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Charles Taylor on Ethics and Liberty

Abstract:

My argument in this paper is that Charles Taylor's view of liberty and ethics unites Isaiah Berlin's liberal pluralism with Elizabeth Anscombe's virtue ethics. Berlin identifies, in "Two Concepts of Liberty," a tradition of negative liberty advocated by figures like Locke and Mill. He maintains that this concept of liberty is unique to modernity, and it is the form of liberty best suited to the political sphere. The much older concept of positive liberty, which is found in ancient philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, as well as modern thinkers like Hegel, Berlin regards as ill-suited to the political sphere. Anscombe, in "Modern Moral Philosophy," specifically identifies and criticizes the Anglo-Saxon tradition of moral philosophy. Utilitarian thinkers like Mill are, for Anscombe, consequentialists. The virtue ethics of Aristotle gives a basis for the intrinsic goodness and badness of actions not in sentiment but reason. Charles Taylor draws upon the views of both thinkers. He advocates a liberal pluralism in a manner comparable to Berlin. However, Taylor strongly emphasizes, with Anscombe, that the most complete conception of ethical and political life must be rooted in virtue ethics and positive liberty. Thus, Taylor's views constitute a synthesis of the approaches of his two mentors.

Keywords:

positive liberty, negative liberty, virtue ethics, political philosophy, history of philosophy

Isaiah Berlin's "Two Concepts of Liberty" is, in the words of Quentin Skinner, "the most influential single essay in contemporary political philosophy."¹ In "Two Concepts of Liberty," Berlin differentiates what he calls "negative liberty," the Anglo-Saxon notion of liberty as non-interference, from the positive concept of liberty as the realization of virtue. In this paper, I argue that the notions of liberty and ethics advanced by Charles Taylor modify the position of his mentor, Isaiah Berlin. Taylor defends "positive liberty" in his paper "What's Wrong with Negative Liberty?" and expresses the notion of freedom that is elaborated in greater historical detail throughout his writings. This paper will show how, at almost every step, Taylor takes a position on the relation between liberty and virtue that is the reverse of his mentor's. In so doing, he draws upon the criticism of the Anglo-Saxon, liberal ethics of his other mentor, Elizabeth Anscombe, as expressed in her essay, "Modern Moral Philosophy." Anscombe's essay, equal in influence in the sphere of philosophical ethics to Berlin's work in political philosophy, as Pathiaraj Rayapan notes, has restored "virtue ethics as a viable option in the search for doing ethics without God."²

My argument is that Taylor's view of liberty and ethics is a creative modification of Isaiah Berlin's criticism of the "positive liberty" of Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau and Hegel. Taylor's modification is to include Anscombe's positive conception of freedom as virtue. Furthermore, Taylor regards Anscombe's conception of virtue as the most complete conception of liberty. Taylor also continues to maintain the liberal pluralism that Berlin advocates.

The influence of Anscombe and Berlin on Taylor's thought is seldom and inadequately remarked upon in the secondary literature on Taylor.³ This essay is meant to rectify this lacuna in the scholarship. As I will show, the influence of both Berlin and Anscombe on Taylor's ethical and political thought is complex and deep. Secondary authors are not wrong to stress Taylor's relation to central figures in the continental tradition, like Habermas.⁴ It is correct to see that Taylor's engaged view is broadly Hegelian and phenomenological in character.⁵ Indeed, as shall be demonstrated below, part of Taylor's modification of Berlin's views involves a positive appropriation of Hegel's thought. Ultimately, Taylor's two chief Anglophone mentors exhibit highly significant and, indeed, blended influences on his thought that should not be overlooked.

Berlin's Two Concepts of Liberty and Taylor's Criticism of Berlin

Isaiah Berlin's influential article, "Two Concepts of Liberty," differentiates negative from positive liberty. Berlin, favoring "negative liberty," defines the latter as the "political liberty" in which none is coerced and none "interferes" with the free person, who should be able to act "unobstructed by others."⁶ This, according to Berlin, is what the, "English classical political philosophers" from Hobbes to Mill have meant by this term.⁷ This concept of

1) Quentin Skinner, "A Third Concept of Liberty," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 117 (2002): 237, <https://doi.org/10.5871/bacad/9780197262795.003.0007>.

2) Pathiaraj Rayapan, *Intention in Action: The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 19, <https://doi.org/10.3726/978-3-0351-0017-4>.

3) Nigel DeSouza, "Charles Taylor and Ethical Naturalism" (unpublished essay), 1–2. This paper explores Taylor's Aristotelian, ethical naturalism.

4) Nigel DeSouza, "Models of Moral Philosophy: Charles Taylor's Critique of Jürgen Habermas," *Eidos* 15, no. 1 (1998): 70–72.

5) Arto Laitinen, *Strong Evaluation without Moral Sources: On Charles Taylor's Philosophical Anthropology and Ethics* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 2, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110211900>.

6) Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *The Proper Study of Mankind is Man: An Anthology of Essays*, eds. Henry Hardy and Roger Hausheer (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1997), 194.

7) *Ibid.*, 195.

liberty may be considered to carry over even to the twentieth-century thinker John Rawls, who defines “liberty” as a feature of “agents who are free” from “restrictions or limitations” about what “to do or not do.”⁸ Berlin holds that such liberals believe that “individual liberty is an ultimate end for human beings.”⁹ Berlin affirms, rightly, that this concept of liberty is expressed most articulately in the Anglo-Saxon tradition of ethics and political philosophy. He accepts that although “‘human freedom’ and ‘liberty’ bear many meanings,” there is a “central, minimal meaning, which is common to all the many senses of the word.”¹⁰ That shared meaning, according to Berlin is, again, the absence of restraint.

Berlin affirms that J.S. Mill is the most articulate exponent of the Anglo-Saxon, liberal tradition, which found expression in the thought of David Hume and the economist Adam Smith. Smith and Hume proposed a common-sense science of practical liberty based on Hobbes and Locke. Berlin asserts that “the best of all modern defenses of political freedom” is in “J.S. Mill’s essay on liberty” where the idea is made “extraordinarily clear.”¹¹ According to Berlin, Mill is the major liberal thinker of the nineteenth century, because his “objective, like that of all liberals of his time, is to set the frontier beyond which State interference cannot go.”¹² Berlin, nevertheless, concedes that the Anglo-Saxon, negative conception of freedom lacks the depth and subtlety of the positive version.

Berlin expresses admiration for what he sees as the greater prudence of the Anglo-Saxon mode of thinking about political organization. Mill and Bentham were perfectly satisfied in their own “not very subtle and thoroughly lucid minds about liberty and why it was desirable.”¹³ Unless individuals “possessed” this liberty, “they could not rationally pursue each their own greatest happiness.”¹⁴

Liberty, for Berlin, is not merely political but economic. Hume and Smith presuppose, with Rousseau, that the sentiment of natural benevolence is a central motivating factor in human life. However, in the view of these Anglo-Saxon thinkers, in contrast with Rousseau, the best order would emerge when rational agents pursue their own, private, selfish ends rather than self-consciously order themselves in accordance with a collective wellbeing.¹⁵ Taylor recognizes that “Isaiah Berlin points out” that negative theories are concerned with “the area in which a subject should be left without interference, whereas the positive doctrines” like those of Rousseau “are concerned with [whom] or what controls.”¹⁶ Rousseau’s theory, like Ancient virtue ethics, interprets freedom as the positive realization of individual and collective virtue. This is where, according to my argument, we see the transition in Taylor’s thinking, from framing the question in terms of Berlin’s conceptual scheme, to drawing upon the ethical work of Anscombe.

Virtue ethics is presented as a corrective alternative to Anglo-Saxon, liberal ethics and political philosophy. Taylor draws from Berlin in recognizing that the great claim of “utilitarianism” and the “greatest source of congratulation for the partisans of utility” is that it seems the only ethical view “consonant with science

8) John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 202.

9) Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” 193.

10) Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Freedom: Romantic and Liberal,” in *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age: Their Rise and Influence on Modern Thought*, ed. Henry Hardy and Joshua Cherniss (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 155.

11) *Ibid.*, 160.

12) *Ibid.*

13) *Ibid.*

14) *Ibid.*, 161.

15) *Ibid.*

16) Charles Taylor, “What’s Wrong with Negative Liberty,” *The Idea of Freedom*, ed. Alan Ryan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 213.

and reason” that also permits “reform.”¹⁷ However, he follows Anscombe in recognizing that the value-neutral quality of liberalism after Hume constitutes an impoverishment of the vision of human ethical life. Anscombe, upon whom Taylor draws, presents a rigorous criticism of this Anglo-Saxon liberal ethic.

Anscombe criticizes the “consequentialism” of Anglophone utilitarianism. She stresses that this “consequentialism” makes the “borderline case” a problem for English philosophers of Anscombe’s time.¹⁸ For Aristotle, a virtuous person recognizes that certain actions are wrong indifferent to consequences. Anscombe stresses that it is, “a necessary feature of consequentialism that it is a shallow philosophy.”¹⁹ This is because there are always “borderline cases in ethics.”²⁰ If you are, “either an Aristotelian, or a believer in divine law, you will deal with a borderline case by considering whether doing such-and-such in such-and-such circumstances is, say, murder, or is an act of injustice.”²¹ Kant’s criticism, in the practical treatises of his critical philosophy, of Aristotelian and Scholastic moral philosophy, as a form of casuistry, here comes to mind. Anscombe, however, accepts the “method of casuistry” or “case-by-case judgment” when attended by the proper sense of the importance of moral character.²² Modern rule-based ethicists ignore character as a dimension of decision-making and prescribe rules that lead to such limit case dilemmas.

Berlin, in a certain sense, accepts the legitimacy of this shift from ethical to political reflection, as he himself recognizes that, “political theory is a branch of moral philosophy, which starts from the discovery or the application, of moral notions to the sphere of political relations.”²³ Although not specifically defending a rule-based ethics and indeed criticizing Kant, Berlin does endorse the liberalism advocated by utilitarians. Anscombe, in her essay, criticizes not only the rule-based ethics of utilitarians but also Kant, whom she regards as implicitly reliant upon religious tradition.

Anscombe’s retort is, again, the cultural and historical religious origin of the conception of a rule-based ethics. Kant’s view is that practical reason and moral conscience have a basis in a practical apprehension of the moral law. Indeed, Anscombe’s reply is that Kant’s notion of rational rules depends on a notion of divine law. The notion of “obligation” and “moral...ought” for Anscombe is tied with the “divine law conception of ethics.”²⁴ It is, according to Anscombe, fruitless to attempt to retain this “law conception” without a “divine legislator” of earlier traditions in an atheistic Modernity.²⁵ As Anscombe asserts, the “law” conception of “ethics” is to hold and be compatible with virtue only if one has a conception of God as law-giver in the manner that Stoics do or that is in Christianity and Judaism.²⁶ Rule-based utilitarian ethics is, in Anscombe’s view, thus, particularly incoherent, because it retains the structure of Stoic or Judeo-Christian tradition, while evacuating the religious tradition which gives the thought conceptual coherence. Berlin equally holds that Kant’s view constitutes a secularized form of Protestantism.

17) Charles Taylor, “Explanation and Practical Reason,” in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 41.

18) Elizabeth Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” *Philosophy* 33 (1958): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819100037943>.

19) Ibid.

20) Ibid.

21) Ibid.

22) Ibid.

23) Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” 193.

24) Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” 13.

25) Ibid.

26) Ibid., 5.

Kant's free individual is a transcendent being, beyond the realm of natural causality. But in its empirical form—in which the notion of man is that of ordinary life—this doctrine was the heart of liberal humanism, both moral and political, that was deeply influenced both by Kant and by Rousseau in the eighteenth century. In its *a priori* version it is a form of secularised Protestant individualism, in which the place of God is taken by the conception of the rational life, and the place of the individual soul which strains towards union with him is replaced by the conception of the individual, endowed with reason, straining to be governed by reason and reason alone, and to depend upon nothing that might deflect or delude him by engaging his irrational nature.²⁷

Anscombe, however, criticizes the opposing view as well, whereby we are directed by inclination or desire alone. Anscombe further elaborates what Aristotle is saying in asserting that “practical truth” in the “formation of a ‘choice’ leading to” an “action” is the “truth in agreement with right desire.”²⁸ Anscombe maintains that Hume lacks this nuanced account. Hume, according to Anscombe, “implicitly defines ‘passion’ in such a way that aiming at anything is having a passion.”²⁹ However, he neglects to recognize that direction implies purpose while retaining the background view, an inheritance of the Protestant Reformation, as much as the Scientific Revolution, that there is a radical distinction between “is” and “ought.” For Hume, as Anscombe rightly points out, the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain is the determining factor in ethical action.

Anscombe maintains that there can be no rule-based “obligation” associated with this view. Notions of “moral obligation and moral duty” and the “moral sense of ‘ought’” are “survivals, or derivatives from survivals, from an earlier conception of ethics which no longer generally survives,” and thus these notions are “only harmful without it.”³⁰ The notion of divine law had been, according to Anscombe, abandoned in the context of civic morals by Protestants during the Reformation.³¹ Of course, Protestants did not “deny the existence of divine law” and the “prescriptions of the *Torah*” but the view that humans, even through “grace,” could fulfill this law.³² Thus, “Christ was only to be trusted as mediator, not obeyed as legislator.”³³

Anscombe stresses that the Anglophone tradition of moral philosophy, through Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Bentham, and Mill, is inadequate. Isaiah Berlin notes how “Neo-Aristotelians and followers of the later doctrines of Wittgenstein” have “shaken the faith of some devoted empiricists in the complete logical gulf between descriptive statements and statements of value, and have cast doubt on the celebrated” is/ought “distinction derived from Hume.”³⁴ The major, if not central proponent of this trend, Anscombe, indeed, begins “Modern Moral Philosophy” with an affirmation that Hume’s notion that one cannot move from “is” to “ought” undermines Anglo-Saxon ethics or moral philosophy.³⁵ Hume describes empirical reality as value neutral, devoid of ethical

27) Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” 210.

28) Elizabeth Anscombe, “Thought and Action in Aristotle: What is ‘Practical Truth’?,” in *From Parmenides to Wittgenstein*, Collected Philosophical Papers, vol I (Oxford: Blackwell; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 72.

29) Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” 2, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819100037943>.

30) *Ibid.*, 1.

31) Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” 10.

32) *Ibid.*, 10, 2n.

33) *Ibid.*

34) Isaiah Berlin, “Does Political Theory Still Exist?,” in *Concepts and Categories: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 166.

35) Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” 2.

meaning.³⁶ Anscombe and Taylor, in the face of a value neutral tradition, argue for a restoration of Aristotelian virtue ethics. Such an ethics recognizes the capacity of practical understanding to evaluate certain actions as intrinsically right or wrong.

Berlin, as advocate of utilitarian liberalism, sees the importation of virtue and positive liberty into the political sphere as potentially authoritarian. Anscombe, in direct contrast, contests the central utilitarian principle of “the greatest happiness of the greatest number” as “criterion” of what is “good” with “what is wanted” and “what is evil” with the “frustration of desire.”³⁷ For Anscombe, Anglo-Saxon moral philosophy and liberalism is insufficiently sophisticated in ethical life, leading to “consequentialist” notions that fail to recognize that such actions as murder are intrinsically wrong, indifferent to the consequences.³⁸

Ethical justification, even for the liberal individual, depends upon life-orienting ideals of virtue and justice. These are, however, derived from historical practice and the traditions of morals and politics that have been handed down. Berlin maintains that, for those who defend positive liberty, the inner freedom achieved by those who practice virtue is a higher freedom than that of mere inclination, both individual and collective. However, he regards this tradition as harmful when applied to the political sphere.

Taylor, according to my argument, draws upon the traditional notion of ethical virtue in criticism of the negative notion of political freedom. Even more fully than Anscombe, Taylor describes the historical origins of the various conceptions of ethical life. Taylor stresses, counter to Berlin, that the “application even of our negative notion of freedom requires a background conception of what is significant, according to which some restrictions are seen to be without relevance for freedom altogether, and others are judged as being of greater or lesser importance.”³⁹ Thus, Taylor stresses the historical source of both negative and positive liberty, as ways by which people come to a practical understanding of themselves in the world. In forming his communitarian concept of liberty, Taylor gives special attention to Plato, Rousseau, and Hegel, the exemplars of the tradition that Berlin criticizes.

The American Revolution and the English, Glorious Revolution both, broadly, embody the negative conception of liberty, expressed in Locke. The French Revolution was predominantly an expression of the positive concept of liberty, represented in Rousseau. As Gary Lehman notes, Taylor criticizes the specifically American tendency to emphasize the importance of liberal markets for freedom, while Taylor continues to stress the importance of Roman or Neo-Roman Republicanism for political liberty.⁴⁰ Quentin Skinner suggests a vision of liberty which combines the preservation of individual rights and freedoms with aspects of positive liberty. Taylor draws upon Skinner’s recognition of Republicanism within the British context.⁴¹ As Berlin recognizes, negative liberty is safeguarded not only in the America Declaration of Independence but also in the Declaration of the Rights of Man of the First Republic. Taylor can, consequently, see shared elements: communal, positive liberty in the American Republic and Anglophone tradition, just as he recognizes aspects of negative liberty in French Republicanism.

36) Charles Taylor, “Ethics and Ontology,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 100, no. 6 (June 2003): 306, <https://doi.org/10.5840/jphil2003100611>.

37) Elizabeth Anscombe, “On the Frustration of the Majority Will by Fulfillment of the Majority’s Will,” in *Ethics, Religion and Politics*, Collected Philosophical Papers, vol. III (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1981), 127 and 129.

38) Ibid.

39) Taylor, “What’s Wrong with Negative Liberty,” 219.

40) Gary Lehman, “Perspectives on Taylor’s Reconciled Society: Community, Difference and Nature,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 32, no. 3 (2006): 365–366, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453706063213>.

41) Quentin Skinner, “Modernity and Disenchantment: Some Historical Reflections,” in *Philosophy in An Age of Pluralism: The Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question*, ed. J. Tully (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 37–48, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511621970.005>.

Negative Liberty, Locke, and Anglophone Revolutions

Taylor sees a return to a time of origins as embodied and enshrined in the language of the founding documents of the United States. Taylor recognizes that natural law underlies the claim of the populace to order sovereign power in accordance with the dictates of justice.⁴² This original vision of justice is clear in the Declaration of Independence with an appeal to, “truths held self-evident.”⁴³ Taylor notes that even, “in Britain [the] “Glorious Revolution” was conceived as “a return to the original position” or return to a “the time of origins” rather than “an innovative turn-over.”⁴⁴

Locke’s political philosophy describes an original state of almost perfect liberty, as a guiding principle for the realization of justice in the present order.⁴⁵ Thus, American rebels, guided by the thought of Locke and the institutional example preserved and codified in Roman legal and other textual sources, felt justified in contesting what they perceived to be the arbitrary or coercive power of George III. Taylor notes that the people of the United States refused to consent to unjust taxation, justifying their decision by appealing to a more original concept of just distribution.⁴⁶

Taylor maintains that Locke expresses a vision which comes closer to the “negative liberty” of Berlin, that is, liberty as non-interference. The English philosopher, nevertheless, retains something of the life-orienting, higher and lower order and meaning in nature. Locke affirms clearly that the “*State of Liberty*” is “*not a State of Licence*.”⁴⁷ That is, even Locke’s state of nature echoes Ancient conceptions of natural law. The higher self must rule over the lower self for the general wellbeing, for the good of the whole.⁴⁸ Locke’s liberalism, though it in many ways helped lead to Hume, precedes the explicitly value-neutral philosophy of Hume and his utilitarian, liberal successors. Taylor even praises the American Revolution for establishing the relation between Republican institutions and popular freedom with greater coherence and clarity than the French Revolution. This Republican, institutional safeguard of negative liberties serves as a counterbalance to the authoritarian potential which Berlin sees in positive liberty alone.

Taylor describes the American Revolution as a case of the transformation of the social imaginary. Authority was transposed from the monarchical sovereign to the people of the United States themselves, with their own executive, legislative, and judicial bodies of representation.⁴⁹ However, even in England something of the Republican aspiration was present, through the influence of Roman law on common law. The citizen was defined, in Roman law, as one autonomous and not subject, as a slave, to another’s dominion:⁵⁰ *Servitus est constitutio iuris gentium, qua quis dominio alieno contra naturam subicitur*.⁵¹ Berlin notes that the emergence of independent Republics in Italy eventually brought a more universal aspiration to other European nations, like Britain and France, to

42) Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 197.

43) *Ibid.*

44) *Ibid.*

45) John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (London: Dent, 1966), Chapter II, 4, 1–6, 287.

46) Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 160.

47) Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*, Chapter II, 6, 1–2, 288.

48) *Ibid.*, Chapter II, 6, 5–10, 289.

49) “Popular Sovereignty could be invoked in the American case, because it could find a generally agreed institutional meaning.” Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 197.

50) Charles Taylor, “Irreducible Social Goods,” 143.

51) *Ibid.*, 143. *Codex Justinianus*, I., V., 4.34 quoted in Skinner, “A Third Concept of Liberty,” 248.

“restore something like” the secular, classical virtue of the “Roman Republic or Rome of the early Principate.”⁵² Italian, French, and Anglophone writers turned to such Roman sources to inspire modern republics.⁵³

Taylor’s elaboration of different institutional expressions of negative liberty is beholden, at least in part, to Berlin. Berlin accepts that the “classical formulation of the ideal of liberty in modern times is the fruit of the Enlightenment, and culminates in the celebrated formulation of the Declaration of Independence of the United States and of the ‘rights of man and citizen’ of the first French Republic.”⁵⁴ Legal protections from coercion should be made in such a way that “the invasion” by harmful forms of interference “should be regarded as forbidden by the law.”⁵⁵ Although Taylor recognizes some of the same dangers which Berlin warns against, he, nevertheless, sees merit in the vision of authentic freedom and self-realization both individual and communal, in Rousseau and the French Republic.

Positive Liberty, Rousseau, and the French Revolution

The French Revolution represented a different interpretation of the realization of liberty and freedom. Taylor affirms, turning to the Roman ideal, the *Etats généraux* tried to bring the National Assembly into one chamber in 1789.⁵⁶ The criticism of perceived monarchical domination, the unjust reign of Louis XVI, as well as Catholic clerical control, led to this push for popular sovereignty.⁵⁷ In Rousseau’s terms, the Revolution in France demanded the achievement of the *volonté générale*.

Taylor stresses that the French Revolutionary Jacobins had their own vision of a society based on nature and liberty, which differs from Anglophone revolutionaries. Jacobins espoused a vision of a society based on nature and liberty, fraternity, and equality.⁵⁸ Instead of stressing the principle of non-interference, upheld in accordance with the liberal tradition of Locke, Rousseau emphasizes a “moi commun” or collective identity, which must be upheld for the freedom of the nation.⁵⁹ The Jacobin Robespierre articulated this principle in the following affirmation: “L’âme de la République c’est la vertu de la patrie, le dévouement magnanime qui confond tous les intérêts dans l’intérêt général.”⁶⁰ Citizens express freedom not by following their private inclinations but by acting in accordance with a collective will.

Berlin identifies Rousseau and Hegel, as thinkers who accept such a vision of a collective spirit or will as the Modern proponents of authoritarian subjugation and the French Revolution as a political expression of this spurious philosophy of freedom, which is, in Berlin’s view, actually a philosophy of subservience. Rousseau and Hegel hold that freedom is only genuinely or fully expressed through the realization of a latent rational will, contained within each individual.

Actualizing this latent, rational potential, intellectually and practically, in the view of Rousseau and Hegel, enables a citizen to realize properly an established and harmonious place within the broader social totality.

52) Isaiah Berlin, “The Pursuit of the Ideal,” 7–8.

53) Skinner, “A Third Concept of Liberty,” 249.

54) Berlin, “Two Concepts of Freedom,” 156.

55) Ibid.

56) Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 199.

57) Ibid.

58) Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 213.

59) Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 118, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822385806>.

60) Charles Taylor, *L’Age Seculier*, trans. Patrick Savidan (Boréal: Montréal, 2011), 367. Taylor cites the statement of Robespierre from George Lefebvre, *Quatre-Vingt-Neuf* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1970), 245–246.

Berlin is overt in his criticism of both Rousseau and Rousseau's influence on Hegel. For Berlin, this notion of the "latent rational will" should be seen as an "occult entity" rather than a genuine, scientific, life-orienting ethical and political principle.⁶¹ According to Berlin, it is an appeal to this "occult entity" which enables coercive individuals to "ignore the actual wishes of actual men or societies" in order to "bully and oppress them in the name, and on behalf of their 'real' selves."⁶² Such coercive oppression is, according to Berlin, done with a false sense of, "secure knowledge that whatever is the true goal of man (happiness, the performance of duty, wisdom, a just society, self-fulfillment) must be identical with his freedom – the free choice of his 'true', albeit often submerged and often inarticulate self."⁶³ Taylor, in contrast, espouses an "ethics of inarticulacy" and interprets the notion of a motive towards a higher rational order in favorable terms.⁶⁴

Not merely positive liberty but the associated language of authenticity Taylor positively takes on. Taylor embraces, rather than dismisses, the first person notion of being "true to myself" as meaning "being true to my own originality, which is something only I can articulate and discover."⁶⁵ In the act of "articulating" my selfhood or authenticity, "I'm also defining myself" and "realizing a potentiality that is properly my own."⁶⁶ Berlin, as we have just seen above, attacks precisely the kinds of submerged and inarticulate sources of moral ordering that Taylor regards as essential to a complete ethical and political life. Taylor locates the individual and collective, modern "ideal of authenticity" in Rousseau and also Herder, for whom Berlin expresses more sympathy. For Berlin, negative liberty is the best course, given that positive liberty leads to tyranny.

The French Revolutionary tradition has engendered a *laïcité* in which religious expression can be borne or tolerated within certain limits. At the same time, for Rousseau and Revolutionary Jacobins, an almost sacral but still secular conception emerges. In contrast with the US, in France, as Taylor maintains, the shift from the "legitimacy of dynastic rule to that of Nation" had "no agreed meaning in a broadly based social imaginary."⁶⁷ Thus, Taylor shares some of Berlin's misgivings about the French Revolution. However, he turns primarily to Hegel in order to form a more complete account of the significance of the French Revolution.

Enlightenment thinkers like Holbach, Helvetius, and Condorcet, with their scientific optimism, inspired Marx to embrace, with unmeasured optimism, the dream of a rational and perfect world without superstition, a world in which humans returned to a harmonious state with nature.⁶⁸ Berlin argues that "political thinkers," like the materialist "*philosophes*" no less than the idealist "Plato", have "advocated oligarchies" in which there is "the rule of the foolish by the wise" and "the inexperienced" by the "experienced" who possess certain admirable, objective qualities.⁶⁹ The sources of figures like Hume and his French contemporaries are Epicurus and Lucretius, anticipating Marx himself, whose earliest research was on ancient atomism.⁷⁰ Taylor affirms, commenting on Hegel, that the "disaster of the Jacobin Terror" and the "excesses of the Revolution" emerge from the excessive

61) Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 205.

62) Ibid.

63) Ibid.

64) Charles Taylor, *Sources of Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 53–90. Taylor cites Augustine, *De vera religion*, XXXIX, 72.

65) Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 299.

66) Ibid.

67) Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 199.

68) Taylor, *Sources of Self*, 325–354.

69) Berlin, "Two Concepts of Freedom," 122.

70) Taylor, *Sources of Self*, 345 and 349. Taylor cites *De Rerum Natura* II, 991 ff, and *De Rerum Natura*, III, 28–90.

emphasis on an incomplete vision of science defended by Enlightenment thinkers.⁷¹ Taylor, in contrast with Berlin, affirms that Hegel's criticism of radical, French Revolution secularism is, equally, an anticipation of the secular excesses of those who observe a form of vulgar Marxism.⁷² Rousseau's vision as expressed in the French Revolution would pass through Hegel's Prussian vision of the state to that of Marx.

Taylor not only exculpates Hegel from the criticisms Berlin presents against the German thinker. Taylor's own approach to liberty and ethics in the Modern world is shaped through an engagement with Hegelian notions about the course of human history. Of course, Berlin, as noted above, sees the source of Modern republicanism in a desire to return to a Roman ideal of virtue. However, equally, for Hegel, the Greco-Roman world contains incipiently what is fully realized in Modern democratic institutions.

This explains Taylor's simultaneous deployment of intellectual and historical examples in the above passages. Plato, with Berlin and Hegel, are used to see the Modern state as inspired by the example of the Roman Republic in the French, American, and even the British cases, where Roman law provided a model in reforming feudal monarchical and clerical authority. The Republican model that underlies Anglo-Saxon negative liberty, rooted in Locke, equally underlies the positive liberty of Rousseau and the French Revolution. To go even further, the ideals of democratic life and learning derive from the Greek *polis*. The historical influence extends not only to liberal democracy but also to social democracy.

Marx's philosophy equally draws upon the Hegelian source. Taylor, a social democrat, expresses enthusiasm for Marx's view of a positive need to escape domination. Berlin, who consecrated a seminal study to Marx, criticizes this view. Nevertheless, in parallel with Berlin's criticism of Marx, Taylor shares misgivings about vulgar Marxism while retaining sympathy for Hegel's positive liberty.

Hegel sees the Modern Prussian state, which provides *Bildung*, as a manifestation of a Greco-Roman heritage.⁷³ To some extent, Berlin exhibits sympathy for this ideal while criticizing the Hegelian, statist conceptions of freedom. Taylor recognizes that the positive view is to be found in Rousseau and Marx where Berlin cites Hegel along with Marx.⁷⁴ Taylor does recognize the totalitarian potential that Berlin describes.⁷⁵ For this reason, he asserts a need for liberal safeguards. Still Taylor identifies the highest expression of liberty with positive freedom.

Hegel asserts more fully that the Prussian state and other, modern European nations are the locus in which self-realization can take place. Hegel even asserts that the Modern nation constitutes a kind of restoration of not only the Ancient Republic but also the Classical Greek *polis*. The city-state of classical antiquity provides intellectual and moral education and establishes the capacity to achieve a higher and lower self. Taylor, like Hegel, sees our action as a form of self-actualization in community, and the higher and lower self is realized or actualized within public space.⁷⁶ These two types of liberty should, for Taylor, be explained with reference to their historical origin. Taylor's criticism of the disengaged agent in human and social science enables him to make this broader claim about the ethical and life-orienting character of scientific education, for the individual as well as the collective.

Berlin affirms that positive liberty envisions the human subject as a rational being who wishes to attain self-mastery or autonomy.⁷⁷ This autonomy is not only individualistic but also collective. One who adheres to

71) Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 403.

72) *Ibid.*, 419.

73) Berlin, "Two Concepts of Freedom," 175.

74) Charles Taylor, "What's Wrong with Negative Liberty," 211; Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 14.

75) Taylor, "What's Wrong with Negative Liberty," 211.

76) *Ibid.*, 220.

77) Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 8.

positive liberty recognizes that one may be a slave to nature and unbridled passion.⁷⁸ One must seek a higher nature than this lower or subservient nature. Berlin recognizes that Platonists and Hegelians both recognize this to be the case.⁷⁹ Plato's and Hegel's view of a higher and lower nature is precisely what Taylor embraces in his notion of liberty. He turns to Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, and Hegel to elaborate a vision of the self-realization of a virtuous individual, in community. Taylor endorses a "self-realization view" which entails a higher and lower self.⁸⁰

Plato's view of the "self-master" is, according to Taylor, that we "are good when reason rules" and "bad when we are dominated by our desires."⁸¹ He cites Plato's *Republic*, in which the master of the self is described as one who has rational self-mastery over passions.⁸² For Taylor, as for Plato, the rational expression of virtue is goodness and beauty of the soul, which counters irrational excess both individual and collective.⁸³ It is, however, not primarily the inner, rational ordering self of Plato but Aristotle to which Anscombe and Taylor appeal to in their criticism of value-neutral liberalism.

Neo-Aristotelian Ethics and the Criticism of Liberal Individualism

Anscombe maintains, with Aristotle, that the *akolastos* or calculating pleasure-seeker is not virtuous, and this is precisely the vision which Bentham and Mill propounded.⁸⁴ The intrinsic goodness or badness of actions must be recognized by a person of ethical character, who habitually carries out such judgments, in accordance with correct reason and in community in order to be considered authentically free in the fullest sense. Taylor maintains that Mill himself, who modified Bentham's purely quantitative notions, must derive a virtue ethical theory of rational calculation only by appealing to notions of intrinsic, rational, ordering, qualitative purposes, which stand above mere utility, that is, the impulse of unreflective pleasure and pain.⁸⁵

Human and social sciences, like psychology, are enriched by the recognition of the greater adequacy of his goal-directed conception of human action.⁸⁶ The disengaged and ethically neutral stance of those who interpret human life as mechanism is a sign of a need to recover what has been lost in the richer, earlier interpretations of nature and human life. Anscombe's linguistic analysis of action underlies Taylor's approach.

Certain human and social scientists might strive for a science bereft of ethically orienting meaning. However, a conceptual analysis of the ordinary language sense of "action" shows that this cannot be the case. We have "implicit" in "the everyday notion of action" the sense of "direction" to a goal or end.⁸⁷ The end or direction gives the action meaning. That is, to make intelligible an action, we consider "the form of goal" or "result which it was the agent's purpose or intention to bring about."⁸⁸

78) Ibid.

79) Ibid.

80) Taylor, "What's Wrong with Negative Liberty," 215–216.

81) Taylor, *Sources of Self*, 115.

82) Plato, *Republic*, 430e.

83) Ibid., 444d–e.

84) Anscombe, "Will and Emotion," 107.

85) Taylor, "Explanation and Practical Reason," 41.

86) Charles Taylor, *The Explanation of Behavior* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), 25.

87) Ibid., 41.

88) Ibid., 27.

As an ordinary language philosopher, Anscombe draws upon not only the English language but Ancient Greek, because this is the manner in which “Plato and Aristotle talk.”⁸⁹ “Ancient and medieval philosophers,” or “some of them at any rate,” maintained that it was “evident” and “demonstrable” that a “human being must always act with some end in view, and even with some one end in view.”⁹⁰ Anscombe and Taylor explore, in depth, the ordering power of an inner, rational will over desire, as found in Aristotle.

Aristotle’s natural explanation of practical life is an expression of his teleological biology. There are two parts of the psyche (ψυχή). On the one hand, there is the higher dimension of human life, rationality, but there is the lower dimension, the irrational, the aspect that encompasses emotion and desire.⁹¹ A human, in Aristotle’s view, as rational animal, in Anscombe’s terms, “flourishes” or achieves happiness and becomes a “good” person (ἀγαθός ἄνθρωπος), by fulfilling purposes through the exercise of virtue or “the virtues.”⁹² Rational, practical deliberation enables a person to “obtain” the object, in Anscombe’s translation, of “one’s will rather than one’s desire.”⁹³ Anscombe recognizes that Aristotle’s ethics requires practical virtue, an habitual state or disposition (ἔξις) of one who observes the mean or measure (μέσση) between excess and defect in an emotion, or passion, and action.⁹⁴ Aristotle’s inner and higher, rational, ethical will, in Anscombe’s translation, expresses, as much as Plato’s rational mind, what Berlin regards as the kernel of positive liberty.

The expression of theoretical or contemplative virtue represents the highest actualization and achievement of one who has ethical virtue.⁹⁵ Anscombe interprets theoretical reason, in Aristotle, as the discernment of truth and falsity through logical, propositional affirmation or denial.⁹⁶ Practical understanding is, in contrast, an engaged disposition of an agent to engage in deliberation and to choose (ἀρεῖσθαι) in accordance with right desire (τὴν ὀρεξίς ὀρθήν) and right reason (κατὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον) what to do or how to act.⁹⁷ Anscombe follows and elaborates on what Aristotle is saying in asserting that “practical truth” in the “formation of a ‘choice’ leading to [an] action” is the “truth in agreement with right desire” rather than the control of reason, as in Hume, by passion or desire.⁹⁸ This truth is, for Anscombe, the “work” of “practical intelligence.”⁹⁹

Taylor might be thought of as simply drawing from an Aristotelian or Catholic, Thomist tradition, which exists outside of the Anglophone recovery of Anscombe. However, that Taylor’s criticism parallels the specific terms of Anscombe’s virtue ethical criticism of Modern, utilitarian liberalism, suggests that the debt to his mentor is much deeper and more direct than shared participation in a wider Aristotelian and Catholic cultural and religious tradition.

Taylor, according to my view, follows Anscombe as a modern Neo-Aristotelian, affirming that the “practically wise man” (φρόνιμος) “has a knowledge of how to behave in each particular circumstance which can never

89) Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” 18.

90) Elizabeth Anscombe, *Intention* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 33 and 52. Here I am paraphrasing and quoting from Anscombe’s own citations and translations of Aristotle in a variety of different works.

91) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, i, 4.

92) Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” 18. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, vi, 3–4.

93) Anscombe, “Thought and Action in Aristotle,” 66. Anscombe, *Intention*, 62.

94) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, I, 1–2; *Ibid.*, II, vi, 9–10; *Cf. Ibid.*, VI, i, 1–2; *Ibid.*, VI, ii, 2–4; *Ibid.*, II, vi, 18. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” 5 and 17. Taylor, “Comparison, History, Truth,” 159.

95) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, I, 4.

96) *Ibid.*, VI, ii, 2–3; *Cf. Anscombe, Intention*, 59–60.

97) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, i, 1–2; *Ibid.*, VI, ii, 2–4; *Cf. Ibid.*, II, vi, 18. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” 17. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, ii, 2–31; *Cf. Anscombe, Intention*, 59–60. *Cf. Aquinas, ST. II-II, Q. 47, Art. 6.*

98) Anscombe, “Thought and Action in Aristotle,” 72.

99) *Ibid.*; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, vi, 1–2.

be equated with or reduced to a knowledge of general truths.”¹⁰⁰ However, according to Taylor, “for Aristotle, this practical wisdom or *phronesis* is a kind of awareness of order, the correct order of ends in my life, which integrates all my goals and desires into a unified whole in which each has its proper weight.”¹⁰¹ The “good life for human beings is as it is because of humans’ nature as rational life.” Humans are “moved by a love of God” and strive to “reach” a “perfection” or flourishing in fulfillment of this “nature.”¹⁰² Thus, as “agents, striving for ethical excellence, humans thus participate in the same rational order which they can also contemplate and admire in science.”¹⁰³

Authentic happiness, according to Taylor and Anscombe, is not, as utilitarian thinkers believe, a question of pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain. Taylor maintains that sensual indulgence, allowing passion to control reason is, simply, an expression of the *akolastos*, at best or, at worst, *akrasia* or weakness of will, a lack of self-mastery.¹⁰⁴ Anscombe asserts, appealing to ordinary language use, that a “philosopher” might say that, “since justice is a virtue, and injustice is a vice, and virtues and vices are built up by the performances of the action in which they are instanced, an act of injustice makes” a person do wrong.¹⁰⁵ Taylor notes that one could not, “ask an Aristotelian or a Thomist, let alone people from other cultures altogether, to accept buy this radical distinction between the right and the good, or between definitions of rights and those of human flourishing.”¹⁰⁶ In this, he follows Anscombe’s virtue ethical criticism of Modern, utilitarian liberalism.

The capacity to make this differentiation is lacking in one who embraces consequentialist modes of thinking. To use an example neither Taylor nor Anscombe explicitly provide, torture or capital punishment might be permitted or prohibited on the basis of a criterion like the maximization of pleasure and the minimization of pain, rather than the more significant criterion of the intrinsic goodness or the badness of the action.

Drawing upon his earlier criticism of mechanistic psychology, Taylor explains in a more recent article, how the vision of an “ideally disengaged” and “rational” subject distinct from the “natural and social worlds” underlies not only economic thinking but virtually all scientific thinking from Descartes onward.¹⁰⁷ According to Taylor, Locke merely applies the vision of the disengaged, rational individual in the political sphere, and this presupposition underlies, “contemporary liberalism and mainstream social science.”¹⁰⁸

Taylor rejects a vision of human behavior that is “neutral” and “disengaged”, and he embraces one of organic interconnection. Taylor criticizes “methodological individualism” in “social science” as much as individualism in politics.¹⁰⁹ Such individualism, “stands in the way of a richer and more adequate understanding of what the human sense of self is like, and hence a proper understanding of the real variety of human culture, and hence a knowledge of human beings.”¹¹⁰ Along with the recovery of intentional purpose, he also recognizes the importance of practical context.

100) Taylor, *Sources of Self*, 125.

101) Ibid.

102) Ibid.

103) Ibid.

104) Taylor, “Ethics and Ontology”.

105) Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” 18.

106) Charles Taylor, “Reply and Re-articulation,” in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, ed. James Tully (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 24.

107) Charles Taylor, “Overcoming Epistemology,” in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 7.

108) Ibid., 8.

109) Taylor, “To Follow a Rule,” 169.

110) Ibid.

Taylor goes on to underscore precisely what it leaves out: the incarnate experience of ourselves, not only in action but in formulating thought, being not detached beings of pure intellect but equipped with the “background understanding” of engaged agents in the world.¹¹¹ Even our theoretical perspectives are rooted in practice, because thought is an extension of situated practice. Taylor notes that Anscombe’s mentor, Wittgenstein, “stresses the inarticulated—at some points even inarticulable—nature of this understanding.”¹¹² The communal character of the philosophy he defends has roots also in Berlin’s cultural pluralism.

Berlin’s Liberal Pluralism and Taylor’s Multiculturalism

Bernard Williams has coined the term “Left Wittgensteinianism” to characterize the political approach that integrates pluralism and community found in Taylor and MacIntyre.¹¹³ Though Taylor defends the view of a higher, rationally ordering Good, Taylor sees ethical and political meaning for individuals and communities as expressions of a form of life.¹¹⁴ Berlin, making use of Wittgenstein’s locution in his interpretation of Vico and Herder, emphasizes the importance of pluralism, which recognizes that forms of life may differ, and goals or moral principles might be many.¹¹⁵ Taylor expresses greater hope than Berlin for the realization of a universal liberty, while at the same time embracing Berlin’s vision of the richness of plural expression.¹¹⁶ Taylor asserts that there “must be something midway between the inauthentic and homogenizing demand for recognition of equal worth, on the one hand, and the self-immurement within ethnocentric standards, on the other.”¹¹⁷ Taylor’s communitarian multiculturalism should be seen, equally, as a development of Berlin’s liberal pluralism.

Berlin notes that law becomes central with Modern, Republican Revolution. With such a view of negative liberty “the law is in a certain sense an instrument for preventing specific encroachment or punishment if it occurs.”¹¹⁸ The freedom-seeking individuals who are the citizens of the Republican community “may be themselves in favour of some other specific form of authority” such as “a democratic body” or a “federation of units constituted in curious ways.”¹¹⁹ As Berlin affirms, such individuals and communities seeking negative liberty have historically sought “to destroy or neutralize the power of some other individual or body of persons.”¹²⁰ Taylor’s active political work, as much as his thought, constitutes an attempt to mediate between liberal neutrality, Republican institutions, and communitarian belonging.

Commenting on Quebec life, Taylor notes that in ancient cities and ancient republics the notions of identity and common good went hand in hand.¹²¹ The most articulate advocates of Anglo-Saxon liberalism

111) Ibid.

112) Taylor, “Overcoming Epistemology,” 11. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. Elizabeth Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1959), paragraphs 193, 194, 202, 211 and 217.

113) Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument*, ed. Geoffrey Hawthorn (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 29, 31 and 37.

114) Charles Taylor, “*Lichtung* and *Lebensform*: Parallels between Heidegger and Wittgenstein,” in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 62.

115) Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1976), 153.

116) Charles Taylor, “The Importance of Herder,” in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 79.

117) Charles Taylor, C., “The Politics of Recognition,” 71.

118) Berlin, “Two Concepts of Freedom,” 156.

119) Ibid., 155.

120) Ibid.

121) Charles Taylor, *Rapprocher les solitudes: Ecrits sur le fédéralisme et le nationalisme au Canada* (Sainte-Foy-Tarentaise: Les presses de l’université Laval: Sainte-foy, 1992), 114–115 and 149–150.

maintain that the neutrality of public life and the emotionally engaged sphere of private life constitute distinct and separate domains.¹²² Yet Taylor stresses that, in his own home province of Quebec, where there is a degree of separatist and nationalist sentiment, it is desirable for citizens to experience a sense of collective belonging and identity linked with a sense of “*le bien commun*” or common good.¹²³ In his emphasis on language rights and concern for nationalism, Berlin’s influence on Taylor becomes just as clear.

Taylor affirms that our identities are “partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves.”¹²⁴ Taylor stresses that non-recognition “or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being.”¹²⁵ Just as in the case of Anglophone and Francophone linguistic groups, a free, democratic society should be open not merely to tolerating but accepting the positive affirmation of Jewish cultural identity, as well as of the Muslim community and of Buddhist practices. This is, of course, only so long as such cultural and religious practices do not contravene basic, constitutional rights.

Berlin criticizes the form of freedom that Taylor most fully embraces. He is critical of Taylor’s espousal of the higher-order teleology of Aristotle along with the historical purpose of Hegel, as well as believing Christians and Jewish believers.¹²⁶ Taylor follows Anscombe more closely in endorsing the teleology of Christianity and Judaism.¹²⁷ Taylor embraces, in Berlin’s words, “the notion that human beings can only rise to their full stature and develop all the potentialities which belong to them as human beings, if human society is liberated from oppression, exploitation, domination.”¹²⁸ This is, indeed, Berlin’s central criticism. However, Berlin sees this as much in those who seek a Marxist “notion of the perfect state or ideal condition in which everything can be harmonized” as in the position of those who embrace the “Roman Catholic faith,” which seeks and demands an ultimate realization of happiness.¹²⁹ This totalizing, positive aspiration in either socialist or Catholic form is not suited, according to Berlin, to political liberty.

Positive liberty, as the expression of a virtue borne of intellectual and practical insight, is the chief point of difference between Taylor’s two mentors, Anscombe and Berlin. Berlin recognizes the deep historical origin of this notion. The positive concept of “virtue” as “knowledge” is “one of the oldest human doctrines,” has “dominated Western philosophy” from “Plato to the present,” and was “not seriously questioned until a comparatively recent age.”¹³⁰ Berlin criticizes the notion of positive liberty as Platonist in origin. Berlin himself recognizes that a large number of cultural traditions, including Jewish, Neoplatonic, Christian, and Muslim, as well as Buddhist, advocate something like positive liberty.¹³¹ Berlin reiterates his objection to “Stoics, Peripatetics,

122) Ibid., 115.

123) Ibid.

124) Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” 225.

125) Ibid.

126) Berlin, “The Pursuit of the Ideal,” 2.

127) Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” 4.

128) Berlin, “The Pursuit of the Ideal,” 2. Cf. Schaap affirms that Taylor’s account of the “struggle for recognition” through dialogue is “too optimistic[.]” Andrew Schaap, “Political Reconciliation through the Struggle for Recognition,” in *Social and Legal Studies*, 13 (2004), 534.

129) Isaiah Berlin, “Letter to Norman Bernbaum, 8 December 1959,” in *Enlightening: Letters 1956–1960*, eds. Henry Hardy and Jennifer Holmes (London: Chatto & Windus, 2009).

130) Berlin, “The Idea of Freedom,” 95.

131) Berlin, “The Pursuit of the Ideal,” 4.

Neoplatonists and Christians,” indeed all those who do not see the world as “chance collision of matter in space” with “no purpose.”¹³²

Taylor’s embrace of positive liberty has to do, in part, with the pervasiveness of the conception of liberty as self-mastery, not only in Western, Greco-Roman traditions, as well as Jewish, Muslim, and Christian engagement with virtue ethical traditions, but also in Eastern traditions. Berlin explicitly criticizes Aristotelian, Thomist, Hegelian as well as Buddhist views.¹³³ Berlin affirms what he sees to be the imperfection of the human condition and a need for a liberal pluralism that recognizes that human values are often in conflict. Yet Taylor accepts, in his reply to Berlin, that “human beings are always in a situation of conflict between moral demands, which seem to them to be irrecusable, but at the same time uncombinable,” while hoping for “a mode of life, individual and social, in which these demands could be reconciled.”¹³⁴ Berlin rejects positive liberty as a beneficial “political” principle, although he accepts that it provides, when coupled with negative liberty, “the whole story” of “the modern concept of liberty.”¹³⁵ This is where Taylor’s religious hope and political orientation fall in a parallel path. Taylor’s *Sources of Self* ends with, “hope rests in Judaeo-Christian theism,” which provides a “divine affirmation” that is “more total than humans can ever attain unaided.”¹³⁶ Though recognizing the problematic relation between religious and political, socialist freedom and solidarity, in Taylor, they are united with an aspiration towards the divine, rooted in specific traditions and ways of speaking about the divine in an open and collective dialogue. The religious dimension is as much an aspect of liberty and freedom as cultural expression.

Taylor’s views on ethics and liberty modifies Berlin’s views on liberty. Negative liberty is individualistic and, on its own, lacks the life-orienting purpose of a positive vision of the ethical and political life, which recognizes a purposeful order beyond mere inclination. The fruition of virtue is authentic self-realization. Taylor significantly modifies Berlin’s conception of negative liberty and defends positive liberty as an essential dimension of communitarian freedom.

This essay has explored centrally a single notion. This notion is that Taylor’s approach to ethics and liberty fuses aspects of the thought of his two mentors, Isaiah Berlin and Elizabeth Anscombe. Much of Berlin’s and Anscombe’s thought entails reflection on other major thinkers, like Aristotle, Plato, Locke, Rousseau, Bentham, Mill, Hegel and Marx. For this reason, the essay has introduced relevant citations and exposition from their work. My hope is that readers will see that Taylor’s debt to his mentors is clearly shown in the salient use of such terms as consequentialism and negative and positive liberty. Most significantly, Taylor adopts these terms in the manner of his mentors in the course of expositing and explaining the thought of major philosophical figures. Where Berlin criticizes the major exponents of the tradition of positive liberty, Plato, Rousseau and Hegel, Taylor finds positive merit. Where Anscombe criticizes the thought of Anglophone liberals like Bentham and Mill, through an appeal to classical virtue, Taylor follows her lead. The result of this effort is a remarkable and fascinating synthesis. Taylor advocates, with Anscombe, a return to an earlier tradition of singular virtue while attempting to sustain what is best in Berlin’s multicultural pluralism.

132) Isaiah Berlin, “Politics as a Descriptive Science,” in *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age: Their Rise and Influence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 63–64. Habermas, as Lehman notes, encourages a “search for universal principles in a chaotic and ultimately indeterminate universe” in a criticism of Taylor’s vision of situated self-realization. Cf. Lehman, “Perspectives on Taylor’s Reconciled Society,” 352.

133) *Ibid.*, 64.

134) Charles Taylor, “Reply and Re-Articulation,” 213–214.

135) Berlin, “Two Concepts of Freedom,” 155.

136) Taylor, *Sources of Self*, 521.

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