Individualism
The tendency for modern people to focus on their individual lives to the exclusion of and any sense of broader vision or larger meaning
This results in a society which is permeated by self absorption.

>"The dark side of individualism is a centering on the self, which both flattens and narrows out lives, makes them poorer in meaning and less concerned with others in society" (4)

Instrumental Reason
The modern tendency to see all objects and people as a means to an end.
A world view which calculates all decisions on the basis of cost-benefit analyses.
Objects in the world are stripped of their intrinsic meanings and seen simply as raw materials.
This tendency strips many decisions of their moral dimensions.

Loss of Freedom
As more people seek to maximize the enjoyments of their private lives, fewer people seek to participate meaningfully in civic affairs.
As a result, the power of government is wielded by an ever narrowing group of people who are largely unaccountable for their actions.
This sets the stage for the development of a "soft despotism" in which government becomes paternalistic and beyond the reach of the democratic process.
The feeling that the individual voice does not matter in such a system hastens the process of citizen withdrawal and thus contributes to a rapidly diminishing degree of real political freedom.
The end result is a loss of political and thus true personal freedom.

>"The only defense against this, Tocqueville thinks, is a vigorous political culture in which participation is valued, at several levels of government and in voluntary associations as well. But the atomism of the self-absorbed individual militates against this. Once participation declines, once the lateral associations that were its vehicles wither away, the individual citizen is left alone in the face of a vast bureaucratic state and feels, correctly powerless. This demotivates the citizen even further, and vicious cycle of soft despotism is joined." (9-10)

Boosters and Knockers
Taylor argues that modern social critics are divided between knockers (those who see the direction of modern society as inherently leading to decay) and boosters (those who see the direction of modern society as a source of advancement and progress).
Taylor argues that the debate between these two groups has served, not to clarify, but rather to obscure the real nature of the moral choices involved in modern life.
Taylor believes that the knockers and boosters are both right, but in a way that defies a simple trade off between advantages and costs.

Taylor's Purpose in *The Ethics of Authenticity*
"There is in fact both much that is admirable and much that is debased and frightening in all of the developments that I have been describing, but to understand the relation between the two is to see that the issue is not how much of a price in bad consequences you have to pay for the positive fruits, but rather how to steer these developments towards their greater promise and avoid the slide into debased forms" (Taylor 11-12).

This book is an exploration of how an ethical framework might be developed to achieve this goal.

Chapter 2 - The Inarticulate Debate	Notes

This book is not a book in which Taylor promotes authenticity.
 	
Rather, Taylor has observed what we all know about modern Western culture - the the achievement of authenticity is something people feel called to achieve:
 	
    "What we need to explain is what is peculiar to our time, it's not just that people sacrifice their love relationships, and the care of their children, to pursue their careers. Something like this has perhaps always existed. The point is that today many people feel called to do this, they feel they ought to do this, feel their lives would somehow be wasted or unfulfilled if they didn't do it" (17).
 	
Taylor argues that what is needed is an **articulate conversation** on the value of authenticity as a moral ideal. By this, he means to adopt a position distinct from either the booster and knockers, but also a position which is not simply an effort to balance the benefits and the costs of modernity.
 	
Taylor argues that discussions of authenticity as a moral ideal are muddled and inarticulate for several reasons:
 	
    • **Knockers** see authenticity as nothing more than an excuse to justify modern narcissism and hedonism. Thus knockers like Alan Bloom tend to dismiss authenticity as an idea that could posses any moral weight whatsoever.
 	
    • On the other hand, **booster**s tend to accept the idea of soft relativism - the idea that one cannot judge the choices made by others as right or wrong. Taylor calls this the "liberalism of neutrality" - the idea that society must be "neutral on questions of what constitutes a good life" (17-18).
 	
    • The belief in "**moral subjectivism**" which is the idea that moral positions are not grounded in reason but simply because people are "drawn to them." The implication of this belief is that reasonable debates about moral positions cannot occur. The mentality that drives this is that all positions are opinions, all are equally valid and thus rational discussion involving evidence or argumentation is invalid.
 	
    • The modern trend toward **social scientific explanations** has led thinkers to explain authenticity purely in terms of historical, sociological and other social scientific terms. This has led thinkers to ignore the possibility that the shift towards a culture of authenticity might have occurred do to the "inherent value" of authenticity as "a moral ideal."
 	
Taylor recognizes that authenticity can lead to deviant and debased forms. However, he claims that to dismiss authenticity as a moral ideal because of these forms is to dismiss an element of modern culture that is simply not going to go away. The purpose of this book is to retrieve the conversation over authenticity from the current "inarticulate debate." In order to do this, Taylor maintains that we have to accept three basic (yet controversial) assumptions:
 	
1. That authenticity is a valid ideal
2. That you can argue in reason about ideals and conformity of practices to these ideals. This is essentially a dismissal of radical subjectivism in which no arguments can take place nor values weighed as everything is simply a matter of perspective.
3. That these arguments can make a difference (Taylor 23)
 	
Taylor believes the answer to all three questions is yes and his book is written with this assumption in mind.	

Chapter 3 - Sources of Authenticity	

Taylor's principle goal in this chapter is to define authenticity and identify its historical sources.
 	
Previous conceptions of living a good life (prior to the Enlightenment) involved being in touch with some source - such as God or abstract concepts of the good, that helped us to achieve fullness as people. In the Pre modern period this source was always *external to the self.*
 	
With authenticity, the source we have to connect with is within us - not some thing external to us. This is part of the *massive shift toward the subjective in modern culture.*
Sources of authenticity:
   1. The Enlightenment - This period sees the rise of rational individualism, the displacement of religion as the principle way to understand the world, disengaged rationality and power of individual to know truth outside of institutional constraints. The individual is freed to make his own way and in many ways define his own self. Two key figures are mentioned by Taylor:
      a. Descartes - The idea of disengaged rationality, which is the power of thought to detach itself from the world of the senses and create understanding independent of the external world. "I think, Therefore I am."
      b. Locke - As we have discussed in class, Locke conceived of the self existing prior to sociality.
   Note that both of these ideas suggest, according to Taylor, "that human beings are endowed with a moral sense, an intuitive feeling for what is right and wrong . . . [that] morality was a voice within" (26).
 	
   2. The Romantic era - The artistic expression of this period reveled in the self and self exploration and placed high value on inwardness and creativity. Taylor explores two key thinkers from the Romantic tradition:
      a. Rousseau (Note: Rousseau straddles the intellectual periods of the Enlightenment and the Romantic era much like Beethoven did the musical periods of Classicism and Romanticism) - Rousseau describes morality as arising from "the voice of nature within us . . . Our moral salvation comes from recovering authentic moral contact with ourselves." This authentic contact with the self becomes the source of "joy and contentment" (27).
      b. Herder - "Each of us has an original way of being human" (28), something that makes us significant and unique, and it is our duty to find what this is. This rises to the level of duty and ideal, because if I fail, "I miss the point of my life, I miss what being human is for *me*" (29). By and large this is the definition of authenticity that Taylor will use throughout the book. Taylor argues that this is a fundamentally new idea because prior to the 18th century "no one thought that the differences between human beings had this kind of moral significance" (28).
 	
Authenticity is often confounded with Rousseau's self determining freedom - Self determining freedom is the idea that "I am free when I decide for myself what concerns me, rather than being shaped by external influences." This idea contains no moral ideal - it simply defines freedom. But, as Taylor will argue later, self determining freedom is often confused with authenticity, thus stripping authenticity of its moral dimension and leading to debasement.
Ethical authenticity and debased authenticity
Taylor argues that this idea of authenticity can be viewed either as an ideal to which individuals aspire to or an excuse to engage in narcissistic self absorption. The conflict between these to interpretations of authenticity is a major theme of the rest of the book. Taylor's goal is to rescue the ideal of authenticity from the more common debased form of authenticity.	

4. Horizons of Significance	Notes
1. Taylor begins the chapter by reminding us of his central question, "Can any one say anything in reason to people who are immersed in the contemporary culture of authenticity" (31)? It is important to remember why this is even a question. If authenticity is understood in terms of subjectivism or self determining freedom, what makes the self (and determines its significance) are the choices the self makes. If this is the basis of the self and thus of authenticity (as the knockers claim), authenticity is impervious to reason, because the only measure of truth, significance etc. is the individual - "you have your opinion, I have mine." There is no basis for reasonable conversation. Taylor clearly rejects this position. 2. Authenticity means "each of us has an original way of being human . . .I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else's . . . If I am not, I miss the point of my life, I miss what being human is for me" (Taylor 28-9). 3. Thus each of us must find what makes us significant. 3. One way of viewing authenticity (described in 1 above) is that "all options are equally worthy, because they are freely chosen, and it is choice that confers worth" or significance (Taylor 37-8). 4. But, if choice is the measure of significance, then all things are (at least potentially) equally significant (think about Taylor's examples of 3732 hairs or wiggling one's toes in mud from p. 36). 5. Significance can be defined as something of special importance - something that stands out. 6. But if choice alone determines significance, nothing stands out and what is significant is not significant - a logical contradiction. This contradiction renders 3 above a meaningless statement and thus destroys the entire basis for authenticity. This is what Taylor means when he says "Soft relativism self destructs" (37). 7. "Unless some options are more significant than others, the very idea of self choice falls into triviality and hence incoherence. Self choice as an ideal makes sense only because some issues are more important than others" (Taylor 39) 8. Significance is only rescued (and with it the very basis for authenticity) by recognizing the dialogical nature of our identity - that our identities are shaped and sustained by interactions with others - "No one acquires the languages needed for self definition on their own. We are introduced to them through others who matter to us, what George Herbert Mead calls 'significant others.' The genesis of the human mind is in this sense not 'monological,' not something each accomplishes on his or her own, but dialogical" (33). 9. It is this dialogical nature of our existence that provides us with "horizons of significance." Horizons of significance are the backdrop of significance beyond ourselves within the context of which we can find our own personal significance and hence authenticity. "I can define my identity only against the background of things that matter. . . . Only if I exist in a world in which history, or the demands of nature, or the needs of my fellow human beings, or the duties of citizenship, or the call of God, or something else of this order matters crucially, can I define an identity for myself that is not trivial" (Taylor 40-1). Such horizons of significance rescue the idea of significance from meaninglessness and and thus authenticity from its debased forms. 10. Therefore: Authenticity as a moral ideal requires the acknowledgement that people and things outside of our selves shape what is significant and meaningful for us. 11. Therefore: It **is** possible to reason with someone from within the culture of authenticity.	

Chapter 5 The Need for Recognition	Notes

This Chapter's Key Question and Argument:
"Can a mode of life that is centered on the self, in the sense that involves treating our associations as merely instrumental, be justified in light of the ideal of authenticity?" (Taylor 50)
 	
Taylor's argument is a resounding "NO!" Taylor uses authenticity in two ways
 	
    ● The contemporary culture of authenticity - This is the debased form of authenticity that is characterized by instrumental reason, subjectivism and narcissism.
    ● The ideal of Authenticity - This is the concept of authenticity as a moral ideal. It is this concept of authenticity that Taylor seeks to more clearly define in this book. Key concept - Recognition
 	
    In this chapter, Taylor explores the conflicts between these two ideals on two levels - the social and the intimate, and attempts to demonstrate that the contemporary culture of authenticity fails on both levels.
 	
1.   "Our identities are formed in dialogue with others, in agreement or struggle with their recognition of us" (Taylor 46).
2.   While in prior times this recognition was based on social rank (which was exclusive), the modern notion of dignity demands equal recognition for all (universal and non-exclusive).
3.   Individual identity "depends on my dialogical relations with others" (Taylor 48)
4.   Thus equal recognition becomes essential to the formation of identity and "its refusal can inflict damage on those who are denied it " and thus can be seen as "a form of oppression" (Taylor 49-50).
5.   Thus modern democratic society demands equal recognition of difference.
6.   But the basis of this equal recognition cannot be simply choice (as we saw in 4)
7.   Thus "recognizing difference . . . requires a horizon of significance, in this case a shared one" (Taylor 52) Without these shared horizons "equality will be empty and a sham" (think of the number of hairs example from chapter 4) (Taylor 52). Likewise identity forming relationships by definition cannot be seen in purely instrumental terms because "If my self exploration takes the form of such serial and in principle temporary relationships, then it is not my identity that I am exploring, but some modality of enjoyment" (Taylor 53).
8. Thus on both the social and personal spheres, the ethic of authenticity is incompatible with both subjective formulations of meaning and instrumental reason.	

Chapter 6 - The Slide to Subjectivism	Notes

Key question in Chapter 6:
Why is the ideal of Authenticity so "prone to deviation into the trivial"(Taylor 57)?

In other words, why is authenticity so often manifested in the debased forms of self-absorption and narcissism which deny horizons of significance?

Taylor suggests three answers:
1. Self interest and survival
   Taylor argues that the struggle of the individual to survive has been a constant in history and thus this doesn't explain why there is "greater ease with which . . . External constraints can now be dismissed or delegitimated" (Taylor 57).
2. Broad social changes
   • Mobility inevitably increases the atomism of the individual and reinforces self absorption
   • The development of technocratic, bureaucratic societies lend credibility to and encourage the use of instrumental reason.
3. Reasons internal to the ideal of authenticity
   Here, Taylor sees two potential factors leading to debasement:

   • "The slide towards self centered modes of the ideal of self fulfillment in the popular culture" (Taylor 60). Think about the mid life crisis book quoted in the last chapter.

   • The movement in high culture towards increasing nihilism and "denial of all horizons of significance" (Taylor 60)

Nihilism in High culture
Taylor argues that tendencies in modern and postmodern thought have tended toward the "negation all horizons of significance" (Taylor 60), thus empower the individual and individual judgement:

> "In the end, it leaves the agent . . . With a sense of untrammeled power and freedom before a world that imposes no standards, ready to enjoy 'free play,' or to indulge in an aesthetics of the self" (Taylor 61).

From this "aesthetics of the self" we can see how the idea of the artist as creator parallels the idea of the authentic self as creator of itself.

> "Since about 1800, there has ben a tendency to heroize the artist, to see in his or her life the essence of the human condition, and to venerate him or her as a seer, a creator of cultural values" (Taylor 62)

The connection is furthered by the idea that both artists and authentic selves will have to "struggle against some externally imposed rules" (Taylor 63).

Thus in both art and authenticity the creative tends to be emphasized over the moral.

Art and authenticity thus become seen as there own fulfillment (and completely determined from within).

Focus on this end alone denies all horizons of significance and focuses instead only on the individual's creative power (and thus becomes self determining freedom).

The problem, Taylor argues, is that the postmodern trend in high culture to deny all horizons of significance emphasizes one aspect of authenticity (creativity) at the expense of another essential aspect of authenticity (self definition in dialogue with others). (Taylor 66-7 this long paragraph is the key to the chapter)

This tendency leads to the narrowed and flattened world Taylor spoke of in chapter one, as it reinforces choice (creativity) as the ultimate arbiter of significance and meaning (Taylor 69).

Chapter 7 - La Lotta Continua	Notes
The chapter starts by restating the idea that the ideal of authenticity "suffers from a constitutive tension" (71). On one hand the creation of an authentic self demands creativity, originality and, to some extent, opposition to social rules and norms, while on the other it demands openness to horizons of significance and dialogue with others (66-67). This constitutive tension suggests that the metaphor for the modern condition is one of perpetual struggle (la lotta continua) - wherein we must constantly fight to retrieve the ideal of authenticity from the more debased individualistic forms of authenticity that lead to narcissism, subjectivism and atomism. Taylor contrasts the idea of struggle with the trend line thinking of the boosters and knockers. Trend line thinking sees the culture of authenticity as either good or bad - leading inevitably to improvement or debasement. For example, knockers like Bloom, see the trend of modern society as analogous to the fate of ancient Rome where "decadence and a slide into hedonism make us incapable of maintaining our political civilization" (78). The problem with this mode of thinking, according to Taylor, is two fold: 1. It ignores the fact that the idea of authenticity is intrinsic to modern Western Civilization, "we can practically *define* the cultural mainstream of modern Western liberal society in terms of those who feel the draw of this and the other main forms of individualism" (75). Thus if trend line thinking is right, and authenticity leads to a downward trend, we are doomed to decline. 2. It dismisses the ethical ideal of authenticity which is that "authenticity points us towards a more self-responsible form of life" (74). Trend line thinking ignores the nature of life in a free society - it presumes an end when freedom implies constant struggle. Taylor argus that "The nature of a free society is that it will always be the locus of a struggle between higher and lower forms of freedom . . . I suggest that in this matter we look not for the Trend, whatever it is, up or down, but that we break with our temptation to see irreversible trends, and see that **there is a struggle here, whose outcome is continually up for grabs**" (78-9). This may well be the most immediately relevant line of the book, it is also clearly the most suggestive of Sartre. Freedom is what we make it. Trend line thinking is nothing more than excuse not to engage in the struggle over whether our freedom ultimately makes us more or less responsible. To avoid this struggle is ultimately to engage in bad faith.* *Note the comparison to Sartre is mine, made to render Taylor's argument down to more familiar terms. He makes no explicit reference to Sartre.	

Subjectivation is the tendency of things to center on the subject
>"Things that were once settled by some external reality - traditional law, say, or nature - are now referred to our choices"
>(Taylor 81).

There are two important modes of subjectivation - "one concerning manner and the other concerning the matter or content of the action" (Taylor 81-2)

While authenticity requires an inwardly chosen (self referential) manner of living, this does not require that the matter one chooses as the focus of one's life must be internal, or self referential.

>"I can find fulfillment in God, or a political cause, or tending the Earth. Indeed, the argument above (in previous chapters) suggests that we will find genuine fulfillment only in something like this, which has significance independent of us or our desires" (Taylor 82)

To confuse these two modes is catastrophic and results in the debased form of authenticity. (This is merely an extension of the point made on pp. 27-8 regarding the difference between self determining freedom and authenticity, p. 37-8 about the problem of equating choice and significance, and the discussion on pp. 66-7 of the problem of acknowledging the role played by creativity while denying the importance of horizons of significance to the concept of authenticity).

To illustrate this distinction (and how easily the two modes can be confused) Taylor returns to the example of art. Remember, Taylor sees the artist as a metaphor for the authentic self.

To illustrate this point, Taylor describes how art has changed from the pre-modern to the modern period.

Taylor argues that in the premodern period the "matter" of art was shaped by "the publicly available reference points that, say, poets and painters could draw on" (Taylor 83).

What Taylor means was that there was a generally known and accepted body of language, knowledge and symbols that artists could use to convey meaning:

>"Until the end of the 18th century there was sufficient intellectual homogeneity for men to share certain assumptions . . . In varying degrees . . man accepted . . . the Christian interpretation of history, the sacramentalism of nature, the Great Chain of Being, the analogy of the various planes of creation, the conception of man as a microcosm . . . These were cosmic syntaxes in the public domain; and the poet could think of his art as 'imitative' of 'nature' since these patterns were what he meant by nature" (Wasserman quoted in Taylor 84-5).

With the coming of the modern period the old points of reference are no longer common to all - No agreed upon body of language, symbols and knowledge exists.

>"By the 19th century these world pictures had passed from consciousness . . . Now an additional formulative act was required of the poet" (Wasserman in Taylor 85).

>"The Romantic poets and their successors have to articulate an original vision of the cosmos" (Taylor 85).
>(Just as art now required an original vision of the world, so individuals in modern society must articulate an original vision of themselves (Herder in Taylor 28-29)

This new vision is articulated in what Taylor calls a "subtler language" - one that draws upon things external to the artists (matter) but expresses the artist's sensibilities (manner) regarding these external things.

To understand art in the modern era, the viewer's "sensibilities must resonate" with the artist's (Taylor 87) - given that no common language now exists. Taylor calls this triangulation (Taylor 83). While previous forms of expression could be directly understood, modern art required interpretation (itself an act of creativity) which required the viewer's sensibilities to resonate with those of the artist and the artist's own manipulation of external sources.

Taylor argues that the greatest modern artists (for example Rilke, Friedrich, Elliot, Proust and Wordsworth) always have an agenda (matter) that is beyond the self, While their articulation (manner) of this agenda may be personal and draw on inner meanings. Thus the world still makes claims on these artists and their work. Taylor contrasts this with "a great deal of modern art [that simply] . . .turns on the celebration of human powers and feelings" (Taylor 89), such as Italian futurism of the early 20th century, which sought:

>""To sweep from the field of art all motifs and subjects that have already been exploited . . . To destroy the cult of the past . . . To despise utterly every form of immitation . . . And extol every form of originality . . To render and glorify the life of today, unceasingly and violently transformed by victorious science" (Futurist Umberto Boccioni quoted in Gardener's *Art Through the Ages 822*). (in many ways this is the artistic equivalent of self determining freedom - creativity/poesis as the only value in art)

Taylor concludes by arguing that if we are going to confront the great problems of the modern world that we, as the great modern artists, must retain a focus on matter that is external to us, even while our manner of action is intensely personal:

>"For some of the important issues of our time, concerning love and our place in the natural order, need to be explored in such languages of personal resonance. To take a salient example, just because we no longer believe in the doctrines of the Great Chain of Being, we don't need to see ourselves as set in a universe that we consider simply as a source of raw materials for our projects. We may still need to see ourselves as part of a larger order that can make claims on us. Indeed the latter may be though of a urgent. It would greatly help stave off ecological disaster if we could recover a sense of the demand that our natural surroundings and wilderness make on us" (Taylor 89).

>"If authenticity is being true to ourselves, is recovering our own 'seniment del'existence,' then perhaps we could only achieve it integrally if we recognize that this sentiment connects us to a wider whole. It is perhaps not an accident that in the Romantic period the self-feeling and the feeling of belonging to nature were linked" (Taylor 91).

Thus a subjectivism of matter as well as manner, strips us of our ability to confront issues beyond ourselves, and just as Taylor would argue that this reduces art to the mere exercise of personal power and authenticity to narcissism, so to does it strip us of our abilities as a society to effectively confront the great and crucial issues of our day.

Chapter 9 - An Iron Cage?"	Notes
Just as Taylor sees the rise of the idea of authenticity as a function of the first major malaise - individualism, he sees modern technological civilization as a function of the second major malaise - instrumental reason. Like the idea of authenticity, modern technological society also has its Boosters and Knockers. Knockers see modern technological civilization as an "unmitigated decline" in which we have "lost contact with ourselves and our own natural being, and are driven by the imperative of domination that condemns us to a ceaseless battle against nature both within us and around us. (94) Boosters see technology as the "solution to all our human problems" (95) Taylor argues that both the Boosters and Knockers are wrong in their view of technology and that we must again engage in "a work of retrieval, in order to get a fruitful struggle going in our culture and society" (Taylor 97). The retrieval he speaks of requires us to seek the roots of instrumental reason just as the previous six chapters sought the roots of individualism. By understanding these roots we will be able to argue in reason about what is good and problematic about technology and instrumental reason - and struggle (ala la lotta continua - P. 107) to steer society in a productive rather than a decadent direction. In other words, the debate between booster and knockers of technology is just as inarticulate as that over the issue of authenticity. *** Before engaging in this retrieval, however, Taylor addresses the position that modern technological market driven societies have locked "us into an 'iron cage,'" which is to say that there is no chance that society can escape the negative impacts of the "atomist-instrumental outlook once one has entered out kind of society" (Taylor 98). This position holds, in brief, that we are trapped by forces beyond our control. Taylor does not see the inevitability of the iron cage - decline is not inevitable as "the mechanisms of inevitability work only when people are divided and fragmented. The predicament alters when their comes to be a common consciousness" (Taylor 100). This common consciousness requires us to give up the notion of humans a simply disengaged rationality (Descartes' cogito) and see ourselves against the backdrop of horizons of significance that both transcend us but also include us. Thus Taylor concludes that "our degrees of freedom . . . are not zero" (100-101). Thus exploring the moral roots of instrumental reason is not pointless. *** Taylor argues that to escape this second inarticulate debate, we must understand the moral ideals that underlie instrumental reason: freedom (and the more self responsible life freedom allows us to live) and the desire to "relieve the condition of mankind" (103-104). Thus instrumental reason springs from "practical and universal benevolence" - or, more simply put, the desire to ease suffering and make life better - to feed the hungry shelter the homeless and cure the sick. It is only when we lose sight of these roots, that we begin to see technology as a means of domination and not as a means to improve the human condition. Taylor provides a good example of this misconception on p. 106 when he writes of instances where modern medicine has lost touch with its essentially humanistic goals. Taylor sums up the argument in the following way: "Instrumental reason comes to us with its own rich moral background. It has by no means simply been . . . [motivated by the simple drive to domination]. . . And yet it all too often seems to serve the ends of greater control, of technological mastery. Retrieval of the richer moral background can show that it doesn't need to do this, and indeed that in many cases it is betraying the moral background in doing so - analogously to the way the more self centered modes of self fulfillment betray the idea of authenticity" (105).	

Chapter 10 - Against Fragmentation	Notes

Taylor argues that modern capitalism and large bureaucratic states tend to favor "an atomist and instrumentalist stance toward the world and others" (111) and to "weaken democratic initiative" (112).
 	
This brings us back to the third malaise, that modern society will generate a kind of "soft despotism" in which the individuals will be powerless against the vast and impersonal forces of the market and the state.
 	
    This soft despotism is not the development of a totalitarian state, but rather an increasing fragmentation of the populace rendering it "less capable of forming common purpose and carrying it out" (112) (It should be noted that this fragmentation is fostered by the first two malaises).
 	
    The fragmented society that results is one in which people "find it harder and harder to identify with their political society as a community" (117).
 	
    Taylor argues that fragmentation is concretely manifested in the United States in terms of the inability of Americans to come together in common purpose except for the defense of individual rights. The focus on individual rights in turn has led to three consequences:
        1. More emphasis is placed on judicial review to solve great societal issues as opposed to more democratic methods of legislation and compromise (Taylor 114).
        2. Most political energy is "channeled into interest or advocacy politics" where people are encouraged to see public affairs through the lens of a single issue - the abortion issue, for example (Taylor 115). This leads directly to the third consequence:
        3. The "atrophy" of the ability to form "democratic majorities around meaningful programs that can be carried to completion" (Taylor 115)
 	
    As a result, only small narrowly defined interest groups have any chance of making significant political change, so people "give up" and stop participating meaningfully in the political process. Cynicism regarding the efficacy of political participation leads people to withdraw into themselves which leads to fewer people voting and meaningfully participating in the political process (again note the connection with the previous two malaises) (Taylor 113, 115).
 	
The only way that this fragmentation can be fought is through "successful common action," in other words democracy guided by a common purpose:
    Fragmentation grows to the extent that people no longer identify with their political community, that their sense of corporate belonging is transferred elsewhere or atrophies altogether . . . A fading political identity makes it harder to mobilize effectively, and a sense of hopelessness breeds alienation . . . Successful common action (on the other hand) can bring about a sense of empowerment and also strengthen identification with the political community" (Taylor 118).
 	
It is at this point that all of the strands of Taylor's argument come together. Such common action requires us, as individuals, to recognize the essentially dialogical nature of our existence and embrace the idea that meaning comes not from completely internal sources but also from external "horizons of significance". It also requires us to measure our instrumental reason against the yardstick of the moral principles that gave rise to instrumental reason. To do so works against fragmentation and facilitates the development of community:
 	
    The force that can roll back the galloping hegemony of instrumental reason is democratic initiative [that emerges out of] . . . common understanding and a common sense of purpose (Taylor 112).
 	
The root of that common understanding must be a conception of the self that sees its own significance in terms external horizons of significance. The self as seen from the perspective of self determining freedom (debased authenticity) must necessarily pursue fragmentation, as its definition of selfhood depends on being unbound and atomistic.
 	
Successful democracy requires us to see ourselves as parts of a whole. Democracy fails when we see our interactions with others in purely instrumental terms, for in such terms there is only individual purpose - there is no common purpose (think of Smith's butcher).
 	
Taylor concludes by writing that modernity is characterized by both grandeur and misery and that "Only a view that embraces both can give us the undistorted insight into our era that we need to rise to its greatest challenge (121). Both boosterism and knockerism of modern society are dead ends. Only an honest understanding of modernity and its roots can lead us to "the good society."	