

DOCTORAL THESIS

The idea of theistic communitarian self in Charles Taylor's political philosophy

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**The Idea of Theistic Communitarian Self in Charles
Taylor's Political Philosophy**

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for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the thesis is to explore Charles Taylor's idea of the theistic communitarian self in his political philosophy in the context of contemporary liberal-communitarian debate. The thesis includes two parts. The first part examines Taylor's political philosophy and its relation to the conception of the self. The second part examines Taylor's theory of theistic communitarian self.

In Part I, I examine Charles Taylor's political philosophy. Taylor thinks that procedural ethics has actually been based on certain substantive notions of good which liberals deny. He criticizes procedural liberalism for falsely relying on an assumption of the atomistic self which neglects the significance of obligation to the community. Taylor suggests that it has also distorted our understanding of liberty which neglects the original aspiration of self-realization. Furthermore, in dealing with the politics of recognition, procedural liberalism actually excludes the recognition of non-liberals and those who cannot endorse the primacy of autonomy. Therefore, Taylor suggests liberalism needs to endorse the republican thesis which suggests that the society should be bonded together by certain common goods. I show that Taylor's criticism of procedural liberalism and his argument of communitarianism have involved his argument of the communitarian self.

In Part II, I will explore Taylor's theory of self. I demonstrate that Taylor's theory of the self is essentially dialogical, embodied and embedded in the particular culture community. For Taylor, human beings are self-interpreting animals. Our actions and emotions are always laden with significance and purpose. So the hermeneutical approach is the most appropriate method of studying the self and morality. Furthermore, our self-understanding inevitably involves strong evaluation, which is the discrimination about better or worse. Besides, in his magnificent account of the philosophical sources of the modern western self, starting with Plato's self-mastery and working his way through to what he calls the 'epiphanies of modernism', he maintains the significance of the articulation of the moral sources. He also claims that the theistic tradition can provide strong moral sources and better affirmation of the significance of humanity. I also argue that Taylor is endorsing a hermeneutical moral realism; and his theory of the self is the "Theistic Communitarian Self". I also show that Taylor's theistic communitarian self involves a change of identity based on the relationship with God. In contrast to secular humanism, Taylor's theistic communitarian self can provide better support for communitarian politics.

Basically, I show that Taylor has offered both immanent criticisms of procedural liberalism by demonstrating its internal inconsistency, and external criticisms relying on our common sense, ordinary life experience and historical retrieval. Taylor has offered an alternative construal of politics which depends on the plausibility of his argument of common good and theistic communitarian self. I argue that Taylor's criticisms of procedural liberalism are plausible; his arguments of communitarianism are coherent, well-supported by good arguments and defensible.

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