

CHAPTER 1

Knowledge and the Self: *Charles Taylor's Sources of the Self*

Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self* has at least two objectives. On the one hand, it traces the historical sources of the modern understanding of selfhood. On the other hand, and perhaps more important, *Sources of the Self* aims to contribute to the *reconstruction* of that same understanding of selfhood. Specifically, it promotes the view that our description of the self should be radically revised so as to take seriously the interdependent claims that values have objective reality and that our moral sensibilities play a central role in determining who we are and what it means to be a self.

Though most readers are likely drawn to *Sources of the Self* by the historical promise implied in its title, Taylor signals the importance of his second objective by prefacing the historical analysis with a one hundred-page defense of the claim that to be adequate *any* description of the self must acknowledge the extent to which human identity is deeply intertwined with our understanding of the good. Rather than appealing to historical sources to defend this claim, Taylor develops a phenomenological argument that lifts up the extent to which human experience is inevitably colored by our capacity (he might even say need) to engage in qualitative judgments. "My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand" (1989, 27). Viewed from this perspective appetition is at the heart of what we mean by life, and the desire to be rightly related to what we take to be good is among those core cravings that constitute life as human (ibid., 44).

VALUE AND THE SELF

Taylor considers it reductionistic to attempt to view the self from a perspective stripped of its moral/aesthetic framework. We live by assessing

the *qualitative* dimensions of things in our world, including ourselves. This constant sifting and measuring is a component of every action and supplies the rationale behind almost every decision.

One could put it this way: because we cannot but orient ourselves to the good, and thus determine our place relative to it and hence determine the direction of our lives, we must inescapably understand our lives in narrative form, as a “quest.” But one could perhaps start from another point: because we have to determine our place in relation to the good, therefore we cannot be without an orientation to it, and hence must see our life in story. From whichever direction, I see these conditions as connected facets of the same reality, inescapable structural requirements of human agency. (Ibid., 51–52)

Because he views the self as emerging from within the context of a moral/aesthetic framework, Taylor rejects the claims of those who would identify the self with a set of core cognitive functions. Our moral/aesthetic frameworks are complicated constructions that combine broad cultural inheritances with dense mixtures of abstract reasoning and the immediacies of concrete experience. Thus in defining the self Taylor turns away from cognitive function and toward narrativity and metaphors such as the *quest for the good* in order to preserve the nuances, ambiguities, and complexities that we bring to bear on all of our qualitative assessments about the world and our selves.

Taylor contrasts this approach with the tendency among modern thinkers to distill the moral self through a few abstract principles, such as the categorical imperative (Kant) or universal justice (Habermas). “In both these cases, and in many others, the ‘moral’ encompasses a domain significantly narrower than what ancient philosophers define as the ‘ethical’” (ibid., 64). As Taylor sees it, “our tendency to limit the range of human moral reflection parallels the rise of natural science and its elimination of the language of final causes, its concomitant dismissal of qualitative distinctions from scientific descriptions of the natural world, and its objectification of all things including the self. Followed to its natural conclusion, science has rendered us ‘inarticulate’ about the basis for our moral judgments” (ibid., 53–91). There is literally nowhere to stand from which we could explain or justify who we are and why we respond to the world in the way that we do. This has led us to speak as if we could identify a self absent of those values that, though hidden from view, continue to give direction to our ownmost feelings, thoughts, and actions. For Taylor such a claim is an illusion. He argues instead that our very identity is tied up with the values that give structure and direction to our lives.

Taylor goes on to say we should not be surprised or dismayed to learn that natural science fails to discern anything like the qualitative

distinctions that animate human life. After all, science is a form of inquiry whose objective has been to describe things from a perspective freed of anthropocentric conceptions. It is “an unjustified leap to say that [notions of good and right] therefore are not as real, objective, and non-relative as any other part of the natural world” (ibid., 56). Against such scientific reductionists, Taylor pointedly asks the following rhetorical question:

What better measure of reality do we have in human affairs than those terms that on critical reflection and after correction of the errors we can detect make the best sense of our lives. Making the best sense here includes not only offering the best, most realistic orientation about the good but also allowing us best to understand and make sense of the actions and feelings of ourselves and others. For our language of deliberation is continuous with our language of assessment, and this with the language in which we explain what people do and feel. (Ibid., 56–57)

Taylor’s defense of the language of values should not be confused with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century obscurantists who fought feverishly against the natural sciences in an effort to preserve a theological basis for human dignity. He gives natural science free rein to construct whatever languages seem appropriate to its pursuits. What he objects to is the tendency to generalize such languages to cover *all* dimensions of human life, arguing that it is possible to do so only if we ignore or deny aspects of life that are central to making it human.

Theories like behaviorism or certain strands of contemporary computer-struck cognitive psychology, which declare “phenomenology” irrelevant on principle, are based on a crucial mistake. They are “changing the subject,” in Donald Davidson’s apt expression. What we need to explain is people living their lives; the terms in which they cannot avoid living them cannot be removed from the explanandum, unless we can propose other terms in which they could live them more clairvoyantly. We cannot just leap outside of these terms altogether, on the grounds that their logic doesn’t fit some model of “science” and that we know *a priori* that human beings must be explicable in this “science.” This begs the question. How can we ever know that humans can be explained by any scientific theory until we actually explain how they live their lives in its terms? (Ibid., 58)

Thus, as Taylor sees it, even those who promote scientific reductions of the human to mere mechanical processes do so only while operating within the context of the very values which their theories claim to unmask as epiphenomenal. In short, there is no way to climb out of the framework of human reflection, a framework that is always partly structured by valuative thoughts, feelings, and goals. Scientists who claim to

have more accurately described the world without the qualitative dimension are “changing the subject” and describing an imagined world, one where human experience simply does not exist.

In light of all this, it is possible to read part 1 of *Sources of the Self* as raising the following pointed question: Why should we continue to allow ourselves to take seriously modern descriptions of the self that seem to render incomprehensible the kinds of activities that form the substance of human experience? The long answer as to *how* this situation came about is contained in four hundred pages of analysis, in which Taylor traces the complicated history of the West’s description of the self. The short answer, however, is that we have allowed a particularly powerful form of discourse (natural science) to extend its range beyond the tasks for which it was designed. “Of course, the terms of our best account [of human life] will never figure in a physical theory of the universe. But that just means that our human reality cannot be understood in the terms appropriate for this physics. . . . Our value terms purport to give us insight into what it is to live in the universe as a human being, and this is a quite different matter from that which physical science claims to reveal and explain” (ibid., 59).

Taylor, however, is interested in more than just detailing how we got ourselves into this awkward situation. The reader who takes part 1 of *Sources of the Self* seriously should see the book as a call to reject the Enlightenment-inspired assertion that qualities and values are epiphenomenal subjective illusions that we impose upon a value-neutral, mechanistic universe. Viewed from this perspective the rest of the book is designed to lift up what has gone into the construction of the modern understanding of selfhood in order to point forward toward the possibility of a newly reconstructed discourse about the self, one that affirms the objective reality of qualitative distinctions and values.

Though *Sources of the Self* points toward a reconstructed discourse about the self, it does remain largely a historical text. Taylor does not present his own fully reconstructed philosophy of selfhood. Nevertheless, he does make a few suggestions that point in the direction he believes new approaches to the self ought to follow. For example, early on he coins the term *hypergoods* to refer to the background values that set the stage for all of our moral and aesthetic judgments. Though typically hidden behind a veil of inarticulacy woven by the modern understanding of selfhood, hypergoods are “goods which not only are incomparably more important than others but provide the standpoint from which these must be weighed, judged, decided about” (ibid., 63). Thus, hypergoods are components of the moral/aesthetic framework that we inherit and modify. They serve to orient us to ourselves and the world around us. Without hypergoods it is hard to see what we might mean by

human identity. For, as Taylor sees us, to be a self at all is to have the capacity to take an evaluative position with respect to the things we confront in our world.

In light of Taylor's quest to restore talk of values and qualities, as well as his constructive description of hypergoods, it is interesting to note that both Whitehead and Dewey built their entire philosophic projects around variations on the assertion that to make sense of ourselves and the way we relate to the world, value must be given ontological status. For Whitehead it is a truism that all organisms are oriented toward maximizing the intensity of experience, a trait he defines in aesthetic/moral terms. Similarly, Dewey points to a line of continuity that stretches from the amoeba's quest for satisfactory physical transactions to the exquisitely complicated satisfactions that culminate in higher-order human experiences.

Some might complain that by describing human values as a subset of these broader organic tendencies, Whitehead and Dewey effectively reduce human experience to a more complicated version of something that animals enjoy. The fear behind such accusations is that both thinkers are engaging in a naturalistic reductionism whose aim isn't far from the scientific reductionisms that Taylor roundly criticizes. But Dewey and Whitehead argue that efforts to protect the integrity of human ends by elevating and separating them from ends-in-nature can lead only to confusion. As Taylor shows, the Western tradition moved directly from a Platonic vision that locates value outside the human realm to the modern scientific conclusion that values are epiphenomenal, subjective impositions on a mechanistic universe. Dewey and Whitehead, by contrast, both argue in favor of a form of continuity that is not guilty of scientific reductionisms. They claim that human values are continuous with those that regulate less complicated organic processes in order to provide an ontological basis for asserting their reality. There is nothing unreal or subjective about the Deweyan and Whiteheadian understanding of value. Value, in all its forms, has an ontological status that, as Taylor shows, many modern philosophers have wanted to deny.

Thus, in affirming the ontological status of value, both Whitehead and Dewey anticipate essential themes in Taylor's analysis even as they reaffirm a commitment to nonscientific forms of scientific discourse. In fact, one advantage both have over Taylor is the conviction that it is possible to develop a naturalistic position that is not reductionistic. There are instances in the early chapters of his book where Taylor seems to equate naturalism with scientific reductionism. Since he does not consider either the pragmatic or process traditions, which both affirm a nonreductionistic naturalism, it isn't clear from the text whether he

would find the Deweyan or Whiteheadian options amenable routes toward restoring value language.¹ As we will see in chapters 4 and 5, pragmatists and process thinkers are able to resurrect value language because they undertake the metaphysical and cosmological arguments that are necessary to make the case for recognizing the ontological status of value. Taylor, who avoids metaphysics in *Sources of the Self*, is on shaky ground when he calls for a reconstructed discourse about the self without explaining what the ontological status of value ought to be. Absent a metaphysical argument, all Taylor can do is rely upon the phenomenological argument that we cannot imagine ourselves operating in the world without engaging in a continual evaluative process. As Dewey and Whitehead make clear, however, to develop a description of the self that takes seriously the role value plays in formulating our identities, just about everything having to do with our understanding of knowledge and action must be rethought. We have to recast our description of matter so that value is restored to it. This leads us to redescribe knowledge in a way that removes any trace of the Platonic and Cartesian notion that knowing is a state of mind. In its place, we need to begin imagining knowledge as a way of relating to something, as a kind of action.

Of course, the denial of ontological status to value is a notion that would be perceived as utterly foreign (and perhaps even barbaric) by most Chinese thinkers. Throughout his life, Wang Yang-ming adhered to the traditional Mencian position that every human is born with an innate awareness of and tendency toward the good. This tendency, if nurtured properly and given a chance to develop, eventually blossoms into a full-fledge moral sensibility, one that is truly human. Thus, according to Confucius, Mencius, and Wang, we are raised up into our humanness (*jen*) by families, teachers, and communities, who have a responsibility to develop in us a more finely tuned responsiveness to values that are inherent in the very nature of things. Like all good Confucians, Wang would automatically reject modern Western efforts to ascribe human selfhood to something that could exist apart from these innate moral feelings and responsibilities. Moreover, like Dewey and Whitehead, Wang draws upon a much broader set of metaphysical arguments to create a context within which it makes sense to claim that human values are interwoven with values that underlie the whole of things. While such talk may sound to modern ears like a form of wishful thinking, I hope to demonstrate in chapter 3 why we ought to pay close attention to thinkers such as Wang whose work emerges from a tradition where the fact/value and subject/object dichotomies have not played the same destructive role that Taylor shows them to be playing in Western intellectual history.

INTERIORITY AND DISENGAGEMENT:
OVERCOMING THE MODERN SELF

As I said at the beginning of this discussion, Taylor's primary objective in *Sources of the Self* is to create the intellectual space necessary for exploring alternatives to the traditional description of selfhood. By showing that contemporary attitudes about the self are a modern construct, Taylor opens us to the possibility of alternative formulations. Rather than experiencing the structures of selfhood as a given, we are freed to seek remedies to the problems and anomalies that those structures entail.

For example, Taylor examines in considerable detail the sources of our attachment to the metaphors of "inwardness." In phrases such as *I know it in my heart*, we sometimes reveal a prereflective conviction that each of us enjoys a purely private realm of immediate subjective experience that is the locus of our "real inner self." This "inner experience" or "interior space" is often perceived as the *only* place where our true identity can be found. It is the one thing that, if taken away, would surely entail the destruction of what we call the "self."

Taylor points out, however, that this very notion of interiority has rendered confusing how we relate to the so-called external world. It also makes anomalous the status of our bodies, which serve a mediating role between the inner self and the world around us.

But strong as this partitioning of the world appears to us, as solid as this localization may seem, and anchored in the very nature of the human agent, it is in large part a feature of our world, the world of modern, Western people. The localization is not a universal one, which human beings recognize as a matter of course, as they do for instance that their heads are above their torsos. Rather it is a function of a historically limited mode of self-interpretation, one which has become dominant in the modern West and which may indeed spread thence to other parts of the globe but which had a beginning in time and space and may have an end. (Ibid., 111)

Human beings did not always view themselves in this way. In fact, as Taylor shows, it took more than two thousand years, roughly the time from Homer to Locke, to create and then occupy this purely inner world where selves enjoy the pleasure of complete autonomy and yet are also forced to suffer the terror of solipsistic isolation.

Metaphors of interiority are particularly important for my argument because of the role that they play in legitimating the separation of knowledge from action. By locating mental states within a so-called inner space, knowledge is lifted clean out of the realm of action. The mind's "inner eye" seems to observe the external world from a metaphysical distance,

and the vital link between knowledge and action becomes obscure. As Taylor makes clear, the way to escape from this situation is to become self-conscious about the route that led us to our current confusion over the relationships among self, world, knowledge, and action so that we can begin to consider alternative paths.

Many have remarked on the West's growing sense of interiority from Homer to Plato through Augustine and on up into Descartes and Locke. Homeric poetry exhibits little sense of an interior self, relying instead on the assumption that selves grow large through brave deeds and sumptuous living. Plato, by contrast, shifts attention away from actions and toward the ideas that he says ought to be directing actions. According to Taylor, however, Platonism exhibits only a very thin sense of interiority. In the Platonic tradition, the focus is typically on our ignorance of ideas rather than the self. Ideas are viewed as objective markers of what is real and important. They reveal a rational order that transcends any particular knower, an order we can use to guide us in our actions. Thus, in both the Homeric and Platonic traditions, the emphasis is on the actual living of life, rather than on the self that lives it.

Things change, however, with Augustine, who turns a self-reflexive eye upon the actions that make up our lives.² Suspicious of his unconscious motives and hyper-attuned to differences between his own first-person accounts of experience and accounts given by others, Augustine translates Socrates' concern for the unexamined *life* into an anxiety over the unexamined *self*. As Taylor reads him, Augustine's quest to locate the sources of his own sinfulness led him to the conviction that the route back to the divine is through the purification of his subjective impulses. Thus, Augustine shifts the focus to purification of the will and away from the acquisition of knowledge. He moves away from transcendent ideas to a new level of reflexive awareness. Ultimately, Augustine's fascination with the motivations that lay behind his actions required that he posit within each of us a *realm* where such motives could be observed and a *capacity* to stand apart from those motives so that one is capable of modifying them.

Though the moves from Homer through Plato to Augustine all contributed to the interiorization of Western consciousness, they are still a long way from the remarkable transformations that appeared with the advent of modernity. In Descartes, Taylor claims, there is a tremendous shift as Augustine's reflexivity is hitched to a new Galilean cosmology and radicalized to a degree that Augustine could not have imagined. Once we see nature as a vastly complicated mechanism, it transforms everything about human experience and human values. The Platonic interweaving of science and morals is immediately unraveled, and scientific knowledge, now disjoined from phronesis, is redefined as *represen-*

tation. “To know reality is to have a correct representation of things—a correct picture within of outer reality as it came to be conceived. And this conception of knowledge comes to seem unchallengeable, once an account of knowledge in terms of self-revealing reality, like the Ideas, was abandoned” (ibid., 144). By supplanting ancient and scholastic teleological assumptions, the new science effectively redefined knowledge and emptied the natural world of its intrinsic value.

Of course, the shift to a mechanized view of nature involved more than merely giving up residual faith in a Platonic moral order. Taylor points out that after Descartes, it is no longer tenable to assert that the qualitative characteristics of experience are aspects of nature. “We have to cease seeing the material universe as a kind of medium, in which psychic contents like heat and pain, or the supposed Forms or Species of the scholastic tradition, could be lodged or embodied or manifest themselves” (ibid., 146). The toothache is no longer in the tooth but rather in one’s mind. Pain is not a part of objective reality but rather is the mind’s way of translating a specific organic state into an experiential one. In this way, the qualitative content of our sensory data shifts from the world into the mind. Consequently they are viewed as largely deceptive and confusing and in need of carefully reasoned controls in order to ensure that we do not lapse into error.

Thus, to gain control over our lives, Descartes adopted what Taylor calls a “disengaged” perspective, one that enables us to separate ourselves from the immediacies of everyday experience so as to be capable of thinking critically about the ideas and sensations that occupy our minds. “To bring this whole domain of sensations and sensible properties to clarity means to grasp it as an external observer would, tracing the causal connection between states of the world or my body, described in primary properties, and the ‘ideas’ they occasion in my mind. Clarity and distinctness requires that we step outside ourselves and take a disengaged perspective” (ibid.). From this perspective, the interior knowing subject objectifies everything. Even the body is viewed as an object capable of being observed, sifted, and measured by an immaterial subject who employs rational procedures in order to discern truth from error, fact from fiction.

Though Taylor doesn’t emphasize it, the link between Descartes’s disengagement and the separation of knowledge from action should be obvious. By requiring that reason disengage from the immediacies of subjective experience, Descartes effectively removes our cognitive faculties from the realm of action. The certainty that he craves could be attained only by suspending immediate experience and limiting rational judgments to an interior realm that is not subject to the changing conditions of daily living. In short, to make it possible for us to attain certainty,

Descartes posits an entirely inner, nonmaterial dimension to subjective experience, one that is necessarily separate from the realm of action where uncertainty is a structural necessity.

Nevertheless, Descartes was interested in more than establishing a certain foundation for rationalist sciences. As Taylor reads him, his whole moral philosophy was also built around the impulse to disengage reason from the hurly burly of immediate subjective feelings. Since Descartes counseled disengagement from subjective experience as essential to clarifying thinking about the natural world, it is not surprising that he applied the same technique in seeking control over the self. According to Descartes, each of us should step back from our passions in order to allow our own rational faculties to give guidance and coherence to our lives. Viewed this way, our rational faculties function from within an inner sanctum separated from the passions and therefore capable of modifying them when the situation calls for it. While this may sound like a reiteration of Platonic and Augustinian themes, Taylor insists there are important differences that mark the shift from the ancient to the modern paradigm for selfhood.

With respect to Plato it is immediately clear that Descartes has expanded the internal life of the subject and internalized the very objects of knowledge that Plato urged us to seek. “For Plato, to be rational we have to be right about the order of things. According to Descartes, rationality means thinking according to certain canons. The judgment now turns on *properties of the activity of thinking* rather than on the substantive beliefs which emerge from it” (ibid., 156; italics added). From this perspective, Descartes follows Augustine’s lead by internalizing Plato’s Ideas and making them a product of reasoning rather than a facet of the objective world. Nevertheless, Descartes also differs from Augustine with respect to the end toward which this disengaged reason aims.

For Augustine, the path inward was only a step on the way upward. . . . [The] thinker comes to sense more and more his lack of self-sufficiency, comes to see more and more that God acts within him. . . . In contrast, for Descartes the whole point of the reflexive turn is to achieve a quite self-sufficient certainty. . . . God’s existence has become a stage in my progress towards science through the methodical ordering of evident insight. . . . The centre of gravity has shifted. (Ibid., 156–57)

Descartes’s disengaged reason suggests we have a level of autonomy that simply was not imaginable for Augustine. By disengaging from the immediacy of its own subjective feelings, it objectifies its “inclinations, tendencies, habits of thought and feelings so that they can be *worked on*,

doing away with some and strengthening others, until one meets the desired specifications” (ibid., 159). Thus, Descartes’s disengaged self is able to take a purely instrumental view of itself.

This Cartesian instrumentalism is carried forward and extended by Locke, according to Taylor. In fact, as Taylor tells the story, Locke represents something of a culminating moment in the history of the West’s understanding of the self. For it is Locke who transforms Descartes’s disengaged subject into what Taylor calls the “punctual self.”

To take this stance is to identify oneself with the power to objectify and remake, and by this act to distance oneself from all the particular features which are objects of potential change. What we are is essentially none of the latter, but what finds itself capable of fixing them and working on them. This is what the image of the point is meant to convey, drawing on the geometrical term: the real self is “extensionless” it is nowhere but in this power to fix things as objects. (Ibid., 171–72)

In order to see why Locke feels compelled to go beyond Descartes it is important to note the role of Locke’s antiteleological commitments. In an effort to put behind him any remnants of the scholastic sciences, he was impervious to assertions that natural objects and human beings might have a natural tendency toward either the true or the good. In fact, given the plurality of our habits and the murkiness of the sources of our passions, whatever tendencies we have are most likely plagued by error and confusion. Our task, he claims, is to clear away such cognitive habits of mind in order to locate those “rock bottom” ideas, which are secure by virtue of having *not* been influenced in any way by our own subjective activity. Having found a foundational starting point, we would then be free, in Cartesian fashion, to build up again the structures of knowledge and morals. However, unlike Descartes, whose foundation was located in a self-reflexive awareness of his own thought processes, Locke’s “ultimate stopping place is the particulate ideas of experience, sensation and reflection. And these are to be taken as rock bottom, because they *aren’t the product of activity at all*” (ibid., 166; italics added). Thus, for Locke, the starting point of all cognitive activity is the *purely passive* reception by the mind of mechanical impressions made by objects in the external world. He characterizes these ideas as interchangeable building blocks, only accidentally associated with a particular mind and easily transferable from one mind to another. Once the mind is stimulated by these impressions, the “real Lockian self,” that part of us that is fully and completely autonomous, steps in to work the ideas into coherent thoughts, plans, and projects. But the starting point is always impressions made by the world on a purely passive, immaterial mental substance.

Thus, Taylor sees in the history of the West's understanding of the self a progressive disengagement from the immediacy of lived experience. Beginning with Augustine's self-reflexive gaze and continuing through Descartes's objectification of our subjective states, the process culminates in Locke's reification of the self and his identification of it with the *capacity* to control our "inclinations, tendencies, habits of thought and feelings." From the perspective of a book on the unity of knowledge and action, it is easy to see how Taylor's story contains a parallel tale involving the growing separation of knowledge from action. With each step inward the links between knowledge and action grow more tenuous. By the time we get to Locke, for whom knowledge is founded on ideas that are imposed upon a passive mind, there is a complete separation. Lockian ideas begin as simple impressions, a form of purely passive mentality lacking any inherent qualitative or valuative content. Whatever qualities or values come to be attributed to them are the result of the habits of our own thought processes and not the things in themselves. Thus, the interiorization of the self as Taylor describes it has led us to the point where ideas are viewed as insubstantial, valueless, qualityless, mental atoms that are the building blocks from which mentality is constructed.

Taylor, of course, is deeply dissatisfied with the direction taken by Descartes and Locke. He points out that it is not obvious that the best route to knowledge is through disengagement. Oftentimes, the quest for greater control in a situation can only be attained through more engagement rather than less. Sometimes in everyday life the better route is to "lose oneself" in an experience. For example, critical distance is only one among a number of approaches to performing music or dancing or making love. Of course, someone might retort that these examples are hardly instances of "knowledge." Such a response, however, raises precisely the issue this book is seeking to examine. Why should we feel the need to draw such a sharp distinction between knowledge and activities such as music, dancing, and making love? As Taylor says,

The point of this contrast is to see that the option for an epistemology which privileges disengagement and control isn't self-evidently right. It requires certain assumptions. If the great age of rationalism and empiricism launched itself on the "way of ideas," it was because it took certain things for granted. Epistemically, it was based in part on a belief in mechanism as against the universe of meaningful order, or the ontic logos. . . . It was [also] powered by a radical rejection of teleology, of definitions of the human subject in terms of some inherent bent to the truth or to the good, which might give justification to an engaged exploration of the true tendencies of our nature. (Ibid., 164)

While a “belief in mechanism” and a “rejection of teleology” were important tools contributing to the rise of natural science, it may be a mistake to think that those assumptions should be treated as cornerstones for the cultivation of *all* knowledge about ourselves and the world around us. As Taylor points out these are useful for getting at the truth from a perspective that examines the world in abstraction from human experience. If, however, we are interested in cultivating our understanding of the world that includes our genuine joys, terrifying sadnesses, and sublime beauty, then we need to look beyond science’s faith in mechanism and its antiteleology. Constructing epistemological and cosmological theories that reduce such experiences to mere illusions or epiphenomenal impositions has precisely the opposite effect from that which is intended. Instead of giving us greater control over our lives, it gives us less. In sum, the interiorization of human consciousness has led us up what feels like a blind alley where our so-called inner life seems disjoined from our physical surroundings. It is a place where some form of dualism seems like the only alternative capable of preserving both our faith in natural science and our conviction that human life is meaningful.

Throughout the rest of his book Taylor explores responses to the crises engendered by the interiorization of the self and the triumph of the natural sciences. He points, for example, to intellectual movements that affirm everyday life, to the romantic reaction to rationalism, and to a variety of other late- and postmodern strategies. All attempt to negotiate some compromise between a fully objectified, mechanistic world and an interior life where the self is equated with pure autonomy and knowledge is separated from action. In this book, however, I am struggling to lift up a line of response not included among those Taylor considers. As I mentioned earlier, the pragmatic and process movements play no role in Taylor’s book. This is an interesting omission because thinkers such as James, Peirce, Dewey, and Whitehead argued that reason must remain “engaged” if it is to be capable of working on or improving the self. In other words, for these thinkers, disengagement from one’s immediate subjective feelings would be precisely the wrong route to take if we are seeking greater control of ourselves and the world around us. Instead of cutting us off from nature, they called upon us to recognize the extent to which human cognitive experience is an outgrowth of processes in nature. As Dewey said, “experience is both *of* and *in* nature” (Dewey, 1958, 4a).

The key to understanding the pragmatic approach to these issues is in its willingness to recognize the extent to which experience is not limited to cognition alone. Dewey, for example, argued in *Experience and Nature* that philosophers who focus their attention upon cognitive activities often fall victim to what he called the “intellectualist fallacy.” They

confusedly assume that the secondary higher-order levels of experience are primary. In effect, such philosophers tend to eliminate from consideration those dimensions of experience that are the bases for our qualitative and valuative sensibilities. Sensory data, for example, is sometimes taken to be the starting point for knowledge. As we have seen, Locke described the acquisition of knowledge as a process whereby objects in the physical world impress themselves upon a passive mind and only later are worked upon by higher mental processes. This is all a muddle as far as Dewey is concerned. "For things are objects to be treated, used, acted upon and with, enjoyed and endured even more than things to be known. They are things *had* before they are things cognized" (ibid., 21). It is in the "having," Dewey claims, that experience is clothed with qualitative content.

On this issue Whitehead is in agreement with Dewey. Like Dewey, he also divides experience into two modes that he calls "causal efficacy" and "presentational immediacy." While a detailed description of what Dewey and Whitehead mean by both of these modes will have to wait until chapters 4 and 5, respectively, it is important to note here that primary experience (Dewey) and causal efficacy (Whitehead) are both designed to fill the epistemological gap that Taylor has uncovered in his analysis of traditional theories of knowledge and the self. Rather than allowing such theories to effectively rule the qualitative and valuative dimension out of experience, Whitehead and Dewey suggest that we reimagine what we mean by experience. Like Taylor, their goal is to describe experience so that it is inclusive of those things without which it would be difficult to make sense of our lives. For Whitehead, qualitative and valuative feelings are the basis for higher-order cognitive activity. Instead of trying to fit them in after the fact, after the mind has formed its Lockian impressions, Whitehead argues that those feelings are embedded in the process from the beginning. In fact, in an ironic twist, Whitehead's magnum opus, *Process and Reality*, contains what contemporary literary theorists might call a "strong misreading" of Locke. In a discussion of Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Whitehead finds evidence leading in precisely the opposite direction from that attributed to Locke by Taylor (Whitehead, 1978, 51–60). Instead of confirming Descartes's move toward the disengaged subject, Whitehead sees Locke providing us with empirical ammunition to support the claim that cognitive experience is always fully engaged in the processes that surround it. He says that Locke "gives the most dispassionate description of those various elements in experience which common sense never lets slip. Unfortunately, he is hampered by inappropriate metaphysical categories that he never criticized. He should have widened the title of his book into 'An Essay Concerning Experi-

ence” (ibid., 51). Whitehead suggests that had Locke shifted from a discussion of understanding, with its limited focus on higher-order cognition, to a discussion of experience, which is much broader and inclusive of the noncognitive organic processes that are essential to the understanding, he would have been in position to develop an epistemology that includes those valuative and qualitative aspects of experience that seem so anomalous under traditional Lockian assumptions.

Of course, it would have done Locke no good merely to shift his epistemological theories so that they were inclusive of quality and value. As Whitehead’s statement suggests, Locke needed to criticize the metaphysical categories he inherited from Descartes and others. For experience to begin with qualitative and valuative feelings, things have to *be* valuable and quality-laden. Nevertheless, this is precisely what the move to mechanism and antiteleology ruled out. Dewey and Whitehead explore alternative metaphysical theories that replace traditional mechanistic metaphors with organic ones. For each, the goal is to develop a nondualistic ontology that is capable of handling value. In pursuit of this goal, both adopt a naturalistic approach to epistemological issues. Both describe mind as emerging directly from natural organic activities. This allows them to maintain that actual values and qualities inherent in the world can when properly criticized spawn the qualitative and valuative feelings engendered by a fully engaged consciousness.

As helpful as they are on these issues, Whitehead and Dewey still do not often address in a direct way one of the key issues motivating Taylor’s historical study. The crisis engendered by the history of Western thinking about the self is more than a philosophic problem. It is, Taylor claims, a moral/religious problem as well. We find ourselves living at a time when the traditional categories for thinking about the self have made us strangers to ourselves and to the world around us. Taylor’s ultimate mission is to contribute to the creation of a context where our first-person experience does not seem unavoidably estranged from other people and the world around us. His goal is to initiate conversations that lead away from chronic feelings of false isolation and anomie and toward a greater appreciation of the extent to which our lives are (for better and worse) interconnected and both aesthetically and morally rich.

On this issue Wang Yang-ming has a tremendous advantage over Whitehead and Dewey, neither of whom spent much time writing about these issues from a first-person perspective. In fact, there has been significant debate among scholars over whether Dewey and Whitehead even have coherent theories of the self. The reason for such debate is likely two-fold. First, their metaphysics and cosmologies are so different from traditional modernist approaches to these issues that a process or

pragmatist self does not look like what we've traditionally called "the self." Second, neither Dewey nor Whitehead wrote much about self-transformation except in abstract terms. Despite an interest in religious issues, and even a couple of small books written by each on the subject, neither developed a full-fledged philosophical anthropology. Both Dewey and Whitehead did write on education, of course. But for them the focus is less on self-transformation and more on the learning process. Wang Yang-ming, by contrast, built his whole philosophy around his understanding of selfhood and self-transformation. In fact, throughout his career Wang focuses almost exclusively on the religious implications of certain important Confucian metaphysical and ontological ideas. Thus, with respect to Taylor's project, Wang is a near perfect partner, offering as he does a window into how the self might be understood were it to have developed outside the pernicious effects of the West's fact/value and subject/object dichotomies. As we will see in chapter 3 Wang's assumption that knowledge and action are truly one thing is rooted in a theory of the self where interiority is not tied to disengagement. As Wang describes it, cultivation of this inner self is the cultivation of a more comprehensive connectedness to the things around you. This is what Wang means by "forming one body with the whole of things."

By beginning with a discussion of Taylor's *Sources of the Self*, I hope to have accomplished a few goals simultaneously. First, I want Taylor's analysis to lift up the extent to which our understanding of knowledge and action is rooted in our understanding of selfhood. Second, building upon Taylor's critique of traditional Western descriptions of the self, I want to highlight inadequacies in our typical understanding of the relationship between knowledge and action. If, as Taylor suggests, the West's traditional understanding of the self is flawed, and if, as I have suggested, our understanding of knowledge and action is tied directly to that theory of the self, then we need to look outside traditional assumptions in order to navigate our way out of the "blind alley" into which Descartes and Locke have led us. This has led directly to my third and final goal, namely, to begin developing my case for presenting Wang Yang-ming, John Dewey, and Alfred North Whitehead as plausible conversation partners who have thought long and deeply about the issues that currently occupy Taylor.

At this point, I would like to turn away from Taylor's concerns with selfhood and look directly to the topic of antirepresentationalism. Specifically, I intend to look at the late/postanalytic philosophies of Donald Davidson and Richard Rorty, who both are struggling to reverse the trend toward greater interiorization of consciousness. They argue that we should drop altogether the notion of an interior mind that is

dependent on a mediating structure such as “experience” to give it access to the external world. Surprisingly, we shall see that in some instances the proposals by Davidson and Rorty resonate well with certain strategies employed by Wang, Dewey, and Whitehead. As was the case in the previous section, one of my principle goals will be to demonstrate why it is that I am convinced Dewey, Whitehead, and Wang belong in these contemporary discussions about mind, knowledge, and the self. The full description of the Neo-Confucian, pragmatist, and process positions will be reserved until later chapters.