The Review of Politics 77 (2015), 669–674.
© University of Notre Dame
doi:10.1017/S0034670515000650

How to Live Together in Difference: Redhead on Taylor

Ruth Abbey

Mark Redhead's first book, *Charles Taylor: Living and Thinking Deep Diversity*,[1] offers an in-depth study of Taylor's political thought which insists, rightly in my view, on the close connection between that political thought on the one hand and Taylor's political context and activism in his native Quebec on the other. In this new book, it is both reassuring and instructive to witness someone with Redhead's deep and long knowledge of Taylor incorporate his more recent work, *A Secular Age*,[2] into a discussion of the themes of Taylor's corpus more generally.

Perhaps as a consequence of this long and deep acquaintance with Taylor's work, Redhead's whole conception of reasoning through baggage seems to have been powerfully informed by Taylor. Toward the end of the chapter, Redhead even claims that "Taylor's career has been built around reasoning through baggage" (125). Further evidence of the close connection between Redhead's thinking and Taylor's appears in this passage where Redhead recounts Taylor's view but could just as easily be outlining his own:

> Thinking through how to live together in difference entails thinking through a manner of engaging other voices. This requires focusing on how other voices are to be directly engaged, the capacities that one has for understanding them, and the cultural terrain on which this process will transpire. Taylor feels that it is possible to induce others to change their point of view and broaden their sympathies. However, we can never simply detach ourselves from our baggage; it continues to mold our thought at subconscious levels. … Only through an interchange with others can we correct some of the "distortions" it engenders. (81)

Yet despite this powerful indebtedness to Taylor's example, Redhead concludes that "Taylor's efforts at reasoning through baggage are not quite

Ruth Abbey is book review editor of the *Review of Politics*, Interim Director of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute, and Professor of Political Science, Department of Political Science, 217 O'Shaughnessy Hall, Notre Dame, IN 46556 (Ruth.M.Abbey.2@nd.edu).

[1]Mark Redhead, *Charles Taylor: Living and Thinking Deep Diversity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).

[2]Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670515000650 Published online by Cambridge University Press

successful" (81; cf. 82). If I understand Redhead correctly, he bases this primarily on his reading of Taylor's writings about religion and secularity, starting with *A Catholic Modernity?* As notionally committed as Taylor's approach is to inclusivity, Redhead avers that

> many whose voices might eventually be excluded from a Taylorian public sphere might feel that all Taylor is providing is a self-justifying means of excluding them rather than a dynamic of interpersonal understanding which could engage their concerns and thereby generate moments of public reasoning… that could be considered fair even when those concerns are deemed unworthy of being accommodated. (126; cf. 117, 124)

I agree with Redhead's suggestion that in his writings on religion and secularity, Taylor's ontological playing field is not quite as level as he presents, and perhaps hopes, it to be. Elsewhere I have argued that despite Taylor's reticence to claim any ontological status for a human orientation toward transcendence, such a position does underlie and inform his analysis of secularity.[3] But I also think that Taylor has a stronger answer to Redhead's charge of exclusivity and exclusion than Redhead allows in this chapter, one which starts with the appeal to his ideal of fullness. Taylor contends that the ideals of fullness adhered to by those who are religious will differ one from another but all will be informed in some way by their religious beliefs.[4] One of the things marking the advent of our secular age is that exclusive humanism has advanced a number of ideals of fullness that make no reference to the divine or transcendent. Even those whose life includes no transcendent dimension harbor, therefore, ideas about what makes their lives more fulfilling.[5] A satisfactory answer to Redhead's question, "Does Taylor slight other spiritualities?" (122) thus needs a more thorough working through of this ideal in order to do full justice to, and provide fair critique of, Taylor's position. Redhead might emerge from such a process endorsing the same conclusion—that Taylor's playing field is not as level as he suggests—but working through his claims about fullness seems like a fairer and more reliable route to that conclusion.

In what follows, however, I briefly consider three of Taylor's short writings before *A Secular Age* to suggest that they provide valuable resources for Redhead's reasoning-through-baggage ideal. Yet these works receive little

[3]Ruth Abbey, "Theorizing Secularity 3: Authenticity, Ontology, Fragilization," in *Aspiring to Fullness in a Secular Age: Essays on Religion and Theology in the Work of Charles Taylor*, ed. Carlos D. Colorado and Justin D. Klassen (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 98–124.

[4]Taylor, *Secular Age*, 11.

[5]In "*A Secular Age*: The Missing Question Mark," in *The Taylor Effect: Responding to a Secular Age*, ed. Ian Leask et al. (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 8–25, I argue that the ideal of fullness is a variation on Taylor's older theme of strong evaluation.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670515000650 Published online by Cambridge University Press

or no coverage in his chapter dedicated to Taylor. Instead of focusing on these essays that seem highly pertinent to his conception of reasoning through baggage, Redhead devotes ten pages (about 15 percent) of his chapter to rehearsing Taylor's well-known arguments about self-interpretation and strong evaluation (82–93). While Redhead's expositions of these themes are fine, I could not help thinking that they were unnecessary to his larger goals in this book, or at the very least, could have commanded considerably less attention. Had Redhead spent more time on the three essays mentioned below, he might have found in Taylor even more helpful resources for developing his own conception of reasoning through baggage. This might, in turn, have led him to be less, or perhaps differently, critical of the shortcomings of Taylor's approach.

Redhead could have done more with Taylor's depiction of the dynamics of democratic exclusion.[6] He makes one brief reference to that argument at the start of his chapter (127n4) and another right at the end (124–25), but neither is developed. Yet Taylor's examination and critique of the dynamic of exclusion that inheres within modern democracies is directly relevant to Redhead's ideal of reasoning through baggage because it focuses on the terms on which, and the ways in which, different groups within a multicultural democratic polity practice and participate in public reason. Taylor observes that in order to function and prosper, any democracy needs to generate and sustain a robust sense of its collective decision-making body. Participants need to believe themselves to be listened to, and heard, by their fellow citizens in order to consider their democracy legitimate. The last decades of the twentieth century witnessed the increasing assertiveness of minority groups demanding to belong to and participate in their larger society on their own terms, without having to mimic the mainstream majority. Minorities of many sorts will continue to demand the right to participate in public life without compromising their particular identities. Thus one continuing challenge Taylor identifies is how a democracy which has grown its sense of "we the people" on nationalist grounds can expand to include those from minority cultures, those of different ethnic origins, religions, and cultures. The key question therefore becomes, "How can people live together in difference in a democratic regime under conditions of fairness and equality?"[7] For Taylor, differences among citizens should not be relegated to the private realm but should become something to be known and valued by all. Taylor's argument here is such a close ally in Redhead's cause to promote

[6]These ideas have appeared in several publications, including Charles Taylor, "The Dynamics of Democratic Exclusion," *Journal of Democracy* 9, no. 4 (1998): 143–56. See also Taylor, "Religion and European Integration," in *Conditions of European Solidarity*, vol. 2, *Religion in the New Europe*, ed. Krzysztof Michalski (New York: Central European University Press, 2006), 1–22.

[7]Taylor, "Dynamics of Democratic Exclusion," 152. Interestingly, in the book's introduction (2), Redhead quotes a version of this question from another of Taylor's texts.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670515000650 Published online by Cambridge University Press

reasoning through baggage that it is surprising that it does not receive more attention.

This same point can be made about Taylor's well-known 1992 essay, "The Politics of Recognition," that it is highly salient for Redhead's purposes but does not receive sufficient coverage in his book. (It is cited in three footnotes on page 128.) In that essay Taylor also points out that groups within Western societies are increasingly making claims for public acknowledgment of their particularity. Ethnic origin is one spur to such demands, but they also can be waged on the basis of nationality, sexuality, gender, and religion. In requiring all to strip away the particular aspects of their identities upon entering the public realm, the traditional liberal model of citizenship presupposes persons who can unproblematically divorce their private from their public persona. Assimilating all individuals into a single model of public personhood privileges, even if only tacitly, some forms of identity or ways of being over others. Taylor argues, moreoever, that a politics that recognizes differences is truer to the core liberal ideals of freedom, equality, and individuality than the traditional model of difference-blind politics. This implies that what Redhead calls reasoning through baggage is more consistent with liberal-democratic principles than is the dominant model which advocates reasoning apart from baggage.

"Conditions of an Unforced Consensus on Human Rights"[8] is a third of Taylor's political theory writings that is directly pertinent for Redhead's project, especially because it transcends the boundaries of the nation-state to reflect on reasoning through baggage across national and cultural borders. Yet this work is ignored entirely by Redhead. Taylor's aim in this article is to find a way of achieving a maximally free and genuine international consensus on human rights ("Unforced Consensus," 124). He points out that because of its Western bias, the very language of rights might be an impediment to international agreement (ibid., 125–26, 135–36). For some, the individualism of rights discourse is also too Western to be considered universal, and even the idea of human dignity is deemed by some to be too Western to command cross-cultural agreement. Despite these stumbling blocks, Taylor suggests that consensus on human rights might still be achievable, because different cultures can converge on the same values even though they are not expressed in the language of rights. Because many cultures recognize certain immunities for individuals, and condemn things such as genocide, murder, torture, slavery, and persecution of the innocent, what should be sought in the first instance is cross-cultural agreement about the norms undergirding rights rather than rights language (ibid., 125–26, 130). Taylor points, for example, to the ways in which the Buddhist commitment to nonviolence can justify some of the key norms of rights

[8]In *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights*, ed. Joanne R. Bauer and Daniel A. Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 124–44.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670515000650 Published online by Cambridge University Press

discourse (ibid., 134–36). This line of analysis and prescription seems to be highly compatible with Redhead's commitment to reasoning through baggage because it allows different cultures to bring their different baggage to the table. The concluding paragraph of this essay is especially apposite for Redhead's purposes, for there Taylor predicts that "world convergence will not come through a loss or denial of traditions all around, but rather by creative reimmersions of different groups, each in their own spiritual heritage, traveling different routes to the same goal" (ibid., 144).

Another way in which Taylor's position in this article seems conducive to Redhead's overall project is that Taylor affirms the Rawlsian ideal of an overlapping consensus as a way of approaching international consensus on human rights (ibid., 124, 137, 143). Taylor finds this Rawlsian mechanism promising because it allows people from very different cultural and metaphysical positions to agree on a core set of basic norms. "We would agree on the norms, while disagreeing on why they were the right norms. And we would be content to live in this consensus, undisturbed by the differences of profound underlying belief" (ibid., 124; cf. 125, 133, 136).[9] Just as Redhead's ambition is not to supplant the dominant model of public reason altogether, but to complement and supplement it, so Taylor's approach in this article seems to embody and anticipate Redhead's synthetic ambitions. Redhead characterizes Taylor as "not unsympathetic" to the idea of an overlapping consensus (100n22), but bases it on a remark in *A Secular Age*. Acknowledging Taylor's longer engagement with this Rawlsian conception might inspire a stronger statement about his admiration for it and, as just suggested, illustrate Redhead's claim that reasoning through baggage complements and enriches the dominant model of public reason.

However, Taylor maintains that any international agreement on human rights based on an overlapping consensus is destined to be fragile. The best way of consolidating this agreement is for each party to learn more about the others' motivations for affirming the shared norms and, ideally, to develop some respect for those different groundings, even though they might never adopt them for themselves. Taylor recommends that "the bare consensus must strive to go on towards a fusion of horizons" because "some degree of sympathetic mutual comprehension" is needed to stabilize the consensus and render it enduring ("Unforced Consensus," 138; cf. 136–37, 143). This caveat makes Taylor's argument even more supportive of Redhead's commitment to reasoning through baggage, for Redheard underscores that "effective public deliberation involves finding manners to

[9]Taylor also invokes the idea of an overlapping consensus in "Religion and European Integration," 16–17, and in his short book, coauthored with Jocelyn Maclure, *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Camdridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 10–12, 15–18, 20–21, 107–8. For an interesting comparison of Rawls's and Taylor's use of this idea, see Michael G. Barnhart, "An Overlapping Consensus: A Critique of Two Approaches," *Review of Politics* 66, no. 2 (2004): 257–83.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670515000650 Published online by Cambridge University Press

engage rather than mutually tolerating those differences which distinguish participants in a given political activity from one another" (4). Rather than mere peaceful coexistence, his model of public reason aims for "mutual understanding" and "the mutual interchange of ideas by adherents of incommensurable traditions, adherents reflexive enough to learn from others" (347).

My point here is not the captious one that there are some of Taylor's writings that Redhead does not discuss or does not discuss in sufficient detail. After all, even an entire book devoted to an author as prolific as Taylor is bound to exclude some of his works. My aim rather is threefold: (1) to convey curiosity that Redhead accords so little attention to essays that are so obviously relevant to his own undertaking in this book, and (2) to speculate whether his criticism of Taylor would have been different had he drawn more heavily from these resources. I also wonder (3) if, when read from a chronological and developmental perspective, Redhead judges that Taylor's thought has become less valuable as a resource for reasoning through baggage in the wake of his religious turn?[10] A brief remark on the chapter's final page that posits an underlying continuity in Taylor's work from 1971 to 2011 (126) suggests that Redhead would not make this claim, but would maintain instead that a buried logic of exclusion has always been a problem for Taylor.

I close my remarks on Redhead's book with another, more open question that is more loosely connected to his relationship with Taylor's thought. As noted at the start of this response, Redhead's interpretation of that thought connected theory to practice, the abstract to the concrete and contextual. In *Reasoning with Who We Are*, Redhead aspires to articulate a more realistic, and presumably more practical, model of practical reason. He characterizes all of the six thinkers who influence and inform his own approach as "concerned with how actual subjects, not abstract ones, come to understand themselves, others, and the world(s) in which they practice democratic politics" (5; cf. 16). Yet it is noteworthy, and somewhat disappointing, that Redhead's own book evidences little sustained attention to actual instances of public reason. I would have welcomed a final chapter in which he puts his preferred approach of reasoning through baggage to work in analyzing in some detail at least one such instance and demonstrating how it improves upon the dominant Kantian-inspired approach. The debate about marriage equality could supply one such test case, but there could be many others. Perhaps the practical application of reasoning through baggage is a task for Redhead's next book?

[10]By the phrase "religious turn," I refer not only to Taylor's interest in religion as a social or historical force but also to the fact that he has become more explicit about his own religious faith and the ways in which it influences his thinking. The first, tentative manifestation of this turn comes at the end of *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989). It was consolidated with *A Catholic Modernity?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) and further strengthened by *A Secular Age* in 2007.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670515000650 Published online by Cambridge University Press