
RELIGIOUS CRITICISM IN CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION: CHARLES TAYLOR

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Abstract

The paper explores the meaning and place of religion in a secular society, while offering an example of contemporary religious criticism in the case of Charles Taylor. Taylor's religion criticism is discussed in the light of reading one of his latest books, namely *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revised*. The first part of paper deals with a brief introduction into Taylor's thought and a brief presentation of book. The second part is an attempt to look into Taylor's criticism, having as a starting point James' religious criticism. Whereas the third part explores the proper place for religion in Taylor's point of view, the last part attempts an evaluation of Taylor's religious criticism.

Keywords: religious criticism, religion, secular society, varieties of religion, William James

1. Introduction

One of the question marks of modern life is that, despite decades of scientific advancement, technological innovation and more rational understandings of life, religious sentiments persist and, in many quarters, continue to have a detrimental emergence in the sphere of public life. Within a society often described as secular, where religion is reduced to a private affair or is part of a differentiated 'social system' [1], religious fundamentalism wins new converts every day. The paradox seems to be enormous since "the religious reaching the end of its life in the modern world" [2] manifests itself in a very radical way. The question that naturally arises is how it is possible in a world in which religion has been rationalized and purified in different ways that religious sentiments continue to create broad movements, jeopardizing the supreme value of modern society: democracy. What brings together into discussion nowadays secular society and religious fundamentalism is the common root they spring from, namely religious criticism.

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It is well known that religious criticism has been an important factor in the process of the separation of Church and State, a process depicted in various terms, such as secularisation, privatisation or differentiation, in both positions as a cause and as an effect. In antiquity the philosophical inquiry has been a powerful stimulus for the differentiation between religion and the political order, as well as for reflection on the aftermath of that process of separation between the two spheres. Within the ongoing process of differentiation, religious criticism functioned in a twofold way. Firstly, religious criticism attempted to conform religion to the needs of the society and the political order, with the aim of undermining social and political order. Secondly, it tried to purify religion from its false aspects and superstitions, with the aim of strengthening social and political order. On the other hand, religion, i.e., Christianity itself was the starting point of 'departure from religion' [2, p. 4]. Taking a stand against the world that issued it, Christianity transformed itself into a major factor in the relation between the mode of human coexistence and political order. Moreover, the 'unusual dynamic polarities of the spirit of Christianity' provided the ground for placing religion outside society. The needs of society and religion do no longer meet in the political order, and even religion does no longer function as a mediator. Furthermore, religious society does no longer exist despite the big number of believers [2, p. 4]. One of the consequences of the new status of religion in an irreligious context, in which religion does not function as 'binding together', is that the context of religious criticism has been changed since its first emergence and exercise. Nowadays, we witness various religious critiques and in particular we notice the emergence of a specific criticism, namely a criticism of religious criticism on the grounds of both philosophical judgment and faith. The purpose of this particular criticism is to evaluate the place of religion in present modern society.

Accordingly, the present paper aims at offering, on the one hand, an example of religious criticism in the case of Charles Taylor and, on the other hand, it is an attempt to answer the question whether religion has a meaning in secular society and what is the proper place of it. Taylor's religion criticism will be discussed in the light of our reading one of his latest books, namely *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revised*. In order to make the lecture fruitful and, consequently to grasp easily his criticism, the first part of this paper deals with a brief introduction into Taylor's thought and a brief presentation of his book. The second part is an attempt to look into Taylor's criticism, having as a starting point James' religious criticism. Within this framework we face two types of religious criticism that have different grounds for their emergence. While the third part explores the proper place for religion in Taylor's point of view, the last part attempts an evaluation of Taylor's religious criticism.

2. Short incursion in Charles Taylor's thought

Charles Taylor is considered a leading philosopher of his generation due to his contribution to a wide range of fields. He is present in the debate between liberals and communitarians in political theory as 'a chief protagonist', and in contemporary discussions of multiculturalism and democracy as 'influential figure'. He equally developed an original and provocative diagnosis of the maladies of the modern age [3].

As an introduction of this dimension could not convey the scope and depth of Taylor's thought in its entirety, I shall point out only some aspects, without necessarily being connected to each other but which, in my opinion, can help in catching a glimpse of Taylor's religious criticism. First of all, it is pertinent to start having an idea of his manner of doing philosophy. Taylor's mode of philosophising is a problem-oriented rather than system-oriented. Because as readers we do not need to get acquainted with a highly specialised philosophical vocabulary, his writings are readily accessible and can be read by anyone interested in modern daily issues, constituting the subject matter he focuses on in his books and articles. While expounding his treatment of philosophical questions in big treatises, he usually follows with the publication of a brief book that makes his argument available to a wider audience. He followed his major work *Hegel* (1975) with the much more accessible *Hegel and Modern Society* (1979). His magisterial *Sources of the Self* (1989), tracing the historical origins of the modern notion of the self, was followed by *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1992) [3, p. 15]. However, on the present topic, the place of religion in the secular society, Taylor has moved away from his usual way of working and published the smaller book first. This might explain why eventually we are not able to draw a very precise answer regarding the proper place for religion in today's world.

Secondly, I would like to draw attention to one aspect of Taylor's biography. Belonging to a mixed Canadian family with his mother's coming from a French-speaking family and his father from an English-speaking one, Taylor was raised bilingually and he noticed the different role played by these two languages [3, p. 12]. While speaking English was a useful skill to possess, an instrument that enabled people to communicate more extensively outside the borders of their culture, speaking French was a way of finding one's identity and 'way of being in the world'. As we shall see, the idea that each language carries with it its own conception of the world, expressing a particular cultural identity, will play a key role in Taylor's philosophy [4]. Thus, the notion of a plural identity, constituted or expressed in multiple ways can be found almost in every book of Charles Taylor. Moreover, the experience of living in Canada (Quebec) made him describe himself as having "lived astride these two world (Canada and Quebec) which do not understand each other". Ruth Abbey underlines in her book *Charles Taylor* that "this fact had contributed to his aspiration to mediate between seemingly rival positions" [5], which can easily be seen in his social and political criticism, and which we shall find in his religious criticism as well.

Thirdly, he is a practicing Christian, namely a Catholic of ecumenical outlook, “who finds greatness in some facets of Islam, Judaism and Buddhism” [5, p. 31]. Although Taylor claims that with only one exception, that of his *Catholic Modernity?*, his religious commitments have not been accentuated in his work, religious ideas seem to underlie his works.

Charles Taylor has recently been concerned with the large question of secularisation and the place of religion in our secular world. First, his concerns were materialized in a series of lectures delivered at the University of Edinburgh as part of the annual Gifford lectures series, in 1999, and at the Institute for Human Science in Vienna, in 2000 and eventually the smaller book, *Varieties of Religion: William James Revised* [6]. Before looking in detail at the various aspects of the topic, Taylor considered that it was necessary to answer what secularity is about. This made the central topic of the lectures at Edinburgh and I shall try to present his main ideas hereunder. The typical depiction of secularity consists in the decline of religious belief in Western societies, the separation of Church and state and the diminution and eventually disappearance of God’s presence from the public sphere [5, p. 189]. According to Taylor, neither of these depictions is adequate, each surmise presenting weak points. Despite the declining number of people who declare themselves believers or practicing believers, there is actually a plurality of religions and spiritual believes. His main argument consists in that “religion does not decline because churches do” [5, p. 196]. He is disposed to accept the second depiction of secular society as one that separates religion from state, but with some corrections. Ruth Abbey explains Taylor’s viewpoint by drawing attention to a very specific fact, which was often neglected, namely that the aim of the separation between Church and State in the American context was to protect religious diversity. The separation of the powers was meant not to drive religion out of the public realm, but on the contrary, to prevent any single faith to be imposed on different believers. In this regard, Taylor draws attention that we should make a distinction between separation and privatisation of religious faith. He suggests therefore that, rather than the retreat of religion from public life, what has happened is more a change of the place of religion.

Whereas in the past political power and authority were seen to be underwritten by the deity, they are now seen as created by the consent of the people for the furtherance of their individual ends. This does not preclude groups and individuals from appealing to God or religious values in political debates, but there is no longer a widespread consensus about exactly how God should figure in politics: this is now a matter for debate and deliberation [5, p. 197].

Taylor comes with a third definition of secularity that takes a wider cultural perspective and focuses on the changed conditions of religious belief. The most notable feature of living in a secular age is that of instability. Even for those who believe, their faith appears as one among several reasonable and possible alternatives [5, p. 10].

Coming to the lectures delivered at the Institute for Human Science in Vienna, Taylor's argument in describing the proper place for religion takes the form of confrontation with the thought of William James, as expressed in the latter's *Varieties of Religious Experience* and in some of the essays in *The Will to Believe*. As Taylor notes in the preface of the book *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited*, reuniting his lectures given in Vienna, his engagement with James is idiosyncratic and selective [6]. Among many of Taylor's aims, one was particularly directed towards casting a light on ways in which James speaks to our present religious predicament.

The book is divided into four chapters, starting with an outline of the central theme in James's *Varieties* that Taylor regards as particularly relevant to the contemporary religious context. Thus, we have found that James' view of religion has to do primarily with 'something that individuals experience' [6, p. 20]. There are two aspects of this view that deserve attention. First, religion resides chiefly in the individual, not in the community and secondly, the real locus of religion is in feeling and action, not in doctrinal formulation [7].

The second chapter discusses two phenomena in which the Jamesian perspective provides a sharp vision of the religious context, which are significant for us. One is the condition of the 'twice-born' or sick soul that reaches a state of assurance that all will be well only after passing through "the great negative experience of melancholy, evil, and the sense of personal sin" [6, p. 47]. The second phenomenon regards the admissibility of belief as an important part of James' *apologia pro fide sua*. Taylor interprets his discussion of the ethics of belief as an inner debate in which James had to argue against voices "that held religion was a thing of the past, that one could no longer in conscience believe in this kind of thing in a age of science" [6, p. 43].

Despite the fact that James is not present in the third chapter of the book, Taylor places James's *Varieties* in a sociological context. Setting his own account of the contemporary religious situation on a genealogical method to show how it has grown out of previous religious dispensation in European history, he claims actually that the context of Durkheimianism is the factor that makes James' *Varieties* intelligible. Relying implicitly on a conceptual apparatus heavily indebted to Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, he aspires to construct a grand narrative that will cast new light on the secularization of the public sphere and on the fact that spirituality is divorced from politics and even from religion.

Paleo-, neo-, post-Durkheimian describe ideal types [with regards to religion-state relationship]. My claim is not that any of these provides the total description, but that our history has moved through these dispensations, and that the latter has come more and more to color our age [6, p. 97].

James' statement that individualism is primary and institutions are secondary in understanding religion [8] is placed in this Durkheimian approach because Taylor relies on the Durkheim's notion that any coherent society must be at base a religious collectivity. Taylor's critique of James is based more on a social anthropology of the human desire to be part of a community. Taylor argues that people are not generally satisfied with what he

calls a one-time experience of being twice-born. In fact, Taylor exclaims that many people are not satisfied with a momentary sense of awe. Taylor is more concerned about what happens after this state, for which James does not account, namely, the continual political and social relations in the community. However, Taylor does not give an alternative to this Jamesian model.

In the last chapter called “*So was James right?*” he answers the question negatively but never gives a positive alternative. His Durkheimian framework provides some explanation about how our society arrived at these current states, but he does not give any alternative to James. He only draws attention to the continuation and unavoidability of community in understanding spiritual experiences.

3. Taylor’s Criticism

3.1. *The starting point of Taylor’s criticism: ‘William James’s Varieties of Religious Experience’*

Varieties of Religion Experience appeared first as a series of lectures delivered in 1901-1902 at the University of Edinburgh, in order to promote and diffuse the study of natural theology. His lectures were published and inaugurated a new direction in religious studies from the objective terms of religion–God to the subjective human experience of religion.

James offered a picture of religion that revolves around individual experience. He claimed that it is the inner lives of men and women, their spontaneous glimpses of a world beyond that determine their attachments to divinity. The locus of religion is inside the individual, not outside. The sphere of subjectivity is wide: every individual is capable of discovering God internally and defining God in a different way. For James, the direct encounter between man and God is unique and an important fact is that it is unmediated by social or ritual or linguistic institutions. The primacy of experience brought James to a damning of the institutions of religion generally. James asserted that: “...when a religion has become an orthodoxy its days of inwardness are over...the faithful live at second hand exclusively and stone the prophets in their turn”. [8, p. 30]

James’ criticism emerged not from an assessment of the religious institutions, the particular practices of churches or religious ideas, but from his definition of religion as an exclusively private phenomenon [9]. Thus, religion is defined as: “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine”. [8, p. 31]

Public institutions are simply powerless in this respect. Moreover, they repress those moments of intensity through authoritative regulation and ‘dull habit’. They dilute the depths of religion by intruding upon the free domain of the spirit. The religious person of the *Varieties of Religion Experience* is therefore charged to stand alone, so as to experience divinity deeply. Neither

ritual (collective practice) nor theology (collective thinking) will ever spur the spirit to action.

In 1897, in his essay *The Will to Believe*, James assigned another important role to the individual, one that itself precedes religious experience. In an effort to secure the foundation of religious belief in a world without revelation, in a world in which doubt is philosophically possible, James argued that faith, like love, could not be found unless one opens oneself to it. James' argument is not to affirm the religious choice, but rather to affirm the right to make the religious choice in the absence of incontrovertible evidence [9].

Charles Taylor explains in several places the reasons for which he makes James' criticism a point of departure for his own critique. On one critical point James turned out to be our fellow. As Taylor points out, James' argument is completely contemporary. Although he would not have used today's jargon, he would in substance have affirmed what many people say today: "I'm not religious but I'm very spiritual". Furthermore, many people believe "that if I have God within myself, churches are not really necessary". Secondly, James' religious criticism is not grounded in the traditional approach of religion. He is not interested in religious institutions or he did not use 'collective connections through sacraments' in his attempt to argue against the voices that religion is a thing of the past. Moreover, he did not use intellectual articulations as primary instruments for the debate. On the contrary, James' thinking is embedded in religious experience [6, p. 58]. These characteristics of James' approach make Taylor call him 'our great philosopher of the cups'. Describing a crucial state of modernity and articulating the decisive drama determined there, James' criticism has resonated for a hundred years, being the point of departure for many approaches.

3.2. Taylor's criticism of William James

Offering an outline in his first chapter of the central theme of James' *Varieties* that Taylor regards as particularly relevant to the contemporary situation, Taylor points out that the Jamesian perspective on religion is limited and can be a source of distortion in a threefold manner. First, it neglects the collective connection prominent in some religions by which ecclesiastical life mediates between the religious sphere and the believer. Secondly, it also fails to appreciate the collective connection established by the sacramentality emphasized in the Catholic tradition. Thirdly, it excludes theology from the centre of religious life [7].

In the book's brief final chapter, Taylor hastily emphasizes three points on which James has missed something important about our new religious predicament. The first is the extent to which many people still find their spiritual homes in the collective connections of churches. The second point is the continuing importance of religious markers of ethnic or historical identity in societies forced to defend their integrity against external oppression. And the third point is the way in which many people respond to religious experience by

searching for exacting spiritual disciplines of meditation or prayer. They are not content with the many tangible spiritualities that are offered by our culture. As Taylor formulates it, “many people are not satisfied with a momentary a sense of wow”[6, p. 103].

To sum up, Taylor’s religious criticism departs from James’s critique of the personal religion. The aim of the undertaken ground is to express a specific critical position. Taylor emphasizes that the Jamesian view of religion as individual action overshadows the essentially Catholic notion of the church as a sacramental communion. In this regard, James is placed in continuity with Schleiermacher’s legacy. In reaction against the rationalism of the Enlightenment, Schleiermacher laid emphasis on the role of feeling in Theology. He sought to preserve the distinct identity of Christianity by arguing that it mediates an experience or feeling of absolute dependence on God. This experience was mediated through Christ, and could be traced back to him from the contemporary experience of Christian piety.

On the other side, the Jamesian clear distinction between institution/personal religious experience deepens the existent rupture within the Christian religion by accentuating the process of the privatisation of religion. This is one of the main critiques and one of great importance. As we have already seen, Protestantism narrowed and marginalized not only the sacraments, but also the quality of the individual’s life. Rejecting the belief that some sorts of activities are qualitatively superior to others and proposing instead that all activities are potentially worthy, the emphasis was placed on the manner in which the work is done. From this perspective, even the most common activity could become sanctified, if it is practiced with the appropriate attitude. On the other hand, possessing the power of understanding and interpreting the Bible led to the fact that for so many people religion became entirely personal and private (having their own orthopraxy). The Church as institution had no power of representation in the life of the individuals. One consequence of this shift is that there is no wide institutional basis for religion in the society. God’s presence in the world (which is no longer mediated by the state) remains evident only in the moral order and in a constitutional order, as we have seen in the American case.

3.3. Taylor’s criticism: What is the proper place for religion?

3.3.1. The result of the denominational process: the inner life of the individual as a place for religion

Placing the process of disenchantment in a historical perspective, Taylor contends that this process began within a religious outlook. In a drive to rationalize religious faith, Christianity generated its own critique of church-controlled functions and of sacraments. To illustrate his thesis that many of the impulses that lead to the privatisation of religion originated from religious motives and aspirations, much of Taylor’s discussion is occupied with recounting drives to reform religious faith and practice within Christianity. He

attributes considerable significance to the circumstances leading to the emergence of many denominations within Christianity. A denominational identity aims to create its own orthopraxy. But by creating its own orthopraxy, it loses the vocation to be a church for everyone. It creates as well a sense of belonging to a wider, less structured whole that used to be and is present in other churches, for instance the Catholic Church [6, p. 72]. The consequences of creating a denominational identity are enormous and Taylor emphasizes the correlation among them, especially between the mode of human coexistence and the political order. First, in a denominational context, religion does not perform an integrating function at a large scale, for instance, at the scale of the state. However, members of different denominations can act according to the demands of God in creating and maintaining their state [6, p. 74]. We can see that by creating their orthopraxy, denominations create in fact their own state, following God design, in order to guarantee the freedom of existence for all churches. In this sense, the discourse of religion does not have to do with 'being together', but it does provide models in designing something else that can bring people together. The relativity of religious truth correlated with the fact that religion has no socio-political function led to the separation of religion from the state. In this regard, Taylor takes in Gauchet's point of view that Christianity constitutes the point of departure from religion. Moreover, placing religion outside the society, Christianity reserved its place only in the inner life of the individual.

In this regard, by criticizing James' individualist approach, Taylor makes a distinction between an individualist motive and an individual path. As a matter of fact, our era might be characterized by a drive for authentic, individual experience of the divine, one which is anti-institutional and anti-collectivist. True individualism, Taylor believes, should allow an individual the choice to abandon isolation, to transfer his or her experiences onto a community of believers, because presence in a group does not necessarily diminish the already internalized religious sensibility. On the contrary, one might attend a communal prayer service in order to perpetuate "*the momentary sense of the wow*" once experienced deeply [6, p. 21]. Whether on theological or sociological grounds, there is room for individuality to profit from community. It is clear that Taylor does not reject James' approach, but he considers it insufficient. A religious experience takes place and should be experienced on both levels: a solitudinous approach, and a communitarian one. But it is not clear whether community is necessary only for prolonging individual experiences or community is something more than a context for the growth of personal inner experience. In other words, the question to answer is what is the place of community in experiencing religion.

First of all, Taylor does not see individuation as the condition of faith, rather the contrary. He believes that the reality of individualism is the beginning of the discussion about religion, not the end of it, that individualism needs, for the sake of religion, to be corrected by being placed in a doctrinal context and amplified through the sacraments of the church. Moreover, he notes that the phenomenon of collective religious life is not just the sum total of individual

religious connections, but is “the way that constitutes or is that connection” [6, p. 23]. On the other hand, regarding human relationships, Taylor relies on his conception of the self as dialogical, i.e., as fundamentally born of exchanges with others. He asserts in *Sources of the Self* that identity is always built out of dialogue with, or struggle against, the perception of significant others. In Taylor’s view, the self exists within the webs of interlocution. There is no self but the self embedded in a context [5, p. 95]. In *Varieties of Religion Today*, Taylor places the context of the self in a religious frame. Being a sacramental communion, the Church is the common way of being due to the idea of God’s life interpenetrating ours. This interpenetrating is made fuller, more intense and immediate through our own practice.

This is the connection that consists in the fact that the church is a sacramental communion; some of the force is carried in an expression like ‘mystical body’. From one point of view, this is just a facet of the connection through the church’s common way of being. But it raises more explicitly the idea of God’s life interpenetrating ours, and of this interpenetration being made fuller, more intense and immediate through our own practices. These practices cover the whole range, including those we might call ethical, or more generally the practices of charity; but the connection gains certain intensity in the signs instituted to manifest it, which are called sacraments. It goes without saying that this sacramental connection is also essentially collective; In fact it participates in the collective nature of the other kind of connection, which turns on a common way of life [6, p. 24].

It is obvious that, in contrast to James, Taylor detects a necessary partnership between solitude and solidarity in the religious life. Thus, we notice that Taylor speaks about the self as socially situated and, on the other hand, about the sacramental connection which is not only collective, but also takes part in the collective nature of the other kind of connection, which turns into being a way of life.

Taylor’s religious criticism can be perceived as an apology for communitarianism, for a philosophy of religion that places community at its core. As a matter of fact, Taylor places in the third type of community described by communitarians the sacramental connection as a source for “communities of face-to-face personal interaction” [10]. The experience of a psychological sense of togetherness is assured by God’s life pervading the community. However, his model of society or the social imaginary in which the participation of the individual or community in the public sphere is discussed, is not fully detailed.

Having acquainted ourselves with Taylor’s manner of doing philosophy makes it possible for us to offer a full description of his religious criticism. His project of defending authenticity in the context of collectivity is here only a bit further supported by his attempt to reconfirm a public presence for private religion.

3.3.2. The Public Sphere as a Place for Religion in Taylor's View

In order to bring to light the answer to the question *What is the proper place for religion?*, we shall start from the understanding of state and civil society in Taylor's view. He uses the term civil society to refer to areas of social life that enjoy relative autonomy from the state, and in this sense they can be associated with negative freedom, for these activities should be maximally free from government interference. Ruth Abbey offers a suggestive description of Berlin's concepts regarding freedom. Negative freedom applies to approaches that focus on the individual and associate freedom with the absence of interference from outside sources, whether this external force is the state or society in general. The positive approach to freedom focuses not on leaving individuals a sphere of free space in which they can do as they please without interference from others but on enabling or empowering them to do certain things, to achieve outcomes or to realise particular purposes [5, p. 107; 121].

Although the state is sovereign, and provides the basic rules and laws that underpin all social activities, the arena of civil society is not controlled by it. According to Taylor, the roots of civil society lie in the separation of Church-State. The public sphere (the sphere where public opinion is formed and disseminated) is one aspect of civil society. Therefore, Taylor places religion within civil society, beside other systems of scrutinizing the political realm. In all his writings we find the idea that religion finds a space in the public sphere in the sense that religious arguments can be formulated or that religious ceremonies can be enacted in the public sphere. However, Taylor underlines that the place of religion is different from the previous places that it has taken in the history. In this perspective he takes in Walzer's point of view, that religion finds a place in the public sphere but it can not be grounded in it [11]. Religion occupies a different place in the public sphere compatible with the idea that all actions take place in the profane time. He believes that the loss of sacred time can be replaced by a strong sense of religion in our political identity, namely in the design of things, in both social and individual life [12]. In this regard, Taylor is a religious critic who lays emphasis on the changing of the context for religious criticism.

4. Towards a conclusion: general evaluation of Charles Taylor's religious criticism

The criteria for religious criticism in Taylor's reflection is formulated on the one hand from the stance of a practicing Christian, and on the other hand from the position of a communitarian political philosopher. His religious orientation is obvious not only in James' criticism but also in his debates against the liberals, as well as in shaping his view with regard to the proper place for religion in the present society. It is noteworthy to see Taylor's model of democracy as one that celebrates the differences among groups and encourages citizens not simply to tolerate but to learn about and engage with one another in

the understanding that their differences enrich one another and the polity as a whole [5, p. 58]. He underlines in his model the Christian fundamentals because the fullness of humanity cannot be achieved by any individual alone but only through interaction with others who realize different aspects of human potential.

Taylor has recently recognized that various religious aspects have been accentuated in his work. On the other hand, it is noteworthy to see in Taylor's system of thought how the elements of communitarian philosophy are present within a religious criticism. He states that the self is always socially situated and always points beyond itself to its social relationship. He equally underlines that people may be socially connected through ecclesiastical sacraments. We can conclude that religion, in its both experiential dimensions on an individual level and as a ritual institution, might play a role in realizing the centrality of the social, which can foster values in creating, reproducing and recreating society and culture.

In his criticism Taylor lays emphasis on the changed status of religion, namely Christianity, in the present context and he tries to cast a new light on this status. It seems that Taylor is one who strongly emphasizes the contrast between the classical political philosophy and the present one. In this regard he can be placed in the same line with M. Gauchet. In Gauchet's standpoint "Christian faith has no connection with the circumstances surrounding its birth, the condition that allowed it to assert itself and develop, or the role through which its major themes and variations have been played out." [2, p. 4] However, by placing James' criticism in a Durkheimian perspective, he underlines the stages in which Christianity exercised its major role in relation to nature, to social coexistence and to the political order. A moment of great significance in the change of status is identified in the aftermath of creating denominational identities within Christianity. In order to guarantee the freedom of existence for all churches, the divine pattern was taken as a model in designing entities that can bring people together. In this respect, God was present in drawing the separation between religion and state. On the other hand, taking into account that our society is characterised by pluralism, the separation between state and religion is the ground for realizing the authenticity of the self. He is aware that there is a kind of nostalgia for a time when religion was deeply anchored in the political order. However, on the basis that we cannot find a final agreement, given that our society is characterized by pluralism, the multiplicity of choices and possible understandings of the social order, we cannot identify the highest and best system. God might be present in the design of things around which the modern society is organised. Taylor's point is that we have to operate with God, following him in designing our social and political organization, and not imagining the best system of social distribution [2, p. 4].

In designing his criticism Taylor uses functional arguments. For him religion presents a functional necessity that defined the content, determined the forms, and accelerated the development of religion. Taylor draws attention to the fact that in a denominational context religion does not perform an integrating social and political function at a large scale. Furthermore, the denominational

context withdraws religion from society, being confined to the individual level. In this regard, Taylor tries to envisage religion within the communitarian level, speaking of the ecclesiastical sacraments as binders of the members of the community. In this sense he ushers in a purely theological concepts such as the one mentioned above, to make it work within a possible definition of the community in modern times.

As we have seen in Taylor's description of the secular society, he is the adept of neither a purification of religion, nor of a departure from it, but on the contrary, he sustains a return to a new understanding of religion in terms of its cohesive function within the larger social and political order. Taylor regards religion through the prism of orthopraxis, and yet he does not clarify the way in which orthopraxis is present at the social and political order. Furthermore, given his communitarian bias, Taylor strongly reacts against the privatisation of religion, and conceives of secularisation not as a negative phenomenon, but as the process of separation between state and religion that ensures the plurality of religious identity and experience, as well as the plurality of choices.

To counter James's portrait of individual subjectivity, Taylor proposes a type of collective subjectivity wherein individuals come together to affirm and direct one another's unique experience. However, Taylor does not completely ground the collective subjectivity within the religious realm. It is well known that groups, like individuals, can become atomised, self-referential, self-congratulatory entities with no significance beyond themselves. The identity of groups, especially religious groups can be even more disastrous than the identity of individuals, in that it resists the possibility of multiple religious choices. It seems that Taylor's attempts to integrate religion in civil society suit the contexts in which religion is part of national identity rather the American context. Examples for contexts wherein religion is part of the national identity are Poland, Ireland and many of Eastern European countries.

All in all, discussions on the place of religion within modern society, as the one we dealt with so far, show that the possibility to acquire objectivity regarding religion is rooted more in a sociological description of it rather than in a philosophical reflection on it, given the unique and unrepeatably responses to religion coming from individuals, as well as from various groups and societies.

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