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Entre Nous: Charles Taylor's Social Ontology

Arto Laitinen

Social Philosophy,Faculty of Social Science, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

ABSTRACT
This article discusses Charles Taylor's philosophy of human sociality, focusing especially on Taylor's analysis of what happens, when a linguistic exchange or conversation starts. On his view, a shared space emerges, in which some object or topic is irreducibly 'for us', *entre nous*, not merely 'for me' and 'for you,'. When something is brought to our shared attention, a 'we' is at the same time created. This article asks, first, how this differs from mutual recognition of others as candidate conversation partners, and from joint commitments, which bind the parties and structure further joint action. The article argues, against Margaret Gilbert, that these are three different phenomena highlighting different aspects of human sociality. Secondly, the article discusses the nature of the 'we': does the irreducibility claim commit Taylor to a view of plural subjects or 'group minds'? Thirdly, the article outlines two possible readings of a 'shared space': one posits an emergent social layer and another an emergence of a 'conversationally extended mind'. Both are possible interpretations of Taylor's account, while neither is committed to a notorious phenomenal group mind or to a more demanding rational unity -view (Carol Rovane). Taylor's '*entre nous*' offers a distinct perspective, of continuing relevance.

Social ontology is an emerging subfield of philosophy discussing, as its name suggests, metaphysics of the social world. It also covers questions about the nature of sociality and the reducibility of social phenomena to individual ones (Epstein 2018; Ikäheimo and Laitinen 2011). This article suggests that the field still has a lot to learn from Charles Taylor's social theory and philosophy of social sciences and, perhaps less obviously, Taylor's philosophy of language. I focus especially on Taylor's (1980, 1985a, 2016) claim that in a linguistic exchange or conversation, a *shared space* emerges, in which some object or topic is irreducibly 'for us', *entre nous*, not merely 'for me' and 'for you' as more individualist or monological accounts would have it. When something is brought to our shared attention, a 'we' to whom the topic or object is present is at the same time created.

CONTACT Arto Laitinen arto.laitinen@tuni.fi

One of the leading theorists in social ontology, Margaret Gilbert (2011), who – discussing this claim of Taylor's – has explicitly claimed that this is where genuine sociality, and social groups in the central sense, emerge. Gilbert however seems to tie together three phenomena that I think should be kept separate: 1) mutual recognition of others as candidate conversation partners, 2) Taylor's actual conversation in a shared space where some topics are irreducibly 'for us', and 3) joint commitments, which bind the parties and structure further joint action. Gilbert (2013) has analyzed these commitments in detail. But I try to show that joint commitments in her sense go further than Taylor's shared space, and also that interesting and important kinds of prior recognition precede the emergence of Taylor's shared space – Taylor's proposal is distinct from those. We therefore can distinguish three rival claims as to what is the key to social reality. It is a live option of course that all three turn out to be equally important, but for the ease of presentation I treat them as rivals. I try to clarify how Taylor's irreducibly social *entre nous* differs from two closely related phenomena: the less demanding prior recognition on the one hand, and the more demanding joint commitments on the other.

Secondly, I discuss the nature of the 'we': does the irreducibility claim commit Taylor to a view of plural subjects or 'group minds'? I contrast his proposal with an implausible strawman view, which holds that group subjects are exactly like individual subjects in having minds, experiences, sensations and a phenomenal consciousness of their own. I contrast it with a sophisticated but more demanding view (developed by Carol Rovane 1997 and Philip; Pettit 2003) which construes a group perspective not as phenomenal consciousness but as a rational point of view, a center of commitments aiming at a rational unity. The latter is a real thing, but again more demanding (analyzable in terms of commitments) than the Taylorian emergent 'we of a conversation'. It also leaves aside the emotional sharedness which is crucial to the Taylorian *entre nous* or 'communion' (and can only cover shared commitments to emotions, not shared emotions). I propose tentatively two interpretations which are compatible with Taylor. One can eschew any commitment to group minds (I call this the Emergent Social Layer – view) as it focuses on the shared space as a 'sociological' rather than 'psychological' entity. The other interpretation is a Conversationally Extended Mind – view, explained below. I think these two interpretations are consistent with Taylor's account. Neither is committed to a phenomenal group mind nor to the rational unity -view.

In sum, Taylor's *entre nous* offers a distinct perspective both to the philosophy of sociality (going further than prior recognition, but not as such involving joint commitments) and to the philosophy of 'we' or plural subjectivity, sometimes discussed as 'group minds'.

1. 'Whew, It's Hot!'

In 'Theories of Meaning' (1980, reprinted in, 1985a), and other articles and ultimately *The Language Animal* (2016), Taylor discusses diverse uses and functions of language. The function of language of interest here is how its use, along with the expressive use of gestures and signs, can create a public space, make something '*entre nous*', between us. This is not reducible to common knowledge or sharing information but it is a matter of creating an open space and simultaneously a collective subject or a 'we' for whom some matters are: they are 'for us'. He illustrates this with an example.

> Let's say that you and I are strangers travelling together through some southern country. It is terribly hot, the atmosphere is stifling. I turn to you and say: 'Whew, it's hot'. This doesn't tell you anything you didn' t know; neither that it's hot, nor that I suffer from the heat. Both these facts were plain to you before. Nor were they beyond your power to formulate; you probably already had formulated them.

> What the expression has done here is to create a rapport between us, the kind of thing which comes about when we do what we call striking up a conversation. Previously I knew that you were hot, and you knew that I was hot, and I knew that you must know that I knew that . . . etc. . . . . But now it's out there as a fact between *us* that it's stifling in here. Language creates what one might call a public space, or a common vantage point from which we survey the world together. (1980, 294)

Such founding of public space can take place without spoken language, with expressive gestures such as wiping one's eyebrow ostentatiously.[1] In that variant, 'instead of saying, "Whew, it's hot in here", I just smile, look towards him, and say "Whew!", wiping my brow'.(1980, 299).

Here language, or expressions in a broader sense including gestures, does two things: it brings things into focus, but also makes a social difference: 'It creates the peculiarly human kind of rapport, of being together, that we are in conversation together. To express something . . . can . . . bring us together qua participants in a common act of focusing.' (1980, 295)

Such conversations come in different varieties. Taylor contrasts a deep, personal conversation with a lover or old friend with casual chatter at a cocktail-party.

> Even in the latter case, what is set up is a certain coming together in a common act of focus. The matter talked about is no longer just for me or for you, but for *us*. This doesn't prevent us from putting severe limits on how much will be in the common realm. In the cocktail-party context, by tacit but common consent, what will be focused on are only rather external matters, not what touches us most deeply. The togetherness is superficial. (1980, 295)

This quote touches on the normative expectations that are pervasive in conversations: there are various norms of appropriateness that concern the conversation. Some of them might be general, while others are based on the previous history of the discussants. There are specific expectations about the nature of the conversation, depending on who the parties are. Linguistic exchanges help create and sustain specific standings or 'footings', which come with specific expectations. The 'avuncular' style continuously adopted in an exchange between an uncle and a nephew creates a certain footing, for example (Taylor 2016, 266–274). There are also normative expectations as to the permission of others to 'enter' the space – *prima facie*, conversations are for the participants only – even if others accidentally overhear, they do not take part in the joint attention: they are outsiders to the shared space. For example, when two people have a conversation, a third person overhearing it is not entitled to take part, without making an entrance ('Excuse me, I couldn't help but hearing, ... ').

Another contrast is between small-scale conversations (deep or superficial) and the formal public space established in institutions, such as the Parliament or the media. Taylor acknowledges these 'various kinds of institutional or pan-societal public spaces' as 'a very important part of the dispensation of human life. You can't understand how human society works at all ... unless you have some notion of public space.'(Taylor 1980, 295).

In explaining what kind of thing the emergent social space is, Taylor makes a negative point, that it isn't to be understood monologically: 'We completely miss this point if we remain with the monological model of the subject, and think of all states of awareness, knowledge, belief, attending to, as ultimately explicable as states of individuals.' (1980, 299–300). But as Gilbert has pointed out, Taylor's positive answer may be less clear (Gilbert 2011, 275). Is the social space thing-like or event-like? While conversations are events that start and end, the shared space is rather some kind of emergent, enabling entity or structure present at all times of the event or process of conversation, within which the event takes place – a bit like a theater stage in which a performance (an event or process) takes place. The shared space is not an event but an emergent entity or structure of sorts, it is not dependent on what the conversation is about, but is the space in which the conversation takes place, and is a space *for* the participants in the conversation. This action or encounter creates a public space which I take to be content-independent social structure, but gradually it also establishes a growing common stock of contents, that the discussants have discussed and agree or disagree on.

The public or social space is something like a 'field of opportunity' – it can be closed via conventional, or even by non-conventional, expressive means. A new token space can be opened soon after, but each conversation, with its

opening and ending, can be seen as a different event (analogously to meetings that start and end). When background conditions are met, individual conversations can also constitute a longer, ongoing process. Consider families or roommates or friends, they can be considered as having one ongoing conversation that is reactivated and paused. They share a social space, and a history, and the 'common ground' established previously is accessible in later exchanges (cf. Stalnaker 2002). The history of interaction builds into a relationship, a friendship or other established 'footings'.

This shared space is not inner-mental, but something shared dependent on individual minds, on the individual attentive subjects who are related to each other and the target of attention. When something is said to be 'out in the open', it exists in this social space that the participants can readily access, or rather, have accessed when the space emerges. Social space or public space exists as an emergent, social phenomenon, opens the dimension in which social reality with all its further distinctions takes place. As an occurrent, event- or process-like phenomenon it is like performance, parole, interaction, conversation, but what emerges can also be viewed as a lasting structure, a space, a dispositional possibility or setting for actual conversations, shaped by a history of past conversations and by normative expectations and entitlements.

Based on his 'whew' example, I interpret Taylor as suggesting that even a brief conversation between strangers creates an ephemeral 'we' (a kind of social formation or group) for whom the shared space is. Friends, lovers and other familiars can be interpreted as constituting a more stable 'we' and sustaining an ongoing conversation, and for them the shared space continues its existence despite the pauses in actual exchanges. Similarly, institutionalized public spaces are for a more stable 'we' with formal inclusion criteria perhaps, and the ongoing conversation in the public space consists of small exchanges which constitute a heterogeneous stream (catching up on the ongoing conversation of one's nation, or the wider world, takes a period of socialization). Conversations at these different levels serve, in addition to other benefits, the human need of togetherness, of belonging, of connecting with each other, and as the joint attention is emotion-infused, Taylor also calls it 'communion' (2016, 55 and passim.).

A key element in Taylor's view is that the first and second person pronouns are used within such social space, within a 'we'. It is a structural feature of a shared space, or a we, that it always includes an 'I' and one or more 'You's. The exchanges within the space are addressed to 'you'. They reveal the important inner structure of the space. A 'we' of a conversation is 'bi-polar', it has (at least) two subject 'poles', it is a perspective with plural structure – it includes, for everyone, an 'I', a 'You' and a 'We'. Further, there always is a structural place for a target or an object or world which is jointly attended.

Taylor (2016, 64–67) puts forward a strong claim, that instead of a traditional Cartesian priority of the 'monological' individual sense of self, the plural perspective has priority. We become selves within such a structure, where we jointly encounter the world, and gradually realize the possible difference between mine and your perspective of the world. Taylor is not happy with a view that individual self-consciousness is merely complemented with a collective one (with Mead), but argues for the priority of the intersubjective take. Taylor defends this by evoking the undifferentiated experience of a child, suggesting that this emotion-infused joint attention, or 'communion' precedes developed self-awareness. He adds (2016, 66) that while a baby of course has separate experiences from the parent or carer, the baby cannot self-attribute them, there is not yet a developed sense of self. This may well be right, but one may note that the child-adult communion must therefore be different from the communion of two adults: the structure of 'I'-'You'-'We' in adult conversations is possible only when there is an 'I'. So the genetic story does not support the priority of the *adult* intersubjectivity over adult self-consciousness.

So all and all, the social space of a conversation is something emergent, is normatively structured and typically excludes outsiders (with important exceptions such as the public sphere being officially open to all citizens), comes with role-specific expectations, and is one way to realize the human need for togetherness.

2. Prior Recognition

According to Taylor, at the bottom of all human sociality is not merely the recognition of others as candidates for we-ness, but the actual achievement of rapport, actual conversation or exchange. A rival view would locate the 'magic' of sociality in the prior recognition of others, which already establishes a social reality in an important sense. Compare people at the train who just keep to themselves, and do not strike up a conversation and there is no rapport. They may share a lot of common knowledge, prior common ground, and default interpretations or assumptions about what the other knows or shares, but as they do not strike up a conversation, the Taylorian social space between them does not emerge. They do not yet address each other, so they don't address each other as 'you' and 'I', and do not constitute a 'we'. At best, they remain mere recognized candidates for the rapport.

But this already seems like an important phenomenon. A person can grant universal, default recognition to everyone, respect them as possible partners in a conversation. Denying this recognition (say, from members of a certain race or caste, or from people with some impairments which are interpreted as obstacles to interaction) can be a form of misrecognition, a form of social invisibilization as it were. Such social visibility does not require actual

conversations, but recognition as someone with whom a conversation is possible: we recognize and are recognized by far more people than those with whom we have actual conversations, and that matters for human sociality. Invisibilization can vary from systematic exclusion of certain kinds of people to situation-specific lack of attention (say, a doctor not realizing that the patient in this bed is no longer the person in the irreversible coma). One aspect of respecting the other as a person is treating them as a candidate for conversation.

In addition to universal respect, we can recognize some candidates prior to any exchange as having a particular kind of social footing, which hasn't emerged in relation to me, and perhaps because of that not approach them. Say, for example, that I see the prime minister and think that it might be inappropriate to approach without an invitation. Or perhaps I approach someone with inadequate expectations (men often help themselves to the assumption that women are helpless and in need of help or mansplaining). Or perhaps I silence some groups altogether. These observations suggest that before the emergence of an actual social space, or the rapport Taylor describes, we have anticipations of the appropriateness or desirability of the conversation and recognize possible conversation partners. Granting (even one-sidedly, but by each) the very universal status of a potential conversation partner is an important facet of human sociality. We live within a field of potential conversation partners. It is not yet a social space, a public space, a rapport, or a communion in Taylor's sense, but it is one form that recognition can take. To be treated as a possible conversation partner is not yet to be engaged in a conversation but denying the status as a possible conversation partner may be a misrecognition, which in turn can lead to internalized negative self-images and grievous wounds (see Taylor 1994).

Such prior recognition of others, including strangers, is a matter of generalized default assumptions ('all human beings are potential conversation partners') which may include harmful implicit stereotypes ('women need mansplaining'). Past encounters may have created a relationship, and thereby a possibility of an ongoing conversation. There, the past is already sedimented in the shared space. One could perhaps try to generalize that and suggest that all prior recognition is in turn dependent on prior exchanges, but that seems unlikely, as we recognize so many more people than we in fact do or could interact with.

I conclude that the prior recognition and Taylorian encounters are separate phenomena, and each can credibly claim to be the key to social reality. The defenders of the relevance of the prior recognition can say that the heavy lifting takes place when the norms of appropriateness and standings as candidates for exchange are recognized, independently of or prior to actual exchange – all the significant elements have been constructed and what takes place is merely actualizing and particularizing them without changing their

nature. I am sure Taylor would protest and stress the transformative and creative nature of the actual exchanges, but it is worth pointing out that a lot of the prior stage-setting is significant, and that grievous wrongs can take place already at that stage.

3. Joint Commitments

Referring to the texts discussed above, Gilbert writes that these passages 'had a significant impact on my own thinking.' (2011, 272) She agrees with Taylor that in a joint attention typical of conversations, the issues are irreducibly 'for us' or 'entre nous' or 'in public space' or within the purview of a 'common vantage point.'

> As Taylor sees it, and as he emphasizes several times, an exchange like that in his example not only *places* certain matters before us, in public space. It *founds* or *constitutes* that space—or a particular part of that space. In his conception, then, public space is constructed, not discovered. To say this is still not to explain what public space is. (Gilbert 2011, 274).

Gilbert thinks that Taylor's discussion is an important one, but 'it is necessary to go beyond it, however, to get a better grasp of what is at issue.' (2011, 275)

As indicated above, Gilbert does not think that Taylor says enough of the positive view of public space. She analyzes Taylor's example in terms of 'joint commitment' to recognize as a body the co-presence of the parties, linking it her other analyses invoking joint commitments.

> Just as an individual can commit himself, by forming a decision, for instance, so two or more individuals can commit themselves *as one*. In order that this come about, something must be expressed by each of the would-be parties, and that is precisely his *personal readiness* to be *jointly committed* with the other in the relevant way. Further, these expressions must be common knowledge between the parties. (Gilbert 2011, 276).

These two conditions are, for Gilbert, individually necessary and jointly sufficient for a joint commitment to emerge. The willingness must be 'out in the open' between the parties. This shares with Taylor the idea that expressions bring something out in the open, but it is more specific: what is expressed is not merely the observation that it's very hot, but it must be an expression of personal readiness to be committed, tied, bound with the other in a certain way.

Gilbert has used the concept of joint commitment to analyze an impressive range of phenomena of people acting together, for example going for a walk. Joint commitment creates normative pressure and the commitment cannot be one-sidedly ended (a bit like one cannot free oneself of a promise, but the recipient of the promise can). In Taylor's example, a social space is

created, but no such further commitments need emerge. It is natural, then, to conclude that Gilbert's joint commitments are a further development within the shared space, or one specific way in which the shared space can emerge.

Now Gilbert does not seem to think so. She suggests that joint commitments are involved already in the creation of a shared space. Here's her example, resembling Taylor's[2]:

> I was sitting at a table in the Merton Street Library in Oxford, reading a book. I noticed that someone had come to my table and had sat down opposite me. I took it that it was now common knowledge between this person and myself that he and I were sitting at this very table. However, we had not yet communicated in any way. At a certain point, I looked up and gazed at him until he too looked up. I caught his eye (as we say); we looked at each other. I nodded towards him and briefly smiled; he did also. We then returned to our respective concerns and had no further interaction. (Gilbert 2011, 275-276).

Gilbert thinks that this belongs to a range of cases where it is appropriate to speak about what *we* are doing, and which require analysis in terms of joint commitments. Here, the parties are jointly committed to recognize as a body their co-presence. Gilbert holds that whenever something is irreducibly 'for us', a joint commitment has been made.

> The same point about *nous* can be made about a joint commitment to recognize as a body that it is hot in here. Generalizing, if you and I are jointly committed to recognize as a body *that such-and-such is the case*, then the fact that such-and-such can plausibly be referred to as *entre nous*, in public space, and so on.(Gilbert 2011, 276).

Gilbert stresses voluntary commitments, whereas Taylor typically stresses that the significance of things for us is not a matter of decisions but 'strong evaluation'.[3] We, for example, find ourselves valuing something or on reflection find something inappropriate. Of course, intentional action is voluntary for Taylor as well, but the kind of emergent sociality in the shared space need not be up to our voluntary commitments. 'Commitment' comes with bindingness and voluntariness which seems too demanding for some range of Taylor's cases. A Taylorian encounter, a conversation, can take place so that the conditions of joint commitment are not met: one of the parties can, for example, bring out to the open his or her *lack* of readiness to be jointly committed – yet this conversation takes place in the Taylorian social or public space. There may be norms of politeness that apply to such situations, but they seem to apply independently of specific commitments to politeness (indeed, perhaps especially to rejections of invitations to be jointly committed). As conversations at the shared space can lead to explicit disagreements and decisions not to have further joint commitments, such

commitments are not needed for the ontology of the shared space or 'entre nous'. Vice versa – the openness of the shared space is one element in the emergence of joint commitments.

Gilbert (2011, 271) suggests that only with this phenomenon she analyses in terms of joint commitment 'do we arrive at genuine *sociality*', and that even 'the simplest form of existence of a *social group* in an important, central sense' emerges. She uses the term 'mutual recognition' here, but in the usage in this article, some recognition is already prior to Taylor's shared space, which in turn is logically prior and less demanding than Gilbert's joint commitment. This is then a rival to the claim that genuine sociality, or a social group in the important, central sense, emerges before or independently of joint commitments.

In this section I have made several claims. Taylor's 'entre nous' is logically less demanding and empirically more general than such phenomena like a joint commitment and is indeed just one building block of Gilbert's analysis. If there is a joint commitment, there is a shared space, but not necessarily vice versa. I have also suggested that a range of entre nous -phenomena does not yet involve joint commitments. There are norms (e.g. of politeness) that apply to parties in a conversation, but these do not all arise from commitments. One can reject an invitation to a joint commitment by expressing one's lack of willingness or readiness, and the conversation in which this takes place is already a short-lived event in a shared space. The demand to do this politely does not require a (prior) commitment to politeness.

4. The Nature of 'Us': a Group Mind?

The 'we' of Taylor's *entre nous* is not an undifferentiated fusion. It is to be distinguished from a strawman conception of group mind, that figures in some defenses of individualism: at least individualism does not postulate a mysterious group mind 'floating above our heads' (a view John Searle 1998, 149 implausibly associates with Hegel). The strawman conception thinks that plural subjects must be like individual subjects, possessing a unified stream of phenomenal consciousness with sensations, pains and experiences. In this conception, two organisms share one phenomenal mind, one stream of consciousness, one set of sensations. This conception approaches a 'group mind' so that it is precisely like an individual mind. Yet nothing in Taylor's *entre nous* phenomenon suggests such a fusion of phenomenal minds, after all 'we' refers to a plurality (in the sense of more numerous than one). Yet, they together can have a plural pre-reflective self-awareness (in the sense of Schmid 2014). In addition to being aware of the shared topic, they are aware of constituting a 'we', while remaining an 'I' and a 'you'.

More sophisticated accounts of 'group minds' do not assume they are exactly like individual minds or that there is a phenomenal unity. Consider Carol Rovane's (1997) and later Philip Pettit's (2003) idea of a *rational* unity. This approach sees the group as a separate center of commitments (which leaves the individual minds as discrete centers of commitments), separated by its own commitment to maintaining rational unity. But again, such further commitments seem to go beyond the less demanding kind of sharedness that takes place in a conversation, that Taylor's example suggests.

What, then is the irreducible 'we' that is in some sense a plural subject of the shared space? Does the emergent sociality imply anything at the 'mental' level? It is a bit hazardous to speculate what, in terms of individual minds, Taylor thinks is at stake in the shared space of conversation, but I offer two possibilities. Both avoid the strawman conception of a full fusion (as if, for the duration of the social space, the individuals would lose their individual minds and there be just one common phenomenal mind). I call them the Emergent Sociality and Conversationally Extended Mind approaches.

The former holds that the social space that emerges is literally for us, and in the conversation the positions of 'you' and 'I' are within that shared space. Ontologically speaking the shared space is an emergent reality, admittedly dependent on individual minds, but not mental in itself – 'the social' or 'the social space' emerges as a fresh layer of reality and is of a different ontological register than minds. There are public (non-inner) expressions that are for us. The space in which the expressions take place is unlike the individual mental arena, it is a shared social space. There is a distinction between the 'inner' reality reachable by introspection and (roughly) that psychology studies, and the lifeworldly 'public, social world' that (roughly) sociology studies, and the emergence of the social space of conversation is the emergence of the latter. Many holists will readily believe that such social space exists and emerges somewhere and somehow; the suggestion here is that Taylor's *entre nous*, the sharedness of joint attention and conversation, is where the sociological plane emerges. On this view, we can leave the 'mind' or the inner mental realm untouched, the 'for us' does not need group minds or extended minds, it is a social space that emerges, and the category of 'mind' does not get in any way extended here.

While I think this is a plausible interpretation, I would like to suggest another, hopefully equally plausible. The 'Conversationally Extended Mind'-interpretation would agree with the emergence of the social plane of reality in this way, but would not leave the category of 'mind' untouched. It would add that in the joint attention or conversation, the category of mind is also extended. Taylor certainly is happy to reject Cartesian construals of mind (see e.g. Dreyfus and Taylor 2015; Taylor 1989a, 2007), and for him, the self is dialogical and identities are shaped by public languages (Taylor 1989a). It

is therefore not implausible to suggest that Taylor might interpret the 'for us'-phenomenon as one more way of broadening the Cartesian view of the mind.

Take the example (discussed by Scheler 1954, Schmid 2009 and Salmela 2012) of parents' joint grief over their lost child.[4] This is a strong example suggesting that there can be one token emotion, one token experience, had by two individuals together. It is not merely that the loss is 'for us' rather than 'for me' and 'for you', in the shared space understood as a sociological public phenomenon, but that we experience one and the same grief – there is sharedness (although not fusion) at the experiential level. Does this take us back to the strawman conception of a group mind? It need not. As Schmid (2009) argues, two people can share the grief, and yet have their own phenomenal streams of consciousness. For example, their immediate sensation or bodily feeling can differ: one may be physically nauseated as an aspect of the grief, while the other feels no nausea. The same grief appears differently to the two experiencers (which would be impossible in the strawman conception), a bit like two people can see different aspects of one and the same visual object.[5]

For it to be the same emotion, however, a somewhat demanding identity theory is needed, more familiar from theories of direct perception, or relational theories of perception: when I perceive the bridge over there, what I see is the very bridge, it appears to me. One of its modes of existence, as it were, is that it appears to perceivers. It is not merely that rays of light cause a sensation in a mind and the mind construes it as a bridge, but the perceiver sees, is related to, the very bridge. The seen bridge and the existing bridge are one and the same thing: perceivers can see such things as bridges (in themselves), bridges are visible. Two people can jointly attend to these things, these targets 'for us' are the very things – there is no gap or veil between subjects and the world; and in joint attention, when they are related to the object, they are also related to their co-subjects.

Two people can point at one and the same lamp, or watch one and the same movie, or talk about the same thing in their conversation, but can they really access one and the same shared emotion, such as grief? Is this not to mistake emotions or mental episodes as external things that can be perceptually accessed? It need not be. If the parents jointly attend to their shared loss grievingly, the grief is the emotional aspect of their attending. The grief is perhaps not the thing perceived, but it is the shared emotional register in which the loss is perceived. The communion that takes place is always emotion-laden, and the emotion can be shared just as the attending can be shared. Because of this, the emergent sociality – reading of the shared space seems to lose something: the emotional aspects of sharedness. Yet, the two grieving accesses can have differences: one is tinted with physical nausea, one is not.

Or perhaps we can go even further and think that we can have some kind of access to each other's sensations, such as pains. I have access to my pain as felt pain, and while no-one else can directly feel my pain, they can have access to the very same pain as expressed. Just as I can see the very bridge built of stones without my perception of it being built of stones – so that it is the very bridge that appears to me – you can access my very toothache via the expressions of my toothache without your tooth aching. Say, a doctor and a patient can jointly attend to the patient's pain, in order to find out what is at stake, the patient as felt and the doctor as expressed pain.

Would the following words, that Taylor writes of expressions of hotness that both feel, apply to toothaches that only one feels, but shares with the other?

> Expression discloses here; not in the sense that it makes known to you my discomfort; you were well aware of that from the beginning. Rather it discloses in the sense of putting this in a public space, that of our rapport. That is, the discomfort is now an object for us together, that we attend to jointly. We enjoy now a complicity. This is an experience that we now share. Thanks to this expression, there is now something *entre nous*. Thus expression reveals, not in the ordinary way of making something visible, as you could do by removing some obstacles to vision. We have a sense that to express something is to put it 'out there', to have it out before us, to be 'up front' about it … expressing something is revealing it, is making it visible, something out there before us. But on reflection, we can see that this space before us is the public space of what is *entre nous*. The space of things which are objects for us together. (1980, 299-300).

I think it is worth considering that they would.

5. Conclusions

I have discussed the nature of the Taylorian social space which emerges in a conversation, suggesting that it is not an event or performance but rather something emergent that remains in existence at least for the duration of the conversation; that it is normatively regulated; that it comes with a 'we' that further is structured as a 'you' and 'I' so that it is not a fusion, but is bipolar or has a dyadic or plural structure; that it comes in different shapes and sizes. I have distinguished it from prior recognition on the one hand and joint commitments on the other hand. I have also discussed the nature of the 'we' that accompanies it, suggesting that it does not have a phenomenal mind, nor is it necessarily committed to a continuing rational unity but rather can consist of disagreeing parties; but that it either is a phenomenon at a higher layer of reality than individual minds or possibly comes with conversationally extended minds.

Space has not permitted me to explore Taylor's other important contributions to social ontology (such as, 1985a, 1985b,1989a) and his powerful defense of the engaged, participatory perspective on social reality and its relation to the scientific perspective on the one hand, and critical, emancipatory perspectives on the other hand. Participants' understandings are not incorrigible, and science or social criticism can show faults in them, but ultimately the social reality is dependent for its existence on participants' understandings. Taylor's reflections on the relation between normative and ontological issues (especially in 1989b) and on the value-ladenness and historicity of social reality remain equally important for such inquiry.

Notes

1. Taylor (2016, 55-60) discusses Tomasello's (2014) take on joint attention, pointing, and language acquisition. It would be an interesting question for further study whether Tomasello's work establishes that the joint attention phenomena and Taylor's *entre nous* are fundamentally pre-linguistic (and a prerequisite for language acquisition), while also present in linguistically structured forms. I will bracket this question here.
2. Both Taylor and Gilbert analyse cases with physical co-presence. It seems, however, that the shared space can be established, say, via a conventional telephone conversation.
3. I discuss this in Laitinen (2008).
4. "Sharing is not a matter of type, or of qualitative identity (i.e. of having different things
   that are somehow similar), but a matter of token, or numerical identity" (Schmid 2009, 69).
5. 'Thus the numerical identity of the feeling does not preclude difference, but the difference here is one between aspects of one feeling rather than one between numerically different feelings' (Schmid 2009, 82).

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ORCID

Arto Laitinen http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4514-7298

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