

Charles Taylor, *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016).

Charles Taylor gave birth to many expressions, which have entered the contemporary debate. It is precisely the situation of disdain and perhaps contempt—as in *The Malaise of Modernity*—that he captures as propitious—republished then as *The Ethics of Authenticity*—because the situation is perplexing, therefore capable of attracting attention and progressing towards a “metaphorical” meaning, that is, “translatable” in the broader context. His particular focus is recently on language as a phenomenon of meaningful expression. In his 2016 book *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity* Taylor attempts to distinguish and give voice to languages within language, i.e., theories, that arise due to the idea in the modern era with claims about the use of language itself in a meaningful way. But perhaps even more he devotes to the role of discourse in speaking, the articulation of significance, and its counterpart, that is, “finding the meanings which can make sense—bearable sense—of our lives” (p. 63).

His insightful analysis leads to the dilemma of the moral dimension of language and its significance. Taylor points out, that the attempts of regimented languages of the post-Galilean natural science “have in the end a normative thrust” (p. 131). As a result, all acceptable sentences—as obvious in Robert Brandom’s “naturalism”—have to obey “ontological requirements which may be imposed.” (p. 131) In this way, the norms that emerge in the descriptive-explicative account are reduced to instrumental usage, thus deprived of the functions of thought in humans and culture. If the analysis in *The Malaise of Modernity* started from worries to provide ample space for the recognition of the complexity of the phenomenon under scrutiny, so as to arrive at a program of *The Ethics of Authenticity*, in *The Language Animal* Taylor already sketches new worries. They will resonate even more in the recent broadcast entitled “What does it Mean to Live in a Secular Age?” Reading Our Times (Oct 27, 2020), hosted by Nick Spencer, namely the mismatch between a country’s official ethics and its practice, and similarly in regards to politics. As if one could never again believe in words, because they delude. Taylor has already acknowledged the conditions for authenticity, or better yet, growth toward “soft authenticity,”—so to speak—which knows how to adapt oneself without getting lost or canceled out. One of these is on the one hand, the articulation of meaning, on the other hand, the recognition of significance in the extended sense of learning and approval. The challenge of contemporary philosophy therefore seems to be to restore to language the capacity to communicate in the sense of constituting human relationships. Without being at the word this would be impossible. Thus, the thesis of the book, which expresses the second part of the title, that is “The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity” is that of the quest for the true dimensions of language, instead of flat communication. Charles Taylor not only earned the reference point through the vocabulary he invented, but he also took the place of the vanguard and provides us with the insight and efficacy of that dimension of discourse.