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Part I
1
Introduction

Aims and objectives
The interpretivist work of Charles Taylor is used in this book to explore the natural environment as a shared ecological and social commonality. The key focus is on the supposition that the natural world possesses intrinsic value and new political structures are needed. My preliminary thinking for this book began in response to important environmental manifestos such as The Brundtland Report on sustainability and The Helsham Report in Australia about how to preserve threatened rainforests and tracts of native land. One of the most contentious points concerned the economic viability of the Lemonthyme area in Southern Tasmania. The Helsham Report's economic reasoning was criticised from many quarters because it submerged discussions about the political implications of the dilemma into the debate between development and conservation. In adopting an essentially economic methodology for environmental management, the report perpetuated the modernist assumption that nature stands in wait of humanity.

It soon became apparent that these environmental reports were shallow, and it became clear that a broad philosophical investigation was required, involving a range of metaphysical and theoretical questions that these reports did not address. These questions concerned humanity's impact on nature and required consideration of issues such as skirmishes over territorial waters, climate change, declining stocks of indigenous species, different rates of adaptation, despoliation of beaches and debates concerning population limits.

This book endeavours to offer a different way to think about these questions by examining environmental and political concepts emanating from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment through to the current
environmental thinking of Charles Taylor. Taylor has stated: ‘It seems to me that every anthropocentrism pays a terrible price in impoverishment in this regard. Deep Ecologists\(^4\) tend to concur from one point of view, theists from another. And I am driven to this position from both.’\(^5\) In this summary statement, Taylor acknowledges that he uses ideas from Deep Ecology and theism to rethink humanity’s place in the natural environment. Implicit in the statement is his quest to understand how modern approaches to environmental and social relationships have been understood in Western political theory.\(^6\)

By way of introduction, this book on Taylor’s relevance to environmental politics canvasses liberal frameworks concerning nature and objections from the perspective of Deep Ecology, far-from-equilibrium systems theory and postmodernism. It then examines those liberal frameworks in line with Taylor’s counter-posing authenticity to liberal proceduralism. It goes on to explore and utilise Taylor’s alternative, noting that his moral framework takes us from a purely human-centred view of ecology to a theistic social imaginary that guides *A Secular Age*. While in *Sources of the Self*, Taylor explains that he aims to reveal the environmental and social impacts of two dominant traditions of thought that shape modern political discourse.\(^7\) The first picture suggests a conception of the subject as a disengaged agent who is ‘free and rational to the extent that he has fully distinguished himself from the natural and social worlds’.\(^8\) The second picture that Taylor develops involves deconstructing the assumptions that underpin this disengaged approach to human agency. His deconstruction of classical political thought criticises modern epistemological premises and replaces them with a picture of the human agent as actively engaged in the natural environment.\(^9\) He explains that these critiques of epistemology often turn on this interpenetration of the scientific and the moral sphere.

I will argue that Taylor explains how his critique of epistemology develops ideas from Kant, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein. These extremely important thinkers offer a shift away from purely disengaged pictures of the human agent. He states that there is a certain interpretivist continuity between Kant and Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty. This engagement points toward a metaphysical analysis to further challenge modern political disengaged approaches to human agency.\(^10\) It is then a relatively simple extension to explain how our conception of human agency impinges adversely on the natural environment. That is, our political systems become infatuated with economic growth at the expense of creating improved relationships with other communities, nation-states and other entities living in
the natural environment. My argument is that interpretivism has the potential to inform new community structures and to change thinking thereby moderating our adverse impacts on the natural environment. Moreover, in the chapters that follow I examine the debate between interpretivists and critical theorists who have made important inroads into environmental debates. The important arguments that they make involve the need to recognise and understand that interconnections between our understanding of commonalities, difference, location and place.

However, before examining these challenges to the modern picture of disengagement involves an openness to the world through an explanation of the intricate connections between people and the natural environment. This leads Taylor to his emphasis on how people’s identities are formed within cultural, environmental and linguistic traditions that frame the factors which have significance in their lives. Clearly, one crucially significant factor is the way people relate to the natural environment. Taylor’s thought, therefore, is relevant to considerations of what it means to be a person as if the processes of the natural environment are not important. In particular, Taylor’s work on authenticity, interpretation and secularism maintains that the most promising ecological argument must engage citizens so that they are involved in community environmental decisions.

These issues are outlined in two principal sections of the book. Part I comprises five chapters examining the connections between Taylor’s work on agency, interpretivism, metaphysics and social imaginaries in environmental contexts. Part II has seven chapters of which three chapters are on Taylor’s environmental and political engagement with critical theory, liberalism and utilitarianism and four chapters examine a number of critical perspectives on Taylor’s work emanating from various postmodern, radical and social approaches to environmental politics.
2

Basic Issues in Taylor’s Philosophy

This chapter outlines some key issues and definitions in Taylor's philosophy to set the scene to understand our place in the natural environment. The focus of this chapter is on interpretivism, the public sphere, and the processes of secularism.

2.1 Environmental conjectures and refutations: preliminary issues

In On Walden Pond, the famous environmentalist David Henry Thoreau claimed that ‘in wildness is the preservation of the world’. ¹ This famous maxim challenges the modern supposition that answers to humanity’s environmental dilemmas can be found through human ingenuity and technology. Taylor has often stated that he agrees with Thoreau, and thus he has explored how the relationship between humanity’s social and natural environments has been understood in Western political philosophy since the Enlightenment. ²

Taylor offers an interesting approach that can be applied to environmental politics by using modern debates concerning how we interact in the natural environment to challenge how humanity thinks about relationships with the natural environment. In this regard, Taylor uses the interpretivist ideas he has developed to critique political perspectives that are based on instrumental ways to reason about the natural environment, because they invariably sever the connections between the social and natural environment. This is why many environmentalists concur with Deep Ecologists and other social environmentalists concur with theism. He combines ideas from both traditions, which leads to an openness to different values that may emanate from within us or from the whole of nature. ³
The environmental argument developed in these chapters draws upon the interpretivist framework employed by Taylor to explore the Enlightenment’s conception of rationality and reason, applying it to political matters central to environmentalism. Furthermore, I use interpretivism to explore the Enlightenment’s commitment to autonomy and the way it evaluates the natural environment as a good to be conquered and mastered. I examine the Enlightenment’s stress on autonomy and the way it submerges political and ecological values. My environmental argument affirms what Taylor calls \textit{authenticity} – extending our understanding of autonomy to consider processes of human self-realisation through exploring humanity’s ‘being-in-the-world’. Autonomy refers to human freedom and the ability to be impartial, but authenticity demands contextualisation of that autonomy. The notion of authenticity helps in considering how Aristotle’s ‘practical reason’ can illuminate values other than those which reflect instrumental considerations.

In particular, Taylor’s work on authenticity informs this book because I believe that the most convincing ecological argument must be built on interpretivist premises. By way of preliminary clearing, my argument canvases liberal frameworks concerning nature and objections to them from the perspective of Deep Ecology, far-from-equilibrium systems theory and postmodernism. The environmental perspective examines modern liberal frameworks counter-posing Taylor’s authenticity to the liberal infatuation with proceduralism. I go on to explain Taylor’s alternative, noting that Taylor’s moral framework takes a theistic direction. In this chapter I ask: can Taylor’s approach be extended to escape anthropocentrism? I explore whether we fully understand our impact on nature. My key argument revolves around Taylor’s attempt to preserve threatened values by understanding perspectives on authenticity and expressivism which provide a radical reworking of humanity’s understanding of being-in-the-world, and a starting point for rethinking the way individuals and communities ought to be dealing politically with ecological crises.

This chapter outlines key structural issues in Taylor’s political philosophy in four key sections following this introduction to the chapter. Section 2.2 introduces Taylor’s interpretivist framework as it applies to his environmental and political work. Section 2.3 extends Taylor’s interpretivism to search for meaning and intrinsic value in the natural environment. Section 2.4 introduces Taylor’s ideas on exclusive humanism, instrumentalism, and secularism in an environmental context. Section 2.5 concludes the chapter by linking Taylor’s work on secularism to
environmental politics in the public sphere: these arguments involve debates with the communicative theorist, Jürgen Habermas.\(^8\)

### 2.2 The relevance of Taylor’s interpretivism to environmental politics: a succinct consideration

I will use Taylor’s work on liberalism and interpretivist frameworks to construct a bridge between democratic, ethical, and ecological perspectives. This leads to a fusion between a broad liberalism and interpretivist ideas, which involves developing common ground to recognise cultural and environmental issues. This fusion of perspectives in the search for a common ground is done in a spirit that aims to moderate the dominant anthropocentric attitude toward the natural environment. More broadly, the ecological perspective developed here owes much to Taylor’s interpretation of Martin Heidegger’s argument that people are thrown into a world saturated with meaning and value. It owes a debt to Merleau-Ponty’s explorations into how we perceive the world in which we live.\(^9\) People’s identities are formed within cultural and linguistic traditions that frame the factors which have significance in their lives. Clearly one crucially significant factor is the way people relate to nature.\(^10\) He argues that Heidegger’s work on language is relevant to considerations of what it means to be a person in the modern world.\(^11\)

Furthermore, it is important to remember that Taylor has been influential in developing the art of interpretation and applying it to issues associated with environmental politics, multicultural recognition, and international relations.\(^12\) He has explored the problems that arise when we solely rely on modern theories of knowledge that emphasise procedural political solutions by using the interpretivist framework. Moreover, there is a critical framework within the interpretivist perspective, a fact that has often been overlooked by critics who say that Taylor’s theological commitments leave him whistling in the dark.\(^13\) The interpretivist argument is that modern environmental and political thinking has narrowed how the natural environment is conceptualised. Interpretivism also involves examining current theories of knowledge and explaining how they have shaped the societies in which people live and their relationships with the natural environment. This interpretivism examines the limitations and possibilities within the dominant theories of knowledge as they apply to environmental and social dilemmas. Central to Taylor’s interpretivist framework is an argument that modern economic and political sciences have created environmental and social practices that narrow how the environmental and social dilemmas of modern societies are perceived.
Therefore, Taylor's interpretivist framework transcends modernity's infatuation with procedure and escapes the visions Max Weber conjured with the 'iron cage' of bureaucracy. On this view, interpretivism moves beyond current political methods that are outgrowths from economic and procedural strategies. These arguments reflect Taylor's dissatisfaction with approaches associated with instrumental reason and procedural liberalism and invite rethinking what would be a full life and how people could strive towards it. To save the natural environment and recognise values of political significance, Taylor gives prominence to the power of a dialogic society. He is particularly critical of political and procedural approaches that are insensitive to significant cultural and environmental values. Taylor has recently pointed out that his key works, *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age*, were inspired by a quest to better understand the plurality of world-views that have been used to explain the meaning and intrinsic value in the natural environment. Moreover, *Sources of the Self* was underpinned by the belief that the natural environment and humanity are entwined. When it comes to articulating different visions of the natural environment, these critical issues require careful attention in a political sense. Furthermore, Hittinger was one of the early reviewers to observe that the Deep ecological and theistic dimensions in *Sources of the Self* left him reliant on an external and transcendental God. That is, ‘there is a theology that is crucial to, and yet left inarticulate in, Taylor’s treatment of these issues’. These critical responses to Taylor, however, do not engage with his philosophical and speculative quest to reveal humanity’s relationships with the natural environment. One of Taylor’s principal aims is to reveal the anthropocentric limitations within exclusive humanism, which cuts people off from the possibility that there exist other sources of the self. Therefore, the interpretivist and narrative dimensions in his work are designed to open us to the splendour and value within the natural environment. That is, the natural environment cannot be reduced to physical causes and effects but contains meaning and value that language-bearing agents appreciate and recognise. Taylor argues that the meaning and intrinsic value in the natural environment is submerged by those instrumental approaches that deny the existence of values independent of a valuing subject.

2.3 Extending Taylor’s interpretivism to environmental politics: the search for meaning and intrinsic value

Drawing on Hegelian and Romantic traditions, Taylor not only challenges the idea that nature is there to be consumed, but doubts whether
humanity is capable of mastering the natural environment, which is far more intractable than most liberal assumptions allow. Far from mastering it, we may perhaps never fully understand it but at least Taylor’s proposals for informed discussion might highlight what we do know about nature’s processes. This is evident in his earliest work where he explores limits to growth and the possible shape of steady-state communities. Here he is at one with ecologists, deep and shallow, though he tends to concentrate more on developing ways to think about how to organise modern communities so that citizens are aware of the decisions being made on their behalf.

Any reader of Prigogine and Stengers’ *Order Out of Chaos* and Stengers’ *Cosmopolitics* might detect a contradiction between nature’s intractability and the advocacy of steady-state communities. They maintain that systems are rarely in equilibrium and that far-from-equilibrium situations are the normal state of affairs:

> We know now that societies are immensely complex systems involving a potentially enormous number of bifurcations exemplified by the variety of cultures that have evolved in the relatively short span of human history. We know now that such systems are highly sensitive to fluctuations. This leads both to hope and a threat: hope, since even small fluctuations may grow and change the overall structure. As a result, individual activity is not doomed to insignificance. On the other hand, this is also a threat, since in our universe the security of stable, permanent rules seems gone forever.

Is it possible here to make use of the separation between ontology and advocacy? Surely, new scientific methodologies, such as those pioneered by Prigogine and Stengers, offer an opportunity to extend interpretivism in a new interpretivist and post-liberal direction. They define ‘dissipative structures’ as non-equilibrium spatial structures which occur beyond the point of bifurcation and offer a new set of phenomena whereby ‘we may have oscillating chemical reactions, non-equilibrium spatial structures, or chemical waves’. From interpretivist quarters, the issue is to recognise how ecosystems are ‘dissipative structures maintained by the matter and energy flowing through them’. Once formed, these structures, in order to keep their shape, need to dissipate entropy so that it will not build up within the system and destroy it (or return it to equilibrium). Because dissipative structures produce high levels of entropy, they require high inputs of matter and energy. The structures, moreover, are prone to random
fluctuations which might result in what is known as a ‘bifurcation point’, where the structure reorganises itself at a higher or lower level of complexity (a possibility which cannot be predicted).

Here Taylor’s interpretivism must recognise that a dissipative structure emerges from a chaotic situation of change, where many options exist but only one path can dominate. But, because of the nature of the disturbance theorists cannot predict what will occur. Prigogine and Stengers’ argue that the classical understanding of science is no longer relevant because systems are never close to equilibrium – they are dissipative structures. Accordingly, physics and biology respond to the environment, take in energy and grow. Classical thermodynamics has little to say about this form of negative entropy which has implications for the construction of human communities. This understanding of thermodynamics, however, attempts to unite both the second law of thermodynamics (the tendency toward entropy) and the development of order out of chaos. The implication of this argument is that the mechanistic approach of the Industrial Revolution was obsessed with equilibrium or near-to-equilibrium situations. ‘The point is that these systems tended to break down, just as the archetypal steam engine wore out. One saw entropy everywhere. If, however, one looked at far-from-equilibrium situations, one could see order generated everywhere.’

The natural environment is but one of many systems that are like a dissipative structure. Moreover, the dialectical and political implication of this new approach to science involves healing the rift between scientific and philosophical interpretations of nature’s value. In the light of these extensions to our understanding of social equilibria it is necessary to abandon the totalisation aspired to by Hegel. But it will be recalled that Taylor retrieves Hegel’s historical method to consider the relationships between particular phenomena and the political structures which articulate common purposes. Taylor, like Prigogine and Stengers, recognises these problems in Hegel’s system and avoids the totalising dilemma through an extension into our understanding of democratic structures. He accommodates political and environmental differences through a political structure which works toward the ideal of authenticity, which is not a fixed end-point but involves a normative approach that provides a critical reflection on the relationships between people and nature.

Interestingly, Isabella Stengers’ recent work on Cosmopolitics also helps us in regaining a glimpse of the ‘scientific’ relationships between the social and the ecological spheres together with the possibility of
reconciling humanity’s relationships with the natural environment. She shares Taylor’s Hegelian terminology that it is through practical reason in broader public spheres that we are able to avoid the type of criticisms levelled at ‘shallow green’ ecology, and anthropocentrism which submerges awareness of humanity’s place in nature. Realising the convergence of his views with part of the Deep Ecology agenda Taylor points us toward his work on environmental and cosmological imaginaries which I examine in Chapter 4.

Yet, while concurring that nature possesses intrinsic value, reflected in the sense of awe that we feel when confronting it, he distances himself from Deep ecologists who define value independent of human moral categories. Taylor emphasises the role of dialogue, language and perception involved in our interactions with the natural environment. An interpretivist perspective, therefore, maintains that it is important to consider the dialogic processes through which citizens are provided with opportunities to learn about the good society through democratic discussion. We shall see in the chapters that follow that meaning and intrinsic value are important concepts that must be given consideration in modern public spheres.

Speculating, Taylor would probably concur with Aldo Leopold’s famous environment perspective that humanity should learn to live from the land, but would add a role for public spheres to articulate ecological concerns. He certainly avoids the tendency, common among Deep ecologists, to rank ecosystem interests higher than those of humanity. Taylor’s interpretivism, in common with the environmental theorist Bryan Norton’s criticism of Deep Ecology, maintains that nature has value for itself, rather than in itself. Norton argues that environmentalists searching for intrinsic-based values, such as J. B. Callicott, cannot locate the intrinsic value in nature independently of present language systems and structures. Norton’s solution is a pragmatic ecological position and uses John Rawls’ idea of an overlapping consensus. Enough has been said above to see how Norton’s ideas could be bent in a Taylorian direction to link the ecological and the social. Taylor, however, a staunch critic of postmodernism, would be wary of the implication of Norton’s advocacy of a new ‘postmodern’ world-view where people respect and operate within nature. Perhaps, though, Norton’s ‘pragmatism’ is similar to the postmodern position but it is not one of the extreme variety where diversity and difference are allowed to trump all conceptions of the good. Extending interpretivism to ecological politics leads simply to the supposition that the community is related to nature, where nature is not something foreign, strange and alien.
2.4  *A Secular Age: the rise of exclusive humanism*

In recent work, such as *A Secular Age*, Taylor offers a master narrative using literary and philosophical visions to explain the forces and social factors that have led to current environmental and social predicaments. Taylor has often stated that he does not offer universal solutions, but rather a speculative thesis about individual well-being. In Taylor’s early work, for example, he argues that Heidegger’s work offers a means to explore the value in the natural environment, which is discussed later in Chapters 7 and 8. In recent work he examines various approaches to the issue of secularism which can be used to understand our environmental concerns. He focuses on what he calls ‘closed world’ secularism that leads to instrumental and procedural thinking, which maintains that only human values count as valid knowledge.

Of course, in his *Secular Age*, he does not argue for a dismissal of secularism altogether. Indeed, his art of interpretation or political interpretivism is relevant to environmental debates in our secular age in the manner it explores how communities ought to be dealing with the environmentally significant issues confronting them. Interpretivists are critical of Western thinking whose ability to solve cultural and environmental issues is limited by procedural and technical methods. Taylor’s interpretations examine how these environmental and political traditions have created current political and social structures. He explains:

> Not all critics attacked on all axes, of course, but what they had in common was the sense that the danger which awaits us in our culture takes a certain form. We are tempted to draw the limits of our life too narrowly, to be concerned exclusively with a narrow range of internally-generated goals. In doing this we are closing ourselves to other, greater goals. These might be seen as originating outside of us, from God, or from the whole of nature, or from humanity; or they might be seen as goals which arise indeed within, but which push us to greatness, heroism, dedication, devotion to our fellow human beings, and which are now being suppressed and denied.  

Here Taylor’s work on the processes of secularism and the role of theism can be interpreted as offering two different, but complementary, political frameworks to understand the contours of modernity. In *A Secular Age* he now offers an exhaustive account of the rise of a secular culture and the costs it can create for our being-in-the-world. From the narrative structures in that work his aim is to explore our being and place in the natural environment.
Furthermore, the dominant Western-inspired thinking assumes that the scientific method is the optimal means to order human interactions with the natural environment. Accordingly, the art of interpretation offers a critical perspective to examine current social structures and their effects on the natural environment. Many approaches have been used to examine human agency, on which modern European economic and political civilisation has been built. Taylor’s interpretations examine how these traditions have created current political and social structures. His recent work focuses on how a certain procedural construal of how we acquire knowledge has gained sway. The relevance to environmental politics, I contend, focuses on what can happen when our culture takes a certain economic path that devalues anything other than pricing and trading mechanisms. As Taylor notes the limits of our life are then drawn too narrowly and we become focused on a narrow range of internally generated human goals. These are the goods of accumulation and transformation, which assume that humanity has usurped the need for Platonic forms, the natural environment or gods.

Therefore, from the direction of Continental philosophy he uses the work of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger to argue that people are directly engaged with the natural environment and not separate from it. One implication from this way of thinking is that our critical ethical and governance structures are rendered ineffective in the moral malaise of modernity. A collective amnesia grips society where the role of common and shared values are forgotten; hence, good practice needs to be nurtured and good reasons need to be provided. Taylor returns to religion to better understand the notion of a social imaginary. He explains:

[A] pattern of practices that gives a certain shape to our social imaginary. Religion – or, as Durkheim liked to put it, the senses of the sacred – is the way we experience or belong to the larger social whole. Explicit religious doctrines offer an understanding of our place in the universe and among other human beings, because they reflect what it is like to live in this place. Religion, for Durkheim, was the very basis of society. Only by studying how society hangs together, and the changing modes of its cohesion in history, will we discover the dynamic of secularization.41

In Varieties of Religion Today, this theme is developed to explore the dominant philosophical trends in modernity and offers an implicit critique of the assumption that the market is free. He uses hermeneutic-inspired
interpretivist reflections on secular processes to explain the retreat of common values that bring people together despite their differences. It is important therefore to remember that Taylor finds commonalities in various religious practices that have been submerged by processes of secularisation. Ultimately these processes reduce the public sphere to market relations.

For Taylor, neither of these interpretations of modernity nor their secular processes are attractive. This is because modern secularism seems unable to acknowledge that there is a range of religious and spiritual beliefs that empower people’s lives which put us in touch with the natural environment. These beliefs are the internal goods associated with virtuous practices that influence what is worthwhile while potentially empowering social institutions to pursue sustainable outcomes. Taylor does not suggest that there has been a straightforward decline in religious belief and thus depicts secularity in a different way. He states:

Secularity closes old, and opens new, avenues of faith. What it doesn’t seem to allow, however, is a new ‘age of faith’, that is a time of universal belief, where the undeniable common experiences that no-one can escape bespeak some commonly agreed spiritual reality. That seems no longer possible in a secular age.42

In this passage, Taylor’s political view emphasises why common goods are needed for well-functioning and secular societies.43 The interpretivist argument is that nature is one such good, but one that the dominant scientific revolution has considered to be devoid of intrinsic value.44 This is because the dominant scientific view relies on objective, disengaged, disembodied knowledge to explain our place in the natural environment. Taylor argues that this dominant scientific view leads to closed world systems. That is, the prominence of the scientific method has created a culture that conceptualises the natural environment as a good to be controlled and dominated. The purely technical scientific approach leads to a depiction of nature as a realm devoid of meaning and perpetuates an instrumental social imaginary.

For Taylor, the critical analysis of a secular age leads to a focus on the common purposes that exist between all entities. The extreme philosophical position that Taylor attacks involves an assumption that there is a strict boundary between people and the natural environment. This assumption denies the possibility that the natural environment contains intrinsic value that can influence people’s life plans and the opportunities available to them. Interpretivism, therefore, is defined by what it
aims to negate in the domain of modern epistemology. In the domain of epistemology there is a quest to explain that there are no ultimate foundations, nor are there any necessary explanatory factors that place the mind before the natural environment. In the formulation of knowledge there is the supposition that our skills of perception put people directly in the natural environment. The interpretivist approach, in this regard, emphasises the role of discourse and language in reformulating how communities interact with the natural environment.

2.5 Taylor’s work on enchanting communicative spheres: informing relevant publics

Central to Taylor’s environmental visions and moral theory is his important work on the public sphere. He emphasises that the role of the public sphere is to create awareness of values other than those determined by market forces. One way to introduce the idea of a public sphere is to return to Taylor’s review of Habermas’s *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Taylor challenges Habermas’s theory of community, language and the public sphere to illustrate how subtle accounts of secularism (concerned with the secularisation of public spaces, the decline in belief and practice) are superseded by newer versions of secularism that allow space for belief and spiritual accounts.

Taylor battles against those who want to return to a pre-humanist framework of the good life, and defends aspects of the Enlightenment against reactionary closed world systems and forces. His interpretivism, through dialogue and dialogic structures, combines and retains the features of these political systems that are worth saving. In this regard, Taylor questions Habermas’s reliance on a procedural approach to create reconciliation and recognition with other interlocutors concerning matters of significance such as the natural environment. He explains that in eighteenth-century Western Europe a new concept of public opinion emerged where commonalities were developed. Taylor points out that coming to grips with the idea of a common space is difficult. Moreover, the concept of a common space cannot be expressed using empirical and scientific methodologies. Taylor continues that the common space must be given full consideration in our collective deliberations because it is associated with factors that shape community and identity. Taylor explains:

What is this common space? It’s a rather strange thing, when one comes to think of it. The people involved here have by hypothesis never met. But they are seen as linked in a common space of
discussion through media – in the 18th century, print media. Books, pamphlets, newspapers circulated among the educated public, vehiculating theses, analyses, arguments, counter-arguments, referring to and refuting each other. These were widely read, and often discussed in face-to-face gatherings, in drawing rooms, coffee houses, salons, and/or in more (authoritatively) ‘public’ places, like Parliament. The sensed general view which resulted from all this, if any, counted as ‘public opinion’ in this new sense.47

The people involved in the public sphere have never met but are linked in a common space of discussion which is opened up by new media mechanisms. Interestingly, this is something both Habermas and Taylor are exploring on their Immanent Frame discussion site. The Immanent Frame moderators are well aware of the danger that discussion pages may degenerate into never-ending disputes.48 It is probably for such reasons that all viewpoints entered on that public site are subject to principles of reasonable discussion.

A further caveat is in order, however. Both Habermas and Taylor have defined the public sphere in different ways. Nevertheless, both agree that the public sphere began to expand in the eighteenth century when print media and new forms of communication emerged. It will be recalled that for Taylor the general view which resulted from this process was deemed ‘public opinion’. This was first expressed by Charles Fox to the British House of Commons:

It is certainly right and prudent to consult the public opinion... If the public opinion did not happen to square with mine; if, after pointing out to them the danger, they did not see it in the same light with me, or if they conceived that another remedy was preferable to mine, I should consider it as my due to my King, due to my Country, due to my honour to retire, that they might pursue the plan which they thought better, by a fit instrument, that is by a man who thought with them...but one thing is most clear, that I ought to give the public the means of forming an opinion.49

Here the legislative forum informs public opinion and exposes it to the pressure of public discourse, thereby illustrating the notion that legislation should ultimately bow to public opinion. Now this space provides an opportunity not simply to shape legislation but also to become involved in the common public sphere, thereby contributing to the common values that make up a society.
Yet, in recent times there has been a decline in developing the common goods in the public sphere, in spite of the fact that even back in the eighteenth-century print media opened up this new space and offered a hope that new ways to inform communities were imminent. In this regard, Taylor integrates ideas from different traditions in a fusion of horizons offering a broader interpretivist approach to environmental and social politics. The approach aims to create shared commonalities which open us to a space of reasoning that includes the intrinsic value of the natural environment. This common space, opened up by our ability to express thoughts in language, provides different ways to consider how to visualise the natural environment and appreciate our place in it. More fundamentally, a procedural political system has the potential to create a bureaucratic structure that imprisons people within an iron cage from which they cannot escape. Taylor responds to Habermas and suggests a return to an earlier way of moderating power in a public forum – the *ekklesia* – which would be called for in the Greek city states when their governments had become too corrupt and oppressive.\(^50\) This was an assembly outside the civil authority of the city, and if enough people came out and refused to accept the existing centralised civil authority that government would collapse. Non-participation has been a successful and peaceful means to free people from oppressive civil authority throughout history. This is because it is ultimately people who have the means to expose and remove governing bodies that stifle the human condition and our ability to appreciate the natural environment.\(^51\)

In these matters, Taylor challenges critical and radical theory to create a political thinking that accommodates complexity and examines dilemmas posed by the forces and powers of corporatisation, harmonisation and globalisation.\(^52\) These forces narrow the role of the public sphere. This is not just an argument for more sites to discuss and narrate the failures of capitalism, but an explicit call to understand the social forces and powers that have resulted in the malaise of critical and radical political strategies to create environmental and social change. Interpretivism points towards the development of civil societies where patterns of meaning in communities reflect structures and political pathways. That is, only when it is appreciated that these forces and powers create our current predicament can we hope to find ways to combine the divergent goods on offer. The politics of change have become marginalised in the quest to facilitate free markets in globalising spatial structures.
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