
Interpreting Rawls has been a difficult business since the 1980's. Many, if not most, early readers of *A Theory of Justice* took Rawls's carefully argued principles to claim universal validity. However, this reading of *A Theory of Justice* was ‘corrected’ by Rawls in a series of articles that culminated in his second major book, *Political Liberalism*. It turns out that the conclusions of the original position will only be reached by those of us who live in a society blessed with a history of democratic institutions. Moreover, the justification and argument for the principles of justice offered in Rawls's original book are optional, appealing to Kantians perhaps, but others can make their own arguments in their own fashion to arrive at the same or similar principles. Robert Taylor's *Reconstructing Rawls: The Kantian Foundations of Justice as Fairness* challenges this 'correction' by arguing on two fronts. First, he claims that the principles of political, social, and economic justice offered in *A Theory of Justice* can be adequately defended only on Kantian grounds. Second, he argues that Rawls's shift to 'political' rather than universal liberalism cannot be philosophically defended, and ultimately should be abandoned in favor of a 'detranscendentalized' Kantian universalist liberal position.

This brief summary of Taylor's project makes it sound like an enormously complicated and intricate endeavor, which it is. However, Taylor's book is remarkably lucid in its exposition and critique of Rawls's ideas and offers the reader a clear line of argument throughout the text. This is no small achievement given the scale of the task Taylor sets himself.

*Reconstructing Rawls* is divided into three parts. The first offers a robust Kantian reading of *A Theory of Justice* largely based on Rawls's own account of the Kantian foundations of his approach laid in “Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory.” Taylor makes detailed and convincing links between Kant's moral theory (largely anchored in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*) and Rawls's constructivist approach to the justification of his moral principles. What is crucial for Taylor's argument is to align Kant's account of the self as morally autonomous with Rawls's account of the self as reasonable and rational. Thus, we are presented with an argument for a philosophically significant overlap between the Rawlsian and Kantian conception of the self and a shared constructivist approach to the justification of normative principles. While Rawls's debt to Kant in *A Theory of Justice* is obvious and Rawls is clear himself that this defense of his principles of justice is Kantian, Taylor's articulation and elaboration of their shared metaphysical assumptions and their shared justificatory methodology is an invaluable contribution.

The second part of Taylor's book constitutes the heart of the argument. He moves from the uncontroversial claim that *A Theory of Justice* can be read in a deeply Kantian universalist fashion to the very much more controversial claim that it *should* be so read. This is not only because such a reading is philosophically more satisfying but because, as he argues, the central claims of Rawls's theory cannot be properly defended without Kantian commitments. This is where the reconstruction of Rawls's project enters. Taylor makes distinctions between the notions
of moral autonomy, personal autonomy, and self-realization, ordering them in a hierarchy that amount to a Kantian conception of the person. He then argues that Rawls's lexically ordered principles of right and liberty, fair equality of opportunity, and the difference principle are best defended with reference to this conception of the person. In some cases, this makes for a revisionist reading of Rawls's ideas by, for example, marking a hierarchical distinction between political liberties and civil liberties (associating Kantian moral autonomy and Rawlsian reasonableness with the former and Kantian personal autonomy and Rawlsian rationality with the latter) and sometimes defending arguments from Rawls's earlier works against revisions Rawls makes in later texts (as Taylor does when arguing for the Kantian defense of the difference principle in A Theory of Justice against Rawls's rejection of this argument in, for instance, Justice as Fairness: A Restatement).

I think Taylor succeeds in showing how a Kantian reading, anchored in a particular view of the person, ties Rawls's principles into a tight and persuasive philosophical argument. Indeed, if we are to retain the implicit ambitions of A Theory of Justice we need a way of defending Rawls's principles against the decades of criticism they have been subjected to, and Taylor's full-bloodied Kantian approach is a convincing candidate for this task.

Lurking in the shadows of Taylor's project is Rawls's political turn. This is particularly pressing for Taylor because a Rawlsian political liberal will view the Kantian reading not as a challenge but, in a peculiar way, a confirmation of the political view. If Kantian liberalism is one among many 'reasonable' comprehensive doctrines then it should be the case that Kantians can articulate and defend the core liberal political values. The point of political liberalism is not that the Kantian defense of the principles is 'wrong' but that it is not the only way to defend these principles. Other reasonable comprehensive doctrines can make their own defenses in their own way. Taylor's task in the third part of the book then is to show not only that the political turn that Rawls takes is philosophically suspect but that it is unnecessary. In other words, Taylor argues not only against political liberalism but defends the view that 'the problem of stability,' which drives Rawls towards the political turn, can be addressed by the Kantian interpretation he favors. This discussion spans only the final fifty or so pages of the book but I suspect will generate the most controversy among scholars.

As I understand it, the argument proceeds as follows: since only a Kantian conception of the person is philosophically adequate for a defense of justice as fairness (established earlier in the book) it follows that comprehensive doctrines that form part of an overlapping consensus in a pluralistic society must accept such a concept of the person if they are to affirm justice as fairness. However, Taylor surveys a number of such doctrines (e.g. 'bourgeois, competitive individualistic, 'free-faith' religious, and perfectionist comprehensive doctrines) and finds that they all reject the strong Kantian view of the person. It follows, then, that justice as fairness cannot be the subject of an overlapping consensus in a pluralistic society. Taylor charts the way Rawls deals with this uncomfortable conclusion in his later works by loosening the definition of liberal to incorporate a broader liberal church in order to achieve stability and political legitimacy. This is unsatisfactory for someone who wishes to defend Rawls's original three principles. Taylor