The Language Animal and the Passive Side of the Human Condition

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ABSTRACT: In some strains of current philosophy, there is a growing interest in the passive and receptive aspects of the human condition. This interest is often paired with a criticism that 'Western' philosophy unduly neglects those aspects because of an 'agential bias.' This criticism has also been directed against the philosophy of Charles Taylor. I try to show that this criticism has some force in principle but is not plausible in the case of Taylor. First, I analyse John Rawls' hugely influential concept of a life plan and show how this 'agential bias' applies here. Second, I argue that such a bias does not apply to Taylor's The Language Animal *by showing how active and passive moments are interwoven in his concepts of articulation and narration.*

RÉSUMÉ : On note, dans certains courants de la philosophie contemporaine, un intérêt croissant pour les aspects passifs et réceptifs de la condition humaine. Cet intérêt s'accompagne souvent d'une critique selon laquelle la philosophie «occidentale» négligerait à tort ces aspects en raison d'un «biais d'agentivité». Cette critique a également été émise à l'endroit de la philosophie de Charles Taylor. J'entends montrer ici que cette critique, bien qu'elle ait en principe une certaine force, ne peut raisonnablement s'appliquer dans le cas de Taylor. J'analyserai dans un premier temps le concept fort influent de «projet de vie» et montrerai comment le biais d'agentivité s'y applique. Dans un second temps, en présentant comment les moments actifs et passifs sont liés dans ses concepts d'articulation et de narration, je montrerai que ce biais ne saurait valoir pour The Language Animal *de Taylor.*

Keywords: Charles Taylor, passivity, articulation, emotions, John Rawls, life plans

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In the introduction to his *Human Agency and Language*, the first volume of his Philosophical Papers, published in 1985, Charles Taylor wrote that this collection would be "the work of a monomaniac": "If not a single idea, then at least a single rather tightly related agenda underlies all of them. If one had to find a name … the term 'philosophical anthropology' would perhaps be best."[1] For the most part, this Taylorian anthropology revolves around two themes: that man is a "self-interpreting animal" and that the resulting self-understanding which partly constitutes who the respective person is, implies seeing oneself against a background of "strong evaluation," that is a "background of distinctions between things which are recognized as of categorical or unconditioned or higher importance or worth, and things which lack this or are of lesser value."[2] These two cornerstones of Taylor's anthropology are critically directed against reductive, and in a broader sense 'naturalistic,' approaches in the science of man. Now, if human self-interpretation, especially against a background of strong values, is constitutive of the self, then language must play an important role in philosophical anthropology for interpretation in large parts happens in the medium of language. Therefore, language itself is recognized as a constitutive part of what it means to be a human self or a person.[3]

The Taylorian picture of what it means to be a self or a person has been criticized by Soran Reader as one-sided and biased. In her view, Taylor treats "'agent' as equivalent to 'person' or 'self.'"[4] For Reader, such an "agential bias" is not only found in Taylor's works but pervades much of 'Western' philosophy and culture. "It says: when I am an agent, I am, I count. But when I am passive, incapable, constrained, dependent, I am less a person."[5] She calls for a modification of our account of personhood: a "more balanced and realistic" one that should include what she calls "patiential features," that is features in which being acted on in a wider sense is central: "we need to integrate the non-agential aspects of our life into our concept of the person. … On the balanced view … passivity, inability, necessity/contingency and dependency are as constitutive of personhood as the 'positive' aspects of action, capability, choice and independence."[6] Reader is not alone in arguing that the concept of a sovereign subject which is characterized solely by those 'positive' and active aspects is an inadequate description of human life and the human condition and that the 'negative' and passive aspects of human subjectivity should not be treated as mere "privations of personhood."[7] The German philosopher Wilhelm

1 Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, p. 1.

2 Ibid., p. 3.

3 See also Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 32-40.

4 Reader, "The Other Side of Agency," p. 580.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., p. 592.

7 Ibid.

Kamlah, for example, made 'befallenness' (*Widerfahrnis*) the focal point of his philosophical anthropology.[8] For Kamlah, befallenness is one realm of human experience that is beyond active agential control but nevertheless is (co-)constitutive of human meaning. The distinction between agency and befallenness is foremost a distinction between activity and passivity. But it would be wrong to see agency and befallenness as strict opposites. For Kamlah, they are two interpenetrated moments of our existence. Even agency for him is not to be understood as one's own 'pure' active initiative. Creative agency, for example, is dependent on certain conditions and prone to interference, both beyond our active control; it can succeed gradually or even fail altogether. Stressing the perspective of befallenness as one moment of human being-in-the-world supplements the one-sided focus on active agency as the primary human relation to the world with passive and receiving efforts of the human subject, which are also part of our relations to the world and of agency itself.[9]

While I agree with Reader and Kamlah that the passive and receptive moments of human existence are often kept in the dark philosophically, I think that Taylor's work is the wrong target for Reader's criticism and that a profound reason for this can be found in Taylor's recent refined restatement of his view on articulation and narration in *The Language Animal*. But before I turn to the passive aspects of human existence implicit in Taylor's philosophy of language, I will take a look at a position that is arguably more deserving of Reader's criticism. I will analyze an important element of John Rawls' understanding of what it is to be a human person, his concept of a life plan, and will try to show how this concept includes a one-sided agential perspective and thus is plausibly subject to such complaints about passiveness (1). I will then show how Taylor's picture of humans as language animals avoids this one-sided active perspective (2).

1. Rawls' Life plans, the Drawbacks of Planning, and the Passive Aspects of a Good Life

Reader's criticism that 'person' is equated with 'agent' has some force in the case of Rawls' thought. For Rawls, a significant feature of what it means to be a person is the "thought that a person may be regarded as a human life lived according to a plan."[10] And the "rational plan for a person determines his good."[11] But what is meant by a plan of life and how does such a plan relate to the individual good? "[P]lanning typically refers to a program of particular lines of action, of what we do. Planning is instrumental and aims at reducing

[8] Kamlah, *Philosophische Anthropologie*, especially pp. 34-40.

[9] See also Andermann, "Widerfahrnisse."

[10] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 408.

[11] Ibid.

the extent of surprise that the future inevitably holds for us, thus making the achievement of our ends more probable."[12]

The goal that Rawls' plans of life determine is the individual good of the respective person holding that life plan. This individual human good is understood in terms of instrumental rationality: "[I]f and only if A has the properties which it is rational for K to want in an X, given K's circumstances, abilities, and plan of life (his system of aims), and therefore in view of what he intends to do with an X."[13] So, a person's good is essentially defined by her purposes and these purposes are chosen voluntarily.[14] Furthermore, these purposes must be rational. Now, rationality here for Rawls is, at its core, prudence understood in instrumental terms:[15] on the one hand, your plan must be consistent with the principles of rational choice[16] and, on the other hand, your plan of life must be such as would be chosen by you with "full deliberative rationality,"[17] which means that Rawls not only (counterfactually) assumes a fully informed person but also that this person "rejects pure time preference."[18] Since "a plan is a scheduled sequence of activities,"[19] the plans of life stipulate purposive agency as a means for the realization of your freely chosen purposes. These plans imply risk-calculating a reduction of contingencies that threaten the realization of your purposes and are confined to actions. This last point is consistent insofar as planning is focused on the things you can actively influence. Without this (potential) active control, there would be no point in planning. So, the ideal vanishing point of life planning is to put life, or at least the most important things in it, under the active control of the agent.[20] And if a "man is happy when he is more or less successfully in the way of carrying out his plan"[21] then Rawls depicts happiness as something we actively make instead of something that (partly) happens to us.

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12 Heyd and Miller, "Life Plans," p. 19.

13 Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 399.

14 See Rawls' much criticized "the self is prior to the ends which are affirmed by it," "hence … the good of individuals is something that, so to speak, is just up to them to decide." Ibid., pp. 559, 560. For a 'classical' criticism, see Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*.

15 See also Larmore, "The Idea of a Life Plan," p. 105.

16 Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 408.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., p. 420. For criticism that Rawls does not take the situatedness of reflection seriously enough, see Williams, *Moral Luck*, p. 35 and Larmore's discussion of Williams' objections in "Idea of a Life Plan," pp. 106-109.

19 Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 420.

20 See also Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, pp. 3-4 and her understanding of 'luck' in contrast to agential control.

21 Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 93.

Reader's observation that persons are solely, or at least predominantly, characterized by the 'positive' aspects of action, capability, choice, and independence seems to hold for Rawls' concept of a life plan. Now, in what sense could this concept be 'biased'? Are there passive aspects of a good life that are not captured within Rawls' concept? I think some of these passive aspects become visible by looking at two connected narrowings that arguably go along with life plans: that (a) a good life is the *successful* realization of your purposes, and (b) that a good life is exclusively tied to successful *purposeful action*.

(a) Is a good life exclusively the successful realization of a life plan and those purposes that it includes?[22] What seems to be missing here is the point that the mode or manner of life's journey can be a value on its own. Good lives seem to be not only about wanting and successful doing but also about the mode or special quality of our doing and wanting. And that holds independently of successful realization of our purposes. Take, for example, Harry Frankfurt's concept of "caring."[23] If we are to decide what to do with ourselves and with our lives, we must know what is important for us; that is to say, we must know what we care about. A life without a thing to which we can devote ourselves wholeheartedly does not seem to be a good one, even if such devotion makes us susceptible to disappointments and violations. Now, this "caring about something is not be confused with liking it or wanting it."[24] This is the case because 'caring' is a special kind of wanting something that has a worth of its own. To care about something or somebody is itself something we care about and that care is independent of achieving the aims that might go along with it. One might say that such things that we care about do figure in Rawls' life plans. Things like what career to take, who we choose to relate to, family planning, etc., are surely things that a life plan can include. That is right. But the point is that 'caring' is not just stark wanting of something, it is something qualitatively different. And by being another kind of wanting something it can contribute to good lives independently of achieving certain aims.

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22 This formulation recalls Kant's understanding of happiness in his *Critique of Practical Reason*: "Happiness is the state of a rational being in the world for whom in the whole of his existence everything proceeds according to his wish and will" (p. 158). I am aware that Rawls somewhat mitigates the criteria of the fulfilment of our desires by granting that someone is happy when he is "more or less successfully in the way of carrying out his plan." But what sounds like a procedural criterion at first sight ("in the way of carrying out") is ultimately just a mitigation of Kant's unrealistic understanding and remains derived from the ideal notion. See on this Seel, *Versuch über die Form des Glücks*, pp. 97-101.

23 Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, pp. 80-94. See also Seel, *Paradoxien der Erfüllung*, pp. 27-43.

24 Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 83.

(b) Is good life exclusively tied to purposeful action, that is to say, something we can directly intend and pretty much make (under reasonably fortunate circumstances)? An obvious objection to that view is that it is impossible for a person to identify and define those aims or desires in advance whose fulfilment would contribute to a good life.[25] That the good in principle cannot be defined in advance becomes visible in situations where our well informed and pondered prior plans are thrown over to our good. These are situations of a positive disappointment of our aims and expectations that are, nevertheless, experienced as happy or fulfilling. This is Charles Larmore's main objection to Rawls' life plans.[26] For him, there are "unexpected goods" whose value is (at least partly) constituted by the fact that they are beyond our prior given desires and purposes. "[T]he element of surprise forms part of the value of what proves unexpectedly good and … we would live less well if our projects, however rational, were never tripped up by experiences that impel us to rethink the way we live."[27] Such experiences often do not fit in some hierarchy of purposes and aims, "For it can reveal forms of relationship, ways of being and acting, whose value we could never have suspected, given all that we could have known."[28] Now, from the perspective of some observer, it still could seem that the good life of the person who experiences such an unexpected value is a function of realizing some purpose. From the first-person-perspective, however, this experience is described differently. From here, such unexpected goods don't have a value because they are desired or because they fit unexpectedly into a given set of preferences and aims. "In the case at hand, it is a good—a good which befalls us—that acts as criterion of rational purpose, and not the other way round."[29]

This last point is also reflected in the structure of the above-mentioned phenomenon of 'caring about.' Unlike the purposes you choose in a life plan, it "cannot be assumed that what a person cares about is generally under his immediate voluntary control."[30] For Frankfurt, there is a "volitional necessity"[31] in caring: to care about something means, in part, to respond to some appeal. This does not imply that such a person is simply the victim of her passions. Instead, in such a case, voluntary and involuntary moments are interwoven: you experience some affection or appeal that some thing or person bears for you. This

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25 See Larmore, "The Idea of a Life Plan," p. 98 or Angehrn, "Glück und Gelingen," pp. 130-131.

26 Larmore, "The Idea of a Life Plan," pp. 108-111. See also Seel, *Versuch über die Form des Glücks*, pp. 107-112.

27 Larmore, "The Idea of a Life Plan," p. 111.

28 Ibid., p. 110.

29 Ibid., p. 111.

30 Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 85.

31 Ibid., p. 86.

has an involuntary moment, and yet it is mainly a voluntary process whether you dedicate yourself to this appeal or you negate it or try to modify it.[32] Given this conjunction of voluntary and involuntary moments, these carings do not fit into Rawls' life plans where it is presupposed that you can simply intend those purposes and aims around which your good life revolves.

So, Rawls' agential description of leading a good life lacks all that is beyond our direct control through instrumental agency. In contrast to life plans where success (or a good life) is defined in advance by chosen purposes, it seems that regarding such unexpected goods, there must also be a stance of openness to leading a good life that allows you to keep at times a certain distance from your life plans, however rational they might be, and experience those fulfilling situations and goods that are beyond the purposes and aims grounded in your life plan.

2. Articulation and Narration in Taylor: The Passive and Receptive Aspects in the Lives of Language Animals

In Rawls' view, living a life according to plan is something essential for a person. For Taylor, the central aspect of the human condition is that we are self-interpreting animals. In what follows, I argue that this view on the human condition, *pace* Reader, does allow for passive aspects that were lacking in Rawls. I try to show this by reference to three closely related points: (a) For Taylor, there are some meanings that are central to human life (human emotions, certain relations, strong value) and I argue that these bear an irreducible moment of passive experience. (b) It is these meanings in particular that call for a proper articulation and I try to show how Taylor's understanding of articulation itself bears moments of passive experience. Finally, (c) I indicate that narration (and narrative identity) can integrate these passive aspects of the human condition.

(a) If humans are self-interpreting animals, then the category of meaning becomes central. Interpretations are always about meaning; only things that have some meaning need to be interpreted. Taylor here follows the ontological turn of hermeneutic philosophy: all being-in-the-world is meaningful.[33] Humans are always already involved in situations that are experienced in terms of certain meanings that are always part of a whole web of meaning.[34] Taylor differentiates between "life meanings" and "human meanings", which he calls "metabiological meanings".[35] Life meanings are meanings we share with other animals. Things have this kind of meaning for organisms that pursue certain

[32] See also Seel, *Sich bestimmen lassen*, pp. 291-292.

[33] For a location of Taylor in the hermeneutic tradition, see Münch and Sigwart, "Wir, die Gesellschaft," pp. 141-153.

[34] See, for example, Taylor, "Philosophy and the Human Sciences," p. 27.

[35] Taylor, *The Language Animal*, p. 91.

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goals that can be "defined by objectively recognizable patterns of need and action."[36] This is not possible for human or metabiological meanings, for they refer to discriminations of better and worse that cannot be grasped without reference to the self-understandings of the persons (or cultures) in question. It is qualitatively different to state what a meaningful life or a certain friendship means to the person in question. A decisive difference between the two kinds of meanings concerns the role of language. In the case of life meanings, language serves a function that, in principle, could be served some other way. Here, language is part of a 'right' reaction that is successful in the sense of realizing the purpose. When a bird in a flock emits a shriek after perceiving a predator, it alerts the other birds and causes the birds to flee.[37] Beyond such life meanings, language "enables us to grasp something *as* what it is."[38] Here the issue of being the right word becomes crucial. Describing something as a lecturing desk presupposes a certain understanding of the issues involved and that is inseparable from describing through language. For the bird, this kind of rightness is no issue. Any other signal that would successfully warn the flock would have been 'right' in its sense too. To describe the lecture desk as a bar table, however, is not right. It is wrong because the word is not the right one regarding the characteristics of the thing described. Now, where the question of such "intrinsic rightness" becomes an issue we find ourselves entering the linguistic dimension. Here, the relationship between the expression and what is expressed is vital: there must be a 'fit.' To be able to sense whether there is such a 'fit,' you have to be in language because this 'fit' has a kind of intelligibility that is inconceivable outside language. Language here is not a means: it's a medium that is constitutive for the meanings which arise within. That is why Taylor draws "a picture of language as making possible new purposes, new levels of behavior, new meanings. …"[39]

What is meant by this, and how this is associated with the passive aspects of the human condition, becomes clearer if one takes a look at what is happening in this linguistic dimension beyond the above-mentioned descriptive case (the lecture desk). For Taylor, there are "outside of the attribution of properties, three other ranges of meanings which are opened to us by language: the properly human emotions (or metabiological meanings), certain relations, and strong value."[40] It is in these three ranges that Taylor's view on finding the 'right word,' that is an expression through articulation, gains its full force. But before I turn to the issue of articulation, I want to point out that these three ranges of emotions, relations, and strong values already on a first sight incorporate

36 Ibid., p. 91.

37 This example is taken from Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, p. 85.

38 Taylor, *The Language Animal*, p. 6; see also pp. 32-33.

39 Ibid., p. 4.

40 Ibid., p. 250.

certain passive aspects of human existence. Typically, emotions are thought to be something that is beyond our full, direct, and active control; they are normally thought to be something that (at least to some degree) happens to us, not (completely) something we make happen. Also, certain relations—normally those we value most—are something that at least in part happen to us. Take, for example, love:[41] Although it is possible that someone wants to love and wants to be loved, it is not possible in the same sense that someone wants to love a specific person. To love a specific person is something that must come about. Because love involves being moved by the beloved person, there is no pure choice of the loving person based on reasons alone. It is, rather, based on an involuntary affection. This involuntary affection then can be affirmed or rejected voluntarily. So, there is, as in Frankfurt's 'caring about,' a conjunction of passivity (being moved) and activity (to give in to or to reject this being moved). Finally, strong evaluations, too, involve an element of passivity. Strong evaluation "exists where what is valued comes across to us as not depending on our desires or decisions, or on whether or not we grasp it."[42] So, within all three ranges of emotions, relations, and strong values, you have a certain kind of passive aspect of being moved or appealed by.

The basis for this observation of (some degree) of passivity is that these three ranges of meaning are grounded in "felt intuition."[43] Taylor here advocates a cognitive view of emotions. To be in some situations always means to experience those situations as meaningful in some way. The reason for this ubiquity of meaning in which humans find themselves is "that things matter to them."[44] This mattering, in turn, is brought about by emotions, not by 'blind' emotional reactions but because these emotions are, in themselves (at least in standard cases), intentional (that is, they are about something). One could say these emotions are already some kind of proto-understanding of how the situation I am in matters to me and my life: "meaning and feeling go together; meanings are felt."[45] Now, these human meanings "impinge on us not singly, as it were, but in interconnected skeins."[46] So, you have constellations of these felt meanings that are defined in term of each other. This level, however, is the 'bottom line,' so to speak, of human being-in-the-world. Now, this 'bottom line'—as it is characterized by emotions—seems to incorporate irreducible passive elements, for emotions (typically) go along with some experience of 'befallenness.'

(b) Building on this 'bottom line,' articulation comes into play. For Taylor, the three ranges of meaning discussed just above in particular—properly

41 See on this Seel, "Glaube, Hoffnung, Liebe."

42 Taylor, *The Language Animal*, p. 192.

43 Ibid., p. 182.

44 Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, p. 98.

45 Taylor, *The Language Animal*, p. 180.

46 Ibid., p. 184.

human emotions, relations, and strong values—call for an articulation. Although your felt intuitions do seem to have some proto-meaning (clearly they are about something and normally that feels 'good' or 'bad'), they don't allow you to grasp the full shape of meaning of the situation you are in. Now, this emotional affect seems to elicit what Taylor calls "a perpetual and urgent striving to greater articulacy."[47] This is because only through such articulations can you get a clear understanding of the meaning of the situation in question and its mattering for you. "Prior to the articulation, the as yet unnamed import may be felt in a diffuse, unfocused way, a pressure that we can't yet respond to. After articulation, it becomes part of the explicit shape of meaning for us. As a result it is felt differently; our experience is changed; it has a more direct bearing on our lives."[48]

While articulating some felt intuition is clearly something that we do and not something that just happens to us, the structure of articulation also reflects the passive side of the human condition. This becomes clearer when we consider how articulation works. For Taylor, there are three levels of articulacy and he speaks of them as a kind of ladder: "enactment, verbal articulation of a name and crucial features, and a fuller account of its role in our lives."[49] One example Taylor gives for this ladder of articulacy is a leather-jacketed motorbike rider expressing and articulating something that could be named "machismo."[50] The base, as described, is a dim sense that something is a better way of living, a felt intuition. On a first level, this is expressed by enactment (for example, the habitus of a biker). Even if this enactment is a somewhat low-level articulation, it brings a new meaning to the skein of meanings while at the same time altering this skein. This enactment calls for a verbal articulation to better understand exactly what is involved here. So, on a second level, this enactment is given symbolic expression, which in turn is—on a third level—the basis of a fuller account of the nature, origins, and advantages of this way of life. A crucial point with this ladder of articulation is that the relation between these different rungs is "quasi-hermeneutical."[51] So, in struggling to realize his ethical outlook, the biker is moving forward in hermeneutical circles. "And so we are sent back and forth, between different points of reference, and this potentially without end."[52]

Why this never-ending struggle and this moving forth in circles? This question brings us back to the semantic dimension. It is because the "'right word' here discloses, brings the phenomenon properly into view for the first time.

47 Ibid., p. 178.
48 Ibid., p. 189.
49 Ibid., p. 224.
50 Ibid., pp. 38.
51 Ibid., p. 252.
52 Ibid., p. 253.

Discovery and invention are two sides of the same coin; we devise an expression which allows what we are striving to encompass to appear. This is a crucial facet of our language capability, which I will call 'articulation.'"[53] As these articulations are essentially interpretations of the respective 'lower' rungs, they are neither arbitrary (for they have to 'fit') nor are they completely determined by the 'lower' rung (for the shape of meaning is never yet fully contoured). So, articulation has, on the one hand, a moment of discovery, for the task is to find the right word, a word that must be true to the lower rung and finally to the felt intuition. At the same time, meaning is not given independently of its medium—articulation. So, felt intuition and the meaning within the respective levels of articulation are themselves (re-)shaped by their expression on the next level. So, on the other hand, there is always also a moment of invention with articulation.

Within this structure of articulation, though articulating something surely is also a bodily and intellectual activity, there are at least two aspects of passivity. First, as mentioned above, the 'bottom line' of felt intuition—the first impulse of the described hermeneutical quest—has (at least in part) the character of befallenness for its being an emotional affect. Second, whether the articulations on each level of articulacy succeed (transitionally) or fail seems beyond our active command. Hitting the right word seems partly to be something that must fall into place. That may not be so much the case if you are to name a felt intuition like 'jealousy' or 'pride' for which you have already gathered considerable experience in the course of your life (though still there might be tricky cases in unfamiliar situations). But if you have to articulate a fuller account of the nature, origins, and advantages of some way of life, for example, the falling-into-place of the right word might play a more important role. Maybe you could compare this situation to writing a novel or a poem. Despite all talents, skills, and effort, at times some writings miscarry. Other times, however, the artist herself is surprised by how well she managed to strike the right notes and how much more than ever expected could be disclosed by this. Sometimes something unexpected happens to the writer herself by and through literary articulacy and likewise articulating felt intuitions or refining meaning through articulation at times bears passive moments which are beyond our direct and active command.

That falling-into-place of the right words is beyond fully agential command also means that all these articulations "remain perpetually vulnerable"; they "cannot reach a firm and assured closure."[54] They cannot because these articulations refer to two or more reference points (the different rungs of articulation and felt intuition) that furthermore are interdependent due to the inventory powers of each articulation. Insofar as Taylor's language animal

[53] Ibid., p. 178.

[54] Ibid., pp. 252-253.

is 'condemned' to articulation, and this articulation is structurally interminable, there is in principle an openness to new experiences that was lacking in Rawls' life plans. Humans as language animals (at least if language is conceived as constitutive as in Taylor) are and must be open to and approachable for situations and things that happen to them. As these interpretative articulations are also constitutive of the self or the respective identity of each person, these personal identities also defy a firm and assured closure. Being set into the linguistic dimension, language animals are never fully transparent to themselves and never in full self-possession.[55] This is because language itself is beyond the full control and command of each speaker, despite being constitutive of personal identity.

The ideal of full self-command and self-possession that lead to an exclusion of contingency and passivity was visible in Rawls at least as vanishing point. For the language animal, however, the lack of (utopian) complete command and (ideally) pure activity is not an impairment of freedom or autonomy. It is the genuine way of self-realization for expressive beings like us. Though we constantly encounter the limits of language, it is language that is an enabling condition for being the kind of persons we are.[56] Here, the passive moments of the human condition are inherent in language itself. Although "language exceeds the powers any subject has to control it,"[57] the linguistic resources enable language animals to cope with aspects of befallenness. We have already seen that the affective bottom line of felt intuition bears an irreducible moment of this befallenness. Through the process of articulation (that at the same time reshapes this intuition), you gain an ever-clearer view on, and a freer stance to, the (in part passively experienced) meanings in question.[58]

(c) That language is not only one source of passive aspects in the human condition but also the medium in which you can positively include those aspects is also reflected in Taylor's conception of narrative identity.[59] It is not only a sum of single articulations that defines the identity of persons, for our self-understanding necessarily occurs in time. "We cannot have an understanding of self and life which doesn't include some such diachronic reading of the whole through an extended gestalt."[60] Now, this "extended gestalt" is the story that you tell of your life and that vouches for some kind of unity of the self. Only "through my story, I define my identity. And this is central

55 See on this also Smith, *Charles Taylor*, pp. 81-85.

56 See also Taylor on the validity of transcendental arguments (though not in a Kantian sense) in his *Philosophical Arguments*, pp. 20-33.

57 Smith, *Charles Taylor*, p. 81.

58 Taylor, *The Language Animal*, p. 251.

59 Ibid., Chapter 8; see also Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 47.

60 Taylor, *The Language Animal*, p. 317.

to being a self."[61] Although this life narrative cannot consist of an incoherent, disconnected sequence of single events, the form of the story has a considerable openness. In a story, there are normally more than some options for how the plot can coherently unfold further. And surely there is more than one narrative interpretation of a certain course of life that can be given convincingly. And there is no reason in principle that stories cannot include those things that happen to us (in contrast to those we do) and integrate them into the context of our whole course of life.[62] Now, compared to Rawls' life plans, this narrative conception allows for moments of passivity as well as offering far more possibilities for openness. The exclusive focus on active agency that we saw with life plans doesn't hold for the concept of narrative identity. And, while the narrative of your life does include some sense of direction, there need not be goals or purposes fixed in advance with which you are to stick, at least to a certain degree, as in life plans. To be sure, life plans in Rawls are subject to reconsideration and adaption. But "[b]eyond a certain degree of change it is no longer the original plan that is followed but a new one. And if the succession of plans becomes too rapid, the whole point of planning is lost and all that is left is a series of ad hoc decisions."[63] The point, however, is that the idea of a plan implies in principle fixed goals or purposes and that success is defined in advance. This substantially limits the openness of life plans as compared to narratives.

So, while I think that Reader's complaint that philosophy often neglects 'the other side of agency' is right in principle (I have tried to make the claim as plausible as possible with the hugely influential concept of Rawls' life plans), I don't think that this criticism applies to the philosophy of Taylor. Admittedly, there are passages where Taylor equates persons and agents and to which Reader refers. But Taylor's anthropology does not focus exclusively on some 'pure' active agency. I have tried to show that the language animal, as Taylor conceives it, is also characterized by the moments of passive experience and befallenness, and that the activity of articulation that is crucial to a person's life also bears moments of passivity that are not understood as some deprivation of some purely active ideal.

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61 Ibid.

62 This is why Wilhelm Schapp built his anthropology on the thought that to be human means to be-always-yet-entangled-in-stories (see his *In Geschichten verstrickt*, which was originally published in 1953).

63 Heyd and Miller, "Life Plans," p. 27.

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