur as an effort in judgement which mediates between teleological visions of the good and moral norms and principles in situations of ethical conflict.

In addition to the above examples from political practice, Ricœur outlines some further examples drawn from medical practice that show of how *phronesis* finds expression in institutions. He discusses how the question of telling the truth to the dying and the dilemma of abortion represent ethical conflicts in the doctor-patient relationship which call for the use of practical wisdom. The tension that arises in these contexts is between the abstract notion of humanity as the basis for the Kantian imperative of respect for others as ends in themselves and the practically infinite variation of the conditions and circumstances of individual human beings. In the first situation, a physician is confronted with the problem of fulfilling the moral duty to tell the truth while remaining sensitive to the patient's particular circumstances. In this case, Ricœur argues that the physician should, out of compassion for the patient, wisely decide whether the patient is in a condition where they are capable of hearing the truth and, if able to hear it, decide *how* to tell the truth in a way that best responds to the individual's circumstances. He argues that, while informed by a code of medical ethics, making a decision in this case is something that can never be done through the application of a moral code alone but requires an exercise in practical wisdom that avoids two extreme attitudes: (1) deciding to always share a negative prognosis out of an unreflective obedience to a duty to disclose medical information (2) deciding not to disclose the full truth out of fear of weakening the patient (p. 269). What is significant here

in relation to the examples of political practice discussed above is that while personal deliberation is essential in this case, an individual medical professional rarely decides in complete isolation but often seeks out greater clarity through consulting with others prior to reaching a final decision themselves:

> … moral judgement in situation is all the less arbitrary as the decision maker – whether or not in the position of legislator – has taken the counsel of men and women reputed to be the most competent and the wisest. The conviction that seals decision then benefits from the plural character of the debate. The *phronimos* is not necessarily one individual alone. (p. 273)

In a similar way to that seen in political practice, medical practice involves conflicts which concern our collective life in institutions. While the individual medical practitioner ultimately decides on the best course of action to take, this decision is often informed by consultation with others that takes place within the broader context of institutions shaped by a code of ethics.

The above examples that Ricœur highlights from political practice and medical ethics help us see that, while individual judgement is essential to navigating ethical conflict, *phronesis* can, and often does, involve deliberation with others in institutional settings. This "plural character" of *phronesis* highlights its role in judgements which shape humanity's collective life in institutions in addition to informing an individual's ethical decisions.

Phronesis **and the Tension between Universalism and Contextualism**

Ricœur argues that the various ethical conflicts discussed in the 9th study, whether in the context of individual moral decisions or those made in broader institutional settings, can be understood in terms of a tension between the "universal" requirement of moral norms (i.e. that

they ought to be universally applicable to everyone and everywhere) and the diverse "contextual" ethical values of particular historical societies:

> In various guises, these arguments converge toward a confrontation between the *universalist claim* attached to the rules claiming to belong to the principle of morality and the recognition of positive values belonging to the *historical and communitarian contexts* of the realization of these same rules. (p. 274)

In the context of the above-mentioned examples drawn from political practice, he finds that the tension between the universalist claim and historical context can be seen when a proceduralist theory of justice like Rawls' notion of a just distribution, is confronted with the diverse estimations, evaluations, and relative ranking of the goods to be distributed. *Phronesis*, in this context, involves public deliberation regarding the just distribution of goods. However, given that social goods may be both valued and prioritized differently across diverse cultural and historical contexts, Ricœur finds that there is a tension between any procedural theory of justice that aspires to universality and the teleological notion of "goods". The tension between teleology and deontology in the context of distributive justice is thus also a tension between the "universal" rule of a just distribution and the "contextual" diversity of estimations, evaluations, and meanings accorded to social goods (p. 284). In addition to this, the process of deliberation itself concerns both deontology and teleology insofar as it is grounded in the teleological "sense of justice" as part of the ethical aim (p. 236).

Alongside public deliberation about the distribution of primary social goods, the tension between universalism and contextualism appears at the two other levels of political practice that Ricœur mentions: discussion on the ends of good government and the legitimation of democracy. In both of these contexts the need to build consensus on questions of a universal nature is met

with the diverse cultural and historical "estimations" (p. 284) regarding the ends of good government as well as the various potential grounds for the legitimacy of a democratic state. As will be discussed in more detail later on, Ricœur argues that, in all of these cases, moral judgment needs to draw on both the universal and the contextual by orienting itself among a diverse range of ethical estimations found in various cultural and historical contexts (p. 284).

The tension between universalism and contextualism likewise appears in the example that Ricœur cites related to medical decision making. In this context, the tension is between respect for humanity in the abstract sense of respect for rational human nature described by Kant and respect for persons in all their particularity, "… the otherness of persons opposing the unitary aspect of the concept of humanity" (p. 285). In this case, the "universal" is represented by the moral rules implicit in the notion of respect for humanity (i.e. not to lie) and the "contextual" by the particular circumstances and conditions of individuals themselves (i.e. a particular patient's ability to bear certain information about their medical condition). Making a wise decision in this case involves a dual commitment to the universal moral rule and to the wellbeing of the particular individual, a commitment which Ricœur argues is based in the ethical desire to live well with others. As with the various cases of political practice, moral judgement in this context calls for a reflection on concepts related to the ethical vision of a good life such as the meaning of and relationship between "happiness" and "suffering" (p. 269). Reflection on the meaning of these teleological concepts informs the search for a wise decision about how to apply a moral rule in a way that is most coherent with the ethical aim on which the norm itself is grounded. Regarding these particular cases which concern the Kantian moral norm of respect for humanity, Ricœur notes that it is the interpersonal dimension of the ethical aim or "solicitude" that is the ethical ground for Kantian respect (p. 273). However, when solicitude passes through the "sieve

of the norm" represented by respect which is, in turn, tested by ethical conflicts, the exercise of *phronesis* gives rise to what Ricœur calls "a 'critical' solicitude":

> "… But this is not the somewhat 'naïve' solicitude of the seventh study but a 'critical' solicitude that has passed through the double test of the moral conditions of respect and the conflicts generated by the latter. This *critical solicitude* is the form that practical wisdom takes in the region of interpersonal relations." (p. 273).

Ricœur argues that *phronesis* in these cases, as well as other forms of ethical conflict such as those related to political practice, gives rise to novel forms of conduct. He explains that, in these situations of conflict, "just behaviour" must be *invented* through responding wisely to the particularities of a given situation (p. 269). When viewed in this light, the tension between universalism and contextualism is therefore also a creative one.[7]

One of Ricœur's primary aims in this section of the 9th Study is to illustrate how the tension between universalism and contextualism is central to ethical conflicts and that *phronesis* represents a way of addressing this tension. His overarching point in this regard is that universalism and contextualism are not actually opposed to one another but represent equally valid claims. In fact, if properly understood, both mutually suppose one another (p. 274).[8] He argues that if this were not so, then ethical conflicts themselves would not bear the weight that

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[7] In discussing Ricœur's interpretation of Aristotelian *phronesis* Junker-Kenny notes how Ricœur also draws on the Kantian notion of "productive imagination": "This function of creating new situation-adequate rules is identified [by Ricœur] as "*poetic*"; it constitutes an "innovation" and actualizes a category used, but by no means exhausted by Kant: The "invention of an appropriate solution to the unique situation stems from … productive imagination (Kant)." (Junker Kenny, p. 208 quoting Ricœur, 1994/2000a, p. xxii)

[8] In this connection, Dallmayr notes that one of Ricœur's most significant contributions to conceptualizing contemporary public life is "his resolute effort to move beyond the stale oppositions between liberalism and communitarianism, and also between universalism and contextualism … one of the central aims of *Oneself as Another* is to find a 'reflective equilibrium' between 'the requirement of universality and the recognition of contextual limitations'; a crucial thesis advanced in this respect is that an open political arena demands the maintenance of both claims, the universalist and the contextualist, "each in a place" without amalgamation or mutual exclusion." (Dallmayr, 2002, p. 227)

they do insofar as the "demand for universality" gives weight to the problems associated with the diversity of cultural and historical values (pp. 280-281). We only experience a tension in situations of ethical conflict because we either implicitly or explicitly recognize that there is a need for universal moral norms. At the same time, Ricœur's analysis of ethical conflict shows that moral norms can only be meaningfully applied when we are also conscious of and responsive to context - while universal in character, morality is not ahistorical. Ricœur argues that without this mutual implication of universalism and contextualism there would be no "room for a tragedy of action" (p. 274) that calls for moral judgement in the first place. As Blundell mentions concerning Ricœur's argument for the complementarity between universalism and contextualism:

> Both the claim [to universality] and the contexts must be affirmed, or the phenomenon of tragic action is stripped of its tragic element, by either reducing it to merely misguided behaviour or denying the seriousness of the conflict. (Blundell, 2010, p. 121)

As such, rather than representing an obstacle to the possibility of universal morality, the tension between universalism and contextualism ought instead to be seen as something which further underscores the need for the creative exercise of practical wisdom in concrete historical situations.

Revision of Kantian Formalism and Discourse Ethics

In order to defend the above points about universalism and contextualism, Ricœur argues that Kantian deontological formalism needs to be revised in a way that, "bare[s] the universalist claim that forms its hard core" (p.274). For Ricœur, this revision involves a rearticulation of several elements of Kant's philosophical framework that draws on the work of contemporary

interpreters alongside his own arguments discussed earlier in the 8th Study. Ricœur's proposed revision involves "three stages" (p. 274): (1) questioning and critiquing the dichotomy between autonomy and heteronomy in the traditional reading of Kant, (2) expanding the Kantian notion of universalization beyond testing individual maxims for logical non-contradiction to the project of constructing a coherent moral system, and (3) conceptualizing universalization as a process of intersubjective deliberation on moral validity claims. The third stage of this revision concerns the reinterpretation of Kant in Jurgen Habermas and Karl Otto Apel. He argues that this revision presents Kantian formalism in its most "credible" form while also allowing us to appreciate the full strength of the contextualist objections to moral universalism itself (Ricœur, 1990/1992, p. 283).[9]

Autonomy and Heteronomy

The first stage involves questioning the order of priority given to autonomy over the principle of respect in the interpersonal context and the principle of justice in the institutional context. Instead of beginning moral reflection at the individual level, Ricœur argues that moral autonomy can only be properly understood by first taking into account its interpersonal and institutional dimensions. He argues that this necessitates a reversal of Kant's original methodology which begins with a reflection on autonomy prior to the principle of respect and the rule of justice. For Ricœur viewing autonomy from this new vantage point, makes it clear that true moral autonomy depends on reference to others. Autonomy is not 'autonomous' in any "monological" or "egological" sense (p. 274) but is instead an abstract expression of the principle of universality that is "… neither you nor me" (p. 204). An implication of this reading

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[9] Ricœur's analysis draws on Habermas' *Moral consciousness and Communicative Action* (1983/1990) and Apel's *Sur le problème d'une foundation rationelle de l'éthique à l'àge de la science: L'a priori de la communauté communicationnelle et les fondements de l'éthique* (1967/1987).

of Kantian autonomy is that instead of seeing autonomy as diametrically opposed to heteronomy, autonomy relies, in a certain sense, on relationships with others inasmuch as moral reflection is concerned with interactions that unfold in both interpersonal and institutional contexts, "… an autonomy that is of a piece with the rule of justice and the rule of reciprocity can no longer be a *self-sufficient* autonomy" (p. 275).[10] This consideration shows us how autonomy is just as much a political principle as it is a moral principle or, phrased otherwise by Ricœur, "… a political principle moralized by Kant." (p. 275).

In addition to highlighting the centrality of relationships for rational moral reflection, Ricœur argues that this "backward approach" allows autonomy to be reconciled with its "…marks of receptiveness, passivity, and … powerlessness" (p. 275) which he identifies in the 8th Study. As discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, Ricœur interprets the Kantian notion of "respect" as a rational feeling that should be differentiated from "self-love" as a pathological inclination contrary to reason.[11] Respect for others and for the moral law are *moral feelings* necessary for the development of a "good will" that is inclined towards moral duty. For this reason, Ricœur notes that Kantian respect introduces "… a factor of passivity at the very heart of the principle of autonomy" (p. 215). From this reading of Kantian deontology, feeling and inclination are thus not contrary to the notion of an autonomous will, but implicit in the very notion of autonomy itself. A conclusion that Ricœur draws from this observation is that a deontological conception of autonomy, thus understood, cannot be fully independent from a *desire* for the good which can only be understood in teleological terms (p. 215).

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[10] Blundell links Ricœur's argument here to Gadamer's retrieval of the notion of authority in response to the Enlightenment opposition between authority and freedom, "Recalling with Gadamer that authority is not coextensive with domination, a dependent autonomy is, ideally, a *liberated* autonomy." (Blundell, 2010, p. 122)

[11] See Chapter 1 p. 10 of this thesis

The observation that autonomy is both inseparable from reference to relationships in an interpersonal and institutional context as well as from the influence of inclination leads Ricœur to conclude that autonomy, in a sense, *depends* on heteronomy. While Kant set autonomy and heteronomy in opposition out of a concern for preserving the independence of rational judgement from the judgment of others, the above-mentioned expressions of heteronomy identified by Ricœur do not run contrary to autonomy in "… its strong sense [as] responsibility for one's own judgement" (p. 276) but, in fact, strengthen it. As such, just as Kantian respect needs to be differentiated from pathological forms of self-love, Ricœur argues that sense of "otherness" found in heteronomy needs to undergo a similar precision by differentiating that which contributes the enlightenment ideal of independent rational judgement and the condition which corresponds to the "state of 'tutelage'" (p. 275) rightly feared by Kant:

> "The very idea of others bifurcates into two opposing directions, corresponding to two figures of the master: one, the dominator, facing the slave; the other, the master of justice, facing the disciple. It is the 'heteronomy' of the latter that has to be integrated into autonomy, not to weaken it, but to reinforce Kant's exhortation in *What is the Enlightenment?: Sapere aude!* Dare to learn, taste, savor for yourself!" (p. 276)

Donagan: Universalization and Constructive Coherence

In the second stage of the revision of Kantian formalism Ricœur argues for an expanded notion of the test of universalization. Rather than conceptualizing universalization solely in terms of whether a maxim contains an internal logical contradiction if posited as a universal law, he argues that a moral system's claim to universality should be evaluated both in terms of its overall

coherence and whether the process of deriving moral duties from categorical imperatives "…

expresses a certain productivity in thought, while preserving the coherence of the whole set of

rules." (p. 276). He finds this reinterpretation of Kantian universalization as a test of productivity

and general coherence to be analogous to the process of legal interpretation found in common

law jurisprudence. While common law interpretation aims at preserving the coherence of the

overall body of case law, it does not merely try to conserve the coherence of a fixed set of rules

applicable to every possible case, but also produces entirely new principles when faced with

novel cases that do not easily fit earlier precedent. While constructed by the judge, these

principles are understood to be implicit in the set of already existing precedents most relevant to

the case. The articulation of a new principle thus serves to clarify pre-existing verdicts while

reinforcing the coherence of the overall legal system. In this regard, Ricœur observes that it is a

presupposition of common law that "every conception of justice requires a coherence that is not

merely to be preserved but to be constructed." (p. 277). While the Kantian criterion of

universalization also aims at achieving a certain kind of coherence in the sense of avoiding

logical contradictions within maxims themselves, this traditional reading of Kantian

universalization does not include the same "constructive character" found common-law judicial

reasoning (p. 277).[12]

     Ricœur finds the above "… constructive conception of coherence" (p. 277) to be well

expressed in Alan Donagan's reinterpretation of Kant who applies the logic of common law

jurisprudence to moral formalism. Donagan argues that it is possible to logically derive a

growing set of moral duties from the Kantian imperative to respect humanity as an end in itself

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[12] As mentioned earlier, it is important to bear in mind that the connection Ricœur draws between moral and judicial reasoning is only analogical insofar as morality does not have the same support of institutions as in the juridical sphere.

through a process similar to common law reasoning but without conflating the concepts of a moral and legal system. One feature of Donagan's argument that Ricœur finds important for understanding the tension between universalism and contextualism is his notion of "specificatory premises" (p. 278). Ricœur explains that the function of specificatory premises "is first to delimit, then to correct, or even extend the class of actions to which the formal imperative applies" (p. 278). As an example, he cites the act of killing in self-defense (or the defense of others) which, if accepted as a specificatory premise for the imperative not to kill, makes the formal norm more precise by limiting its application to murder and assassination (p. 278). That being said, not all specificatory premises are legitimate and it is possible for a "specificatory premise" to unnecessarily restrict or even distort the meaning and application of a norm. As such, while common law jurisprudence is primarily concerned with "precedents endowed with legal status" (p. 279), Ricœur notes that a moral system must deal with the, "…unexpressed – and frequently restrictive – 'specificatory premises' that mark the intermingling of relations of domination and violence, themselves institutionalized, at the heart of moral convictions held to be closest to the Golden Rule" (p. 280).

This implies that, in addition to incorporating a model of "constructive interpretation" similar to common law jurisprudence which clarifies the content of moral convictions while also making them more precise, moral philosophy has the additional task of critiquing "prejudices and ideological residues" that *distort* its foundational principles (p. 280). Ricœur cites the overly narrow and reductive conceptions of duty to the city and to the family expressed by Creon and Antigone (p. 243-244) as examples drawn from tragic wisdom that are analogous to the "perverse use of … specificatory premises" in moral theory and practice He argues that these distortions in morality have to be "unmasked by a critique of ideologies" (p. 280), a task he finds

well expressed in the work of Jurgen Habermas and Karl Otto Apel whose work informs the third stage of his reinterpretation of Kantian formalism. Ricœur notes that it is primarily the link between language and power-as-domination that makes this critique essential insofar as our "ethical" language is often marked by distortions stemming from historical injustices:

"… between discourse, power (in the sense of domination), and possession, the ties are so inextricable that a social therapeutics of the systematic distortions of language has to be added to a simple hermeneutic incapable of curing by its discourse alone the misunderstandings in discourse" (p. 280) [13]

Habermas and Apel: Universalization and Communicative Action

Ricœur argues that Habermas and Apel's work represents a further reinterpretation of Kantian formalism and an additional revision of the test of universalization. Like Donagan they view universalization in terms of constructive rational coherence, but propose a notion of autonomy that is grounded in interpersonal communication (p. 281). According to Habermas and Apel's deontological formalism - what Ricœur refers to as the "morality of communication" (p. 280) - universalization is conceived as a process of interpersonal deliberation that aims to reach rational consensus or "intersubjective recognition" on moral arguments (Habermas, 1983/1990, as cited in Ricœur 1990/1992, p. 281). Habermas refers to the process of argumentation that characterizes communicative action as "practical discourse" (Habermas, 1983/1990, as cited in Ricœur, 1990/1992, p. 282). Practical discourse calls for each participant to clearly cite reasons

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[13] Blundell finds a further link here between Ricœur's critique of a self-sufficient notion of autonomy and the need for a critique of our inherited ethical language: "The self-sufficient *cogito* need not consider the question of "social therapeutics," but the hermeneutic self who recognizes that his ethical reflections are saturated with language and concepts that he did not develop cannot pretend to such a lofty station." (Blundell, p. 122)

for why a moral norm should be universally applicable with the intention of working towards

consensus in the form of intersubjective recognition that the norm is equally good for all those

affected by its application (Habermas, 1983/1990, as cited in Ricœur, 1990/1992, p. 282).

Ricœur argues that this process of argumentation which aims at consensus on universal moral

claims mirrors Donagan's arguments about coherence, but now the construction of a coherent

moral system unfolds fully within the context of intersubjective deliberation:

> "The logic of practical discourse holds the place here that was held in the preceding
>
> pages by the analysis of the conditions of coherence in moral systems; whereas this
>
> analysis was conducted without any concern for the dialogic dimension of the principle
>
> of morality, in Apel and Habermas the theory of argumentation unfolds entirely within
>
> the framework of communicative action." (Ricœur, 1990/1992, p. 282)

Unlike Rawls, who attempts to identify the "historical conditions" that allow for the

possibility of practical discourse by describing the main features of an original position,

communicative action is primarily concerned with showing how the principle of universalization

itself can be rationally justified in actual conversation between individuals (p. 282). To do this,

Habermas and Apel try to demonstrate how the presuppositions of universalization are implicit

in the very structure of argumentative statements themselves. If, for instance, I make a claim that

appeals to reasons which can be recognized as valid by others, then I am assuming the possibility

that we may reach an agreement at some point in the conversation. Habermas and Apel argue

that anyone who claims that this is not so falls into what they call a "performative contradiction"

because claiming that argumentative statements do *not* presuppose the possibility of

intersubjective recognition appeals to reasons which could, nevertheless, be recognized as valid

by others. For Habermas and Apel, this line of reasoning suggests that any process of

intersubjective rational deliberation unfolds against a "horizon of consensus" insofar appealing to rational arguments to justify moral claims assumes the possibility that all those involved are capable of recognizing the validity of such claims:[14]

> The presupposition of an "unlimited community of communication" has no other role other than to state, on the level of presuppositions, the perfect congruence between the autonomy of judgement of each person and the expectation of consensus of all the persons involved in practical discourse." (p. 282)

While Ricœur agrees with many of the premises of communicative action and considers it the most credible version of Kantian deontology thus far, he argues that Habermas and Apel's focus on rationally justifying the possibility of universalization obscures the ethical conflicts that become apparent when we consider how practical discourse might unfold in actual practice. These conflicts arise from the fact that intersubjective deliberation always occurs within a given historical or cultural context which informs the viewpoints of those involved. The communitarian or "contextualist" critique targets this apparent deficiency in Habermas and Apel's moral theory by pointing out that practical discourse cannot simply side-step the diversity of cultural and historical contexts in its attempt to rationally justify moral universalism. Ricœur finds in this critique a similar challenge to that faced by Kantian moral norms which might be rationally validated along the abstract "path of justification" but encounter difficulties along a second "path of actualization" (p. 280). In this regard, Habermas and Apel's justification of communicative action represents, for Ricœur, a reiteration of Kant's transcendental deduction in the "practical field" (p. 282). And just as Kant's justification of deontology does not anticipate

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[14] That practical discourse necessarily involves a horizon of consensus does not, however, mean that agreement *will* be reached only that the *possibility* of agreement is a presupposition of any argumentative statement.

the ethical conflicts that arise when moral norms are applied in real life situations, Habermas and Apel's focus on justifying the possibility of universalization on the basis of the presuppositions of argumentation overlooks the issues that diverse cultural and religious contexts present for the "practice" of practical discourse in actual historical societies. However, in the same way that the ethical conflicts encountered along the path of actualization do not negate the validity of moral norms outright but, instead, call for the exercise of practical wisdom, Ricœur finds that the "contextualist critique" of moral universalism does not undermine possibility of practical discourse but draws attention to situations which calls for a similar exercise in moral judgement. The contextualist critique is thus seen by Ricœur as valid to the extent that practical discourse will inevitably be shaped by cultural and historical context, but this observation does not, in itself, negate the possibility of universalization through intersubjective recognition (p. 280). In fact, Ricœur argues that the conflicts highlighted by pluralism would lose their significance without an implicit sense that there is a need to reach consensus on universal moral claims – as he mentions concerning the ethical conflicts associated with pluralism, "…these conflictual situations would be stripped of their dramatic character if they did not stand out against the backdrop of a demand for universality..." (p. 281).

Universalization, seen in light of the revised conception of deontology that communicative action represents, thus involves a similar twofold "test" to that which Ricœur argues is necessary for Kantian maxims. The first test - which Habermas and Apel focus on - is the "foundation in reason of the principle of universalization" (p. 282). The second test - which the contextualist critique draws attention to - is the practical application of communicative action in concrete historical contexts. It is the need to test practical discourse along a "progressive path on the level of actual practice" (p. 283) that brings the tension between universalism and

contextualism to the fore. Here the tension is between the "universalist" argument that it is possible to work towards the intersubjective recognition of universally applicable moral principles and norms, such as universal human rights, and the "contextualist" objection that values and norms are so particular to context that any claim to universality would be a disguised attempt at cultural imperialism. Ricœur contends that, just as with the other cases of ethical conflict discussed in the study, the conflict between moral universals and contextual or "communitarian" values ultimately stems from a false dichotomy. Instead, if we are to avoid recourse to radical cultural relativism that renders all rational deliberation on moral norms superfluous, the problems associated with the pluralism of "historical" values should be approached in light of an implicit need for universal moral consensus, "…it is the plea for *universality* that gives full weight to the problems tied to the *historicity* of concrete morality" (p. 280).[15]

Conclusion

In this chapter I have followed one of the central threads of Ricœur's argument in the Ninth Study: the role of *phronesis* in responding to the challenges presented to morality by the tension between universalism and contextualism. These challenges become particularly apparent when we consider the institutional, "public", dimensions of *phronesis* in conjunction with Habermas and Apel's revision of Kantian universalization as a process of deliberation aiming at

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[15] In this connection, Junker Kenny notes that Ricœur's approach can be seen as steering a course between Rawls's notion of incommensurable "comprehensive doctrines" and Habermas' "universal pragmatics": "[Ricœur's] methodically reflected style of enquiry steers a middle course between a simply culturalist track that renounces the task of investigating any features of shared reason, and a theory that stays at the level of rationality, language or culture in the singular. The first direction can be seen in Rawls's assumption that philosophy just like worldviews disassembles into an array of comprehensive doctrines that do not communicate with each other; the second in the foundation of Habermas's discourse ethics on the presuppositions of argumentation at the level of a universal pragmatics. Ricœur's hermeneutics arises from the basis of a phenomenological anthropology; dealing with the plural historical manifestations of language, it asks and answers the question of how cross-cultural comparisons are possible." (Junker-Kenny, 2014, p. 268)

the intersubjective recognition of universal moral norms. Since "… practical discourse is a real discourse" (p.282), Ricœur finds it conceivable that the ethical conflicts discussed throughout the study can be addressed through such a process of deliberation as that proposed by Habermas and Apel (p. 285-286). This point, however, further underscores the need for *phronesis* as a means to navigate the tension between the idea of universal moral norms and diverse contextual and historical values.

Chapter 3: Ricœur's "Inchoate Universals"

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the tension between universalism and contextualism and the place of *phronesis* in navigating this tension. This chapter will review Ricœur's further arguments regarding intersubjective agreement on moral universals in light of the "contextualist" critique of Habermas and Apel's moral universalism. In the final section of the Ninth Study of *Oneself as Another*, Ricœur outlines a process of deliberation on moral validity claims that involves both an openness to the convictions of others and a critical reflection on one's own convictions. The form of criticality, however, is not one aimed at undermining or putting convictions into doubt, but raising them to the level of considered convictions (Ricœur, 1990/1992, p. 288). The aim of such a process is the mutual recognition of universals that both resonate with and extend across particular cultural and religious contexts. This mutual interaction between testing the potential for universalization of moral validity claims and drawing on convictions is reflected in Ricœur's notion of "inchoate universals" - something he also refers to as "potential universals" or "universals in context" (p. 289). Ricœur's arguments in this section suggests that, rather than negating the concept of moral universals the tension between universalism and contextualism ought instead to be seen as a creative tension that further underscores the need for the exercise of practical wisdom as an alternative to the pitfalls of both cultural relativism and forms of moral universalism that are insensitive to context.

The Critique of Communicative Action

As discussed in the previous chapter, Ricœur finds that Habermas and Apel's theories of communicative action represents the strongest versions of deontological formalism thus far. He also sees in their arguments a possible means for addressing the various conflicts discussed in the

second and third parts of the Ninth Study (pp. 249-273) given their pragmatic concern with

deliberation about real life ethical conflicts rather than deductive reasoning conducted in

hypothetical situations.[16] However, while communicative action may be viewed as perfectly

valid along the abstract "path of justification", the limitations of Habermas and Apel's formalism

become apparent along the practical "path of actualization". Ricœur finds that making a

distinction between justification and actualization to be crucial here for understanding the

contextualist critique of communicative action because it makes it clear that the critique does not

target the rational *justification* for intersubjective deliberation, but instead questions whether a

formal process of deliberation can lead to normative consensus on moral universals in actual

practice (pp. 283-284).[17] The issue is thus not so much the logical possibility of rational

agreement implicit in the presuppositions of argumentation, but the practical possibility of

reaching agreement on moral universals once one dismisses the role of values and conceptions of

the good in intersubjective deliberation about universal moral claims.

Ricœur therefore considers the contextualist critique of Habermas and Apel to be valid to the

extent that it exposes the difficulties which cultural and historical context present for

communicative action. However, he does not think that this entails a total rejection of the

possibility of intersubjective recognition of universal moral claims. Indeed, if one were to

entirely reject the possibility of consensus on moral validity claims on the basis that moral

reasoning is shaped by diverse cultural and historical contexts, then we would have no choice but

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[16] Indeed, David Kaplan considers Ricœur's interpretation of practical wisdom as a "version of discourse ethics" (Kaplan, 2003, p. 115) albeit a significantly revised one as we shall see further below.

[17] In his analysis of Ricœur's reading of the debate between universalism and contextualism Kaplan notes: "The reason there is an apparently irresolvable dispute between universalists and communitarians is because universalists tend to overlook the actual conflicts that arise in the application of moral norms, while the communitarians 'simply exalt, through overcompensation' these conflicts and thus adhere to a problematic, potentially relativistic, moral historicism." (Kaplan, 2003, p. 115)

to adopt a cultural relativism that "… makes all differences indifferent, to the extent that it makes all discussion useless" (p. 286).[18] For Ricœur, the main issue with Habermas and Apel's theory of communicative action is therefore neither the logical justification of intersubjective agreement nor even the possibility of rational consensus once cultural context is taken into account, but the purely *formal* characterization of argumentation underlying the theory that prevents it from engaging with the question of "values" embedded in diverse cultures. As Ricœur explains:

> What I am criticizing in the ethics of argumentation is not the invitation to look for the best argument in all circumstances and in all discussions but the reconstruction under the title of a strategy of purification, taken from Kant, that makes impossible the contextual mediation without which the ethics of communication loses its actual hold on reality. (p. 286)

In the same way that Kant's ideal of autonomy is one that is "purified" from all inclination and affectivity, Habermas and Apel's ideal of argumentation is one that is entirely independent of all forms of "convention" – a category which they argue covers the diverse values and normative content found in various cultural contexts. However, insofar as the opposition between argumentation and convention limits moral validity claims to purely rational cognitive constructions that bracket out pre-existing ethical commitments, it becomes difficult to see how such claims could speak to the particular historical communities to which the participants engaged in practical discourse belong. For Ricœur this is the crux of the issue: the strength of

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[18] In a later interview Ricœur mentions reconciling the claims of universalism and contextualism in the context of Habermas' discourse ethics as one of his primary philosophical concerns: "… I approach things on the basis of the ethical presuppositions of the discussion – in a Habermasian style – which assumes unlimited deliberation, without the constraints of time or participants, and I try to determine what is lacking in this approach that describes itself as transcendental pragmatics. The entire question is then whether one can contextualize the universal while keeping it as a regulative idea" (Ricœur, 1998a, p. 61)

communicative action is its concern with real life discussion in actual societies, but its dismissive attitude towards the values and cultural content that has shaped those societies renders it far too abstract to be realized in actual practice. This central point of contention underlying the contextualist critique is encapsulated by Ricœur in his essay "The Universal and the Historical" in *Reflections on the Just*:

> "How, it has been objected, can we speak of a formal character of principles that ignore the variety of contents of their application, of ahistorical rules alien to the variety of cultural heritages, and also of the rootedness of such rules for life in common in the practice of particular communities?" (Ricœur, 2001/2007b, p. 232)

In addition to this, if we consider the close link that Ricœur draws between the "ethical aim" and motivation for normative action, it seems unlikely that a purely formal moral consensus could meaningfully tap into the motivation of participants in a deliberative process. As Maureen Junker-Kenny notes in her analysis of Ricœur's work in relation to the public sphere:

> Discourse about [moral norms'] universalizability is one necessary area of argumentation, but it needs to be linked to prior exchanges on motivations; otherwise the universality consented to is at risk of remaining disconnected from the self-motivated pursuits of agents in the public sphere. (Junker-Kenny, 2014, p. 241).

According to Ricœur, the dichotomy between argumentation and convention that exposes communicative action to the above critique stems, in part, from the enlightenment opposition between autonomous reason and traditional sources of authority:

> "I attribute the rigorousness of the argumentation to an interpretation of modernity almost exclusively in terms of breaking with a past thought to be frozen in traditions subservient

to the principle of authority and so, by principle, out of reach of public discussion. This

explains why, in an ethics of argumentation, convention comes to occupy the place held

by inclination in Kant. In this manner, the ethics of argumentation contributes to the

impasse of a sterile opposition between a universalism at least as procedural as that of

Rawls and Dworkin and a 'cultural' relativism that places itself outside the field of

discussion." (Ricœur, 1990/1992, p. 287)

However, just as the "heteronomy" of inclination and the "autonomy" of independent moral

judgment can be seen as complementary under certain circumstances,[19] "autonomous" rational

argumentation need not necessarily be opposed to the normative content found in cultural

context, even if this content is "heteronomous" in the sense that it is both exterior and anterior to

one's independent rational judgement. For this reason, Ricœur finds that a reconciliation

between autonomy and heteronomy applied in the context of communicative action might show

us the way beyond the theoretical stalemate between cultural relativism and formal universalism

described above. While it is clear that the blind imitation of cultural convention conflicts with the

independent judgement that ought to characterize the argumentation proper to practical

discourse, this does not mean that all normative content external to rational cognitive

construction ought to be reduced to convention. In order to move beyond the admittedly narrow

characterization of argumentation found in Habermas and Apel's communicative action, Ricœur

argues that the opposition between argumentation and convention should be replaced with a "…

subtle dialectic between argumentation and *conviction*, which has no theoretical outcome but

only the practical outcome of the arbitration of moral judgement in situation" (p. 287).

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[19] As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis, one of Ricœur's main critiques of conventional readings of
Kantian formalism is that, due to the various references to relationality at the core of Kantian autonomy,
deontological autonomy is not entirely "autonomous" but actually *depends* on heteronomy in a certain sense.

The Dialectic between Argumentation and Conviction

To clarify what is meant by a dialectic between argumentation and conviction, Ricœur explains that when we consider how argumentation is carried out in actual practice, it becomes clear that it cannot be artificially isolated from other uses of language that derive from cultural and historical context. He argues that if argumentation were to be conceived in such terms, it would "[cease] to correspond to any form of life" (p. 287). As Ricœur mentions concerning the relationship of argumentation to other forms of expression,

> In real discussions, argumentation in its codified, stylized, even institutionalized form is but an abstract segment in a language process that involves a great number of language games, which themselves also have a relation to the ethical choices made in perplexing cases. We turn, for example, to narratives, to life histories... (p. 288)

He explains how these various language games constitute pre-argumentative forms of expression "… in which humans learn what is meant by wanting to live together" (p. 288). In this regard, they express normative content which has the *potential* to be rationally analyzed and rearticulated in argumentative terms, though without being arguments in and of themselves. While the "requirement of universalization" distinguishes argumentation from other language games, Ricœur argues that universalization nevertheless only becomes possible once we see how argumentation interacts with these other forms of expression that "… participate in the formation of options that are the stakes of the debate" (p. 288). While the form of argumentation proper to practical discourse is characterized by a search for the best argument in a given discussion, the deep interconnection between argumentation and other forms of expression means that this

search is only possible if the discussion itself is "about the 'things of life'" which are brought to

language through drawing on the linguistic resources available in cultural and historical context

(p. 288). In this connection John Wall raises the interesting observation that Ricœur's critique of

Habermas suggests a broader notion of what it means to 'participate' in social discourse:

> For 'participation' in social discourse is not just the freedom to argue for oneself, to 'take
>
> part'; it is also, and at the very same time, the need to situate oneself as already 'being
>
> part' of a substantive history that conditions argumentation from the very start. (Wall,
>
> 2005, p. 153)

Ricœur relates the concept of conviction itself to the ethical/teleological level of moral

reasoning. He explains that it is our convictions which,

> "[express] the positions from which result the meanings, interpretations, and evaluations
>
> relating to the multiple goods that occupy the scale of praxis, from practices and their
>
> immanent goods, passing by way of life plans, life histories, and including the
>
> conceptions humans have, alone or together, of what a complete life would be" (Ricœur,
>
> 1990/1992, p. 288).

Convictions, in light of the above statement, are ethical visions of the good life which underlie

the moral validity claims that participants in practical discourse bring to a process of

intersubjective deliberation. A crucial point that Ricœur raises here is that argumentation plays a

"corrective role" (p. 288) in regard to convictions. Argumentation, for Ricœur, enables us to

reflect on the potential of our ethical convictions to contribute towards rational consensus on

universal moral norms. In addition, argumentation plays a "critical" role insofar as it seeks to

identify and eradicate the various ideological distortions sedimented in our cultural context that

affect our moral reasoning. In this regard, he agrees with Habermas and Apel that conventions

tend to contain historically accumulated prejudices and that one of the main purposes of

normative deliberation is to eliminate such distortions from normative discourse through

adopting a critical stance towards our cultural context. However, he does not think that a critique

of prejudice and ideology can be accomplished through adopting a purely formal approach to

rational deliberation but, rather, calls for a dialectical approach that engages with cultural context

moving back and forth between rational reflection and deeply felt ethical convictions.[20] An

example of this approach to the relationship between argumentation and conviction can be seen

in his chapter on John Rawls' theory of justice in *The Just* titled "Is a Procedural Theory of

Justice Possible?":

> We cannot do without a critical evaluation of our alleged sense of justice. The task would
>
> be to discern what components or what aspects of our considered convictions require a
>
> continual eradication of ideologically based prejudices. (Ricœur, 1994/2000b, p. 56)

While convictions are needed to furnish the normative content of any process of

intersubjective deliberation, they also need to be submitted to critical reflection in order to stay

true to their original ethical intention and be freed from the ideological distortions. Ricœur's

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[20] Ricœur describes his reading of practical wisdom as drawing together Aristotelian *phronesis*, Kantian *Moralitat* and Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* "The practical wisdom we are seeking here aims at reconciling Aristotle's *phronesis*, by way of Kant's *Moralität,* with Hegel's *Sittlichkeit*." (Ricœur, 1990/1992, p. 290). In her analysis of Ricœur, Junker Kenny further elaborates on this point: "In his discussion of the complex questions posed by Hegel's critique of Kant, Ricœur takes care to distinguish the resources offered in the existing ethical life of a polity, from Hegel's understanding of *Sittlichkeit* as a counter-proposal to Kantian morality which in its radically personal conscientious quality Hegel ultimately denounces as "terrorist." In his defense of the "beautiful soul" against its dismissive review by Hegel, Ricœur moves the innovative conclusion represented by the term "conviction" away from the pole of given cultural values systems, to the pole of individual conscience. It figures both as emerging from a shared *Sittlichkeit*, and as taking a reflected stance against it in conscientious objection. The concluding formulation for the achievement of this level thus highlights the internal validation, as opposed to a structurally conservative use of *phronesis* as mediating in a closed cultural framework…." (pp. 208-209).

For Ricœur's analysis of Hegel's *Sittlichkeit* in the context of his discussion of *phronesis* see Ricœur, 1990/1992, pp. 255-256; pp. 290-291.

dialectic between argumentation and conviction thus expresses a form of criticality that does not

seek to undermine the ethical convictions participants bring to a process of intersubjective

deliberation, but, rather, represents the means to clarify and rearticulate convictions while

drawing out the moral content embedded in the full range of linguistic resources available in our

given cultural and historical context. As Ricœur explains concerning the interaction between

argumentation and conviction,

> Argumentation is not simply the antagonist of tradition and convention, but … the critical
>
> agency operation *at the heart* of convictions, argumentation assuming the task not of
>
> eliminating but of carrying them to the level of 'considered convictions,' in what Rawls
>
> calls a *reflective equilibrium*. (Ricœur, 1990/1992, p. 288).

Recognizing the need for a reflective equilibrium between argumentation and conviction is

crucial for both Ricœur's conception of *phronesis* as well as his approach to the tension between

universalism and contextualism discussed in the previous chapters. This is because reaching

moral judgement in particular situations requires engaging with ethical estimations that are found

in various cultural and historical contexts (p. 284). In *Reflections on the Just* Ricœur further

clarifies this point by identifying the conflict between diverse conceptions of "the good" as a site

for the exercise of practical wisdom. He points how the tension between universalism and

contextualism can be seen in the three aspects of the ethical aim: 'Aiming at the "Good Life",

with and for others, in just institutions' : we all wish for a good life, but the answer to the

question "what is a good life?" has varied considerably, we all have some desire for a life

together and friendship seems to be something common to every culture and time period but

conceptions of friendship also tend to vary, we all wish to live in just institutions but differences

tend to arise when we seek to answer the question of what exactly constitutes a just institution.

Ricœur further notes that differing conceptions of the good can, at times, lead to social conflict when we consider how these evaluations inform our understanding of what moral and legal norms ought to govern the relationships which constitute society and its institutions (Ricœur, 2001/2007b, p. 236). He explains that it is this concern with the conflictual character of ethical evaluations and such as conceptions of the good life and hierarchizations amongst diverse "goods" that has motivated thinkers like Habermas and Apel to adopt proceduralism as an approach to moral theory (Ricœur, 2001/2007c, p. 184). However, despite their attempts to bracket out questions regarding the good in favour of identifying formally articulated moral rules and procedures that are neutral on such questions, proceduralist theories of morality inevitably come up against the objection that they cannot circumvent deeply held convictions about the good life in actual practice.[21]

Without attention to the actual moral convictions or conceptions of the good that people hold and which they inevitably bring into public deliberation, discourse ethics entirely loses its hold on reality. This is mainly for two reasons: firstly, we use language to deliberate about normative

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[21] In his article "Rawls and Ricœur on Reconciling the Right and the Good: An Overlapping Consensus or An Ethical Aim?" Gary Foster raises the interesting case of the language of "rights" in the relationship between Indigenous communities and Canadian society more broadly. Referring to a speech given by Pierre Elliot Trudeau in 1969 in which he discussed his vision of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians as one of equality within a rights-based framework, Foster argues that while the idea of equal rights expresses laudable intentions limiting a vision of justice to 'rights discourse' can obscure the problem of diverse conceptions of the good that underlie visions of what constitutes a just society:

"The problem with Trudeau's proposal, even though we may agree that it reflects a conception of justice which aims at fairness, is that it did not take into account the particular historical circumstances and divergent conceptions of the good of native peoples. This includes the historical understanding that native peoples had of treaties with European colonialists including early Canadian governments. This conception of good also includes understandings of the relation between people and land. The native conception of territory and being a custodian of the land, which is to be used for common benefit, stands in contrast (and conflict) with the European notion of private property. Therefore, it is not only a fair distribution of goods that is at stake in this case, but a conceptual difference about how one views goods, or, ultimately, the good life. This would seem to suggest that sometimes considerations of the good need to modify our conceptions of right. To apply a liberal, European conception of right or rights, along with the notion of property that is entailed in this conception to the native land issue creates a situation where history and the native conception of good is ignored." (Foster, 2007, p. 168)

principles, but our 'normative' language cannot be constructed out of thin air as if rational

discourse could exist on its own without being informed in any way by cultural and historical

context. Rather, whether explicitly or implicitly, normative arguments necessarily draw on the

moral resources that we have at our disposal in a given context. However, if we insist that

drawing on these resources is antithetical to reason this makes it impossible to argue about

anything normative, or at least anything normative that could be responsive to a concrete

historical situation. As mentioned, Ricœur finds that overcoming the impasse between

universalism and contextualism in practice is essential because if we were to abandon the

possibility of building consensus on moral universals on the basis of the contextualist objections,

then we would be forced to admit that people inhabiting very different cultural or religious

outlooks cannot meaningfully engage with each other, or at least not in a way that seeks

normative agreement. Commenting on Ricœur's reading of contemporary multiculturalism and

global pluralism Fred Dallmayr notes, "What this scenario clearly requires is cultivation of

respect for difference, for the diversity of cultures and traditions - without succumbing to

particularistic myopia anchored in self-enclosed language games." He further remarks, "In this

situation, *phronesis* demands a complex negotiation of claims -through dialogue and

argumentation – that steers clear both of hegemonic universalism and contextual

incommensurability." (Dallmayr, 2002, p. 228)

In light of the above, a further connection between Kantian deontology and Aristotelian

teleology can be seen in the tension between procedural universalism and its contextualist

critiques. Just as deontology is grounded in the teleological "ethical aim" - which, in turn, needs

to be "tested" via the practical application of moral norms - to be practically viable, Habermas

and Apel's deontological conception of argumentation needs to draw on the ethical content of

convictions which, likewise, need to be tested by the formal/deontological "rule of argumentation" (Ricœur, 1994/2000b, p. 57). As Kaplan mentions concerning Ricœur's approach to the question of normative consensus-building:

> "Whatever we agree on should square with our convictions about who we are, what kind of people we should be, and what kind of society we want to live in – in short, our shared notions of the good life. In turn, our convictions should be considered, that is, open to deliberation, argumentation, and revision." (Kaplan, 2003, p. 119)

For this reason, Ricœur finds that the dialectic between argumentation and conviction represents a further expression of the dialectic between teleology and deontology at the core of his ethical framework,

> The articulations that we never cause to reinforce between deontology and teleology finds its highest – and most fragile expression in *the reflective equilibrium between the ethics of argumentation and considered convictions*. (Ricœur, 1990/1992, p. 289)[22]

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[22] In proposing a dialectic between considered convictions and the ethics of argumentation Junker-Kenny notes how Ricœur is placing both Rawls and Habermas' theories in relation to one another:

"The public space will include Rawls's contextual anchoring of justice in "considered convictions", reinterpreted as belonging to the foundational level of striving for justice in all its dimensions; the "reflective equilibrium" into which they are to be brought with principles requires the testing that discourse ethics will carry out. Together, these two approaches are identified as the two parts which practical wisdom seeks to relate to each other." (Junker-Kenny, 2014, p. 222)

Inchoate Universals and the Dialectic between Universalism and Contextualism

Ricœur finds that an example of the dialectic between the ethics of argumentation and considered convictions can be seen in the debate around universal human rights. He argues that human rights "taken on the level of declarative and not properly legislative texts" reflect the kind of intersubjective consensus sought by communicative action (p. 289). In addition to this, they are a practical example of a moral universalism that extends across particular cultural contexts – as Ricœur mentions, "… it is as though universalism and contextualism overlapped imperfectly on a small number of fundamental values, such as those we read in the declaration of the rights of man and the citizen" (p. 289).   However, despite the apparent global consensus around human rights there is still a suspicion that they are ultimately tied to the particular legal and philosophical traditions of the West and are thus a subtle form of cultural hegemony. He argues that while this is somewhat understandable given the fact that the legislation underlying the idea of human rights is "… indeed the product of a singular history that is broadly that of Western democracies" (p. 289), we should avoid falling into the trap of cultural relativism. As Ricœur mentions in a lecture titled "Éthique et Morale" (1990), while the tendency to be unaware of the Western origins of human rights needs to be overcome, their connection to Western "rights" discourse does not mean that the universalist claim underlying human rights does not have genuine universal value. Rather, from the perspective articulated by Ricœur, what the recognition of the cultural origins of any universal claim ought to imply is that its potential universality can only be made concrete through a continuing global dialogue. [23] As such, rather

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[23] « Ce que nous ne voyons pas, c'est que la prétention d'universalisme attachée à notre profession des droits de l'homme est elle-même entachée de particularisme, en raison de la longue cohabitation entre ces droits et les cultures européennes et occidentales où ils ont été pour la première fois formulés. Cela ne veut pas dire que d'authentiques universaux ne soient pas mêlés à cette prétention ; mais c'est seulement une longue discussion entre les cultures - discussion à peine commencée - qui fera paraître ce qui mérite vraiment d'être appelé "universel" ». (Ricœur, 1990, p. 7).

than rejecting the universal claim of human rights simply on the basis that its legal features derive from a Western cultural context and history, Ricœur argues that we should instead the "test" the universal moral claims expressed in the declaration of human rights through a practical discourse that is open to drawing on diverse convictions,

> One must, in my opinion, reject this drift and assume the following paradox: on the one hand, one must maintain the universal claim attached to a few values where the universal and the historical intersect, and on the other hand, one must submit this claim to discussion, not on a formal level, but on the level of the convictions incorporated in concrete forms of life. (Ricœur, 1990/1992, p. 289)

While the notion of human rights may well have a connection to a particular cultural context and history, this does not mean that the moral values and aspirations implicit in the declaration of human rights cannot be "universalized" in a way that meaningfully recognizes the diversity of cultural contexts. Doing so, however, depends heavily on the attitude that participants adopt towards others. An important feature of this process of intersubjective deliberation that Ricœur mentions in this regard is that the participants in a deliberative process must recognize that there may be other "universals" contained in cultures other than their own; universals that, like those expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have the potential to be recognized and embraced across a variety of cultural contexts,

> Nothing can result from this discussion unless every party recognizes that other potential universals are contained in so-called exotic cultures. The path of eventual consensus can

emerge only from a mutual recognition on the level of acceptability, that is, by admitting a

possible truth, admitting proposals of meaning that are at first foreign to us. (p. 289)

This reflection on human rights in light of the debate between universalism and contextualism

leads Ricœur to propose the notion "universals in context or… potential or inchoate universals"

(p. 289), a concept that blends the idea of universal moral norms with a recognition of the

influence of cultural and historical context. In introducing this term Ricœur conserves the

requirement of universalization central to Habermas and Apel's proceduralism is, but does so in

a way that opens practical discourse to engaging with diverse teleological conceptions of the

good and the normative content embedded in diverse cultural contexts. He explains that it is only

through a "…real discussion, in which convictions are permitted to be elevated above

conventions…" (p. 290) that a true consensus around moral universals can be achieved.

However, in suggesting such a perspective on how moral consensus can be reached across

diverse contexts, Ricœur does not mean to adopt the position that all moral universals are

"inchoate" and that any and all moral validity claims can only be made concrete in the distant

future. As examples of moral claims that have gained widespread recognition, Ricœur notes the,

"… condemnation of torture, of xenophobia, of racism, of the sexual exploitation of children or

nonconsenting adults etc..." as "… cases in which universality and historicity provide mutual

comfort to one another, rather than separating off from one another" (pp. 289-290).

        In her comparative analysis of Ricœur, Rawls, and Habermas on religion in the public

sphere Junker-Kenny links Ricœur's arguments about cultural context in *Oneself as Another* to

an earlier article "Universal Civilization and National Cultures" in which he argues for a

"creative nucleus" at the core of every great civilization (Ricœur, 1965 as cited in Junker-Kenny,

2014, p. 192). She notes, in particular, Ricœur's argument that the creative energy found in a

culture's linguistic resources can be revived through reinterpretation and engagement with other cultural formation. (p. 192). Junker-Kenny further notes in her comments on Ricœur's arguments in this section of the Ninth Study that while Habermas has since taken the cultural and historical context of communicative rationality into consideration in his work, he still maintains a division between critical reason and "contextual" forms of life:

> Although, as we have seen, Habermas has inscribed his project into a framework much enlarged by Karl Jasper's concept of an "axial age" of the joint origin of the great philosophical systems and the world religions to which we are still heirs two-and-a-half millennia later, the distance of critical reason from life forms in their particularity is still maintained…. Ricœur's hermeneutical approach goes beyond this in pointing to the enabling power of cultural traditions. They form a reservoir of already articulated precedents for current quests for meaning, much more than being restricting conventions. (p. 220).

Ricœur himself further elaborates on the notion of inchoate universals in his article "The Universal and the Historical" in *Reflections on the Just*, describing them as "claims to universality" insofar as they make moral claims that are potentially recognizable by all but not yet established as "concrete universals" with full global recognition. He argues that it is through a process of discussion centered on such claims to universality that an inchoate universal may become established as a genuine concrete universal:

> "No moral conviction would have any force if it did not make a claim to universality. But we must confine ourselves to giving this presumed universal sense to what first presents itself as claiming universality. Let us understand here by presumed universality the claim to universality offered by public discussion in expectation of being recognized by

everyone involved. In this exchange, each protagonist proposes an alleged or inchoative

universal seeking recognition. The history of such recognition is itself driven by the idea

of a recognition having the value of a concrete universal." (Ricœur, 2001/2007b, p.

247)[24]

Elaborating further on the nature of a conversation that aims at the mutual recognition of

moral universals, Ricœur likens it to a process of translation. He argues that the working towards

consensus on moral universals calls for a similar attitude towards one's own convictions and the

convictions of others as the attitude a translator has to both their own and other languages. In

doing so, he characterizes the attitude participants should have towards one another as "linguistic

hospitality":

> With translation, the speaker of one language transfers himself into the linguistic universe of
>
> a foreign text. In return, he welcomes into his own linguistic space another person's words.
>
> This phenomenon of linguistic hospitality can serve as a model for all instances of
>
> understanding in which the absence of what we might call a third-person overview brings
>
> into play the same operations of transference and of welcome whose model can be found in
>
> the act of translation." (Ricœur, 2001/2007b, p. 246)

Ricœur explains that the "phenomenon of linguistic hospitality" inherent to the act of translation

can be understood as a "model" (p. 246) for the kind of practical discourse aimed at discovering

moral universals embedded in diverse cultural contexts. In addition to adopting a stance of

critical reflection towards convictions - "... not to eliminate them…" but to "carry them to the

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[24] In her analysis of Ricœur's arguments Marianne Moyaert discusses how claims to universality which are "weighed, opened to criticism, and submitted to the rule of argumentation" have the potential to "change from being no more than conventions rooted in local, particular, historical traditions to being deliberate convictions, the scope of which transcends their particular origin." (Moyaert, 2014, p. 88)

level of considered convictions" (Ricœur, 1990/1992, p. 288) – exercising practical wisdom in this context therefore calls for a *hospitable* attitude towards the moral validity claims of others. As Ricœur notes in the passage above, part of this involves transferring oneself into the "universe" of another while welcoming the words of others into one's own space.[25] Discussing Ricœur's engagement with Habermas' ethics, Junker-Kenny notes how Ricœur broadens the basis of Habermas' discourse ethics by drawing attention to linguistic diversity as well as the potential of language for promoting understanding across cultures:

> … by treating language in the singular as the defining characteristic of the human species, and analyzing it mainly in regard to argumentation … its creative, its dialogical and its culture-bridging potentials are missed, such as the ability to connect to the stranger through the "hospitality" present in the capability for translation. A much more promising starting-point for the interest in the potential of language to forge agreement would be the plurality of languages and their translatability. (Junker-Kenny, 2014, p. 221).

Applied to the reading of human rights texts themselves, Ricœur's dialectic between universalism and contextualism not only helps us better understand the process leading to the mutual recognition of universal claims, but can also yield new interpretations of the content of

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[25] In and articled titled "Theonomy and/or Autonomy" Ricœur offers some further insight into this attitude. He argues that in order to maintain the distinction between "communicative reason" which aims at genuine rational consensus and "strategic reason" which instrumentalizes dialogue for manipulative purposes, we cannot ignore the question of "the *ability* and the *goodwill* of the protagonists of public discussion" (p. 298). In the final analysis, Ricœur finds that it is the love of one's neighbour that allows participants to overcome the tendency towards violent struggle and the manipulation of discourse: "…why discourse rather than violence? The problem is deemed resolved the moment the protagonists decide to have recourse in their conflicts to the argument of the better argument. They succumb to the objection of the "performative contradiction" only once they have abandoned argumentation … should the ethics of communication not accept the supra-ethical assistance of a love that obliges, in order to be in a position to hold firm the distinction that is ultimately most dear to it, that between communicational reason and instrumental or strategic reason? In truth, when it comes to safeguarding the gap between the two levels of practical reason, what could be mightier than love of neighbour?" (Ricœur, 1996, p. 298). For further discussion from Ricœur on violence and discourse see "Violence and Language" (1998b).

the claims themselves. In his Introduction to the 1986 volume *The Philosophical Foundations of Human Rights*, Ricœur notes how interpreting the Declaration of Human Rights involves both a recognition of its original philosophical context *and* an effort to expand and refine the meaning of human rights. As the "text" of human rights is brought to bear on other contexts it opens opportunities for new and broader understanding of the idea of human rights themselves,

> "[interpretation]… consists of two steps. First, to identify the original philosophical context within which these rights find their meaning, and then, if necessary, to seek a more adequate context for these rights in philosophies and cultures which might be quite different from the culture that originally produced these rights. Indeed, any text can be taken out of its original context and out into a new one, from which it receives in return a new significance." (Ricœur, 1986, p. 11)

This mutual interplay between the universal and the contextual thus suggests a reading of pluralism not only as an empirical condition prevailing in the modern world that calls for mutual tolerance, but a context for normative deliberation with the potential for greater levels of moral consensus as well as novel and broader understandings of universal moral validity claims themselves.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed how Ricœur's proposal for a dialectical approach to the tension between universalism and contextualism conserves the universalist aspirations which animate Habermas and Apel's theories of communicative action while also recognizing the validity of the contextualist critique. This dialectic is grounded on the observation that rational argumentation is inseparable from the normative content embedded in cultural context as well as the ethical convictions of the participants in a deliberative process. The dialectic between

argumentation and conviction is, for Ricœur, a form of *phronesis* insofar as it is concerned with the practical realization of universal moral claims in concrete historical contexts, "It is through public debate, friendly discussion, and shared convictions that moral judgement in situation is formed." (Ricœur, 1990/1992, p. 291). [26] I have also discussed how Ricœur finds an example of the tension between universalism and contextualism in the debate surrounding universal human rights. In the same way that *phronesis* responds to tragic wisdom by avoiding the extremes of univocity and arbitrariness, a practical discourse aimed at the mutual recognition of inchoate universals avoids both the pitfalls of cultural relativism and a procedural universalism that is opaque to its own cultural situatedness. By mediating between teleological "convictions" and a deontological "ethic of argumentation", the moral norm thus refers back to the ethical aim putting communicative action to the test by opening practical discourse to diverse ethical convictions. In concluding his analysis of practical wisdom in the Ninth Study Ricœur describes the process of intercultural dialogue on human rights as well as moral universals more generally

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[26] Although it may be implied by his reference to "convictions" perhaps we could also add "universals found in different cultural contexts" to this list given Ricœur's view that such a discussion seeks to recognize universal moral claims articulated through the normative language found in various contexts.

Wall also offers an interesting interpretation of Ricœur's argument for "shared convictions" in light of the arguments about *phronesis* earlier in the Ninth Study. Just as *phronesis* involves "inventing" new conduct by drawing on the creative tension between universalism and contextualism, Wall finds that the process of reaching normative consensus across contexts leads to the emergence of newly shared convictions: "The point, for our purposes, is that the kind of practical wisdom or critical phronesis called for in distorted social systems is not about applying fixed principles to the messy situation but about forming new principles or convictions themselves, what Ricœur calls (adapting Rawls's term) 'considered convictions' that reshape the social imagination itself. What makes a conviction "considered" is not its formation through universally applied procedures but its gradual and difficult movement toward the concreteness of 'universals in context' or 'potential or inchoate universals.' Beyond deontological universality is the potential universality – however little attained – of shared social convictions … the required universalization involves not just participation but also coming to newly shared convictions." (Wall, 2005, p. 153)

as "one of the faces of practical wisdom" (p. 290) referring to is as "… the art of conversation in

which the ethics of argumentation is put to the test in the conflict of convictions" (p. 290).[27]

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[27] Given its connection to the shared values found in historical context and collective deliberation within institutions, Ricœur identifies *phronesis* with Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*, but in a way that does not make the state or an institutionalized forms collective morality the final arbiter: "… 'critical' *phronesis* tends, through the mediations, to be identified with *Sittlichkeit*. The latter, however, has been stripped of its pretention to mark the victory of Spirit over the contradictions that it itself provokes. In return, because it has crossed through so many mediations and so many conflicts, the *phronesis* of moral judgement in situation is saved from nay temptation of anomie. It is through public debate, friendly discussion, and shared convictions that moral judgement in situation is formed. Concerning the practical wisdom suited to this judgement, one can say that *Sittlichkeit* "repeats" *phronesis* here, to the extent that *Sittlichkeit* "mediates" *phronesis*." (Ricœur, 1990/1992, p. 291)

Chapter 4: Strong Evaluations in Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self*

Introduction

Another philosopher who has explored the tension between universal norms and cultural context is the Canadian moral and political philosopher Charles Taylor. Like Ricœur, Taylor argues for a form of universalism that is sensitive to the contextualist critique while maintaining the possibility of consensus on universal moral claims. The following chapter brings Taylor's work on the relationship between moral norms and notions of the good into conversation with Ricœur's arguments in *Oneself as Another* outlined in the first part of this thesis. In this chapter, I briefly review some of the major elements of Taylor's moral philosophy as discussed in *Sources of the Self* and correlate them with Ricœur's arguments concerning the relationship between ethics and morality. Both Taylor and Ricœur defend the idea that universal moral norms must ultimately be grounded in conceptions of the "good life" shaped by the linguistic resources available in a given cultural or historical context. In doing so, both philosophers offer critiques of the dichotomy between ethics and morality (Ricœur) or between norms of conduct and underlying notions of the "good life" (Taylor). While Ricœur's arguments focus on the need for moral norms to be connected to an underlying conception of the good in order to navigate situations of ethical conflict, Taylor highlights how "articulating the good" is essential for generating the motivation to uphold moral norms. Although the two philosophers adopt slightly different argumentative angles in this regard, both *Sources of the Self* and *Oneself as Another* ultimately illuminate complementary dimensions of the relationship between moral norms and their underlying conceptions of the good. The intimate connection between moral norms and notions of the good life thus forms a key point of departure for comparing the two philosophers' positions on moral universals as well as their ethical frameworks more generally.

Taylor on Strong Evaluations

One of Taylor's main aims in his book *Sources of the Self* is to shed light on the

fundamental, and often inarticulate, structure of our basic moral experience as well as the

inextricable link between our notions of "the good" and our self-identity as human beings

(Taylor, 1989, 1.1, p. 3). Like Ricœur, Taylor defends the idea that norms of conduct cannot be

isolated from our understanding of what a "good life" consists in. The tendency in contemporary

moral philosophy to separate questions concerning "what it is good to be" from "what it is right

to do" (1.1, p. 3) is seen by him as a source of confusion insofar as it obscures the various goods

to which those who propound such theories are themselves committed. He argues that getting a

better grasp on how human beings navigate fundamental questions regarding "the good" is

crucial for understanding many of the conflicts and tensions in the contemporary world. For

Taylor, this involves making more explicit the "richer background languages in which we set the

basis and point of the moral obligations we acknowledge" (1.1, p. 4). A major claim which he

defends throughout his book is thus that both our self-identity and basic moral experience is

structured by what he calls "strong evaluations" - something he describes as,

> …discriminations of right or wrong, better or worse, higher or lower, which are not
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> rendered valid by our own desires, inclinations, or choices, but rather stand independent
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> of these and offer standards by which they can be judged. (1.1, p. 4)

To clarify what he means by this notion, he contrasts strong evaluations with weaker forms of

evaluation that do not have an important bearing on our sense of what is ultimately important in

life such as our preference for certain flavours of food. According to Taylor, when we try and

describe something like what makes a human being worthy of respect (whether it is seen in terms

of our nature as rational beings, or made in the image of God, or immortal souls etc…), we do

not see this as only valuable "to us", as a subjective projection on to a morally neutral universe, but as something that holds true independently of whether or not others recognize it and which offers a standard by which we are able to make sense of our lives and our moral duties to others. Taylor argues that it would not make any sense for someone to say that their commitment to something like universal justice is the same thing as whether they prefer chocolate over vanilla ice cream – the two types of evaluation are categorically different,

> In each of these cases, the sense is that there are ends or goods which are worthy or desirable in a way that cannot be measured on the same scale as our ordinary ends, goods, *desirabilia*. They are not just *more* desirable, in the same sense though to a greater degree, than some of these ordinary goods are. Because of their special status they command our awe, respect, or admiration. (1.5, p. 20)

Strong evaluations are seen by Taylor as the foundational "qualitative distinctions" that make up the broader frameworks within which we are able to exercise our moral agency. As he mentions concerning moral frameworks:

> [they] provide the background, explicit or implicit, for our moral judgements, intuitions or reactions …. To articulate a framework is to explicate what makes sense of our moral responses. That is, when we try to spell out what it is that we presuppose when we judge that a certain form of life is truly worthwhile, or place our dignity in a certain achievement or status, or define our moral obligations in a certain manner, we find ourselves articulating inter alia what I have been calling here 'frameworks' (2.1, p. 26)

Taylor adopts the position that, whether or not we recognize it, we are always operating within some kind of moral framework defined by a sense of strong evaluation. As an example of how

strong evaluations can be implicit but, nevertheless, present in our lives Taylor cites the "honour ethic" of archaic societies. He notes that while this ethic may not have been explicitly formulated in terms of a philosophical theory about the "good life" in the way that later Socratic thought was, this culture still contained *implicit* evaluations about what was ultimately higher, more worthy, or admirable such as "fame and glory" in the sense of military prestige and political power (1.5, p. 20).

Drawing on a spatial metaphor to further clarify the place of strong evaluations and moral frameworks in our lives, Taylor argues that every human being, regardless of culture or philosophical outlook, exists in "moral space" or a "space of questions" concerning the good (2.2, p. 34). And, just as we stand in need of some orientation in order to navigate physical space, we likewise stand in need of some kind of orientation concerning the ultimate meaning and purpose of life. Strong evaluations, in this regard, function as "defining orientations" that allow us to navigate moral space and act as standards by which we are able to assess moral progress. In an analogous fashion to how the cardinal points of north, south, east, and west are not defined by personal preference, strong evaluations likewise carry a significance for us as being grounded in a reality beyond our own subjective desires and inclinations. According to Taylor, a fundamental feature of being a human agent is thus to take some kind of stance "in relation to the good" (2.3, p. 42) and that this situates ourselves within a space of "inescapable" moral questions (2.3, p. 41).[28] The way we answer such questions may, of course, change over time. We may be drawn to recognize new and different goods and our sense of what strong evaluations guide our

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[28] In his own comments on Taylor, Ricœur notes: "This correlation expresses the fact that the question *who?* – Who am I? – presiding over every search for personal identity, finds a first outline of an answer in the modes of adhesion by which we respond to the solicitation of strong evaluations. In this respect, we can make the different variations of the discrimination of good and evil correspond to different ways of *orientating oneself* in what Taylor calls moral space, ways of taking one's stand there in the moment and of maintaining one's place over time." (Ricœur, 1994/2000c, p. 148).

lives may become more or less explicit, but the important thing for Taylor is that engaging with such fundamental questions about ultimate meaning and purpose is, itself, an unavoidable facet of what it means to be human.

Strong Evaluations and Ricœur's Ethical Aim

As can be seen from the discussion of Taylor thus far, his position on moral selfhood resembles, in certain respects, Ricœur's arguments concerning the ethical aim. As mentioned in Chapter 1 of this thesis, Ricœur argues that a desire for some conception of the good life rests at the core of human moral agency and identity. In a similar way to how Taylor argues that strong evaluations constitute "defining orientations" and "standards" by which we are able to assess our progress and direction in life, Ricœur's ethical aim is constitutive of an individual's sense of meaning and purpose representing the "… ultimate end of our action" (Ricœur, 1990/1992, p. 172). Both Ricœur's notion of the ethical aim and Taylor's notion of strong evaluations thus reflect an Aristotelian or teleological conception of human moral agency.[29] And, just as Ricœur aims to challenge the dichotomy between description and prescription in moral philosophy (between "judgements of fact and judgements of value" (p. 171), Taylor also defends the position that a "descriptive" conception of the good life is essential for giving shape and direction to our actions. In the same way that we would be unable to properly situate ourselves in moral space without being oriented by some evaluative conception of the ultimate aim of a good life, both philosophers consider it inconceivable that we could recognize an action as "good" without an underlying commitment to a vision of a "good life". Conceptions of the good life or the final end and purpose of our action may, however, change and become more refined over

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[29] Indeed, in his own comments on Taylor Ricœur recognizes the Aristotelian inspiration underlying Taylor's work (Ricœur, 1994/2000c, p. 148)

time as we asses our progress towards the ethical aim, but having some relationship to questions concerning "the good" is an indispensable feature of morality for both Ricœur and Taylor.

Hypergoods

In arguing for the fundamental role of strong evaluations in human life, Taylor, like Ricœur, does not adopt the position that we can only adhere to a single good. Indeed, he finds that most of us live with a commitment to multiple goods, all of which contribute to a "good life". It is perfectly possible, for example, to be committed to a meaningful family life while also recognizing the value of a just society. That being said, Taylor finds that we tend to rank various goods in relation to one another often identifying a particular good as a strong evaluation of overriding importance. In doing so, we make a "higher-order contrast" between a single good and a collection of others which are judged and weighed in relation to this higher good. These "higher-order goods" do not negate the other goods by which we live our lives, but operate as strong evaluations of fundamental importance around which other strong evaluations are organized. Due to their qualitatively higher status Taylor refers to these goods as "hypergoods":

> Let me call higher-order goods of this kind 'hypergoods', i.e, goods which not only are incomparably more important than others but provide the standpoint from which these must be weighed, judged, decided about. (Taylor, 1989, 3.2, p. 63)

Taylor identifies the "principle of equal respect" as an example of a hypergood that has emerged in the course of Western history. In this case, the hypergood claims to supersede earlier, less adequate, visions of both the individual and society such as earlier "patriarchal forms of life" and notions of the family (3.2, p. 65). In this regard, Taylor finds that hypergoods can often lead to

conflict insofar as they claim to be more superior visions of the good life than other hypergoods which may be present in a given cultural and historical context:

> Hypergoods are generally a source of conflict. The most important ones, those which are most widely adhered to in our civilization, have arisen through a historical supersession of earlier, less adequate views… (3.2, p. 64)

As can be seen in the previous chapters, Ricœur recognizes the potential for conflict underlying conceptions of the good life. As mentioned in Chapter 2, he finds that the question of the relative priority given to goods in a scheme of distribution tends to underlie much political debate (Ricœur, 1990/1992, pp. 257-258) and that various conceptions concerning the good life ultimately underlie any process of collective deliberation about universal moral norms (pp. 288-289). He likewise argues that the conflict between goods is often what is overlooked or bracketed out by proceduralist theories of morality thus becoming one of the primary sources of ethical conflict when moral norms are applied in practice. Ricœur reiterates this difficulty presented by the idea of strong evaluations and hypergoods in his own commentary on Taylor's *Sources of the Self*:

> Strong evaluations claim to be shared; therefore, they require communicability in principle. But, for this very reason, they are also contestable. Their discrimination, which we saw was inevitable, opens the way to controversy. To put this rather than that, "higher up" requires giving reasons. The question "How ought we to live?" opens a field of conflict as soon as our choices call for justification. As we have already noted: the Socratic call for an "examined life" brings criticism, a crisis of evaluation, into play in an exemplary fashion. The heterogeneity of hypergoods also opens the way to controversy,

for how are we to place what is fundamentally heterogenous into a unique hierarchy?

(Ricœur, 2001/2007c, p. 183)

Ricœur further notes that "spectacle of competition among goods of a higher order, and even whole systems of priority" has motivated proceduralist theories such as those of Rawls and Habermas to attempt to isolate questions concerning the good from the formulation of universal moral norms (p. 184). However, as mentioned above, the fact that both Ricœur and Taylor recognize the inseparability between moral norms and conceptions of the good means that isolating the "good" from the "right" is ultimately not an option for them. For this reason, both authors find it important to articulate ways in which conflicts concerning the good can be navigated without sacrificing the universalist character of moral norms defended by proceduralist theories.

Moral Sources

While Taylor's notion of strong evaluations and hypergoods underscores the central role that recognizing certain things as qualitatively superior or valuable plays in our moral reflection, he argues there are some ways in which our strong evaluations refer to the good in a much "fuller" sense (Taylor, 1989, 4.1, p. 92). In addition to identifying "actions, feelings, or modes of life" which characterize a "good life" (4.1, p. 93), Taylor finds that our strong evaluations tend to bear reference to a deeper "reality" by virtue of which all the goods that we recognize are considered "good". To clarify what he means by this, he draws on Plato's theory of the Order of Being as an example of how the good can be understood in a more "substantive" way:

[according to Plato] the distinction between higher and lower actions, motivations, ways of living turns on the hegemony of reason or desire. But the hegemony of reason is

understood substantively. To be rational is to have a vision of rational order, and to love

this order. So the difference of action or motivation has to be explained in reference to a

cosmic reality, the order of things. This is good in a fuller sense: the key to this order is

the Idea of the Good itself. Their relation to this is what makes certain of our actions or

aspirations good; it is what constitutes the goodness of these actions or motives. (4.1, p.

92)

While not advocating for a return to Plato's theory of the cosmos per se, Taylor does find

that some notion of a higher good that constitutes the "goodness" of our other strong evaluations

is fundamental to human moral agency. He thus refers to these particular goods as "constitutive

goods" differentiating them from the various "life goods" that are also articulated through the

strong evaluations discussed above:

> … I have been concentrating on qualitative distinctions between actions, or feelings, or
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> modes of life. The goods which these define are facets or components of a good life. Let
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> us call these 'life goods'. But now we see, in Plato's case, that the life goods refer us to
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> some feature of the way things are, in virtue of which these life goods are goods. This
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> feature constitutes them as goods, and that is why I call them constitutive. (4.1, p. 93)

Building on this point, he argues that a further feature of constitutive goods is that the more we

bring them to language though various forms of articulation, the "closer" we become to them

(4.1, p. 92). And Taylor argues that it is this proximity to the good that "empowers" an

individual to pursue a good life. Constitutive goods are thus seen by Taylor as empowering

objects of love and devotion that *enable* human moral agency. In light of this consideration, he

also refers to constitutive goods as "sources" of moral power or "moral sources":

> The Good is also that the love of which moves us to good action. The constitutive good is a moral source, in the sense I want to use this term here: that is, it is a something the love of which empowers us to do and be good. (4.1, p. 93)

He argues that if we accept the idea of moral sources as fundamental to our agency (a claim that Taylor defends throughout the entire book), moral theory should not only include "injunctions … to act in certain ways and to exhibit certain moral qualities but also to love what is good" (4.1, p. 93).

Taylor and Ricœur on Teleology and Deontology

As can be gleaned from this very brief description of Taylor's core notions of strong evaluations, hypergoods, and moral sources, he shares Ricœur's perspective that deontological formalism cannot really exist independently of teleological considerations. As mentioned in Chapter 1 of this thesis, Ricœur finds that moral norms are inextricably tied to an ethical background that is shaped by the desire for a good life with and for others in just institutions. He argues that Aristotelian teleology and Kantian deontology thus ought to be understood in a *dialectical* relationship. Notions of obligatory action, from Ricœur's perspective, can only be meaningfully applied to the complexities of real life if we are sensitive to the vision of the good life on which they depend. And, in this sense, conceptions of the good form both the origin and creative resource that enable us to apply moral norms to new and difficult situations. While Ricœur finds that the connection between teleology and deontology becomes apparent when we confront the difficulties associated with applying moral norms to actual practice ("the path of application"), Taylor recognizes a similar connection between moral norms and conceptions of the good in the "inescapable" nature of strong evaluations for structuring our moral agency. Like Ricœur, Taylor critiques the "narrow focus" of contemporary moral theory on identifying a

single criterion for obligatory action alongside its dismissal of questions about the good life. Indeed, for Taylor, strong evaluations are seen as essential for making sense of why an action or norm should be considered moral in the first place:

> Articulating our qualitative distinctions is setting out the point of our moral actions. It explains in a fuller and richer way the meaning of this action for us, just what its goodness or badness, being obligatory or forbidden, consists in. (3.3, p. 80)

In this sense, all proceduralist moral theories hold some *implicit* commitment to goods in the strong evaluative sense of the term even if they do not *explicitly* consider such goods as part of their theory. Taylor argues that proceduralist conceptions of morality such as Habermas' and Apel's theory of communicative action are thus "grounded on an unadmitted adherence to certain life goods, such as freedom, altruism, universal justice" (4.1, p. 93). In this regard, he finds that, underlying any series of norms, rules and procedures is some kind of commitment to a notion of the good which allows us to make sense of these precepts for action, "… the good is what, in its articulation, gives the point of the rules which define the right." (3.3, p. 89).[30]

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[30] In an article titled "Le juste et le bien" Taylor discusses the historical origins of the dichotomy between the "right" and the "good" in early modern theological and philosophical developments. He argues that there is a close connection between the modern notion of rationality and freedom and the position adopted by contemporary proceduralist theories that any conception of the good is inherently limited to an uncritical assent to the values of a particular culture and way of life. However, for Taylor, such theories have not succeeded in rejecting notions of the "good" in favour of the "right", but have actually lost sight of the conceptions of the good on which they rely:

« Mais la faiblesse des théories procédurales n'est guère difficile à trouver. Elle apparaît lorsqu'on demande ce qui est à la base de la hiérarchie qu'elles reconnaissent, et que toute théorie morale doit nécessairement reconnaître, soit le sens de ce que j'appelle une évaluation forte. Qu'est-ce qui oblige à suivre les procédures privilégiées? La réponse doit consister en une certaine compréhension de la vie humaine et de la Raison, en une doctrine anthropologique, et donc en une conception du bien. Il faut savoir gré à Kant de l'avoir reconnu et d'avoir énoncé sa conception de l'homme ou plutôt de l'être rationnel, et de la dignité qui s'y rattache, soit ce qui lui confère une valeur infiniment plus grande qu'à toute autre chose dans l'univers. Cela nous permet de voir qu'on n'a pas échappé à la logique de la " nature "du " telos " et du " bien " dans ces théories, mais qu'on l'a simplement perdue de vue. »

It should be noted that, while Taylor draws on his notion of strong evaluations to critique proceduralist theories, his intention is not to reject them entirely but, in a similar vein to Ricœur's position on Habermas and Apel as discussed

While both Taylor and Ricœur recognize a necessary connection between moral norms and underlying conceptions of the good, Taylor's notion of moral sources focuses on the relationship between "articulating the good" and the *motivation* to adhere to moral norms. As Taylor mentions in the passage quoted in the above section, our connection to moral sources empowers us both to be and to do good. For this reason, he argues that the higher the normative standard, the stronger a moral source needs to be (25.4, p. 516). While articulation allows us to recognize and deliberate about our strong evaluations and broader moral frameworks that form the background context for our judgements, choices, and actions, it also connects us to sources of moral *power* through which we are enabled to uphold moral norms and standards:

> A formulation has power when it brings the source close, when it makes it plain and evident, in all its inherent force, its capacity to inspire our love, respect, or allegiance. An effective articulation releases this force, and this is how words have power. (4.1, p. 96)

While both Taylor and Ricœur defend the idea that moral norms must ultimately be grounded in conceptions of the good life, the two philosophers draw attention to different dimensions of the relationship between ethics and morality. Ricœur's arguments highlight how reflection on the teleological concepts is a necessary part of applying moral norms in a creative way to novel and conflictual situations and moral norms, in turn, give proper expression to the ethical aim thus protecting it from its various distortions. In a complementary fashion, Taylor's arguments about moral sources draw attention to the close relationship between articulating

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in Chapter 3 of this thesis, Taylor argues that proceduralist theories would be more plausible if reformulated in a way which combines procedural thinking with reference to the substantive conceptions of the good already implicit in such theories (Taylor, 1988, p. 40).

teleological conceptions of the good and generating the motivation to uphold moral norms.[31] The mutual relationship between moral norms and notions of the good life thus represents an important point of agreement between Ricœur and Taylor's ethical frameworks and a key point of comparison for *Oneself as Another* and *Sources of the Self*. What remains to be discussed is how Taylor's arguments also respond the opposition between universalism and contextualism.

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[31] Interestingly, in a later published discussion on the foundations of morality with neuroscientist Jean-Pierre Changeux Ricœur links Taylor's notion of moral sources to his arguments about ethical convictions: "In a pluralist democratic society such as ours, several sources of legitimacy are in competition. The word *source,* as I indicated previously, I understand in the sense in which it is taken by Charles Taylor in *Sources of the Self,* which is to say as something more radical and more profound than formal rules of debate—say, the public rules of procedure that govern a legally constituted state. It involves conceptions of the good, or, if you like, visions of the world, that constitute the basis of our convictions— hence the importance I attach to conviction, as distinct from convention. It is at this deep level that a delicate relationship between consensus and disagreement is to be found. Given the irremediable pluralism of developed societies, the problem of creating a shared public life is how one gets to the stage where rival traditions must mutually consider themselves to be co-founders if they wish to survive the forces of destruction, both external and internal, that they face." (Ricœur and Changeux, 2002, p. 257)

Chapter 5: Taylor on Moral Universals and Human Rights

Introduction

In the previous chapter I highlighted how the close connection between conceptions of the good life and moral norms forms a key point of agreement in both Ricœur and Taylor's ethical framework. The following chapter builds on this point by discussing Taylor's treatment of the theme of moral universals and question of cultural and historical context. The first part of this chapter continues to explore Taylor's arguments in *Sources of the Self*, particularly influence of cultural context on strong evaluations and his reflections on the possibility of cross-contextual agreement on universal moral claims. Here, Taylor argues that while strong evaluations may be shaped by cultural and historical context there is no a priori reason to consider notions of the good life that have formed in diverse contexts to be incommensurable unless we meet situations of incommensurability in actual practice. We should therefore stay open to the possibility that strong evaluations in other cultural contexts may have something genuinely universal to say and that we should try and communicate about such claims. Taylor thus follows Ricœur in suggesting that notions of the good, while initially articulated in particular cultural contexts, may carry universal content that can be recognized through dialogue across contexts.

The second part of the chapter discusses Taylor's arguments concerning consensus on universal human rights as discussed in his 1999 essay, "An Unforced Consensus on Human Rights" and compares them with Ricœur's position on universalism and contextualism formulated in the Ninth Study of *Oneself as Another*. In the same way that Ricœur identifies the universal declaration of human rights as an example of an inchoate universal at the end of the Ninth Study, Taylor likewise finds the debate around human rights to be a context for examining

the question of whether it is possible to reach agreement on moral universals across cultures. In this essay, Taylor argues that while an overlapping consensus on human rights that focuses on norms of conduct while bracketing out underlying conceptions of the good life might be possible to a limited extent, agreement on moral norms must, sooner or later, be complemented by a mutual learning process grounded in an effort to sympathetically understand the underlying conceptions of the good that move others. As such, in addition to arguing that the influence of cultural context on morality does not negate the possibility of moral universals, Taylor's position in this essay also supports Ricœur's claim discussed in Chapter 3 that a process of consensus building ought not to be limited to formally expressed moral norms but should be open to underlying ethical convictions and notions of the good life.

While Taylor discusses the universalization of human rights both in terms of their legal form and the fundamental values underlying the declaration in his article, I will focus on the values underlying human rights as an object of moral consensus in order to better bring Taylor's article into conversation with Ricœur's arguments concerning the "contextualist" critique that there can be no moral universals but only collections of values limited to particular cultures. In this sense, my concern is with the moral character of human rights rather than their legal expression. For example, Article 26 mentions that "Everyone has the right to education, education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages…" and that one of the purposes of education is to "… promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups…" (United Nations, 1948, article 26.1-2). While this article could be interpreted in diverse ways within a given country's legal system, it also expresses certain values or moral aspirations that can be viewed as an object of moral consensus.

As mentioned in Chapter 3 of this thesis, Ricœur considers the fundamental values implicit in the declaration of human rights to be a potential object of universal moral consensus. While human rights are already "universalized" in the sense that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been ratified by most of the world's nations, he notes that some are still suspicious that human rights are a Western invention and not truly universal. From Ricœur's perspective, the view human rights are ethnocentric focuses on the observation that the legislative form of "rights" was developed in the West and he argues that this observation has led some to shift the accusation of ethnocentrism to the values expressed in the declarative texts themselves (Ricœur, 1990/1992, p. 289). Viewed in this light, the debate around human rights can be seen as a particular case of the more abstract debate about whether human beings can actually come to agree on moral universals or whether anything normative that claims universal status is ultimately just one particular culture asserting its influence over others.

Universalism and Contextualism in *Sources of the Self*

Strong Evaluations and Cultural Context

An important point that Taylor raises in *Sources of the Self* about the relationship between moral norms and the goods on which they rely is that the "language" of strong evaluations is much richer and more "culturally bound" than the language used to describe norms of conduct. In this regard, he finds that our strong-evaluative language resembles Clifford Geertz' notion of "thick description" in contrast to the "thin" description of moral actions alone:

> To move from external action descriptions to the language of qualitative distinctions is to move to a language of 'thick description', in the sense of this term that Clifford Geertz has made famous, that is, a language which is a lot richer and more culturally bound,

because it articulates the significance and point that the actions or feelings have within a certain culture. (Taylor, 1989, 3.3, p. 80)

Like Ricœur, Taylor recognizes the intimate link between "articulations" that draw on the content available to us within a given context and our capacity to deliberate about conceptions of the good life. There is, for Taylor, a necessary connection between bringing conceptions of the good to language and the possibility of adhering to such goods as sources of moral agency. For Taylor, "Articulation is a necessary condition of adhesion; without it these goods are not even options" (4.1, p. 91), but this articulation cannot be carried out through a formalized language isolated from cultural and/or historical context:

The rather different understandings of the good which we see in different cultures are correlative of the different languages which have evolved in those cultures. A vision of the good becomes available for the people of a given culture through being given expression in some manner. The God of Abraham exists for us (that is, belief in him is a possibility) because he has been talked about, primarily in the narrative of the Bible but also in countless other ways from theology to devotional literature …. Universal rights of mankind exist for us because they have been promulgated... (4.1, p. 91)

Taylor finds that it is, in part, due to a recognition of the influence of culture on our strong-evaluative languages coupled with the potential for conflict surrounding the notion of hypergoods that has motivated procedural theories to separate the idea of universal moral norms from considerations about the "good life". As Ricœur identified in his discussion on Habermas, the assumption underlying proceduralist theories is that a formalized language which isolates itself from notions of the good can more effectively promote normative consensus than one which is laden with cultural and historical baggage. Taylor likewise recognizes the assumption

underlying proceduralist theories that notions of the good life represent barriers to normative consensus (3.3, p. 85). Like Ricœur, Taylor finds that the desire for creating the conditions for a universal normative consensus coupled with a sense that notions of the good are unavoidably conflictual has, in particular, motivated the separation between "questions of ethics" and notions of the "good life" underlying Habermas' discourse ethics:

> … in Habermas's case, the boundary between questions of ethics, which have to do with interpersonal justice, and those of the good life is supremely important, because it is the boundary between demands of truly universal validity and goods which will differ from culture to culture. This distinction is the only bulwark, in Habermas's eyes, against chauvinistic and ethnocentric aggression in the name of one's way of life, or tradition, or culture. (3.3, p. 88)

While Taylor recognizes the potential for conflict surrounding strong evaluations and, in particular, the various "hypergoods" that have emerged across cultures and over time, he does not think this realization warrants adopting an a priori position that goods articulated in diverse contexts are incommensurable. While he does accept the *possibility* that we may not be able to meaningfully deliberate about some goods across cultural contexts, Taylor maintains that until we meet such a situation where incommensurability becomes evident in actual practice, we have no reason to deny the possibility that the goods to which we are committed may indeed be universal. However, in a similar vein to Ricœur's notion of inchoate universals, Taylor argues that the recognition of the potential universal status of our strong evaluations has to be coupled with an equal recognition that the goods articulated in other societies may also carry universal content. As such, while some conceptions of the good may indeed be incommensurable, Taylor

argues that we should not "… start with a preshrunk moral universe in which we take as given that their goods have nothing to say to us or perhaps ours to them." (3.1, p. 62).

Against the background of the above considerations, Taylor raises the question of deliberating about the "objectivity" of hypergoods across cultures. Since, like Ricœur, he does not make the assumption that understanding and mutual learning across cultural contexts is a priori impossible, he finds it reasonable to consider what might be involved in a cross-contextual deliberation on universal validity claims. While Taylor does not claim that any and all conceptions of the good can be shown to be right (some notions of the good may indeed be ethnocentric or parochial), he does ask whether the validity of *any* cross-cultural claim about the good could be meaningfully demonstrated (3.2, p. 68). In his exploration of this question, he suggests that the efficacy of a given articulation of the good to make sense of and clarify our understanding of human experience represents a potential way to judge between moral validity claims both within and across various cultural contexts. In a way not unlike how a scientific theory is assessed based on its ability to make sense of phenomena in the physical universe, Taylor argues that the strength of a universal claim about human affairs[32] should likewise be judged on its potential for offering the most "realistic and insightful" account of things in the realm of human experience. From this perspective, if a certain term or concept allows us to more clearly understand our experience relative to a previous understanding we may have had – if, in Taylor's terminology, it allows us to make an "error reducing move" (3.2, p. 74) – then it is a sign of its potential universal validity:

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[32]Taylor refers to human affairs as the "the domain where we deliberate about our future action, assess our own and other' character, feelings, reactions, comportments" (Taylor, 1989, 3.2, p. 69)

What these terms pick out will be what to us is real here … If we cannot deliberate effectively, or understand and explain people's action illuminatingly, without such terms as 'courage' or 'generosity', then these are real features of our world. (3.2, p. 69

As such, while Taylor recognizes that strong evaluations may be shaped by cultural context and are, in this sense, culturally and historically contingent, this does not constitute a sufficient reason to deny the possibility of moral universals nor the potential for reaching agreement on universals moral claims across cultural contexts. Taylor does not elaborate further about the question of reaching consensus on the cross-cultural validity of goods in *Sources of the Self* since his aim in the rest of the book is to focus on the various goods that have shaped the history of Western civilization. However, in a later essay titled "An Unforced Consensus on Human Rights" he revisits the question of normative consensus across cultures by discussing human rights as an example of a universal moral claim.

Taylor's "An Unforced Consensus on Human Rights"

An Overlapping Consensus?

Taylor's 1999 essay "An Unforced Consensus on Human Rights" discusses the conditions necessary for reaching a voluntary consensus on human rights across various cultural contexts. In a similar way to how Ricœur uses the declaration of human rights as an example of a universal moral claim around which there is a high degree of consensus across cultural contexts, Taylor explores human rights as an example of consensus building around universal moral principles across cultures. As I mentioned at the outset, while part of his discussion concerns whether the legal form associated with human rights can be adapted to diverse contexts, my discussion of Taylor in this chapter focuses primarily on his treatment of human rights as a series

of normative aspirations which claim universal status in order to focus on a comparison with Ricœur's arguments discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Taylor begins his essay with asking the question: "What would it mean to come to a genuine, unforced international consensus on human rights?" (Taylor, 1999, p. 124). He speculates that, at least at an initial stage, it might be something that resembles Rawls' overlapping consensus. Such a consensus would involve agreement on a set of formal moral principles that are justified on the basis of mutually incommensurable "comprehensive doctrines". As Taylor notes concerning this potential scenario:

> "…different groups, countries, religious communities, and civilizations, although holding incompatible fundamental views on theology, metaphysics, human nature, and so on, would come to an agreement on certain norms that ought to govern human behaviour. Each would have its own way of justifying this from out of its profound background conception. We would agree on the norms while disagreeing on why they were the right norms, and we would be content to live in this consensus, undisturbed by the differences of profound underlying belief." (p. 124)

While he agrees that this sort of consensus is certainly possible, he finds that, at least at the outset, it is not immediately evident what the consensus would be *on*. He notes that while, intuitively, we may think that such a consensus would be on human rights, Taylor, like Ricœur, recognizes that "rights discourse" (or at least certain features of it) is, itself, rooted in cultural and historical developments associated with the West:

> Rights talk is something that has its roots in Western culture. Certain features of this talk have roots in Western history, and there only. This is not to say that something very like

the underlying norms expressed in schedules of rights don't turn up elsewhere, but they

are not expressed in this language. (p. 125)

Taylor argues that, because of this connection between the *language* of rights and

Western culture, we cannot begin a reflection about global normative consensus with the a priori

assumption that this future consensus will inevitably be articulated in the language of human

rights. While it may indeed be a possibility, there may also be elements of rights discourse that

will not make it into a truly global consensus. Taylor thus finds that there may be various

elements of the cultural "package" of human rights that may not ultimately be "universalizable".

For Taylor, a truly global consensus could thus conceivably draw on an entirely different

language than that of human rights, or it may adopt some features of what he calls the "Western

package" (p. 125) while leaving other features of this cultural heritage aside.

Taylor admits that fully articulating the universal values underlying human rights might

be something beyond our capacity at present and may indeed be ultimately impossible.

However, for a Rawlsian overlapping consensus, this predicament would not, in itself, represent

an obstacle insofar as the aim is to reach agreement on norms of conduct while allowing for a

diversity of potentially incommensurable underlying justifications. Taylor observes that there

are already certain moral norms such as the condemnation of genocide, murder, torture, slavery

etc… that can be found across a wide range of cultures in the contemporary world. A Rawlsian

overlapping consensus would involve agreement on norms such as these, but the universal

"values" supporting and justifying such norms would "… belong to the alternative, mutually

incompatible justifications." (p. 125). If we consider Taylor's discussion of the language of

strong evaluations discussed above, an overlapping consensus of this kind would be articulated

in the "thin" language of norms of conduct while leaving various cultural groups to correlate the

language of rights with their various "thick" descriptions of the good. However, while a relatively high degree of consensus around human rights can be observed in the contemporary world to some extent, attempting to bracket out the issues related to cultural context leaves such a consensus vulnerable to the contextualist suspicion that agreement about human rights is still only a form of Western cultural imperialism rather than a genuine universal consensus.

Consensus-Building and Mutual Understanding

In his exploration of how we might work towards greater normative consensus on human rights in a way that is sensitive to cultural context, Taylor argues that we may be better able to reach an unforced consensus if we are able to more clearly distinguish between level of norms and their underlying philosophical justifications without obscuring their deep interconnections. He notes that the "Western rights tradition" exists at both the level of moral norms and underlying justifications insofar as it contains certain norms of conduct and legal forms for its implementation but is also the outcome of a certain view of human agency and society. Taylor refers to the critique that Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew raised against the individualism underlying the Western legal tradition with its lack of attention to collective ties as an example in this regard. He notes that this critique and those similar to it are not only aimed at the legal forms associated with human rights but also their underlying philosophy of individualism:

> In their criticism of Western procedures, they also seem to be attacking the underlying philosophy, which allegedly gives primacy to the individual, whereas supposedly a "Confucian" outlook would have a larger place for the community and the complex web of human relations in which each person stands. (p. 126)

In this regard, Taylor argues that if we are at least able to make an *analytical* distinction between legally enforceable norms and their underlying justifications then it might be possible to see how universal human rights can find creative reappropriations that are more suitable to diverse cultural contexts such as those influenced by a Confucian tradition and history rather than Western Liberalism:

> Perhaps, in fact, the legal culture could 'travel' better, if it could be separated from some of its underlying justifications. Or perhaps the reverse is true, that the underlying picture of human life might look less frightening if it could find expression in a different legal culture. (p. 126)

While the above possibilities may be seen as a path forward, Taylor's hunch is that neither of these two "simple" solutions will be adequate for addressing the challenge of an unforced consensus (p. 126).

While Taylor explores the possibility of implementing "the essential norms involved in the human rights claims" (p. 129) through diverse legal forms as well as grounding human rights on diverse underlying justifications (pp. 129-137), he argues that consensus on human rights, even if adapted to diverse cultural contexts in these ways, can only be a temporary stage in a longer-term process of consensus building. An overlapping consensus is described by Taylor as the "situation at the outset" after which a process of mutual learning between cultures can occur (p. 136). The surface-level consensus on human rights norms is, in a sense, a precondition for a deeper form of consensus rather than the ultimate goal of dialogue on human rights. Taylor describes such a process of mutual learning as one "… in which the moral universe of the other becomes less strange" and likens it to a Gadamerian "fusion of horizons" (p. 136). He argues that, at this stage, new and hybrid forms of moral norms can emerge. In fact, he finds this to have

already occurred with the practice of nonviolent resistance in the American Civil Rights

movement. In this case, Martin Luther King, a "Western" human rights activist, drew on

Gandhi's interpretation of *ahimsa* to develop his non-violent approach to social change.[33] Taylor

notes that Gandhi's *ahimsa*-inspired approach to nonviolent resistance has since become part of

the "world repertory of political practices" citing the Philippines' 1988 People Power Revolution

and Czechoslovakia's 1989 Velvet Revolution as further examples. The practice of non-violent

resistance thus emerged through interaction between cultures at the level of philosophical

justifications and, while it was initially articulated in a particular non-Western cultural context, it

has since been adopted in the West as well as other cultural contexts.

While the example of Gandhian *ahimsa*-inspired non-violent resistance shows that such a

mutual learning process across cultural contexts is possible, Taylor finds that this process is also

necessary. He argues that if we do not give adequate attention to underlying justifications in our

efforts to reach consensus, then the "gains in agreement [at the level of norms of conduct] will

remain fragile" (p. 137). He finds this to be the case for at least two reasons. Firstly, both the

elaboration and application of human rights calls for ongoing discussion that involves

participants from a wide range of cultures and belief systems. However, this discussion will be

hindered to the extent that there is a lack of genuine mutual understanding and sympathy

regarding the deeper spiritual motivations that motivate others to try and uphold human rights in

first place (p. 138). The second reason that Taylor cites for why an overlapping consensus must

gradually move towards a fusion of cultural and philosophical horizons concerns the close

relationship between mutual understanding and the mutual "respect" necessary for dialogue to

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[33] It should be noted that King also correlated certain aspects of Gandhi's philosophy with Christian teachings. See: King, 1957, pp. 322-328.

occur. Taylor makes the fair assumption that any process of dialogue across cultures calls for of a profound respect towards the other, but questions whether such a condition of mutual respect can be maintained in the long term if the parties in a dialogue are dismissive of the deep sense of purpose that moves others to work towards consensus on human rights. There is thus a deep link between a cross-contextual understanding of diverse philosophical justifications for human rights and the mutual respect necessary for a process of consensus building:

> If the sense is strong on each side that the spiritual basis of the other is ridiculous, false, inferior, unworthy, these attitudes cannot but sap the will to agree of those who hold these views while engendering anger and resentment among those who are thus depreciated. The only cure for contempt here is understanding. This alone can replace the too-facile depreciatory stories about others with which groups often tend to shore up their own sense of rightness of superiority. Consequently, the bare consensus must strive to go on towards a fusion of horizons." (p. 138)

In drawing on Gadamer's notion of a fusion of horizons, Taylor wants to emphasize the fact that this second "stage" involves a process of "sympathetic mutual comprehension" (p. 138) across contexts. There is a sort of overcoming of cultural distance involved in this process, but not one that involves a dominant culture exerting its influence over others. Rather, like the example of *ahimsa* and the American Civil Rights movment discussed above, the process of reaching mutual understanding at the level of philosophical justifications is characterized by mutual learning.

Taylor and Ricœur on the Universalization of Human Rights

Many of Taylor's arguments in an "Unforced Consensus on Human Rights" suggest a similar position to that adopted by Ricœur in his response to the debate between universalism and contextualism. As we saw in Chapter 3, Ricœur argues that, if we are to meaningfully address the issues highlighted by the contextualist critique, deliberation on moral validity claims should involve an openness to the convictions of others as well as a critical reflection on one's own convictions. For Ricœur, the aim of this consensus-building process is the mutual recognition of moral universals that both resonate with and extend across particular cultural contexts. He employs the term "inchoate universals" to capture the fact that universal moral claims emerge from within and are articulated in the language available in a given cultural and historical context. However, inchoate universals are still "universals" in the sense that they may indeed carry universal validity despite drawing on language that is relative to a particular context. Ricœur draws on the example of the values associated with the declaration of human rights as one such example of an inchoate universal. While there is a high degree of international consensus around the declaration, there is still the "suspicion" that it is merely a Western invention and therefore not truly universal (Ricœur, 1990/1992, p. 289). Ricœur argues that instead of falling into an intractable debate between procedural universalism and cultural relativism, the concept of human rights can be considered one such example of an inchoate universal and that it can become recognized as a concrete universal through a form of discourse ethics grounded in convictions. Concerning the fact that the declaration of human rights is accused of ethnocentrism despite "being ratified by all the governments on this planet" Ricœur argues:

"... One must, in my opinion, reject this drift and assume the following paradox: on the one hand, one must maintain the universal claim attached to a few values where the universal and the historical intersect, and on the other hand, one must submit this claim to discussion, not on a formal level, but on the level of the convictions incorporated in concrete forms of life. Nothing can result from this discussion unless every party recognizes that other potential universals are contained in so-called exotic cultures. The path of eventual consensus can emerge only from mutual recognition on the level of acceptability, that is, by admitting a possible truth, admitting proposals of meaning that are at first foreign to us.

This notion of universals in context or of potential or inchoate universals is, in my opinion, the notion that best accounts for the reflective equilibrium that we are seeking between universality and historicity. Only a real discussion in which convictions are permitted to be elevated above conventions, will be able to state, at the end of a long history yet to come, which alleged universals will become universals recognized by "all the persons concerned" (Habermas), that is, by the "representative persons" (Rawls) of all cultures. In this regard, one of the faces of practical wisdom that we are tracking throughout this study is the art of conversation, in which the ethics of argumentation is put to the test in the conflict of convictions." (Ricœur, 1990/1992, pp. 289-290) [34]

As such, even if the values associated with human rights may have links to a Western cultural context and history, for Ricœur, this does not mean that we cannot take its claim to universality seriously. However, taking its claim to universality also means that we cannot turn a blind eye to

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[34] See also Ricœur's comments in "Éthique et morale" (1990) in footnote 24 in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

the influence of culture and history on our normative conceptions. The conversation about human rights and other moral universals should therefore be open to the possibility that there are other valid universal claims expressed through the linguistic resources in cultural contexts outside the West.[35]

Taylor likewise considers human rights to be potentially universalizable and, like Ricœur, he argues that true normative consensus cannot only be at the level of moral norms, but must also consider underlying justifications. While Taylor finds that some level of consensus can perhaps be reached at the "formal" level of moral norms alone, he finds that difficulties arise when we consider how cross-cultural normative consensus building unfolds in actual practice. Similar to Ricœur's observation that a discourse ethic which brackets out conceptions of the good would ultimately lack relevance to diverse cultural contexts, Taylor finds that the kind of "respect" necessary for meaningful conversation cannot be maintained without some degree of mutual understanding and engagement at the level of underlying justifications. He also argues that "hybrid-forms" of moral universals can emerge through interactions across cultures at this level. As mentioned above, he cites the global spread of the Gandhian *ahimsa*-inspired approach to non-violent resistance which emerged within a particular cultural context but has since gained recognition in other contexts.

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[35] While Ricœur does make the argument that inchoate universals can only be recognized as universal through this discussion, he does not consider all universals to be inchoate (as mentioned on p. 66 in Chapter 3 of this thesis). It is my interpretation that Ricœur focuses on values expressed in the declaration of human rights as inchoate universals because of controversy in the debate between universalism and contextualism regarding whether the declaration of human rights merely expresses Western cultural values or whether the declarative texts have something genuinely universal to say. Despite the fact that there is a near "universal" consensus around the values underlying the declaration, by referring to them as inchoate universals or universals "in context" Ricœur is able to respond to the contextualist suspicion towards human rights by showing how its claim to universality can still be taken seriously even if it is the case that human rights legislation emerged in Western cultural and historical context.

Just as Ricœur considers dialogue on universal moral norms impossible without drawing

on the normative content of convictions, Taylor finds that it is difficult to see how participants

could engage in the difficult and long-term process of working towards consensus on human

rights without trying to understand the underlying justifications and conceptions of the good that

"move" another. For Taylor, engaging at the level of underlying justifications therefore not only

involves critical reflection and deliberation but a process of "sympathetic understanding" that

aims at overcoming cultural distance. As mentioned above, Taylor finds this idea of sympathetic

understanding across contexts expressed in Gadamer's notion of a fusion of horizons. Ricœur

likewise argues that a form of practical discourse which draws on the ethical content of

convictions "incorporated in concrete forms of life" (Ricœur, 1990/1992, p. 289) should be

characterized by an attitude of openness to other contexts, an attitude which he finds reflected in

his notion of "linguistic hospitality". As discussed in Chapter 3, Ricœur argues that an effort at

understanding characterized by linguistic hospitality involves a sincere attempt to enter the

"linguistic universe" of another while, at the same time, welcoming their words into "one's own

linguistic space" (Ricœur, 2001/2007b, p. 246). Considering Taylor's arguments above,

Ricœur's notion of linguistic hospitality might suggest the kind of attitude towards other contexts

that is needed for the kind of sympathetic understanding that Taylor associates with the

Gadamerian fusion of horizons. Whatever the case, for both Ricœur and Taylor, any process of

building consensus on moral universals must go beyond critical argumentation and attend to the

ways in which *understanding* develops across diverse contexts at the level of underlying

justifications or convictions concerning the "good life".

Conclusion

In sum, both Taylor and Ricœur share the perspective that the "universalist" project underlying human rights is a possibility. At the same time, they recognize that the tension between the demand for a global consensus on human rights and the contextualist "suspicion" of cultural imperialism renders a purely formalistic account of consensus building implausible. This is because any account of normative consensus building that limits the object of discussion to norms of conduct and legal forms cannot meaningfully respond to the contextualist critique because it is opaque to the underlying conceptions of the good on which it relies. These conceptions of the good are, according to both Taylor and Ricœur, shaped by cultural and historical context. Both philosophers find it is therefore necessary to develop an approach to consensus building on moral norms that is able to engage at the level of underlying notions of the good life and their diverse "contextual" articulations without sacrificing the goal of consensus around moral universals. Taylor's arguments in "An Unforced Consensus" and Ricœur's arguments in the Ninth Study of *Oneself as Another* thus describe a 'middle' ground in the debate between moral universalism and cultural relativism that draws insight from both rather than treating them as mutually irreconcilable positions. In doing so, they are able to articulate how the tension between universalism and contextualism, if approached properly, may not only yield a firmer grounding for universal human rights but also greater consensus around moral universals more generally.

Conclusion

In this thesis I examined the positions of Paul Ricœur and Charles Taylor on moral universals in order to shed light on a possible path beyond the debate between universalism and contextualism as one of major oppositions in contemporary philosophy. In both rearticulating Ricœur and Taylor's major arguments and bringing them into comparison with one another, I outlined a position that refigures the opposition between universalism and contextualism as a creative tension rather than an insurmountable dichotomy. I argued that this position can be found in the work of both authors and can be seen reflected in their arguments concerning human rights as a particular example of debate around moral universals. In doing so, I attempted to show how their perspective not only represents an overlooked position in the debate between moral universalism and cultural relativism but also represents a key point of departure for comparing the two philosophers' ethical frameworks.

In the first part of this thesis, I focused on Ricœur's arguments concerning moral universals in *Oneself as Another*. Specifically, I examined how his notion of "inchoate universals" relates to his dialectical conception of the relationship between ethics and morality. One of the major aims of this section was to identify some of the core threads of Ricœur's arguments in *Oneself as Another* that underlie his arguments concerning moral universals and human rights. Namely: (1) the dialectical relationship between Aristotelian teleology and Kantian deontology; (2) the role of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) in mediating between the ethical and moral levels in situations of conflict; (3) the tension between universalism and contextualism that underlies ethical conflict; and (4) the further role of *phronesis* as a practical mediation between universal moral norms and conceptions of the good life shaped by cultural context. Rather than seeing an impasse between procedural theories of moral universalism that

attempt to bracket out conceptions of the good life and a cultural relativism that finds diverse conceptions of the good to be incommensurable, Ricœur seeks to combine the insights of universalism and contextualism and apply them to the question of intersubjective deliberation raised by Habermas and Apel. Ricœur's reading of the tension between universalism and contextualism thus reflects his earlier arguments about *phronesis* as steering a path between the univocal application of moral norms and a moral situationism that rejects the idea of universality.

Chapter 3 focused on Ricœur's response to the contextualist critique of moral universalism and discussed how his notion of inchoate universals reconciles the aspiration towards universal moral norms underlying Habermas and Apel's discourse ethics with the observations raised by the contextualist critique. In doing so, Ricœur articulates a middle ground between the two sides of the debate, conserving Habermas and Apel's argument for the possibility of normative consensus while incorporating the objections raised by contextualism. This not only offers a possible way to overcome the dichotomy between moral universals and the recognition of the cultural influence on morality, but opens space for novel and creative applications and reformulations of moral norms themselves.

In the second part of this thesis, I brought Ricœur's work into conversation with Charles Taylor's arguments in *Sources of the Self*. The aim of this section was to show the similarities between Taylor and Ricœur's position on moral selfhood and how this contributes to the emergence of a middle position between moral universalism and cultural relativism. While the two philosophers adopt slightly different argumentative angles, I argued that they illuminate complementary dimensions of the relationship between moral norms and underlying conceptions of the good. Taylor and Ricœur's recognition that moral norms depend on notions of the good that are articulated in particular cultural and historical contexts leads both philosophers towards a

similar position on universalism and contextualism This perspective opens space for thinking about how consensus on moral universals can emerge in the context of global pluralism in a way that draws on cultural context without sacrificing the universalist aspirations of proceduralist moral theories. As Ricœur mentions in *Reflections on the Just*, the universal and the contextual are not "opposed to each other on the same plane, but stem from two levels of morality". The first level is a "presumed universal obligation" and the second is "a practical wisdom that takes into account the diversity of cultural heritages." (Ricœur, 2001/2007b, p. 248).[36]

It may be tempting to conclude from the above statement that because Ricœur finds the universal to be linked with the deontological idea of a universal obligation and the contextual to be associated with cultural heritage, that the dialectic between universalism and contextualism simply maps on to the dialectic between teleology and deontology and vise versa. However, if we look closely, the tension between universalism and contextualism is found at the level of *both* moral norms and conceptions of the good. It does not seem to be the case that only moral norms carry a universal tenor for Ricœur. The conceptions of the good on which they are based also claim universality. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Ricœur does not see a sharp dichotomy between judgements of value and judgements of fact (Ricœur, 1990/1992, p. 170). Variations on the ethical aim thus purport to say something about reality as it is or, at least, make some kind of claim to validity beyond an individual's subjective experience or a particular cultural context. As Ricœur mentions "No moral conviction would have any force if it did not make a claim to universality" (Ricœur, 2001/2007b, p. 247). At the same time, convictions, or conceptions of the

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[36] "… universalism and contextualism are not opposed to each other on the same plane but stem from two different levels of morality, that of a presumed universal obligation and that of a practical wisdom that takes into account the diversity of cultural heritages. It would not be off base to say that the transition from the universal plane of obligation to the historical one of application comes down to returning to the resources of the ethics of a good life in order, if not to resolve, at least to pacify the aporias arising from the inordinate demands of a theory of justice or a theory of discussion that bases its formalism only on procedural principles and rigor." (Ricœur, 2001/2007b, p. 248)

good life, are also "contextual" insofar as they are articulated through the linguistic resources available in a given cultural and historical context. It is because of this close relationship between conceptions of the good life and our "ethical" language shaped by culture and marked by history that Ricœur finds that mutual understanding on claims to universality ought to be approached as an act of translation across contexts. On the other hand, universal moral norms are also "contextual" in the sense that they are grounded in conceptions of the good shaped by language and history. And yet, as was discussed in the preceding chapters, by claiming to apply to all, universality is also built into the very concept of moral norms.

It follows from the above that when Ricœur argues at the end of the Ninth Study that the "reflective equilibrium between the ethics of argumentation and considered convictions" is the "highest" and "most fragile" expression of the dialectic between teleology and deontology (Ricœur, 1990/1992, p. 289), we should be attentive to how this dialectic applies to *both* the ethics of argumentation and considered convictions. The process of intersubjective deliberation aiming at at rational consensus on moral universals (Habermas and Apel's reinterpretation of Kantian deontology) must draw on conceptions of the good (Aristotelian teleology) which are articulated through the resources available in a given context (Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*). Likewise, for Ricœur, convictions about the good life (teleology) need to be submitted to the "test" of argumentation in a deliberative process (deontology); a process which, in turn, must draw on such conceptions of the good if participants are to have any normative content on which to deliberate in the first place. He describes this multi-layered dialectic which involves two simultaneous processes of testing articulations of the good life through rational argumentation and bringing universal moral norms to bear on diverse cultural contexts as an act of *phronesis*. This rather complex imbrication of hermeneutical circles helps us to break out of the tendency to

see universalism and contextualism as an "either-or" debate, but does so in a way that does not loose sight of the valid insights that both perspectives contain.

A similar position can be seen to underlie Taylor's arguments about strong evaluations and moral sources. It is not only that strong evaluations purport to say something about reality 'as it is', but they are also articulated in the language of a given cultural and historical context (Taylor, 1989, 4.1, p. 91). However, the fact that strong evaluations are *shaped* by context does not mean that they are *limited* to context. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Taylor does not adopt the position that conceptions of the good found in diverse cultural and historical contexts are a priori incommensurable. Rather, he finds that we should be open to seeing them as commensurable until we encounter cases of total incommensurability in actual practice. He argues that, in a similar way to how the strength of a scientific theory should be just based on its ability to "make sense" of the physical universe, articulations of the good life should also be judged on their capacity to better explain our moral universe. As also mentioned in Chapter 4, Taylor finds that we can judge the validity of an articulation by what he calls an "error reducing move", whereby we see how it clarifies certain misconceptions or offers a fuller picture of human life and experience than we may have initially had (3.2, p. 72). While Taylor allows for the possibility that a given articulation of the good might potentially offer a better, or more complete, account of our moral experience, this does not imply that it totally negates other accounts any more than the model of quantum physics negates the atomic model. Rather, just as a new scientific model overlaps in certain respects with earlier models but offers a clearer account of the same phenomena, another articulation of the good may offer a clearer account of the same moral phenomena that was the object of our initial articulation. Taylor likens the above process to the way in which we get a clearer view of something unfamiliar or perplexing by taking a second,

more focused, look at it. In this case we are still looking at the same thing as before but now have more clarity about it.[37] For this reason, he argues that any reliable moral view must be "grounded in our strongest intuitions" that have stood the test of possible error-reducing moves (3.2, p. 75).

Limitations and Further Research

While this thesis brought texts from both Ricœur and Taylor into conversation with one another, it did not include an extensive discussion of the ways in which both authors have themselves engaged with one another's work. A more fine-grained analysis of Ricœur's reception of Taylor as well as Taylor's reception of Ricœur would surely yield further insights into the influence that these philosophers have had on one another as well as, perhaps, some important differences that may come out in contrast. While Taylor does not engage with Ricœur's work directly in *Sources of the Self,* he does draw on him extensively in his more recent book *The Language Animal* (2016) and has analysed Ricœur's approach to hermeneutics and approach to history in other places.[38] Moreover, in a recent interview published in the 2020 volume *The Philosophy of Reenchantment,* Taylor identifies Ricœur as one of the major influences on his arguments concerning strong evaluations (Taylor and Meijer, 2020, pp. 25-26). A deeper look at the various ways in which Ricœur's work has influenced Taylor would, no doubt, yield important insights into the work of both philosophers.

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[37] "The predicament of practical reason resembles the most primitive context in which I acquire factual knowledge, that of perception …. A typical response when we encounter something surprising, unsettling, or seemingly wrong is to stop, shake our heads, concentrate, set ourselves to command a good view and look again. When we look again, we give greater credence to this second perception … because we have the sense that we now have a better prise on the situation. Our sense that the transition was a purchase-improving one is what underlies our present confidence." (Taylor, 1989, 3.2, p. 75)

[38] See Taylor, 1968; 1979. See also: Carr, Taylor and Ricœur, 1985/1991, pp. 174-179**.**

Ricœur has likewise drawn directly on Taylor's arguments in a significant amount of his later work published after *Oneself as Another*, particularly in *Reflections on the Just* where he adopts Taylor's notions of strong evaluations and moral sources in multiple chapters and includes an in depth commentary on *Sources of the Self*.[39] While I have touched on a few of Ricœur's references to Taylor in the preceding pages, a more detailed analysis of the various ways in which Ricœur has employed Taylor's arguments and engaged his work would surely push the arguments made in this thesis further.

In the first part of this thesis, I devoted considerable space to exploring Ricœur's reading of Kant followed by his comments on Habermas and Apel. However, I limited my focus to Ricœur's interpretation of these authors as expressed in his own writings. This, of course, was because one of the main aims of this thesis was to develop a reading of Ricœur's position on universalism and contextualism as discussed in *Oneself as Another*. That being said, I do not doubt that a deeper analysis of Ricœur's reading of Kant that draws on primary sources from the latter would shed light on both Ricœur's own thought as well as potential discrepancies with other Kantian texts. As for Habermas, examining how Ricœur's arguments might compare with his later work and revised positions might help to correlate Ricœur's position with some of the more recent discussions that Habermas has been engaged in.[40]

Finally, my thesis has certainly focused much more on similarities than points of difference between the two authors. A more critical comparison that highlights areas of potential

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[39] See Ricœur, 1994/2000c; 2001/2007d; 2001/2007e; 2001/2007f; 2001/2007g. See also Ricœur and Changeux, 1998/2002.

[40] I am thinking, in particular, of Habermas' more recent concern with the role of religion in the public sphere. See: Habermas, 2005/2008 and Habermas 2008/2010. Something of this nature has already been carried out by Junker-Kenny (2014) in her comparison of Ricœur, Rawls, and Habermas on religion in the public sphere cited in the Introduction and Chapter 3 of this thesis.

disagreement or tension between the two authors' ethical frameworks would likely bring added

rigour to this work. However, with that being said, identifying and articulating points of

agreement is a first step to any meaningful dialogue. As Taylor himself has mentioned

concerning Ricœur's thought, "… the first task it requires of us is a stricter understanding.

Criticisms, if there are any, may follow." (Taylor, 1985/1991, p. 174)

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