

The Limits of Recognition: Culture and Historical Necessity in the Work of Rawls and Taylor.

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October 2020

Abstract

Canadian political philosophy – particularly the work by Charles Taylor, James Tully, and Will Kymlicka – can be read against the changing landscape of Canadian constitutional and social history. In this paper, I will trace the genealogy of Taylor’s politics of recognition from Rawls’ Theory of Justice, through the liberal-communitarian debates to the triumph of liberalism after the fall of the Soviet Union. In the form of reading called “contrapuntal” by Edward Said, I will then connect Taylor’s theory with the social uprisings of the 1960s, the transition to neoliberalism in the 1970s, and the Canadian constitutional debates of the 1980s and 1990s. I will argue that Taylor’s communitarianism is made possible by Canadian political realities, and are an attempt to provide a way to deal adequately with questions of Indigenous and Quebecois sovereignty. I will then try to show how Taylor’s philosophy is inadequate to the task, and to suggest ways we might better approach these problems as we move out of neoliberalism into whatever new conjuncture is coming next.

The Refoundation of Political Philosophy

In her 2019 book on the origins and reception of John Rawls’ *Theory of Justice*, Katrina Forrester Forrester argues that its publication in 1971 constituted a re-foundation of political philosophy. Since then, political philosophy has tended to mean liberal philosophy, and liberal philosophy means Rawlsian philosophy (Forrester 2019, p. x). Charles Taylor’s communitarian critique of Rawls can be understood, then, as a reaction set in motion by the *Theory of Justice*. But the relationship between Rawls’s work and Taylor’s is more complicated than that. In the course of Forrester’s work, we can tease out a dialectical set of connections between Rawls and Taylor which undercuts the abstraction or “worldlessness” (McBride 2016) of their philosophy and illustrates the

fact that, far from producing transhistorical or universal philosophy, both men were responding to concrete historical events and changes in their own time.

Rawls encountered the group of young philosophers that eventually formed the New Left - including Taylor - in Oxford in the 1950s. Later, after the publication of the *Theory of Justice* in 1971, Taylor became associated with the communitarian critique of Rawls' procedural liberalism¹, as well as other forms of individualistic or atomistic philosophies such as those associated with Ronald Dworkin (Taylor 2003) and Robert Nozick (Taylor 1985). The social and political transformations that pivot around the period between 1968-1973 suggest that in order to understand the primacy of Rawls' theory as a refoundation or revitalization of political theory, as well as Taylor's response to it, we need to be able to link developments in liberal philosophy with concrete political changes. Adopting a materialist position similar to that of Georg Lukacs and Antonio Negri, I want to suggest that political theory, in this case liberal theory, is subject to historical necessity, and indeed is *produced* by the very political events and tendencies it seeks to explain.

In order to connect these two sets of developments - the philosophical and the historical - I will deploy what Edward Said called, in *Culture and Imperialism*, "contrapuntal" reading. Said describes contrapuntal reading as reading "with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts" (Said 1993, p. 51). For Said, references to, for example, the West Indian plantations in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* are not contingent, not subject solely to the author's fancy, but historically necessary, produced by the reality of British colonial power. Similarly, despite the absence of concrete historical references in much political philosophy, we must read the development of theory *against* the real historical and political facts that produce them.

Applying the idea of a contrapuntal reading to political theory is not unprecedented. In "Political Theory as Historical Counterpoint", Jeanne Morefield suggests that "engaging in contrapuntal readings of key moments in the canonical history of political thought - moments that have become frozen around certain particular ideas and thinkers - can shake up the sleepiness of our received canon and, in the process, broaden our sense of what is possible in the now" (Morefield 2016).

Additionally, Keally McBride has argued that "providing historical information is one way of asserting the political aspects of the production and reception of a theory, [that] by extension brings a political awareness to the practice of interpreting of these texts" (McBride 2016). The methodology described by Morefield and McBride imposes on us the responsibility to ask just what were the historical and political dynamics that led to the "refoundation" of political theory in Rawls' *Theory of Justice* and the development of Taylor's own communitarianism as a response to Rawls.

¹"Proceduralism" is associated with Ronald Dworkin's working out of some of the consequences of Rawls' theory in Dworkin's 1978 paper "Liberalism" (Dworkin 1978)

Rawls and Social Responsibility

Despite having developed his theoretical and moral framework many years before, Rawls' chose to publish the *Theory* in 1971, and Forrester connects this decision with debates around civil disobedience and moral responsibility connected to the Vietnam War (Forrester 2019, chaps. 2 and 3). However, the war was only one aspect of a much larger upheaval affecting the social liberalism of the postwar welfare state. 1968 marked a watershed moment in Western politics: a culmination of various new social movements for civil rights (the US civil rights movement, second wave feminism, and gay liberation, for example), the combination of worker-student revolt, and a generalized countercultural assault on "the establishment", by which was meant mainly the repression of individual desire in favour of social solidarity in the name of capitalist reconstruction and progress. Stuart Hall writes that between 1964 and 1968 "the world turned". In that period, the "great consensus of the 1950s" was challenged, and when the state and the ruling classes began to understand that what appeared merely as anti-establishment childishness (we can think of the Beatles or Monty Python here), or a fad for "permissiveness" was in fact "something worse than that - something close to an organized and active conspiracy against the social order" (Hall 2017, pp. 149–150).

Postwar reconstruction and re-establishment of the social peace necessary for capitalist renovation was made possible both by the individual repression of desire for the greater good, but also by higher wages, higher standards of living, and better working conditions, paid for out of capitalist profits. But it also meant the flattening-out of individual and collective differences in the name of an equally-distributed, universalizing liberal administrative state. The anti-establishment upheaval of the late 1960s - which rejected this reductive universalism - also showed capitalism the way to win back some of that income. The neoliberal economics of Hayek and the Chicago School served as a justification for a deregulated economy (breaking the postwar compromise between labour and capital) and an individualistic consumer economy. The common element between these two planks was the free-market fundamentalism that came to characterize neoliberalism itself. Over the next decade, capital sought to deconstruct the welfare state by recuperating the energies released by the new social and political movements of the 1960s. By 1979/1980, the neoliberal project won political power in the elections of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan.

Despite having been developed in the heyday of the welfare state, Rawls' *Theory of Justice*, became the blueprint for political philosophy under neoliberalism. In the decade after it was published, political philosophers tried to understand it and tease out its consequences, often challenging some of its premises, but this very engagement ensured its centrality. Forrester writes that "even many who opposed [the *Theory of Justice*] were shaped by it" (Forrester 2019, p. x).

The liberal-communitarian debate which arose in the late 1970s and 1980s can be understood as a debate *within* Rawlsian liberalism because, as Forrester

recounts, the *Theory of Justice* that formed the basis of individualistic and atomistic forms of liberalism and libertarianism, was itself informed by a more communitarian position Rawls held earlier in his career.

This ambiguity - between atomistic and collectivist forms of liberalism - enabled the working out of a theory appropriate to neoliberalism in the 1970s, since neoliberalism was made possible by collective demands for civil rights but was itself based on an atomistic model of rational consumer choice. While dominant forms of liberalism had always tended to side with the individual in the question of social relations (in J.S. Mill, for example), Taylor has pointed out that there was always a more moderate, "Lockean" liberalism in conflict with a radically individual "Hobbesian" one (Taylor 1977) ².

Individualist liberalism, social contract theory, was predicated on an absolutely prior individual identity (the state of nature) with subjects only deciding to come together to enter society after the fact. Mill's utilitarian theory of liberty sought to protect individual rights against the will of the majority on the basis of social utility, while Rawls conceived his theory of justice as deriving from the egalitarian distribution of recognition and rights. These rights were, in Rawls' view, what people would choose under the "veil of ignorance", that is as individuals severed from all aspects of identity and social relationships. However, as the demands for civil rights based on identity demonstrated, social relationships could not easily be jettisoned from social or political thinking. This was the fundamental position of communitarianism. In this way, liberalism began to recognize what had long been known on the Marxist left: that social relationships were what *made* individuals, that there were no individuals without social relations. Neoliberalism is itself marked by the antagonism between identity-based collective civil rights and individual consumerism, and we are still working out the consequences of this antagonism today. This antagonism and ambiguity was analyzed and worked out in the liberal-communitarian debate in the ten or fifteen years after the *Theory of Justice's* publication.

Despite the imputation of radical individualism to Rawls' theory, and its influence on the proceduralist liberalism identified with Dworkin and the libertarian atomism of Robert Nozick, Rawls' own views tried to find the right balance between individualism and communitarianism. Forrester notes that early in his career Rawls rejected both the the social contract tradition and the "big state" social liberal position in order to "[carve] a space between collectivist theories, which gave little space to individuals, and individualist ones, which abstracted individuals from their social contexts" (Forrester 2019, p. 5).

The post-*Theory of Justice* positions of Dworkin and Nozick were criticized by communitarians like Charles Taylor and Michael Sandel. Sandel saw Dworkin's proceduralism as leading inexorably to a society of alienated, isolated individuals with no social relations at all (Sandel 1984). Taylor criticized the libertarian perspective for ignoring the role played by social relations in fostering

²Indeed, while Rawls based his theory of justice on the social contract theory of Rousseau, Locke, and Kant, he rejected Hobbes' version because it caused "special problems" for Rawls' theory

individual freedom and autonomy. If society indeed plays such a role, Taylor argued, then the form of society best suited to the role should be supported and maintained for that reason if for no other (Taylor 1985). Despite his critique, however, Taylor still held on to the Enlightenment view of emancipation and freedom. In his critique of Nozick's libertarianism, Taylor takes issue with the idea that society is unnecessary for or inimical to the development of "the free individual or autonomous moral agent", but he does not deny the idea of individual freedom or autonomy as such (Taylor 1985). What makes the "communitarian" and "liberal" positions really mere variants on a common Enlightenment liberalism is precisely this adherence to a concept of freedom distinct from necessity. Liberalism is thus marked off from "critical theories" that take necessity, social construction, and the active production of subjectivity seriously³

Indigenous and Quebecois Resurgence in the 1970s

Social theories about individuality, autonomy, and collective or communitarian life were never purely philosophical. They were intimately connected with demands for civil rights and individual autonomy at the end of the 1960s. In Canada, they are bound up with Pierre Elliot Trudeau's "Just Society" programme, launched as part of his bid for the Liberal leadership in 1968. In *Federalism and the French Canadians* published in the same year, Trudeau expressed a post-war liberal universalist orthodoxy when he wrote that "the state... must seek the general welfare of its citizens regardless of sex, colour, race, religious beliefs, or ethnic origin" (Trudeau 1968, p. 4). Indeed, Trudeau's view is framed in much the same way as Rawls' "original position". This liberal universality implicitly rejected both Indigenous sovereignty and Quebecois nationalism, both of which received new impetus in the general upheaval of the late 1960s. For example, the National Indian Brotherhood, formed in 1968, represented a new sense of pan-Indigenous awareness in Canada, and in the same period Quebec nationalism had developed to such an extent as to produce the FLQ crisis in October of 1970.

In the face of this resurgence, liberal governments like that of Pierre Trudeau sought to increase the universalism of post-war social policy (the social liberalism of the welfare state) in order to undermine sectarian cultural and political demands. In formulating the "Just Society" programme, historian Sarah Nickel writes, Trudeau "rejected the notion that any group could be accorded a position separate from the rest of the population and was convinced that removing the legislated difference between Indigenous and other Canadians [i.e. the Indian Act] could cure Canada's 'Indian Problem'" (Nickel 2019, pp. 49–50).

Based on this orthodox liberalism, the 1969 "White Paper" produced by then Minister of Indian Affairs Jean Chrétien, proposed scrapping the Indian

³The various Marxisms are probably the clearest example of these theories, but feminism, Critical Race Theory, other philosophies adopt variations on what Roy Bhaskar has called the "transformational model of society" (Bhaskar 1998).

Act, eliminating "Indian Status", and fully assimilating Indigenous peoples into settler culture and society. However, in Nickel's words, Trudeau and Chrétien misunderstood "Indigenous realities and how liberal concepts of individualism, freedom, and equality ran counter to Indigenous peoples' history, collective rights, and self-identification" (Nickel 2019, p. 50).

When it was used in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to describe the residential school system (Truth and Canada 2015, p. 1), the phrase "cultural genocide" proved controversial. But it was first employed in 1969 by Harold Cardinal to describe the effects of the White Paper policy. In his response to the federal position, *The Unjust Society*, Cardinal wrote that:

The new Indian policy promulgated by Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau's government... is a thinly disguised programme of extermination through assimilation. For the Indian to survive, says the government in effect, he must become a good little brown white man. The Americans to the south of us used to have a saying: "the only good Indian is a dead Indian." The [White Paper] doctrine would amend this but slightly to "The only good Indian is a non-Indian". (Cardinal 1969, p. 1)

In Nickel's view, reaction to the White Paper in combination with Indigenous political action (including the formation of new associations and organizations) created space for the addition of Indigenous discourse to the Canadian political landscape (Nickel 2019, p. 52). According to Glen Coulthard, a resurgence of "Indigenous anticolonial nationalism" in the early 1970s forced the Canadian government to abandon its policy of assimilationist cultural genocide and adopt "a seemingly more conciliatory set of discourses and institutional practices that emphasize [Indigenous] recognition and accommodation" (Coulthard 2014, p. 6). Legal struggles, such as the landmark Calder (1973) and Delgamuukw (1997) decisions on the recognition of land and treaty rights were important elements in the process that led in a direct line to the politics of recognition formalized by Taylor and Tully in the early- to mid-1990s. But Indigenous sovereignty is only one strand in this process.

The other strand is Quebec nationalism, which came to a head just at the time Indigenous resurgence was taking place. The nationalist Front de libération du Québec (FLQ), formed in the early 1960s, carried out a number of attacks between 1963 and 1970, including the bombing of the Montreal Stock Exchange in 1969. In October 1970, the group kidnapped British Trade Commissioner James Cross and subsequently kidnapped and killed Quebec labour minister Pierre Laporte. Trudeau's response to the "October Crisis" was to trigger the War Measures Act and declare martial law. This crisis marked a turning point in Quebecois sovereignty, as sovereigntists repudiated violence and focused on legal measures to advance the nationalist cause, such as the passing of the Charter of the French Language ("Bill 101") in 1977. The politics of recognition developed, at least in part, in the context of legal victories on the part of Indigenous activists and Quebec nationalists.

The Quebecois push for constitutional sovereignty reached a high point with the referendum on independence in 1980. The referendum failed, but it underlined the importance of recognizing Quebecois demands for Trudeau's project of national unity. The patriation of the constitution took place in 1982, amending the British North America Act and supplementing it with a Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This Charter followed the same liberal principles we have seen Trudeau adopt before. For Trudeau, constitutionally-protected language and education rights would recognize, at least to a limited extent, Quebec's identity as a "distinct society" within Canada, and thus undermine Quebecois nationalism. Legal scholar Lorraine Weinrib, has written that for Trudeau, "a bill of rights would fulfil one goal of the original Canadian constitution" - to allow all its citizens to 'consider the whole of Canada their country and field of endeavour'" (Weinrib 1998, p. 262).

The passing of the Constitution Act in 1982 ran into problems both with Quebecois and Indigenous sovereignty, and subsequent attempts to amend the constitution (the Meech Lake [1982] and Charlottetown [1992] accords) have been unable to deal adequately with these issues, as the continuation of Indigenous protest and Quebecois minority rights policy attests. The passing of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act in 1988 added another aspect to the problem of a universal Canadian identity, that of officially enshrined multiculturalism. More recently, Prime Minister Stephen Harper's xeno- and islamophobic desire to implement a "Canadian values" test can be understood, as Megan Gaucher has written, as

(re-)producing a particular version of the Canadian nation rooted in normalized, and undoubtedly problematic narratives about, among others, race, ethnicity, citizenship, gender, class, sexuality, and Indigeneity... In order to protect the happiness of the Canadian state and its citizens who belong, the [Conservative Party of Canada] enacted policies aimed at refusing and revoking citizenship to those suspected of threatening that happiness. (Gaucher 2020, p. 93)

Questions of multiculturalism, multinationalism, and polyethnicity became part of particularly Canadian debates over liberalism and communitarianism and were taken up by Taylor, James Tully, Will Kymlicka, and others. By the mid-1990s, the unofficial politics of recognition that informed the Canadian government's attempts to deal with these dynamics had been enshrined in Taylor's work on identity and intersubjectivity and Tully's work on democratic constitutionalism. Kymlicka adopted the opposite approach, reasserting the primacy of individual rights and their applicability to Canadian political problems. These philosophers especially tried to explicate Canadian policy up to that point and to lay the groundwork for a liberal reconciliation of national, ethnic, and economic contradictions for a just and progressive future.

Taylor's Politics of Recognition

Taylor's politics of recognition, explicitly formulated in the early 1990s, was a response to the perennial questions in Canadian politics: how to accommodate Indigenous nation-to-nation sovereignty, Quebecois nationalism, and other forms of multiculturalism within a liberal political framework. Despite, Kymlicka's insistence, liberal universal egalitarianism based on individual rights did not seem to provide a way to deal adequately with these questions. Taylor's politics of recognition and theory of intersubjective identity formation, developed in the 1980s and early 1990s, sought to provide a communitarian form of liberal theory which would allow for a solution to these particular political problems.

In his 1992 essay on the politics of recognition, Taylor offers a theory of cultural accommodation based on the mutual recognition of equals⁴. For this recognition to be politically significant, institutions need to depart from universal and equal distribution of individual rights in favour of the accommodation of some forms of unequal treatment in order to pursue and accomplish specific collective goals. Taylor is explicit in his adoption of a non-proceduralist, communitarian concept of political equality. Referring to Quebecois nationalist policies in particular, Taylor writes:

A society can be organized around a definition of the good life, without this being seen as a depreciation of those who do not share this definition. [...] A society with strong collective goals can be liberal provided it is capable of respecting diversity, especially when dealing with those who do not share its common goals. (Taylor 1994, p. 59)

Taylor thus requires that even a polity like Quebec, where strong collective goals around Quebecois identity and culture are reflected in public policy, maintain a set of inviolable individual rights equally and universally distributed. These rights, of course, are the fundamental ones enshrined in the Charter: "rights to life, liberty, due process, free speech, free practice of religion, and so on".

In the end, what Taylor supports is a kind of liberal politics that is prepared to balance the individualism of Dworkin or Nozick with a non-uniform, unequal treatment of difference. As long as some inalienable individual rights are universal and equally distributed - Taylor uses habeas corpus as an example - other areas of social policy can afford to be selectively or unevenly applied. In this, Taylor finds the same balance between individualism and society - reflected in the limits of government intervention - that Rawls did. In an early essay quoted by Forrester, Rawls wrote that political agreement was required

⁴The philosophical origins of this approach are found in Hegel, see Honneth 1995. Glen Coulthard has convincingly challenged Taylor's politics of recognition by arguing that the fundamental equality required for recognition is absent from settler-Indigenous relationships Coulthard 2014

on the major policies, but that “we don’t need agreement all the way down the line from theology to tastes in tea” (Forrester 2019, p. 14).

This idea of a limit to government intervention is vitally important, because it draws a hard line between what are considered properly “political” questions and what might be considered personal or cultural. This distinction means, in fact, that only *cultural* difference - not, say, economic ones - can be accommodated by a communitarian liberal society. In the same way that a policy which denied the universal and equal application of habeas corpus could not be tolerated as an aspect of cultural difference or social distinctness, so a policy which challenged the underlying requirements of capitalism are also a priori dismissed.

For, despite Rawls and Dworkin’s insistence that the liberal state is agnostic towards any particular conception of the good, there are certain goods which the state does in fact commit to. Liberal theory tends to take these goods for granted, as quasi-natural features of the social world, and so its commitment to them *as goods* is mystified and obscured. Take private property as an example. In a justification, written in 1990, of “property-owning democracy” as the form of society he envisages in the *Theory of Justice* in contrast to the welfare state, Rawls writes that:

These ideas are quite different, but since they both allow private property in productive assets, we may be misled into thinking them essentially the same. One major difference is that the background institutions of property-owning democracy, with its system of (workably) competitive markets, tries to disperse the ownership of wealth and capital, and thus to prevent a small part of society from controlling the economy and indirectly political life itself. Rawls 1999, pp. xiv–xv

Rawls argues that nothing in the “justice as fairness” theory requires private property or precludes worker ownership in a “liberal socialist state”. Nevertheless any social system that challenges private property - not just communism but also Indigenous reciprocal land-based economies - are excluded from liberal political thought. Rawls occasionally includes political economy in the *Theory of Justice*, but subsequent political philosophers like Dworkin and Taylor adopt a philosophical idealism which automatically excludes economic considerations and considerations of material power.

For Rawls, the connection between private property and the tyranny of a minority is contingent. Tyranny can be mitigated by avoiding the concentration of too much property in too few hands, but private property itself is not the problem. While it appears as if Rawls thinks “justice as fairness” is compatible with both capitalism and socialism, it is clear that his vision of socialism is limited to the state-capitalism of the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc countries at the time (Rawls 1999, p. 235). Forrester notes that for Rawls, “private ownership was the bedrock of an open society”. What mattered was “less redistribution or limiting inequality, and more the dispersal of power away from

centers and towards peripheries” (Forrester 2019, p. 17). In other words, Rawls did not see the division between property owners and non-property owners as significant, so long as property-ownership was not concentrated into too few hands. Rawls’ theory - with its attempted transhistorical generalizability - thus ignores the major site of exploitation, social and political inequality in capitalist society: the separation of property owning capitalists and workers who have nothing to sell but their labour-power ⁵. This is not a surprise, as Rawls was far from being a socialist. But Taylor often has a reputation as being a progressive if not particularly left-wing (despite his involvement with the New Left in Britain in the 1950s).

Despite Taylor’s inclusion among the communitarian challengers of Rawls’ position, Taylor’s politics of recognition in fact merely modifies the details of Rawls’ politics. For Taylor, as for Rawls, liberal society require a basic suite of rights universally and equally applied. Where Taylor and Rawls differ is in the role of government intervention in the recognition and support of goals that require uneven or unequal commitments and distributions of rights and obligations. Rawls’ two principles of justice combine the universality of individual rights with a modifier: that inequalities are justified if they benefit the least advantaged members of a society. Taylor merely replaces the second principle of justice with a recognition of collective rights: inequality of distribution is allowed in order to recognize and accomodate cultural difference and cultural survival.

Conclusion: The Limits of Recognition

The a priori limiting of recognition or accommodation to *cultural* - that is not political or economic - aspects of minority cultures make Taylor’s politics of recognition inadequate to deal with the particular problems of Canadian politics. Indigenous sovereignty, with its focus on land defense and stewardship, its reciprocal and relational social structures, is not merely a question of *cultural* difference from the dominant settler-colonial culture. Rather, Indigenous land rights directly challenge the extractive objectification of natural resources on which Canada’s capitalism is built.

Furthermore, the emphasis on relationality and reciprocity in Indigenous social thought is not only a cultural *difference* from capitalist alienating and atomistic individualism, but a direct *challenge* to the quasi-natural social and political ontology of capitalism itself. Indigeneity is not simply a cultural difference to recognized and left at that. Its challenges threaten the liberal-capitalist order which Rawls and Taylor’s philosophy is designed to defend.

Similarly, Quebec nationalism is not simply a request for recognition as a distinct society, but a demand to overcome the history of material inequalities within the dominant culture of the settler-colonial polity. In *Two Solitudes*,

⁵I have taken an explicitly Marxist position here, but this can also be understood from the perspective of decolonization, where the major site of exploitation is the extractive private ownership by settlers of Indigenous land

Hugh MacLennan sees the difference between the English and French as a failure of understanding. The Quebecois “were almost powerless against an alien people who called themselves countrymen but did not understand the peculiar value of the French and did not want to understand it”.

But the problem of Quebec nationalism is not a failure of understanding to be rectified by recognition of Quebec’s distinct culture. Rather, it is the product of historical necessity. When MacLennan writes that “the French-Canadian press roared against conscription when they saw thousands of casualties listed as the price of a few acres of mud”, this is no longer something that can be changed. Conscription, casualties, and millions of dead in a war for capitalist profits are, to us, historically necessary because they have already happened and can no longer be otherwise. As Marx wrote in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, “men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past” (Marx 1963, p. 15).

Just as the liberal ontology is based on individuals freed from all social relations, all aspects of identity or social position, so liberal politics is based on a societies freed from historical necessity. Cut off from any real understanding of history, looking to develop abstract, ahistorical political philosophy, liberal politics cannot accommodate such necessity. This is why Taylor’s politics of recognition is unequal to the task of dealing with the thorny problems of Canadian politics, but also why liberals are unable to address questions of structural oppression or inequality, or legacies of injustice and exploitation. The Federal Government’s unwillingness or inability to implement the Truth and Reconciliation’s Calls to Action, and its reluctance to sign on to the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, far from being anomalies to be explained, fit the liberal model of ahistorical atomistic social and political philosophy.

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