The Relevance of Charles Taylor's Interpretivism for Environmental Politics

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Introduction

Environmental conjectures and refutations: Preliminary issues

In this article the work of Charles Taylor is used to explain how the relationship between humanity's social and natural environments has been understood in Western political philosophy since the Enlightenment.[1] In particular, the article considers the internal and external reasons to debate and challenge how humanity thinks about relationships with the natural environment. In this regard, the ideas developed by Charles Taylor are used to critique political perspectives that are based on instrumental ways to reason about the natural environment, because they invariably sever the connections between the social and natural environment. Taylor postulates:

> It seems to me that every anthropocentrism pays a terrible price in impoverishment in this regard. Deep ecologists tend to concur from one point of view, theists from another. And I am driven to this position from both.[2]

The above quotation reflects Taylor's openness to different values that may emanate from within us or from the whole of nature. For Taylor, the full range of values which are of critical significance for people's lives may not necessarily be articulated and expressed using scientific and technical methods. This article owes much to Taylor's discussion of interpretivism and his attempt to overcome the alienation of modern life.[3]

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[1] Taylor argues that Enlightenment rationality has led to 'boosters' of modernity, assuming that through human autonomy and reason technological solutions can fix and solve ecological dilemmas: Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992), 11-12.

[2] Charles Taylor, "Response to my Critics," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 54(1) (1994): 13.

[3] Alasdair MacIntyre explains that the adjectives 'communitarian', 'communitive' and 'communist' were used interchangeably, and that the term 'communist' incorporated many diverse strands of thought until the early part of the 1920s; MacIntyre, A. (1995), 'The Spectre of Communitarianism', *Radical Philosophy,* 70, 34-35. Some deep ecologists use the term communitarian in a different sense, referring to a 'biotic community'; see Callicott, J. B. (1996), 'Do Deconstructive Ecology and Sociobiology

Taylor's interpretations relate considerations of broader environmental issues associated with the quality of life and to general cultural and social relationships.[4] In this article the term 'interpretivism'[5] is used as representative of a particular approach critical of contemporary liberalism and attempts to make clear to citizens what is happening in their lives.

The article draws upon the interpretivist framework employed by Taylor to explore the Enlightenment's conception of rationality. Interpretivism is used to explore the Enlightenment's commitment to autonomy and the way it evaluates the natural environment.[6] It examines the Enlightenment's stress on autonomy and the way it submerges political and ecological values. The article affirms what Taylor calls *authenticity*[7] - extending our understanding of autonomy to consider processes of human self-realisation through exploring humanity's 'being in the world'.[8] Autonomy refers to human freedom and the ability to be impartial, but authenticity demands contextualisation of that autonomy. The notion of authenticity helps in considering how Aristotle's 'practical reason' can illuminate values other than those which reflect instrumental considerations.

In particular, Taylor's work on authenticity[9] informs the article such that the most convincing ecological argument must be built on interpretivist premises. By way of introduction, it canvasses liberal frameworks concerning nature and objections to them from the perspective of deep ecology, far-from-equilibrium systems theory and post-modernism. It then examines modern liberal frameworks counter-posing Taylor's authenticity to liberal infatuation with proceduralism. It goes on to explain Taylor's alternative, noting that Taylor's moral framework takes a theistic direction. This chapter asks: can Taylor's approach be extended to escape anthropocentrism? It explores whether we fully understand our impact on nature.

The key argument revolves around Charles Taylor's attempt to preserve threatened values by understanding perspectives on authenticity and expressivism which provide a

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Undermine Leopold's Land Ethic', *Environmental Ethics*, 18(4), 353-373.

[4] Cohen, J. E. (1998), 'How Many People Can the Earth Support?', *The New York Review of Books,* XLV(15), (1998), 29-31.

[5] Interpretivism involves: (a) the politics of the good and recognition of 'significant' identity issues; (b) people's 'strong-evaluations' which people find of critical importance; (c) the inter-relationships between the right and the good that involves weighing the principles of neutrality against, for example, the right for cultural survival.

[6] See Hegel, G. W. F. *Philosophy of Nature,* Miller, A. V. (ed. and trans.), (foreword by Findlay, J. N.), Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970.

[7] See Ferrara, A., *Reflective Authenticity,* London and New York, Routledge, 1998.

[8] Dreyfus, H. (1994), *Being and Time,* (Massachusetts, Massachusetts Institute of Technology), 173-174.

[9] Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, *op. cit.*

radical reworking of humanity's understanding of being-in-the-world, and a starting point for rethinking the way individuals and communities ought to be dealing politically with ecological crises. Therefore, the argument in this articleuses Taylor's work on liberalism and interpretivist frameworks to construct a bridge between democratic, ethical, and ecological perspectives. This leads to a fusion between liberal and interpretivist ideas which involve the development of common ground to address cultural and environmental values. This fusion of perspectives in the search for a common ground is done in a spirit that aims to moderate the dominant anthropocentric attitude toward the natural environment.

More broadly the ecological perspective developed here owes much to Taylor's interpretation of Martin Heidegger's argument that people are 'thrown into the world'.[10] People's identities are formed within cultural and linguistic traditions which frame the factors which have significance in their lives. Clearly one crucially significant factor is the way people relate to nature.[11] Heideggerian thought, moreover, is relevant to considerations of what it means to be a person living a hectic life as if the processes of time are accelerating.[12] Furthermore, it is important to remember that Charles Taylor has been influential in developing the art of interpretation and applying it to issues associated with environmental politics, multicultural recognition, and international relations.[13] He has explored the problems that arise when we solely rely on modern theories of knowledge that emphasize procedural political solutions using the interpretivist framework.

There is a critical framework within the interpretivist perspective, a fact that has often been overlooked by critics to whom his theological commitments are said to leave him whistling in the dark.[14] Taylor's interpretivist argument is that modern environmental and political thinking has narrowed how the natural environment is conceptualized. Interpretation also involves examining current theories of knowledge and explaining how they have shaped the societies in which people live and their relationships with the natural environment. This interpretivism determines the limitations and possibilities within the dominant theories of knowledge as they apply to environmental and social dilemmas. Central to the interpretivist framework is an argument that modern economic and political sciences have created social practices that narrow how the environmental and social dilemmas of modern societies are perceived.

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[10] Dreyfus, *Being and Time, op. cit.,* pp. 173-174, 242-244.

[11] See Taylor, C., 'Heidegger, Language and Ecology', *Philosophical Arguments*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), 123 and Taylor, C., 'Language and Society', in Honneth, A. and Joas, H. (eds.), *Communicative Action,* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1991), 23-36.

[12] Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity, op. cit.,* 7-10.

[13] This interpretivist approach underlines Charles Taylor response to an empiricist critique leveled by A.C. Grayling. Found in <u>Ben Rogers,</u> "Charles Taylor Interviewed," *Prospect*, <u>February 29, 2008,</u> p. 4.

[14] R. Hittinger, "Charles Taylor: *Sources of the Self*," *Review of Metaphysics*, 44(1) (1990): 111–130.

Therefore, Taylor's framework transcends modernity's infatuation with procedure and escapes the visions Max Weber conjured with the "iron cage" of bureaucracy.[15] On this view, interpretivism moves beyond current political methods that are outgrowths from economic and procedural strategies. These arguments reflect Taylor's dissatisfaction with approaches associated with instrumental reason and procedural liberalism and invites rethinking what would be a full life and how people could strive towards it. To save the natural environment and recognize values of political significance, Taylor gives prominence to the power of a dialogic society. He is particularly critical of political and procedural approaches that are insensitive to significant cultural and environmental values. Taylor has recently pointed out that his key works, *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age*, were inspired by a quest to better understand the plurality of worldviews that have been used to explain the value of the natural environment.[16] Moreover, *Sources of the Self* was underpinned by the belief that the natural environment and humanity are entwined. When it comes to articulating different visions of the natural environment, these critical issues require careful attention in a political sense. Hittinger was one of the early reviewers to observe that the deep ecological and theistic dimensions in *Sources of the Self*[17] left him reliant on an external and transcendental God.[18] That is, 'there is a theology that is crucial to, and yet left inarticulate in, Taylor's treatment of these issues'.[19] These critical responses to Taylor, however, do not engage with his philosophical and speculative quest to reveal humanity's relationships with the natural environment.[20] One of Taylor's principal aims is to reveal the anthropocentric limitations within exclusive humanism which cuts people off from the possibility that other sources of the self exist. Therefore, the interpretivist and narrative dimensions in his work are designed to open a full range of values that the natural environment provides.

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[15] The term of iron cage is that of Max Weber in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Alan and Unwin, 1965); B.S. Turner, *For Weber* (Boston, MA: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981). Weber explained how modern bureaucracies perpetuate procedural structures that stifle the human condition.

[16] Charles Taylor, "Challenging Issues About the Secular Age," *Modern Theology*, 26(3) (2010): 404–416.

[17] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989).chapters 18–21. For a critical perspective on the theological dimension see Redhead, M., 'Charles Taylor's Nietzschean predicament: a dilemma more revealing than foreboding', *Philosophy and Social Criticism,* Vol. 27, No. 6, 2001, pp. 81-107.

[18] Hittinger, R., 'Charles Taylor: *Sources of the Self*', *Review of Metaphysics,* Vol. XLIV, No. 1, 1990, pp. 111-130. See also J. Casanova, "A Secular Age: Dawn or Twilight?" in M. Warner, J. Van Antwerpen, and C. Calhoun, eds., *Varieties of Secularism: In A Secular Age* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2010) 265–282.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Taylor, "Response to my Critics," 13.

Taylor argues that liberalism's narrow focus is unlikely to accommodate environmental values. Liberalism's procedural focus submerges the analysis of good structures. The environmental limitation of liberalism is that it focuses on rights and individual personal freedom as opposed to what is significant for a full life. That is, liberal doctrine looks inward rather than to external things, such as the *polis*, or republic, and even less to the environment. According to Taylor, morality is viewed in terms of self-interest or of de-contextualised 'right'. In eighteenth century terms, which many philosophers have now forgotten, the Enlightenment collapsed ethics into morality. Morality (*moralis*) - being true to a role – is personal whereas ethics is about objective value structures (as in Hegel's *Sittlichkeit,* Taylor, 1975). Taylor's criticisms of liberalism are evident in his argument that Enlightenment thinkers such as Immanuel Kant reduced ethics (*ethicus*) where the focus is on *what I should be* to morality where the focus is *what should I do*. Kant's categorical imperative acted as a yardstick for what *I ought to do* rather than what it is *good to be*. Considerations of good political structures which might be environmentally embedded have been displaced by considerations of principles of right behaviour.

The essay begins by exploring background democratic and liberal issues that influence ecological politics. The second section considers how Rawls' theory of justice has been extended to ecological politics and examines problems with extending liberalism beyond its initial focus. The third section develops Taylor's interpretivism in a collective and environmental context.[1] The final section outlines how Taylor's work on interpretivism and practical reasoning might better accommodate environmental politics in the public spheres of democratic societies.

Background Dilemmas: Liberal-Democracy and the Environmental Good

Liberal theorists such as Daniel Bell (2002), Will Kymlicka (1989) and John Meyer (2011) adapt and examine central features of the liberal doctrine to address cultural and environmental political issues. Taylor's work is relevant in providing means to test whether liberal environmentalism can recognise the natural environment as a hyper-good, or strongly-valued good. These goods determine the outcome of other goods and may not have a market value. A hyper-good is explained by Ruth Abbey who points out that these goods orient us in shaping how we recognise the other goods confronting us. She explains:

We judge them differently and perhaps experience them quite differently, to the point of possible indifference and, in some cases, rejection' (Abbey 2001, pp. 69-70).

These goods include intrinsic values which require recognition as significant in people's life-plans. They are necessary conditions of our being-in-the-world. Many theorists have worked to extend liberalism to recognise cultural and environmental goods in a society where free citizens are able to live according to their own value systems, and as they see fit. This is significantly at variance from Rawls' liberalism, in that Rawls advocated the belief that all societies would independently arrive at a set of values and principles that would be viewed as common to all "reasonable" men and women in different cultures. These attempts to reform liberalism have been examined by Bell, Kymlicka and Meyer but this paper returns to Taylor's critique of liberal attempts to create new political pathways in a secular age.

For example, Will Kymlicka has responded to Taylor and argues that Rawls' theory can be extended to analyse cultural politics. Kymlicka claimed that Taylor's reforms are not necessary because liberalism can be adapted. He argues that liberalism can solve cultural differences and remain stable.[2] This strategy has also been utilised in ecological politics to extend liberalism to incorporate environmental values. However, extending liberalism does not fully engage with how practical reasoning is used by Taylor to interpret the significant dilemmas posed by ecological politics (See Taylor, 1992b). Procedural liberals tend to downplay the dialectic that can be developed between interpretivism and the liberal predilection for procedural respect. Taylor extends the parameters of respect through mutual respect to incorporate direct engagements between people and the natural environment. These dialectical elements are implicit in Taylor's interpretivist politics which fuse horizons based on the notion that mutuality is integral to respectful discourse. In this way, the value in the natural environment is incorporated into the basic institutions of the public sphere.

For Taylor, the natural environment is the ultimate source of value and these themes can be traced back to his work on Heidegger's being-in-the-world. Taylor argues that simply extending liberalism does not come to grips with our more basic interactions and place in the natural environment (Taylor, 1994). More fundamentally, he argues that modern liberalism loses sight of the significant moral values that shape our being-in-the-natural-environment. He questions whether extending liberalism to integrate 'green' values into our democratic deliberations is enough (Bell, 2002).

A useful starting point in the argument is to remember that both Rawls and Taylor have noted that their work engages ideas inspired by the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. The latter's essential theme is that each individual is sacrosanct and their rights are inviolable. Kant's focus was on the individual and principles of justice. Indeed, Kant had very little to say about animal and environmental rights other than stating that it is wrong to be cruel to animals. He formulated the idea of a 'categorical imperative', where no person is to be treated as a means to an end (Kant, 1949, p. 96). In applying

a Rawlsian inspired version of Kant, it is argued that the diversity of individual interests must be addressed as a moral term (Rawls, 1993, pp. xxviii-xxiv).

While Rawls adapts Kant because he believes that justice must be grounded in the public sphere, the overall set of political values remains constrained by principles of political neutrality (*Ibid*). The question is whether the environment is a necessary condition of being and how our public spheres promote environmental awareness. Kant's categorical imperative and political approach has been criticised by Hegelians, such as Taylor, as being based on a narrow and individualistic understanding of community. However, despite Kant's utilisation of transcendental arguments to avoid these types of criticisms his work remains committed to the construction of procedure.

It is well known that procedural reasoning prioritises procedures of right over the good. Taylor argues that despite Kant's reforms to instrumental approaches the core features of liberal atomism remain. This is a society where people act on their own, without interference from others and the institutions of the state (Taylor, 1985). As we will come to see, Taylor's contention is that economic-liberal based environmental reforms are hardly likely to create and nurture the type of appreciation that would put us on a path to recognise environmental values. He offers an optimistic view that by informing the people in the public sphere improved environmental outcomes will result.

Rawls' political liberalism is significant because he releases liberalism from its moorings in negative liberty and a minimal state. On Taylor's view, we do not merely need more liberal procedure and procedural respect. Rather, we need an ontological and advocacy investigation into political pathways that put us in touch with the natural world. His interpretivist thought offers answers to these questions through an exploration into the connections between humanity and the natural environment which challenges communities to totally transform how they interact with the natural environment.

As Taylor notes in his recent work, *A Secular Age,* some of the impacts associated with the rise of secularity rely heavily upon procedural principles. He argues that procedural approaches emanate from the work of not only Kant but also David Hume. It will be recalled that Kant awoke from his philosophical slumbers when he responded to Hume's claim that morality depends on some 'internal sense or feeling which nature has made universal in the whole species' (Hume, 1777, Part 1). Taylor argues that Hume's focus on sentiment has the potential to close thinking to the existence of intrinsic values in the natural environment.

Taylor argues that while Kant is downstream from Hume both have developed ideas that have shaped our secularising trends. Since the Enlightenment's emphasis on rights and justice this has created a tendency to submerge appreciation about the worth

of other beings and the natural environment. Ours is an epoch which has elevated economic reasoning above interpretation in the public spheres of civil society. This has created a disenchanted world view, one which reduces the natural environment to a factor in economic production. Accordingly, the supposition that the natural environment contains intrinsic values has been submerged in the endeavour to control the natural environment. Taylor argues that our secular age has ignored other ways to think about the world. He explains:

> But that can't be the whole story … The rise of modernity isn't just a story of loss, of subtraction. The key difference we're looking at between our two marker dates is a shift in the understanding of what I called "fullness" between a condition in which our highest spiritual and moral aspiration point us inescapably to God, one might say, make(s) no sense without God, to one in which they can be related to a host of different sources, and frequently are referred to sources which deny God. Now the disappearance of these three modes of God's felt presence in our world, while it certainly facilitates this change, couldn't by itself bring it about. Because we can certainly go on experiencing fullness as a gift from God, even in a disenchanted world, a secular society, and a post-cosmic universe. In order to be able not to, we needed an alternative. (Taylor, 2007, p. 26).

On Taylor's view it is important to understand how we have moved between enchanted visions of the universe and a prevailing disenchanted worldview. This argument leads to the main point of his recent work: 'that a secularist régime must manage the religious and metaphysical diversity of views (including non-and anti-religious views) fairly and democratically.' (Taylor, 2011). This might include setting certain limits to environmental, religious and spiritual actions action in the public sphere (Taylor, 2010e).

Yet, for Taylor, religion is not the primary focus of secularism because the aim is to explore new ways to effectively re-enchant the system. In this way, our horizons of environmental value are broadened and the role of public institutions developed. For this to occur, not only do environmental concerns need to be considered within a society's collective thinking, but environmental values must be recognised in the deliberative and educative process. Taylor argues that our ideological and political structures have become 'closed world' structures which deny the existence of intrinsic environmental values. The economic focus on sustainability tends to close off ideas about our place in the natural environment and what our relationship to it should be.

Central to Taylor's art of interpretation is the view that liberalism operates within a narrow understanding of the factors important for a full life. He has argued that liberal

attempts to define the natural environment as a primary good provides superficial interpretations about what it is good to be. He argues that liberalism tends to homogenise identity because it has been extended beyond the bounds for which it was originally intended. Taylor's work implies that we need to totally rethink our basic set of assumptions and directions for our communities. He has argued that a collectivist approach focuses on common bonds that can provide workable environmental and social solutions. The environmental issue is not simply about justice, but creating new pathways to recognise that the natural environment is a necessary condition of being.

Taylor explores the notion of a steady-state community is one that explores the limits of the current system that has created 'our present pattern of inequality [which] is made provisionally tolerable only by rapid growth' (Taylor, 1978, p. 168). This is the dilemma the environment poses on people freely choosing their own values. Environmental politics challenges modern political systems to determine when such external values are significant for the political system. This is the classical problem positive liberty poses for modern societies and their governing systems. The problem for democratic-liberalism is that not all environmental values and voices can be heard equally. A decision in favour of development obviously overrules the environmental objections of those who oppose it. This issue reflects the pragmatic mantra that it is not possible to focus on all people's values at the same time. This maxim, while lacking Kantian categorical force, could be used to argue that the dominant voices submerge other ways of being-in-the-world. The problem is when should the state provide special treatment for environmental values which might conflict with the need for all citizens voices to be expressed (and not just periodically when elections are held). Taylor addressed the issue of equal voices:

> Another obvious difficulty for a liberal defense of community aspirations is the element of coercion and discrimination it may unavoidably entail. Suppose a minority of members want to assimilate. But suppose, at the same time, that the laws needed for the survival of the community require everyone's support. So all members of the community are taxed, say, to support some institutions; or in the name of survival, which a minority are happy to forgo, their choice of language is restricted. Once we get caught in the rigid requirement of equal concern for everyone's view of the good, are we not forced here to violate our principle [of equality]? (Taylor, 1994a, p. 261).

This issue applies to environmental politics which is addressed in the interpretivist emphasis on social frameworks that inform citizens about these dilemmas. This involves accommodating two critical features of deliberation. First, citizens have opportunities to participate in the formation of the good. Second, citizens may find themselves in agreement with a government or state on some points, and not on others.

These two issues reflect the problem for modern liberal extensionism concerning what to do when the polity is divided on matters environmental. Obviously, environmental concerns may be in direct conflict with economic imperatives and realities. In early political theory it was assumed that mechanisms of power such as an absolute monarchy or a benevolent dictatorship were the means to create and nurture a general will. From Taylor's work on identity and liberal secularism, the key issue involves the development of deliberative structures throughout society to critically analyse, inform and nurture the significant values that shape our being-in-the-world. At the very least, Taylor's explorations about our being-in-the-world offers steps toward the creation of new directions for modern communities.

However, before exploring Taylor's critique of liberal extensions, it is necessary to examine how Rawlsian liberals have adapted the doctrine to ecological politics. This is important if we are to understand how political liberalism has been applied and, why Taylor now points out that at the time nobody thought Rawls was 'out of his mind to try to decide between different principles of justice with the aid of rational choice theory' (Taylor, 2007, p, 64). For Taylor, during the past three decades criticisms of Rawls were in a distinct minority, as the Rawls boom showed.

John Rawls Political Liberalism and the Environment

One of the most prominent exponents of liberalism, John Rawls, created a social theory which was intended to reform capitalism by creating fairer relationships between people in a civil society. However, his *Theory of Justice* has subsequently been adapted to address environmental issues as well as some of the criticisms outlined in the preceding section. Rawls is a trenchant critic of utilitarianism, but despite the affirmations of some of his admirers, his starting point is not rights but intuition. Though the criterion of intuition could be an important aspect of any bridge between procedural liberalism and interpretivist authenticity, Rawls himself is a procedural thinker.

Rawls began his political journey with a concern for procedure and decision-making in ethics, returning to it in *Political Liberalism* (1993). In *Political Liberalism* Rawls bracketed the metaphysical from the political, offering a number of pragmatic recommendations to reform modern liberal-democracies (See Rosenthal, 1996). The crucial question is whether Rawls' responds adequately to the new saliencies such as cultural and environmental politics. In his *A Theory of Justice* he is clearly aware of the omissions:

> ...*Theory* leaves aside for the most part the question of the claims to democracy in the firm and the workplace, as well as that of justice between states (or peoples as I prefer to say); it barely mentions retributive justice and the protection of the environment or the

preservation of wildlife...The underlying assumption is that a conception of justice worked up by focusing on a few long-standing classical problems should be correct, or at least provide guidelines for addressing further questions. (Rawls, 1993, p. xxviii).

To deal with these issues Rawls offers a 'constructivist' framework which some have adapted to considerations of nature through discussion of what Rawls calls 'primary goods.'[3] According to Rawls, the citizen must ultimately choose which of these is more 'primary' to the fulfilment of their personal life plans. Here, Rawls was operating with an internal reasons approach to political matters but he did not deny the possibility that external reasons may exist and command people's allegiance. But is this incorporation of communitarian and interpretivist ideas sufficient to deal with ecological concerns? That is, how does Rawls' method conceptualise authenticity in an environmental context? The answers to these questions are to be found in the extent to which Rawls' liberalism can incorporate authenticity under the rubric of what he calls 'respect' and 'self-respect'.

Rawls attempts to avoid criticisms such as Taylor's interpretivist critique by grounding Kant's categorical imperative within the public culture of a liberal-democratic society. He explained it as an ideal conception of citizenship for a constitutional democratic regime, because it takes people as a just and well-ordered society would encourage them to be. (Rawls, 1971, p. 11). The question is whether such a political structure can accommodate environmental values as a comprehensive political value. That is, whether simply ordering environmental differences according to a constitutional framework is enough to recognise nature as a condition of our being-in-the-world.

In later work, Rawls observed the need to alter the principles of justice to accommodate salient issues such as work-place reform, the environment and international relations. Liberal theorists emphasize individuality, autonomy, and the inviolability of human rights for people to choose their own life plans as they see fit. The ideology has an emphasis on the rule of law and in upholding the freedom for people to determine principles of justice using their own sense of individual practical reasoning. This means that individuals can abstract away from circumstances and contingencies in constructing fair and just principles.

It is worth remembering that in liberalism there are competing notions and arguments involving the 'the right' and 'the good'. The good is concerned with an ordered scheme of final ends and by extension the type of world in which we would want to live. Principles of right, by way of contrast, involve the derivation of principles of justice. Rawls' liberalism develops the principles in a framework that determines the ordered scheme of final ends. According to Taylor, however, Rawls moves away from ontology

to advocacy, but leaves open ontological thinking to supplement his work (Taylor, 2007). The question is, however, does he bridge the liberal-interpretivist divide?

Proponents of liberalism argue that it is capable of 'refinement' and can 'evolve' to emerging and significant issues even though these revisions have created a pastiche of ideas. In this regard, even Taylor seems to agree, saying that '[e]valuation is such that there is always room for re-evaluation' (Taylor, 1976, p. 296). However, where the liberal and interpretivist schools of thought differ is that the liberal doctrine claims to be able to respond to contingencies as they arise. In part, this has been a response to criticisms by interpretivists that liberal doctrine is inconsistent and unable to accommodate significant factors associated with people's identity and their being in the world. More particularly, Rawls's revisions to political liberalism and concessions to comprehensive doctrines continue to be shaped by the current legislative and social structures. Rawls states:

> [A] bill may come before the legislature that allots public funds to preserve the beauty of nature in certain places (national parks and wilderness areas). While some arguments in favour may rest on political values, say the benefits of these areas as places of general recreation, political liberalism with its idea of public reason does not rule out as a reason the beauty of nature as such or the good of wildlife achieved by protecting its habitat. With the constitutional essentials all firmly in place, these matters may appropriately be put to a vote. (Rawls, 2001, p. 152).

Despite the many complex moves Rawls made to *Justice as Fairness: a Refinement* the fundamental liberal doctrine remains locked into the current political system. This argument is made noting the urgencies of the environmental crisis. The implication of Taylor's argument is that it might be too late to wait for intermittent elections to solve these democratic conundrums. That is, the core environmental problem is how to recognise significant goods without compromising principles of justice. The point is for democratic systems to act authentically, create and offer opportunities for citizens to participate in the construction of a good society.

Furthermore, critics of Rawls's liberalism point out that while the two principles of justice, the notion of primary goods and of an overlapping consensus are straightforward, liberalism has proven problematic and inadequate in how these principles are to be satisfactorily applied. Such criticisms fall into four main categories. First, that liberalism is an overall model which is becoming increasingly complicated and has lost its original force as it is continuously adapted to address modern contingencies. Second, that such liberalism only addresses a world model in terms of anthropocentric

values. Third, that it assumes its solutions are universal and derived from ahistorical principles between societies. Last, that it considers all members of society are entitled to an equal share of society's resources.

These issues are reflected in extensions to Rawls' political liberal attempt to include environmental values in democratic voting. Obviously, this was not an original part of the constitutional arrangements that existed. In this regard, interpretivist theorists advocate democratic models work to provide opportunities for people to understand how humanity relates with the world. In response liberals argue that existing institutions can be transformed by reasonable citizens in an overlapping consensus. Accordingly, Rawls believed he could accommodate communitarian and interpretivist criticism by continuing to uphold the fundamental notion of freedom of choice and equality (Rawls' first principle of justice). Rawls himself later addressed critics of his theory by moving to a revised model in which he emphasised politically neutral values that would be accepted by all. The term 'politically neutral' refers to how supporters of different comprehensive doctrines can agree on a specific form of political organization. These doctrines may include religion, political ideology or morals. The overlapping consensus is based on there being a morally-significant core of commitments common to the 'reasonable' fragment of each of the main comprehensive doctrines in the community. It remains problematic, however, whether a liberal system committed to an overlapping consensus can create a vision of the world which engages with the notion of significant environmental values and their intrinsic value.

This reflects Rawls' commitment to constitutional principles, and a move away from a fixed model of justice to a more situation-based framework of reasoning. The new aim was to liberalise environmental issues in terms of justice and rights. In this way, liberalism attempted to side-step claims it was incompatible with environmental issues and local community politics. Additionally, the system Rawls said he was trying to construct was not based on a Western point of view, and was a more neutral system than previously. Bell summarises Rawls' argument:

> If something is a good, politically speaking, it makes a positive contribution to the maintenance of a co-operative society of free and equal citizens, each with the capacity to form, revise, and pursue their own doctrines, and the ability to live by principles of justice appropriate for such a society. (Bell, 2002, p. 705.).

However, history has shown that principles of justice vary among communities as much as cultural and social values. Where societies potentially come into conflict is where the values of one community collide with those of another. Indeed, environmental ethicists

such as J. Baird Callicott has pointed out that certain native tribes may dismiss current Western culture being on the wrong track because we are not connected with the land.

Rawls' revisions to his theory of justice indicate a willingness to engage with critics and refine his principles (See Wolff, 1977, p. 202). His later thinking is influenced by the arguments of Will Kymlicka (1989) which was a reaction against the belief that communitarians impose certain conceptions of the good on citizens. Liberals respond to communitarians by developing the idea of primary goods which allow people to identify and pursue what is significant in their lives. The initial focus of Kymlicka's liberalism was to accommodate cultural values through an explicit concern for culture and the articulation of associated minority rights (Kymlicka, 1989, 1997, p. 77). He claims that major liberal theorists had not addressed this area. It is then a short step to integrate significant political contingencies, such as cultural and environmental values, into the societal structure. If Kymlicka considers minority rights can be accommodated easily the problem becomes how to accommodate environmental rights. Meanwhile, liberal progressives remain committed to principles that exist within the boundary conditions of that system's understanding of the relationship between people and the natural environment.

Where the aim is to integrate cultural matters of significance into the more basic structure of a liberal society, Kymlicka states that it is obvious that some national minorities – like some majority nations – are illiberal and restrict choice. The implication is that communitarians try to assimilate members to the liberal majority culture. Kymlicka's solution is 'not to assimilate the minority culture, but rather to liberalize it' (*Ibid*, p. 77). The inherent issue with this statement is the belief that those who are 'illiberal' will be accommodated to the extent to which liberalism can transform their set of values. He argues therefore that liberalism is not hostile to Taylor's interpretivist social thesis that cultures should be protected, and that it can be adapted to accommodate group rights. Liberals extend the same process to environmental politics to accommodate humanity's relationship with the natural environment.

Taylor's Interpretivism and Respect for Nature

Taylor criticises liberal theory based on the argument that extending an ideology does not directly address the new political salience, in this case that of the natural environment. The liberal response has been to note that liberal societies are not necessarily in conflict with green values (see Bell, 2002, p. 710). Interpretivists contend that the existing liberal model of the world cannot be adequately refined, as it is limited by an anthropocentric understanding of the world.

Taylor's response is that the liberal solution only offers a superficial understanding of reconciliation, even if liberalism is defined more broadly. It has not begun the process

of reconciling these differences on terms that both sides of the dispute can understand. Commenting on Kymlicka, Taylor notes that he seems to reduce culture – which is a vital constituent of identity - simply to a resource:

> What has happened is that a proponent of liberalism has found his own reasons to support the struggle for cultural integrity of some peoples, who for their part are engaged in this struggle for their reasons. The two are not the same. The liberal accords a culture value as the only common resource of its kind available for the group in question. It is the only available medium for its members to become aware of the options. If these same individuals could dispose of another such medium, then the case for defending the culture would evaporate. For the people concerned, their way of life is a good worth preserving; indeed, it is something invaluable and irreplaceable, not just in the absence of an alternative, but even if alternatives are available. (Taylor, 1994, pp. 259-260).

Taylor insists that liberals only *manage* the demands of cultural and environmental issues through procedural recognition. Thus, the liberal approach focuses on rights-based principles and people's conceptions of how they want to live their lives, whereas the latter is about the development of commonalities that visualise humanity as a part of the world. The interpretivist approach emphasises commonalities and issues of significance.

Justice is not simply an overlapping consensus but might involve giving ground to create better relationships. Otherwise justice may *prima facie* be seen to be done, while obfuscating the injustices, discrepancies and other inequalities that exist in the world. These problems translate to the international relations dimension and require careful negotiations about sustainable futures. A further example is that of the claims made by workers in the logging industry for a natural right to work which inevitably clashes with the environmentalists claim for green natural rights and preservation. These two political goods, the right to work and the value of the environment, are primary goods which are needed to satisfy people's life-plans. The question that presents itself is how Rawls' lexical ordering of these goods will lead to solutions that conflicting parties will come to recognise as legitimate.

Taylor's contrary approach focuses on the provision of reasons that disputing parties in democratic structures can concur. His reforms to liberal-democratic structures involves not only thinking about the good life, but how our institutions of governance provide and inform the public spheres to inform citizens concerning the value of the natural environment. Of course, the road to green and sustainable societies is never going to

be easy. It is obvious that political arguments for more discursive public spheres are unlikely to be supported by proponents of market reforms.

The first point of interpretivism is to provide ideas for new structures to accommodate environmental values. In this respect, interpretivism challenges environmental and social theorists to consider how the natural environment shapes the options and values that are critical for our horizons of value. It is through practical reasoning that 'significant features' of human identity are explored and this requires redesigning our basic institutions to consider these issues (Taylor, 1969). Moreover, political mechanisms and structures of governance must be developed to account for the fact that humans do not exist prior to their understanding according to the interpretivist framework. They are constituted by it.

For Taylor, simply bringing an issue into the societal structure according to liberal principles offers only procedural respect. The granting of cultural or environmental rights does not come to terms with how these values shape peoples' identity. Therefore, the respect granted is limited by the contours and forces of the pre-existing system. These limitations submerge not only creative solutions but the role for perceiving and feeling the intrinsic values that are contained in the natural environment. He argues that this dilemma requires the exploration of how intrinsic values are a commonality that must be incorporated into deliberative processes. Alternatively, such values may be accommodated to the extent that the system allows for those additional values, even if they are presently not at all common.

However, when a social system has external and intrinsic elements imposed upon it, or presented to it, to which it has no natural affinity and no pre-existing mechanism by which those elements may be introduced and embraced, conflict invariably is the end result. In recent work he has observed that we are crippled by many of our policies. He argues:

> I think the way to conceive [of] our situation is that we are living through a set of extremely painful dilemmas, and are going to go on doing so. In other words, capitalism is, if you like, the source of a number of terrible dilemmas. We can't live with it; we can't live without it. We can't live without it because it's tied to certain kinds of growth and so on. (Taylor, 2008, p. 15).

Taylor's solution is in part to recognise that searching for universal solutions is likely to fail, but that compromises must be made. That is, once we outline not only the type of society we want to live in, but how our priorities shape our basic institutions. For Taylor, if political theory is to assist the collective dimensions of community structures, there exists a role for the state in creating conditions for dialogic interaction concerning goods

of significance. The role of the state will involve consideration of the commonalities between people and the natural environment.

For Taylor, at the root of the contemporary problem is the liberal construction of the self which has been moulded by processes of secularisation (see Taylor, 1985). These processes see the liberal self as independent from the interests and attachments we may have at any moment in time. Yet, much environmental value is deemed to be intrinsic, and also essential for realising a good life. In this respect, environmental harmony and preservation are also essential to humanity's understanding of the good life, even if the market does not necessarily create a desired political outcome. Taylor explains that the ideal of authenticity and the search for significant values engages a depth of thought that using a fixed liberal yardstick cannot. That is, interpretation questions why we defer to neutral principles and yardsticks of justice in the first place. He states:

> [I]t is uncommonly difficult to reflect on our fundamental evaluations …the obstacles to this way of thinking are deep and make us want to turn away from this examination'. Some of our evaluations may in fact become fixed and compulsive, so that we cannot help feeling guilty about X, or despising people like Y, even though we judge with the greatest degree of openness and depth at our command that X is perfectly all right, and that Y is a very admirable person. This casts light on another aspect of the term 'deep', as applied to people. We consider people deep to the extent, inter alia, that they are capable of this kind of radical self-reflection. (Taylor, 1976, pp. 298-299).

Taylor's work on depth thinking connects with his dialogic reforms to democratic theory. This vision of democratic thinking aims to express values submerged by rights-based thinking. Indeed, this Hegelian framework might be idealistic, but idealism should not be misinterpreted for an enthusiastic attempt to create a common ground. The commonalities canvassed in a dialogic society include ecological matters otherwise submerged in an efficient and ordered world.

Here Taylor draws a distinction between the public sphere of our modern age and the public sphere of the ancient republic, or polis. Taylor develops Michael Sandel's argument that procedure ignores attempts to explain how the world is ultimately full of meaning (Sandel, 1982, p. 175). Procedure simply orders differences without fully coming to grips with the underlying dilemmas that they represent. He is particularly critical of representative systems that limit the means through which we can imagine and develop a new conception of ecological politics.

More fundamentally, a procedural system has the potential to create a bureaucratic structure from which we cannot escape. As an example of the type of democratic reforms, Taylor suggests a return to an earlier way of moderating power in a public forum, the ekklesia, which would be called for in the Greek city states when their governments had become too corrupt and oppressive (Taylor, 2007, p. 189). This was an assembly outside the civil authority of the city and if enough people came out and refused to accept the existing centralized civil authority that government would collapse. Non participation has been a successful and peaceful means to free mankind from oppressive civil authority throughout history.

Taylor emphasises the power within communities that can ultimately remove governing bodies that stifle the human condition (*Ibid*). The purpose of this exercise is to recall how these ancient models included discussion outside the decision making bodies of governance. Through improved interpretations and improved discourse it is possible to subvert the current order of things. The difference between the ancient polis and the public spheres of today is that in the ancient polis people could hold governments to account. Taylor explains:

> Now there is a subtle but important difference. Let's compare the modern society with a public sphere with an ancient republic or polis. In this latter, we can imagine that debate on public affairs may be carried on in a host of settings: among friends, at a symposium, between those who meet in the agora, and then of course in the ekklesia where the thing is finally decided. The debate swirls around and ultimately reaches its conclusion in the competent decision-making body. Now the difference is that the discussions outside this body prepare for the action ultimately taken by the same people within it. The "unofficial" discussions are not separated off, given a status of their own, and seen to constitute a kind of meta-topical space. But that is what happens with the modern public sphere. It is a space of discussion which is self-consciously seen as being outside power. It is supposed to be listened to by power, but it is not itself an exercise of power. (*Ibid*).

In the modern public sphere these debates are being seen as outside of power. With the rise of the modern public sphere comes the idea that there is a need for political power to be checked because of the separation from the people. It is in this sense extra-political. *A Secular Age* contains a perspective on language that is designed to provide better interpretations that act as a metric to adjudicate between different narratives. He argues that the power implicit in improved interpretations can be used to moderate the excessive scope bureaucratic reason has in the modern world. These

ideas are not about idealising the public sphere, but engaging with capitalist dilemmas that have led to massive environmental and social inequalities.

The argument for change through the public sphere is based on the view that the economic and material causes of our current dilemmas can be moderated by an explicit political approach that investigates the **ideas** behind them. After all, it is human communities that have created the economic systems that divorce people from each other and their natural environments. According to Taylor, the public sphere is the arena to reveal the moral worth of different visions of the good life.

Conclusion

This essay employed Charles Taylor's criticism of liberalism and its secularising structure to explore environmental values as a source of the self. The value of liberalism is, of course, its emphasis on the rule of law and its sincere commitment to the protection of fundamental individual rights, reflecting certain common features among all people. Its shortcomings have been its proceduralism, instrumentalism and the priority it gives to negative freedom without exploring what is significant for identity. Taylor's interpretivism may supplement liberalism in these respects and particularly by casting freedom in a more positive way. That is, as self-determination which is involves a role for the state by recognising differences and environmental values.

It has been argued that Rawls endorses negative freedom and is somewhat suspicious of the state. He has been criticised, moreover, for offering us no theory of the state. Nevertheless, if limits to growth become real, Rawls' principles of justice demand reform to accommodate environmental values. The state is vital in providing a democratic forum within which to foster ecologically aware politics which will not emerge spontaneously but must be forged by democratic institutions. Taylor's work emphasised a role for the state that involves the public sphere, and involved more than state directives for sustainable futures. It involved shaping our civil societies in a manner that counters both corporate power and excessive state power in policy.

Therefore, Taylor's work on environmentalism and secularism is to recognise that there is more to people's identity than simply following a liberal procedure and rule. The ecological implication of Taylor's interpretivism is that environmental values must be implemented through advocacy of a politicised civil society. That is, where the state and its institutions influence but do not determine how people are to live their lives. These visions for an environmental world are guided by a normative commitment which respects the value in the natural environment.

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[1] Some might argue that liberal societies do not have to be capitalist, but it is difficult to think of any liberal society which is not economically organised on capitalist lines (see Bowles, & Gintis (1987)).

[2] Rawls (1993, p. 27n) stated that Will Kymlicka's response to communitarianism is on the whole satisfactory.

[3] See Norton and Hannon, (1997); Partridge, (1984),; Hoff, C. (1983); VanDeVeer, D.(1979), For Rawls' explanation of how his political liberal principles can be adapted to incorporate environmental concerns, see Rawls, *Political Liberalism, op. cit.,* pp. xxviii-xiv.