

## **Taylor: Transcendental Conditions of Human Agency and Two Versions of Liberalism<sup>1</sup>**

**Seyed Mohammad Ali Taghavi<sup>2</sup>**

Received: 23/6/2008

Accepted: 9/5/2010

### **Abstract**

Taylor argues that *procedural* liberalism is not viable, or is insensitive to the conditions of social and political possibility, since it cannot justify the political furtherance of common goods. This is because the ontology and epistemology behind it disregard the “transcendental conditions” of human identity and the “dialogical” way of its formation. Taylor’s own version of liberalism, on the other hand, does not eschew promoting collective goals, such as cultural survival, and is supported by these transcendental conditions. However, his charge of non-viability against the liberalism of rights, and his argument for a liberalism of promoting collective goods, on epistemological and ontological grounds, are not convincing. Although he is right that rights-based theories of justice cannot account for promoting collective goals, such as a culture or a language, that liberal societies at large advance, these are goals that go beyond ensuring the survival of the society or its liberal characteristics, and are about preserving the distinctness of the society.

**Keywords:** Charles Taylor, Procedural liberalism, Liberalism of rights, Dialogical feature of human identity, Collective goals.

---

1. I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Bhikhu Parekh and Professor Noël O’Sullivan for their critical comments on this article.

2. Assistant Professor, Dept. of Politics, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (Iran).

Charles Taylor's philosophical arguments, as well as his politics, have been criticised from a variety of perspectives. However, less attention has been paid to the argument he puts forward in order to arrive at his moral and political views from what he considers to be their philosophical grounds. Such an argument is important because he believes that political and moral stands presuppose some epistemological and ontological accounts, which though do not determine a certain policy or moral belief, can show that its realisation is an impossibility or carries a heavy price (Taylor, 1997: 183).

Taylor primarily focuses on two versions of liberalism. The thrust of his thought is his critique of the rights-based or procedural liberalism of neutrality. He criticises procedural liberalism for its inability to justify the political furtherance of common goods such as culture or language. Taylor also challenges the ontology behind procedural liberalism and the modern epistemology that underpins it, which disregards what he calls the "transcendental conditions" of human identity and, particularly, the "dialogical" way of its formation. He believes that this version of liberalism is not viable, or is insensitive to the range of social and political possibilities, as identified in his ontological discussions. On the other hands, he advocates another version of liberalism that does not eschew promoting collective goals like culture. For him, the vitality of culture for

selfhood requires a cultural politics. Taylor's concern with cultural "survival" as a collective good to be pursued by the state has been attacked by many, such as Jurgen Habermas and Anthony Appiah, as being oppressive and a violation of individual autonomy (Gutmann, 1994: 130 and 157).

In this article, Taylor's attempt to ground the politics of promoting culture and collective goods on "transcendental conditions" of understanding and selfhood is examined; and it is discussed why such an attempt is not persuasive. It is argued that liberalism can accommodate what Taylor calls "transcendental conditions" of human agency, such as the need for "strong evaluation" and "dialogical feature" of selfhood. It can also account for the survival of the society and its liberal democratic characteristics. Nevertheless, Taylor is right that liberalism cannot justify the furtherance of collective goods that most liberal states pursue, such as cultural survival.

### **1. Embodied Understanding**

Taylor criticises modern epistemology, or what he generally calls "the epistemological tradition," because of its notion of disengaged thinking. He argues that we perceive things through our capacity for action, while being at grips with the world. Embodiment is an essential feature of our experiences and perceptions, similar to those features that Kant

calls “transcendental.” The impossibility of disengaged thinking amounts to the impossibility of having a disinterested understanding of the world which, in turn, undermines foundationalism as well as representationalism.

Our previous knowledge and experience, as the results of our engagement with the world, form a background understanding against which we think about things. This background is primarily taken for granted, and is the locus of unresolved issues. This is contrary to the modern intellectual tradition, which looks for self-explanatory foundations, and treats all potential issues as though they could become transparent. In this tradition, even the self is considered in epistemological terms as an entity that is basically capable of representation, and whose sole constitutive feature is self-consciousness (Taylor, 1997: 169). The moral or evaluative concerns of human beings are considered secondary, as subjects to be studied neutrally.

What makes Taylor scornful of the disengaged view of the self is primarily its moral corollaries. The disengaged view considers the subject as ideally free and rational and distinct from the natural and social worlds, in the sense that his identity is not defined in terms of the worlds surrounding him. From this picture flows the moral ideal of the punctual self, ‘ideally ready as free and rational to treat these worlds - and even some of the features of

his own character - instrumentally, as subject to change and recognizing in order the better to secure the welfare of himself and others’ (Taylor, 1997: 7).

## **2. Human Agency**

Taylor sees every epistemological account in a complex relation of mutual support with an ontology accounting for ultimate factors in explaining social life. Hence, he tries to refute the atomist view of human agency that he discerns to be the ontology behind modern epistemology. In contrast, he argues for a “dialogical” view of the self that elucidates the significance of the community and culture for human agency. Here, it is necessary to explore what Taylor means by human agency, selfhood or identity.

### **2.1. Identity and Strong Evaluation**

Identity is a ‘person’s understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being’ (Taylor, 1992: 25). It is about commitments and identifications that orient us in life, and give meaning to things around us, suggests Taylor. Using a spatial analogy, he explains that

To know who I am is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary (Taylor, 1989: 28).

Taylor distinguishes three axes of moral thinking, namely, a sense of respect for obligation to others, an understanding of what makes a full life, and notions concerned with dignity, by virtue of which one thinks of oneself as commanding the respect of others. Taylor's main attempt in the first part of *Sources of the Self* is to show that these axes are not separate from each other (Taylor, 1989: 14-15).

An important issue about all three modes of moral thinking is that they entail "strong evaluation." That is, they all involve 'discrimination of right or wrong, better or worse, higher or lower, which are not rendered valid by our own desires, inclinations, or choices, but rather stand independent of these and offer standards by which they can be judged' (Taylor, 1989: 4). Our strong evaluations give rise to "frameworks" or "horizons" which define what is valuable, and what should be done. We cannot do away with frameworks without risking an "identity crisis," or speaking of "pathological" cases (Taylor, 1989: 31). Thus, Taylor's thesis is that 'living within such strongly qualified horizons is constitutive of human agency, that stepping outside these limits would be tantamount to stepping outside what we would recognise as integral, that is, undamaged human personhood' (Taylor, 1989: 27). This phenomenological argument accounts for what Taylor calls "transcendental conditions," outlining the limits of what is conceivable in human life. Therefore,

those theories that deny these conditions, and in particular the necessity of "qualitative discriminations" for human life, are self-defeating.

Strong evaluation involves a judgement about what is good. Taylor defines the good broadly as 'whatever is picked out as incomparably higher in a qualitative distinction. It can be some action, or motive, or style of life, which is seen as qualitatively superior' (Taylor, 1989: 92). Conceptions of the good play a crucial role in all aforementioned axes of practical reasoning. Thus, to speak of one's identity is to speak of one's idea of the good. In particular, identity is defined by "hypergoods," the goods that are ranked incomparably higher than, and are used for judging, other goods. One example of these higher goods is the idea of equality in western democracies (Taylor, 1989: 63-4). Taylor argues that even those philosophers, such as naturalists, utilitarians and postmoderns, who deny any qualitative distinction of some goods or ends as incomparably higher than others, are committed to their own goods and hypergoods. They regard, for instance, the "ordinary life" of work and family, self-affirmation, or inclusion and emancipation as higher. For them, '[t]he notion is never that *whatever* we do is acceptable' (Taylor, 1989: 23). The problem, however, is that they cannot account for their moral preferences.

Although Taylor distinguishes two orders of goods in identity, namely, hypergoods and other goods, his definition does not account for the complexity of identity. For instance, identity consists of universal and particular (at different levels of society, individual, etc.) elements, none of which has necessarily priority over another from aesthetic, moral, ethical or political points of view. Such complexity should be taken into account, because different aspects of identity require different ways of handling. Moreover, his account of identity does not cover a crucial element which is the sense of belonging. Attachment to different kinds of grouping, such as community cultures, is a main ingredient of identity which gives rise to moral claims and duties. Taylor's notion of identity is primarily a package of values and principles.

## 2.2. Dialogical Character of Human Agency

In discussing the self, Taylor's main emphasis is a rejection of "atomism," as an ontology that considers societies as nothing more than individuals interacting with each other. Atomists suggest a disengaged identity for individuals whom they consider metaphysically independent of society (Taylor, 1995: 8). Also, for them, there is no 'locus of thought or feeling other than the minds of individuals' (Taylor, 1997: 130). Refuting atomism, Taylor argues that the community is constitutive of the

individual. Contrary to modern epistemology, which takes the human agent as 'the monological subject of representation,' he remarks that our understanding is carried through dialogically in the sense that it is an action affected by an integrated and shared agent beyond the individual, that is by a "we" (Taylor, 1997: 173). This leads us to the "fundamentally *dialogical* character" of human agency (Taylor, 1992: 32).

Taylor argues 'my discovering my own identity doesn't mean that I work it in isolation, but I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others' (Taylor, 1992: 34). This dialogue happens on two levels: intimate and social. On the intimate level, identity is formed through our contact with significant others, such as parents or teachers. Dialogue is even more important on the broader level of society, where through interaction with others we acquire language, in the broad sense, to define ourselves. One can only be a self among others. Taylor, therefore, calls the necessity of conversation with others another "transcendental condition" of selfhood to the effect that only in this way we can be sure that what we say makes sense even for ourselves (Taylor, 1989: 38). The fundamentally dialogical feature of the self gives rise to a need for "recognition," Taylor believes. He sees a close relationship between identity and recognition.

A difficulty with Taylor's account of the dialogical feature of the self is that he arrives from this feature, as a "transcendental condition," at moral statements, such as repudiation of instrumental relationships and the need for recognition, without making a plausible link between them. It seems that he equates his account of transcendental condition of human agency with these normative assertions. This may be related to an ambiguity in Taylor's view to the effect that, although he primarily accounts for the dialogical character of human life as a "transcendental condition," or an inescapable predicament, sometimes he emphasises its *moral* importance, rather than its *inescapability*. For instance, he argues that '[t]o shut out demands emanating beyond the self is precisely to suppress the conditions of significance, and hence to court trivialization' (Taylor, 1991: 40). It seems that Taylor implies that the moral significance of dialogical relations follows from the dialogical feature of selfhood, while he cannot establish such a direct relationship. In other words, he cannot prove that the former is a corollary of the latter.<sup>1</sup>

1. The same problem recurs when Taylor concludes that his argument about identities being shaped through dialogue shows that relationships with others cannot be seen as instrumental. His repudiation of instrumental relations has two strands, though he does not distinguish them. On the one hand, he does not deny the possibility of having instrumental serial and temporary relations, though they cannot be about exploring one's identity, but are 'some modality of enjoyment,' and hence "self-

### 3. Two Versions of Liberalism

Taylor maintains that his critique of modern epistemology is 'a rejection of moralities based purely on instrumental reason, such as utilitarianism; and also critical distance from those based on a punctual notion of the self, such as the various derivations of Kant.' In politics, according to him, this criticism refutes certain forms of contemporary conservatism as well as radical doctrines of unencumbered freedom (Taylor, 1997:15).<sup>2</sup> More precisely,

---

stultifying." On the other hand, he denies that the notion of instrumental relationships has any coherence, which, perhaps, refers to their logical impossibility. 'The notion that one can pursue one's fulfilment in this [instrumental] way seems illusory, in somewhat the same way as the idea that one can choose oneself without recognizing a horizon of significance beyond choice' (Taylor, 1991: 53).

Taylor must distinguish between his transcendental and moral arguments. While his discussion of the dialogical feature of human identity establishes the former, the latter does not follow. Another argument is needed to refute instrumental relationships normatively. Taylor is too quick to jump from the inevitability of the dialogical condition of the self to the conclusion of trivialising instrumental relations. Consequently, as we will see later, his moral and political views about communities and cultures cannot be supported by his account of the dialogical formation of identity and the inevitable role of these entities in that process.

<sup>2</sup> More precisely, Taylor believes that '[s]tability, and hence efficiency, couldn't survive ... [the] massive withdrawal of government from the economy, and it is doubtful if freedom either could long survive the competitive jungle that a really wild capitalism would breed, with its uncompensated inequalities and exploitation' (Taylor, 1991: 110).

Taylor mainly focuses on two competing versions of liberalism, namely, the procedural liberalism of neutrality and equal rights, and a liberalism that permits the promotion of some common goods such as culture and language or even political participation by political apparatus and recognises differences. He believes that his account of epistemology and ontology not only shows the implausibility of the former, but provides philosophical presumptions for the latter too.

Taylor believes that there is a “natural affinity” between this account ‘with its stress on situated freedom and the roots of our identity in community, on the one hand, and the civic humanist tradition [i.e., republicanism], on the other’ (Taylor, 1997: 15). His version of liberalism accepts that a society ‘can be organised around a definition of the good life’ (Taylor, 1992: 59). This political doctrine, unlike procedural liberalism, accommodates promotion of common and collective goals, such as the survival of a particular culture or language. An example of this kind of doctrine is cultural or linguistic nationalism like that of the Quebecois who find language ‘an important enough [common] goal to take priority in some cases over individual goals that would otherwise have been considered as beyond legitimate constraint’ (Taylor, 1997: 140).

Given the vital role of culture in constituting identity, it appears acceptable to arrive at a

politics of promoting culture. Preserving and strengthening a culture is a justified common good, because, as Taylor argues, the language, practices and institutions that shape the background of meaning to our actions are parts of our culture. A problem with the above account, however, is that Taylor does not provide us with a clear argument demonstrating the “affinity” between his transcendental accounts of understanding or identity and a liberalism of promoting collective goods. His reasoning is mainly confined to stressing that the other version of liberalism, that is, procedural liberalism, is not viable. In other words, according to him, since implementing procedural liberalism runs contrary to transcendental condition of human life, the liberalism of pursuing collective goals can be the only plausible alternative.

Taylor tries to question the viability of procedural liberalism by attributing to it a naturalistic epistemology and an “atomist” ontology that he undermines, as seen in the previous sections. He assumes that ontological atomism makes it unproblematic ‘to conclude to atomism in politics’ (Taylor, 1997: 135) which he considers as ‘one of the most negative’ features of modern identity (Taylor, 1995: 8). Taylor identifies atomism with the seventeenth century social contract theory and its successors, which advocate the priority of the individual and his/her rights over the society

(Taylor, 1995: 187). He calls the latter doctrines of “the primacy of rights” or procedural liberalism.

Taylor charges procedural liberalism with non-viability, either because it does not accommodate the “transcendental conditions” of identity and the self, or because it is politically unsustainable. This paves the way for a cultural politics or a politics of promoting common goods. Hence, it is necessary to examine his argument about the non-viability of procedural liberalism.

### **3.1. Non-Viability of Procedural Liberalism because of Giving Priority to Rights over Goods**

Taylor believes that procedural liberalism involves a rejection of the need for “qualitative distinctions,” which he regards as a transcendental condition of selfhood, and that it consequently is not viable. In this respect, he argues that contemporary moral philosophy ‘has tended to focus on what it is right to do rather than what it is good to be, .... and it has no conceptual place left for a notion of the good as the object of our love or allegiance’ (Taylor, 1989: 3). He goes on to say that contemporary moral philosophy solely emphasises obligations, while having no room for what is good to do without being obliged. This account gives rise to the view, in political theory, that a liberal society should be centred on the

conception of the right rather than on the good, which is left to individuals.

Taylor tries to equate the proceduralist ideal of the priority of rights over conceptions of the good with the denial of “qualitative distinctions” (Taylor, 1989: 79). Hence, based on his account of identity and strong evaluation, he implies that such an ideal flies in the face of the “transcendental condition” of living with a horizon of “qualitative distinctions.” He hints that the notion of the primacy of rights is similar to the naturalist view of morality as optional, which cannot account for humans’ moral intuitions. Rights philosophies do not see that rights are ultimately based on conceptions of the good, and thus amount to the denial of qualitative distinctions. However, *pace* Taylor, procedural justice does not need to, and actually some of its celebrated versions do not, deny qualitative distinctions as segregation of worthy from unworthy. Taylor himself concedes that procedural accounts of justice enjoy such distinctions based on the notions of equality and universal justice (Taylor, 1989: 64). Moreover, if “good” means anything valuable, there is “an extremely important shared good” in the procedural account of polity (Taylor, 1997: 194).

Taylor sometimes levels the charge of non-viability against procedural liberalism by ascribing to it an “atomist” ontology that cannot account for the dialogical character of human

agency. He argues that the liberalism of rights does not take into consideration the fact that individuals are constituted by their communities. It presupposes the notion of a disengaged subject, and thus a concept of disengaged thinking. In response, it has been said that right-based theories of justice do not need to deny that individuals are constituted by society. They can accommodate the view that one's identity is dialogically formed in relation with others, and by being introduced to language and culture. Walzer, Rorty and even Rawls, in his recent works, among others, vindicate liberalism in this way (see, for instance, Galston, 1989; Rorty, 1991: 179; and Rawls, 1993: 151-2). Liberalism might give priority to the individual over the society, but still accommodates the view that the individual is a product of society, as liberalism itself is a product of a certain society, culture and history. Taylor acknowledges that procedural liberalism does not entail an "atomist ontology;" it can be grounded on "holism" (Taylor, 1997: 97).

Taylor also argues that rights theories are foundationalist, that is, they attempt to unify all aspects of morality around obligations. They lack sensibility to moral aspirations such as perfectionism, heroism and the like (Taylor, 1989: 89-90). Any moral directive is considered as merely a derivation from rights. In response to this stricture, Richard Tuck argues that founders of social contract theory (Locke and

Hobbes) and especially the inventor of natural rights (Grotius), unlike Kant and utilitarians, have never been reductionist. They did not consider rights as the foundation for other parts of ethics and morality. Grotius discerns rights as "a minimal spot" where all cultures overlap each other. From within a culture there need not be a priority for this overlapping meeting ground over the rest of the moral (Tuck, 1994: 160). In a later work, Taylor accepts that not all theories of natural rights derive other parts of ethic from rights (Taylor, 1995: 188, footnote no. 2). He particularly mentions that classical founders of right theory and even Rawls are not his targets in his objection to rights theory (Taylor, 1994: 246-249).

### 3.2. Procedural Liberalism's Disregard for Collective Goods and Common Bonds

Taylor's more serious charge against procedural liberalism is that it is not viable because it cannot account for fostering the *collective goods* or *common bonds* required for the survival of a society. Here, his discussion is not about transcendental conditions, but about the political viability of human societies. Taylor argues that societies cannot be without a common bond. This common bond persuades people to obey the law, observe disciplines and make sacrifices such as paying tax and serving in the armed forces, which are requirements of every political society. In a free society, these

can only be enforced by 'a willing identification with the polis on the part of the citizens, a sense that the political institutions in which they live are an expression of themselves' (Taylor, 1997: 187).

Taylor believes that the lack of such a common bond causes political fragmentation and a sense of atomism, and leads to failure to sympathise with others. People will be more interested in partial, local, ethnic, or interest-based grouping than in common projects for the whole society (Taylor, 1991: 112-13). Symptoms of this fragmentation can be seen in the United States which, as a society united merely in the defence of rights, faces low turnout in elections, suffers from an underdeveloped welfare state, and in which interest groups and single-issue campaigns take the place of the formation of democratic majorities around interrelated programmes (Taylor, 1997: 281-4). Lack of identification with one's political community, an instrumental view of one's society, political fragmentation and a sense of atomism reinforce each other in a vicious circle. Hence, a free society, in order to prevent disintegration, needs a sense of attachment and "common enterprise."

Nevertheless, patriotism or a sense of common good is not central to liberal politics. Procedural liberalism is mainly concerned with "convergent" goods, and sees society as instrumentally valuable. For it, the individual is

the ultimate, and the society and its institutions are merely "collective instruments." The liberalism of rights does not take the principle of belonging or obligation to society or authority as fundamental. It gives, Taylor believes, a distorted description of political aspirations to common goods as quests for instrumental or subjective goods. In short, procedural liberalism, which due to its atomist ontology cannot account for common goods and bonds, faces the charge of non-viability.<sup>1</sup>

In response to Taylor, it can be argued that procedural liberalism can provide what is needed for the survival of a political society. It can demand some sacrifices, such as obeying the law, paying tax, complying with some sorts of distribution of wealth, serving in the armed forces, resisting invaders, and some kind of

---

1. Despite his critique of procedural liberalism Taylor does not deny that it is motivated by a philanthropic moral outlook which aims at the recognition of the value of the ordinary life as well as individual happiness instead of supposedly higher values or great social and political projects (Taylor, 1997: 144-5). The attempt to do without conceptions of the good should be seen as liberation from the stifling and burdensome demands of higher ways of life on human beings which lead to depreciation and suffering or self-delusion. The ideals of autonomy and freedom as well as a desire for transcending parochial theories of the good have also buttressed rights theories (Taylor, 1989: 8 and 85). In the background of these accounts, there is preference for conceptions of altruism and benevolence over self-absorption and obsession with the fulfilling life.

public participation like serving on juries, based on its individualistic account of rights. In all these cases, one can appeal to the proceduralist account of the instrumental value of the society, rather than the republican or communitarian view of the intrinsic value of the society. The instrumental value of the society is sufficient to persuade one to pay tax, obey the law, resist a dictator or even fight for his or her society. The common bond for procedural liberalism can simply be a shared destiny, or a commitment to rights. Further, such a commitment can even be a basis of non-instrumental identification with the society. Taylor's argument that the survival of the society would be at stake by sticking to proceduralism and neglecting culture and community can easily be refuted by a counter-argument that there is not such a danger to the societies adhering to procedural accounts of justice (Gray, 1993: 265). Acknowledging the above point, in his more recent works, Taylor states that 'procedural liberalism can parry the objection of nonviability' in the sense described above (Taylor, 1997: 194).

Elsewhere, Taylor maintains that although certain types of common bonds, viz., a shared view about rights, may be found in procedural liberalism, it is centred on concepts such as rights, rule of law and equality rather than collective goods and, particularly, participation. The latter, according to "the republican thesis," are the essence and safeguard of freedom and

patriotism (Taylor, 1997: 201-202). Taylor, here, means that procedural liberalism does not take into consideration what is necessary for the survival of the *liberal* features of a society. Moreover, Taylor believes that the proceduralist view of liberalism discounts the significance of democratic decision-making and the importance of the public sphere or civil society in this respect (Taylor, 1997: 287).

Against the republican thesis, however, it is argued that participation *per se* may not be of intrinsic value; what matters is that state apparatus works for the well-being of citizenry. Participation or democracy might be merely instrumentally valuable, in order to achieve good governance. Viable liberal societies, in which freedoms and rights, such as freedom of expression, are respected, can rely on allegiance on the basis of enlightened self-interest, rather than on patriotism or collective goals (Taylor, 1997: 195). Taylor finds this answer incompatible with the reality in societies allegedly based on procedural justice, like the US. He maintains that people's outrage in cases such as Watergate goes beyond 'sources recognised by atomism,' and shows a sense of 'patriotic identification' among people who do not think of 'their society purely instrumentally, as the dispenser of security and prosperity' (Taylor, 1997: 196). However, Taylor's response is hardly convincing, because such outrage need not be based on a sense of

identification with the society or patriotism. It may perfectly well have been caused by people's self-interested resentment at the administration's dishonesty or its waste of taxpayers' money. The point is that even safeguarding freedom against would-be despots can be achieved through procedural liberalism.

It can be argued that what rights-based theories of justice cannot account for are measures that go beyond ensuring the survival of the society or its liberal characteristics. These are issues like preserving the distinctness of the society, restricting citizenship or the scope of the welfare system to compatriots, or promoting a collective good such as a culture or a language. Taylor maintains that procedural liberalism, due to its instrumentalist and subjectivist view, is inhospitable to views about the intrinsic value of the society, and to collective goods of national, linguistic or cultural kinds (Taylor, 1997: 140-42). However, he does not notice that in these cases, what is at stake is not the survival of society and liberalism, but the survival of particular features of a society that are beyond these. Participatory self-rule, as an intrinsic good and a component of human dignity, and distributive justice when it goes beyond a measure for preventing the disintegration of the society, are other examples of these particular features. The latter, however, may be not less important than the liberal and democratic characteristics of the society for its members.

What gives credibility to the above argument is Taylor's own distinction between countries whose political culture allows adhering to procedural liberalism and those tending towards promotion of a common good. He does not see the first group in danger of disintegration. He goes on to say that procedural liberalism is only suitable for countries like the US or, perhaps, Britain. The political culture of some other countries like Canada inclines towards more participation. Taylor argues that there is a more or less total "fusion between patriotism and free institutions" in the political culture of the US, whereas, in some other modern democratic societies like Quebec, 'patriotism centers on a national culture, which in many cases has come to incorporate free institutions, but which is also defined in terms of some language or history.' Taylor goes on to say that

The procedural model will not fit these societies because they can't declare neutrality between all possible definitions of the good life. A society like Quebec can't but be dedicated to the defense and promotion of French culture and language, even if this involves some restriction on individual freedoms. It can't make cultural-linguistic orientation a matter of indifference (Taylor, 1997: 203).

It is important to distinguish between those collective goods that can be accommodated by

procedural liberalism, viz., those needed for the survival of the society or for the prevention of despotism, and those that cannot, that is, collective goals giving the society a particular feature. While the first group are *necessarily* political, the second group are not, in the sense that their realisation does not require the intervention of the state. Nevertheless, in certain cases, the latter type of collective goods *may* also legitimately be followed through political institutions, contrary to the dominant liberal view. However, if there are several incompatible collective goals of the latter kind in a society, perhaps due to its culturally plural population, then dealing with them requires a special and complex solution.

### 3.3. Objections to Taylor's Liberalism of Promoting Collective Goals

Taylor's liberalism of pursuing collective goods, apart from its philosophical grounds, attracts several criticisms. For instance, it homogenises the society, undermines autonomy, and weakens self-awareness. To begin with, a society that is organised around a view of the good, and pursues collective goals like cultural survival, tends to substitute a dominant interpretation of the common good for various others. It is prone to suppressing other accounts of the common good, sub-cultures and particular interpretations of the culture. Dispersed minorities are the main

victims of such a homogenising process.<sup>1</sup> In a society that advances collective goods, minorities would be at a disadvantage. The state subsidises the majority's idea of the good life at the expense of others' ideas. Such a society discourages difference. Confronting this objection, Taylor introduces the concept of "fundamental human rights," as determining the limits of the political promotion of collective goals.

The drive of the Taylorian community towards homogeneity may also hinder the development of a self-critical approach towards one's cultural identity. It does not provide a favourable environment for revising one's final vocabulary, and might even obstruct the process of strong evaluation and, consequently, awareness of one's identity. As we have seen, for Taylor, strong evaluation is a constituent of selfhood; he also cherishes critical self-awareness. Richard Weinstock eloquently shows that the task of strong evaluation, that is, second-order reflection on one's desires and evaluative distinction of actions as good, bad, base or noble, is more feasible in a liberal society with a neutral state than in a society pursuing an overarching common good politically (Weinstock, 1994: 186-91). It is

---

1. Taylor's politics of recognition permits geographically concentrated minorities to follow their collective goals and promote their cultural identity, and to be exempt of standards of "uniform treatment" that apply to the population at large (Taylor, 1992: 59).

more likely to be aware and also critical of one's moral framework in a cultural diversity that can be provided by a neutral polity than in a homogenised communitarian society of the like-minded.

Moreover, Taylor's cherished notion of fusion of horizons can flourish better in an impartial liberal society than in a society that seeks cultural survival through state actions. As seen, the latter tends to suppress attempts by marginal or minority cultures to articulate or publicise their own horizons; and this can lead to cultural self-preservation in isolation, and undermine any attempt to change the self-identity of cultures. A parallel fear, expressed by Habermas and Appiah, *inter alia*, is that the idea of survival may be interpreted as cultural self-preservation in isolation. Such an interpretation weakens any possibility of change in the self-identity of cultures, and, in turn, could end up in a kind of fundamentalism (see Gutmann, 1994: 131-133 and 159). Nevertheless, it should be said that a Taylorian community may hinder intercultural exchange to some extent, but it does not block it. As a matter of fact, Taylor maintains that the dialogical condition is not restricted to human agency as an individual, but extends to cultures and communities; and that is why recognition of cultural communities is a crucial need.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this paper, it has been argued that Taylor's attempt to refute the liberalism of rights, and support a liberalism of promoting collective goods, on epistemological and ontological grounds, or what he calls transcendental conditions of selfhood, is not convincing. His charge of non-viability against the liberalism of rights because of disregarding these conditions is not tenable. Moreover, Taylor's appeal to transcendental issues exposes him to his own stricture of universal moralities and, particularly, procedural liberalism, viz., supplying a universalist, ahistorical and transcultural view of morality.

*Pace* Taylor, procedural liberalism is also a politically sustainable doctrine; but, as he remarks, it does not accommodate the collective goals that most societies advance. One of these goals is cultural survival. If we accept that culture is constitutive of our identity, we cannot help desiring its survival. The very notion of identity implies survival. The question, however, is whether it is necessary to involve the state in the realisation of the wish for the preservation of cultures. Contrary to Taylor's politics of pursuing collective goals, some of these collective goals such as cultural survival do not need to be, and in some societies actually are not, considered as political pursuits. In these cases, precisely because the civil society is able to promote these goals, the state is exempted. This means that if the civil

society lacks the ability or sufficient resources, the state should do the job. Hence, political doctrines of the Taylorian type are necessary for the latter cases.

Nevertheless, in a society that allows the pursuit of cultural survival through state apparatus, compared to an impartial liberal one, there would be more attempts to homogenise the society, individual autonomy would be more limited, critical self-appraisal would be diminished, and there would be some discrimination against the demands of dispersed minorities, even if fundamental human rights are observed. On the other hand, such a society would follow collective goods that most, if not all, of its members find worthwhile. The choice between an impartial state and one promoting a collective good is not a choice between a non-viable and a viable society, as Taylor sometimes suggests. Nor is it a choice between moral and immoral or suppressive options. Adjudication between the two versions of liberalism should be based on their relative moral merits and the features of the social context in which they are supposed to operate, rather than on philosophical arguments, such as Taylor's transcendental conditions.

## References

- [1] Galston, William A., (1993), "Community, Democracy, Philosophy: The Political Philosophy of Michael Walzer", *Political Theory*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1989.
- [2] Gutmann, Amy (ed.), (1994), *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition"*, 2nd ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- [3] Rawls, John, *Political Liberalism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.
- [4] Rorty, Richard, (1991), "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy," *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 1: *Objectivity, Relativism, And Truth*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- [5] Taylor, Charles, (1992), "The Politics of Recognition," *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition"*, Amy Gutmann (ed.), Princeton University Press: Princeton.
- [6] Taylor, Charles, (1997), *Philosophical Arguments*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- [7] Taylor, Charles, (1995), *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [8] Taylor, Charles, (1989), *Sources of the Self*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [9] Taylor, Charles, (1991), *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

- [10] Charles Taylor, (1994), "Reply and Re-articulation," *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, James Tully (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [11] Tuck, Richard, (1994), "Rights and Pluralism," *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, James Tully (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [12] Weinstock, Daniel M. (1994), "The Political Theory of Strong Evaluation." In *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism: The Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question*, edited by James Tully, 171-93. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



## چارلز تیلور: ویژگی‌های استعلایی انسان و دو قرائت از لیبرالیسم

سید محمد علی تقوی<sup>۱</sup>

تاریخ دریافت: ۱۳۸۷/۴/۳

تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۳۸۹/۲/۱۹

چارلز تیلور، فیلسوف کانادایی، اظهار می‌دارد که "لیبرالیسم معطوف به رویه"، از آن‌رو که نمی‌تواند توجیهی برای پیشبرد "خیر عمومی" در جامعه ارائه کند، قابل تداوم نیست و نیز نسبت به واقعیات سیاسی و اجتماعی بی‌توجه است. این امر از آن‌جا ناشی می‌شود که هستی‌شناسی و معرفت‌شناسی نهفته در این نوع از لیبرالیسم "ویژگی‌های استعلایی" هویت انسانی و شکل‌گیری آن به شیوه "گفت و گویی" را نادیده می‌گیرد. در مقابل، وی قرائتی از لیبرالیسم را ارائه می‌کند که به پیشبرد اهداف جمعی همانند "بقای فرهنگ" توجه می‌کند و بر ویژگی‌های استعلایی مزبور نیز متکی است. با این حال، ادعای وی در مورد آن‌که "لیبرالیسم مبتنی بر حقوق" قابل تداوم نبوده و قرائت وی از لیبرالیسم پیشبرنده اهداف جمعی بر مبنای هستی‌شناختی و معرفت‌شناختی اتکا دارد، قانع‌کننده نیست. اگرچه این دیدگاه تیلور پذیرفتنی است که نظریه‌های عدالت مبتنی بر حقوق نمی‌توانند تعقیب اهداف جمعی مانند بقای یک فرهنگ یا زبان را (که جوامع لیبرال عموماً به پیشبرد آن‌ها مبادرت می‌ورزند) توجیه کنند، اما اهداف مزبور به بقای جامعه یا حتی ویژگی‌های لیبرالی آن معطوف نیستند، بلکه صرفاً حفظ تمایز یک جامعه از سایر جوامع را مد نظر دارند. به سخن دیگر، ناتوانی لیبرالیسم معطوف به رویه در توجیه این اهداف به معنای بی‌توجهی آن به ویژگی‌های استعلایی شکل‌گیری هویت آدمی نیست.

واژگان کلیدی: چارلز تیلور، لیبرالیسم مبتنی بر حقوق، لیبرالیسم معطوف به رویه، اهداف جمعی، بقای فرهنگی، هویت انسانی.

۱. استادیار، گروه علوم سیاسی، دانشگاه فردوسی، مشهد، ایران