



Anthropological Implications of Political Liberalism

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Abstract

The central purpose of this work has been to assess the anthropological assumptions that underlie political liberalism. Charles Larmore, the author I have chosen to study, emphasizes that it is impossible to make a rational decision about the good life of man, from which it follows that no liberal policy can be founded on a commonly accepted idea of the human good. He claims that pluralism and reasonable disagreement have become for postmodern thought ineliminable features of the idea of the good life. Although it is true that political philosophy has a specific logic, the unity of the human subject prevents us from talking about heterogeneous areas of morality. Deep down, political liberalism, even if it doesn't want to, is presupposing an important anthropological and ethical thesis: the inability to answer about the true meaning of politics and the subject of politics, that is, the human person, his identity and his most intimate truth, which reflects that liberalism, although strong in practice, is not without serious fractures at the theoretical level.

Keywords: Political liberalism; Charles Larmore; Neutrality; Autonomy; Freedom; Person; Individual; Truth; Consensus

Introduction

Contemporary cultural framing: the postmodern mind-set

It is a sentence shared by many contemporary thinkers that among the transformations our current culture has undergone there is one of special relevance. It is an epochal change: the transition from Modernity to Postmodernity [1]. Due to temporal proximity, we lack sufficient historical perspective to date the end of the period considered Modernity; nor can we apply this epochal change indistinctly to all spheres of knowledge, but what is a fact is that there have been historical events that have directly shaped social reality and the *forma mentis* of those who inhabit it.

What historical events have given rise to the postmodern mind-set?

1. The end of World War II and the brutalities of the war (the Auschwitz massacre, as a paradigm) and, especially, the explosion of the two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, have given rise to a *greater demand for peace*. The massive destruction of human beings has been, without a doubt, the most serious and brutal event in our history. For

- this reason, it is understandable that they appeared on the stage in the middle of the XX Century figures like Mahatma Gandhi who have professed and proclaimed the culture of non-violence [2]. Martin Luther King Jr. is another emblematic figure whose unforgettable speech condemning the Vietnam war still resounds in certain American consciences [3]. This attitude implies a deep yearning for peace that spreads throughout the world, although recent terrorist attacks seem to deny it.
2. The decolonization of African countries gives rise to the emergence of a plurality of cultures and voices in international organizations. A more "ecumenical" thinking arises, opening up to new cultures. Since the 70's with the oil crisis, people began to become aware of the negative effects of industrialization on natural resources. There are not a few who think that the ecological crisis comes from having given man full ownership over nature, when the man felt fully entitled to use it abusively [4]. A new ecological consciousness arises, which moves the desire to recover the lost unity of man with nature. Specifically, this new ecological thinking has its origin in the UN Conference on

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the environment that took place in Stockholm on June 1972, subsequently continued by the UN Convention on Climate Change, which charts a new course in the global climate effort in the Paris Agreement, negotiated by 195 countries. The objective of this agreement is the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions to mitigate the effects of global warming. A new ecological consciousness arises, which moves the desire to recover the lost unity of man with nature [5].

3. In our time, there is also a *deep feminist conscience*, which tries to claim the importance of women in society and of feminine values. Women had been the fundamental marginalized sector of modern society. Unlike what happened in the Late Middle Ages, women were excluded in modernity from participation in political, economic and cultural life. Simone de Beauvoir, in the middle of the XX Century raised the flag of feminism and carried out a defense of the rights of women, comparing them with men in everything. This first feminism defends equal rights, but at the price of sacrificing what is specifically feminine such as motherhood, on the altar of the chauvinist values of production and success. Awareness of such loss gives rise in the 1970s to the emergence of the neo-feminist movement. This new feminism fights for equality between women and men's rights, but it emphasizes the recovery of feminine values related to care and conservation [6].
4. A new event will acquire period traits from 1989 onwards: the agony of Marxism with the collapse of communist regimes in the West. That is when the diffuse awareness arises that capitalist liberalism is the only alternative with guarantees of success in institutional practice.

In the last forty years, important attempts to make explicit the great values of the liberal tradition, inherent in the reality of our democratic societies, have emerged in the field of political philosophy. The discussion begins when *A Theory of Justice* of the American philosopher John Rawls comes to light, which is immediately followed by strong criticism from Michael Sandel and Alasdair MacIntyre, exponents of the communitarian line.

The controversy focuses primarily on the anthropological vision, contained in liberalism, which conceives the person as *pure autonomy*. The criticisms that communitarian have addressed to liberals have made them reform their proposal, to such an extent, that we are at a juncture of the discussion that it is not entirely clear whether or not liberalism implies a certain image of a person. We are facing with the paradoxical fact that liberalism always strong and dominant on a practical level suffers from a remarkable weakness on a theoretical level. The lack of philosophical coherence of the liberal ideal makes it difficult to find the ultimate foundations of our liberal democracies.

In this essay I will focus particularly on the anthropological

implications that liberalism contains, which can shed lights to fully understand the postmodern mind-set [7].

My fundamental bibliographic sources are the works of Charles Larmore, professor at Columbia University since 1977, Chicago University since 1997 and Brown University since 2006 as the W. Duncan MacMillan Family Professor in the Humanities. He is the author of several works of special interest to our subject: *Patterns of Moral Complexity* (1987) [8], *Modernité et morale* (1993) [9], *The Morals of Modernity* (1996) [10], *The Romantic Legacy* (1996) [11], *The Autonomy of Morality* (2008) [12] and *What is Political Philosophy?* [13], which was published by Princeton University Press in the current year. Apart from Larmore, my objections have also come to two works by John Rawls: *A Theory of Justice* (1971) [14], *Political Liberalism* (1993) [15].

Rawls is the foremost Kantian moral philosopher of our time. But Larmore claims that what Rawls dragged from Kant weakened the later thinker's main insights. Rawl's deepest contribution to political philosophy is the idea of the *public reason*, which rests on the unconstructed value of respect for all human beings, as well as the insight, available to modern thinkers but inaccessible to an earlier philosophical tradition, that free human beings cannot but differ profoundly about the good. Rawls's principal failing, thinks Larmore, is his turning away, under the influence of Kant, from the robust realism found in the "rational intuitionism" (as Rawls called it) of such figures as Clarke, Prichard, and Ross [16].

In one of his books, Larmore criticizes Rawl's theory of the good presented in *A Theory of Justice*, because it rests on the assumption, widespread all through the history of moral philosophy that one ought to live one's life according to a plan. That statement misses the fundamental point that many important goods take us by surprise, because they escape our ability to plan and are made goods by future events [17].

Anthropological Implications of Political Liberalism

The aspiration of the American way of life that controls international public opinion

This aspect needs no comment because it is an indisputable empirical fact, which stands out in our democratic societies.

The dissolution of truth by consensus. The "culture of consensus" keeps control

The fundamental concern of liberals of the 20th and 21st century since the European wars of religion is *civil peace*, that we all live united and peacefully. The only condition of civil peace possibility is for the State to adopt a *neutral* attitude. In a liberal political order, political principles are to be "neutral" with respect



to controversial ideas of the good [18]. "The fundamental principle of liberalism," says Larmore, "claims that the State must remain neutral with respect to good-life ideals that are the object of dispute and controversy" [19]. According to Larmore liberal neutrality, so understood, is thus a procedural ideal. It also usually involves a "neutrality aim" in virtue of which political principles are not intended to favor any controversial view of the good life, since the reasons justifying political principles often concern the aims of State action [20]. If it were not neutral, violations of freedom could be caused by the State meddling in the private sphere of individuals, influencing with a notion of good or moral posture [21]. The bitter experience of the religion wars made them aware that it was impossible to live in peace if one attempts to impose on others the own moral and religious convictions. Therefore, it seeks to obtain civil peace through *consensus*. What matters is that we all agree, not the objective truth, because in the end the truth is established by consensus. This means that if not all citizens agree about something, we must abandon it, and retreat to a commonly accepted ground in order to continue a peaceful dialogue. But what happens- as it has indeed happened- whether all or a large majority- which is politically the same- agree to take measures that harm the rights of a very small minority, or the rights of those who are not yet able to participate in the dialogue (because they are not born, because they cannot speak as they have mental disabilities, or because they are measures of ecology or genetic engineering that will harm only future generations, who also cannot express their disagreement now)? This way of gaining consensus in the establishment of political decisions is not consistent with the respect for the person of a human rights culture.

True respect for the person's dignity is achieved by safeguarding the intimate relationship of the person's freedom with the truth. Only respecting this binomial avoids the mistake of applying to the political ethics problems the logic of personal ethics, causing injustices, wounds and misunderstandings. The person's dignity- in the political language: "doctrine of human rights"- must be based on an inalienable right: the freedom of each person's conscience to seek and adhere to the truth *in freedom*. These two poles, freedom of conscience and objective truth, bear witness to the transcendent character of the person in front of society. Therefore, the intrusion of the State into the conscience of people is only avoided if the yearning for peace is joined to the respect for the person's dignity, whatever his vision of good life and his religious creed is. It is not that all the religions are equal, is that the State does not have to take part with the force in the conscience of any man, which does not have anything to do with the objective statute of the truth. As John Paul II has stated about the freedom of conscience: "No human authority has the right to take part in the conscience of any man. This is also a witness of the person's transcendence in front of society, and as such, it is

inviolable. Nevertheless, he is not something absolute, it is located over the truth and the error; it is more, its intimate nature implies one *relation with universal, equal and objective truth* for all, which everybody can and must look for. In this relation with the objective truth the freedom of conscience finds its justification, like necessary condition for the search of the worthy truth of the man and for the adherence to the same, when it has been properly known. This implies, as well, that all must respect the conscience of each one and not try to impose to anybody the own "truth", respecting the right to profess it, and without despising for that reason to those thinking in a different way. *The truth does not impose but by virtue of itself*. To deny a person the total freedom of conscience and especially the freedom to seek the truth, or to try to impose an own way to understand it, goes straight against his more intimate right" [22].

Enthroning the freedom of choice as ultimate value

Political liberalism confuses choice or ability to choose with freedom. People are free when they choose, regardless what assets such freedom is exercised on. This trait of liberalism penetrates our *forma mentis*. Man's freedom and autonomy find his last justification in the same exercise of choice ability, and not in the good for which such capacity is exercised. The ultimate substantial value of freedom is not in *what* is chosen but in the simple action *to choose*. When making a free choice (not coerced. I choose to stop working, for example) I am exercising my autonomy and that is already the ultimate foundation of the goodness of every choice, regardless of its substantial content. Therefore, for liberalism no *free* choice needs further justification in front of a rule that does not come from the same person's autonomy.

This notion of autonomy differs from a concept centered on the person that sees in autonomy a capacity for free choice based on substantial goods. These goods only confer on this capacity their true value, that is, the goodness or badness of my ability to choose depends on how I use of my freedom, whether I put it at the service of superior goods, or at the service of only apparent goods that downgrade me as a person. It will always be possible to distinguish between good uses or misuse of freedom, not every choice is good, and therefore, not every choice *releases* the person, even if choosing is a sign that I have freedom. Knowledge of truth is the necessary condition of authentic freedom, for freedom has love as its own act- the free choice of good- and only by knowing the truth can we know what true good is.

For liberals only a *rational* choice can be called really free. Specifically, according to Charles Larmore "a man becomes truly human (we could say *rational*) only when, instead of remaining subject to certain desires and needs, he conforms his conduct according to a law that he gives himself, and morality is not only



a form of this self-legislation, but it is also a necessary legislation to attain our full humanity" [23].

By putting the condition of choice on the *rationality* it is being assumed that human reason is not and cannot be intrinsically oriented towards substantial truths of the human good. Kant starts on the confirmation that "experience does not provide any idea of happiness and perfection that is shared and sufficiently determined" [24]; from here the impossibility of founding morality (of a universal nature) on a certain conception of the particular good.

The ideal of Kantian autonomy is based on an unconditioned interest, an interest that Kant defines as *Vernunftinteresse*, (i.e. interest of reason), because every human being, as rational being, "when dismissing his past experience is sufficiently motivated to fulfill what he has the moral duty to accomplish" [25]. Based on these considerations Kant expresses the archetype of person, as rationally motivated to fulfill his own duties, and detached from all empirical conditioning; and it is precisely in the light of this ideal that Kant expresses himself in favor of political neutrality. According to Kant, putting in parentheses the different conceptions of good life in order to reach agreement on common political principles is not only a way of solving the problems of pluralism values, but expresses what our personal ideal should be. As our will is not empirically conditioned, no substantial conception of good can be at the basis of the political order: "in this sense, the *political neutrality* would be interpreted in the sense that we take care (we realize) of the essential diversity existing between our transcendental freedom and the empirically conditioned conceptions of good life" [26]. Thus, within the "kingdom of ends" autonomy becomes the main value that carries the political neutrality of the State and the foundation of mutual respect among human beings who are capable of expressing rational choices.

This leads to a *voluntarist* concept of choice (typically Kantian), because deep down, it is an affirmation of the autonomy not really of the *reason*, but of the *will*. An autonomy guaranteed by the purely formal principle, not of content, of submission to the will of the law of reason. Nevertheless, this law of reason does not indicate us the good (like the natural law: Kant denies the existence of a natural law, by the split that marks between freedom and nature), but it only makes us *free*- more properly independents- from any heteronomy, that is, of being determined by an empirical good [27].

The thesis of absolute autonomy gives rise to the individual notion

Absolute autonomy "cuts the roots of the self", it rejects everything that is not fruit of the free choice. It rejects everything that is part of me as person, leaving aside the natural, cultural, political, moral and religious assumptions of my personal

identity. The result is emptiness, and it also loses the value contents. At personal level the individual has a "self" centered in himself, as well as rootless, confused and as part of a mass.

The individual is considered as an independent entity that bears interests and needs, mainly material, that tends to satisfy (having things) in order to preserve and develop his own life. The pioneer and first representative of that conception is John Locke [28].

In this case, the man's spirituality is comprised of his capacity to exercise control, his capacity to possess. His supremacy over things comprises of these are means or instruments; the man's world of "having" is the world of *utility*. Useful to whom? The individual himself, who thus becomes the source of morality, the place of good and evil, of what is true and what is false.

The fundamental value in an individual considered in this way, is the physical life, the well-being and the self-preservation. There is no transcendence. The purpose of the State is the preservation of individual life and this is what material goods serve. How is the relationship with others then? The interests and demands of the various individuals agree and are integrated under some aspects; however, under other aspects they enter into competition and in open contrast. In other words, among the needs of individuals there is also this: they need others. For this reason, there is *more* interest in collaborating than in harming each other. Therefore, it is necessary to reach a type of organization and coexistence that allows each one the maximum satisfaction of their own interests with the least sacrifice of them.

As we see, in political liberalism there is the dissolution of the "person" concept, which gives place to the "individual" concept, and the concept of an autonomous "self" arises [29]. They conceive a "self" that is in complete independence and in original indifference towards any conception of good. A "self" deprived of ends, goods, traditions, social context, and community bonds. For this way of conceiving the individual and his autonomy, Charles Taylor- a Canadian philosopher considered a key figure in the debates on being and the problems of Modernity- has coined the term "*atomism*": an individual would be a being whose self-understanding is independent and previous to the society in which he is currently living.

The autonomous "self" is like a nail hanging on the wall, deprived of everything, which primarily pursues its individual interests. Atomism, for Taylor is closely linked to the spirit of modern contractualism for proposing a "vision of society, made up of individuals, who primarily pursue individual ends" [30]. According to atomism, autonomy represents the absolute primacy of freedom to choose, regardless of what is chosen. No objective judgments can be made about the moral superiority or inferiority of the ways of life that are chosen.

Individualism rejects from the root the relational dimension of the person and, therefore, the notion of *solidarity* and mutual assistance in a community context. According to this approach,



solidarity would be impossible, because it implies recognition of one another, which is impossible, because the possessive individual only recognizes himself and his needs. To be supportive means to recognize the other as equal to us in the need and to collaborate with him, it means to recognize that one needs the other, and that is diametrically opposed to the liberal notion of the autonomous "self".

A philosophical, moral and political stream of thought that emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which brings together authors from diverse backgrounds under the name of "Communitarianism", has radically opposed to liberal individualism. They criticize liberals for the attempt to base the liberal political system on a concept of person such as *pure autonomy*, without its ends, goods, values, traditions and community. They attack liberalism because it distorts the notion of man by abstracting him from his bonds and his vital *ethos*, at the same time they try to regain in society the importance that the bonds of solidarity and traditions, history and culture, bonds and values have for the lives of communities and people. They are very interested in restoring the basic institutions of social cohesion [31].

Although this is not the place to develop the subject, it is enough to indicate that from the point of view of a serious anthropological grounding, absent, on the other hand, in liberalism, the dignity of the human being lies in the fact that he is a *person*. The notion of person points to the most specific nucleus of each human being, which is only improved in the sincere gift of himself, due to his relational dimension. However, as Viola claims, it is not enough to attribute to man the ability to know and love to justify his being *person*. The theorists of instrumental reason also recognize this special feature of the human being, but this way of understanding human rationality opens access to the order of being. Precisely, man is a person because he is open to the knowledge of the being and to the love of good. He has the radical need to know the *truth of things*, which is the clearest mark of creative thinking [32].

Pluralism or heterogeneity of values

For liberalism the meaning that each person gives to his life will always be different and contrary to others meaning, because reason is intrinsically plural, when it is exercised in conditions of freedom, as it happens in liberal societies. This is the case in any form of liberalism. Perfectionist, pluralist and subjectivist aspects meet at a crucial point: there are divergent and contrasting notions among them about the human good, which is plural *per se*. For the perfectionist this is true because each person has unique abilities, whose development confers a different value to his life. For the pluralist it is so, because there are many and conflicting values and no life can include them all, nor make the right choice between them. And for the subjectivist it is so, because our ideas

about what is valuable arise from our tastes or desires, and these are different from one individual to another [33]. These three visions underpin the basic liberal idea that the people *reasonably* pursue different equally valuable ways of life, and that one cannot be said to be superior to others, because there is no monolithic conception of the human good. Reason cannot be identified with an absolute notion of good, nor its end is the good, because good is inherently plural [34].

There is, in substance, an absolute conviction that human reason produces a plurality of "reasonable" conceptions of the good that are contradictory and incompatible to each other. What is good for me, for others is not: everything is relative; there is no absolute or objective good. At the "private" or "personal" level we will always disagree with others, because the human good is plural. Therefore, a liberal society must be morally neutral, so that all kind of divergent conceptions of good can fit in a peaceful way, without trying to impose upon others our conception of good.

So far it might seem coherent what liberalism claims. However, when we think about universal issues such as happiness and the meaning of life, a theoretical inconsistency arises, which is difficult to solve. Let's have a look.

All people aspire to happiness. This is an incontestable fact from which no one escapes. Questions about the meaning of life come from the question of happiness: What life is worth living? What do I have to do to live well, to be happy, and to optimize my life accomplishments? What is the meaning of the things I do, of my life, in general? How can I be happy? These are questions that sooner or later we all ask ourselves.

The reflection on happiness is very old, because the aspiration is as old as man and woman. The whole philosophy in different epochs, but above all the Greek one, is a set of proposals on individual and social happiness (so is liberalism). To this end, the Greeks seek to solve two major problems, the second of which agrees with the supreme objective of liberal theory: how to take control of one's own behavior and how to integrate individual behaviors into a common project. In other words, the Greeks consider: how to achieve excellence in the person and in the city. The art of learning to sail with excellence in this sea stirred by great problems and unknowns we call it *ethics* and it arises from thinking on happiness. For liberalism, ethics is something absolutely personal and changing, on which the prohibition of appearing in public weighs, because there is no interest in integrating it into a common project, because it is not important to live in *freedom*, and happiness is a totally individual matter, which should not go outside the scope of *privacy*. This liberal invitation to hold moral choices in private is something impossible to fulfill. Why? Because when we expel certain moral proposals from the public, we do so, always and inevitably, in the name- and in favor- of others, because the prior delimitation of



"the public" already implies a moral judgment. Moreover, the theoretical weakness of political liberalism appears when it addresses the issue of happiness, because it conceives it in a hedonistic way, identifying it with pleasure and sensory enjoyment; therefore, it is impossible to give a sense of life, which satisfies man, starting from hedonism- which reduces the person to mere instinct and feeling. It is also impossible to give meaning to life if human spirituality is understood as the simple ability to exercise control and possession over things. As long as the autonomous individual is the source of ultimate morality, the place of good and evil, the true and the false, it will be difficult to find a happiness that is beyond possession and pleasure, and, therefore, it will be more difficult to find a meaning in life that satisfies the aspirations of the human spirit. Not in vain, Taylor stressed that the great crisis of the 20th and 21st century man is the loss of his life meaning.

The political ideal of neutrality

A liberal society must be morally neutral, so that all kind of divergent conceptions of good can fit into it in a peaceful way [35]. To this end, liberalism selects a legal framework where plurality fits in and achieves it through consensus. In its neutrality, political liberalism cannot choose or promote "strong" moral values with normative value (*strong evaluations*).

The neutrality that liberal model pursues is not a neutrality of *results* but of *procedure* [36]. That is to say, that the liberal State (constitutional democratic) must have as objective of its legislative activity, when issuing constitutions, laws and administrative decrees, not the promotion of the common good, but simply the maintenance of a balanced *modus vivendi* to avoid favoring one way of life over others. The liberal state will prohibit, for example, the commission of a murder based on the victim's right to live (according to the law), and not on the (non-neutral) basis of *moral evil*, which would downgrade the life of the murderer. In this case the procedure is neutral, although the *result* remains the same [37]. But let's see what the application of a neutral procedure would be to a law that assumes in itself "strong" substantive values, such as marriage. This is what arises when, relying on the *right* of free choice, homosexuals are claimed the right to marry with all the legal repercussions and implications that this entails. If the State rejects such a request, it could be argued that it is not being neutral, because it is favoring one conception of life over another. It could be argued that the State is assuming certain "strong" moral values with normative *value*, recognizing marriage as a communion of life, open to the transmission of life, and therefore heterosexual, with a specific educational mission. On the other hand, if the State decides to recognize homosexual unions as true marriage, it would have to broaden and reform the definition of "marriage", which also would not be neutral, because it would assume a substantive

value, and its application would be detrimental to the family institution, and its public interest and usefulness (the transmission of life and educational mission) [38].

Important consequently, being feasible the neutral procedure for *some cases*, it is absolutely impossible for *all*. Even with regard to the fundamental rights of citizens it is not possible to separate them from "strong" conceptions about good, because a State acting to protect the rights of individuals will always have the effect of favoring some ways of life and not others, although it pretends the justification be neutral, in the sense of not making judgments about the goodness or badness of those different ways of life [39].

The liberal stance seeks to prevent the state and the political order from having an expressive dimension, because it claims that the transmission of values and the life ideals shaping should occur only in the "private" sphere of individuals, families and small communities [40]. However, even if it is hidden under the motto of a *super-neutrality* (a *neutral* justification of neutrality), expressivism is inevitable. Somehow it is assuming substantive goods, which undoubtedly influence society. And, as long as this dimension is not enough considered, there is a risk that the *boomerang* effect will occur with the liberal political system. In other words, if the educational influence those political and social institutions inevitably exerts is not governed, in the long term it can become destructive to the same foundations on which it is based: rational dialogue and equal respect. An objectified *ethics* morally *neutral* could generate- because it has been left to "no one"- attitudes, beliefs, desires, and motivations that in the long run would make impossible the rule of equal respect, or at least would remove from citizens the valid motivation to accept their demands. It is not strange for this typically liberal way of thinking to exert a permissive influence on society if it is used in areas other than politics, which is an inevitable situation [41].

At the core of the liberal thesis is missing a reflection on the fact that the political community is also a community of values, which are often expressed in institutions that are not specifically political, such as the family, the school, etc. It is not possible to separate the moral education of the "citizen" from that of the "man", because, in some way, political institutions are also an expression of a conception of the good, of ethical models and of traditions that shape people's lives. For liberalism the only good that political community expresses are the desire for peace and rational dialogue, and it is doubtful that there can be peace and dialogue in a society where only those two goods exist. Political forms are valid not only for what they do, give or allow, but also and above all for what they *express*, and there are no political forms that do not express anything.

Conclusion

As we saw at the beginning of this essay, among other events, the fall of communism has placed liberalism as a political form in a new, somewhat emblematic position that shines with the same strength with which our modern liberal democratic societies in the West advance.

There is a feature of liberalism that has not been mentioned, and that I do not want to omit, perhaps because it shows us that we are not at a dead end, and that it is possible to channel liberal political theory towards broader understanding horizons of the truth of man, no matter how much contemporary authors try to ignore, deny or hide it: liberalism was built on a Christian heritage.

For example, the principles that were at the base of the American Revolution were rooted in medieval theology and the appeal to God of the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America has roots not only in Locke, but in the great Thomist lesson about the conscience primacy, the duty to resist the oppressor, or about the pluralism of the State (also, in the second Scholastic, Suárez, who set specific limits to the power). And in our days, Christianity has tried to recognize- and recover- the best part of the liberal tradition: freedom as an essential element for social organization and for appreciation of the same moral conscience [42]. The citizen, indeed, can only make truly ethical choices when he is free from coercion, whether internal or external. This has not only helped to recognize the component elements of liberalism, but it has served Christianity itself to better formulate important regulatory criteria of social life, such as religious tolerance or the relations between the Churches and the State.

However, when one delves a little into the anthropological implications of liberalism, it is also glimpsed that the difficulty remains as long as the individual is considered as a point in the space, as an autonomous entity bearer of (not dependent) interests and needs, essentially materials, which tends to satisfy by owning things, exercising its freedom through choice, regardless of the content of the choice.

The theoretical crisis of the liberal tradition is due to its inability to seriously question itself about the meaning of politics and about the very subject of politics, that is, about the human person and its truth. Hence, we face the challenging task of discovering the persons, humanizing them and restoring their dignity. This proposal includes a deep self-understanding in the light of the interpersonal relationship and openness to the gift of the other. In some way, this proposal offers some indications to face the foremost matter of personal identity in the third millennium.

Declaration of Interest

The author has no relevant affiliations or financial involvement with a financial interest in or financial with the subject matter or materials discussed in the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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15. Columbia University Press, New York 1993.
16. Kraut R. A review of Ch. Larmore, *The Autonomy of Morality*. Cambridge University Press. 2008.
17. Larmore C. *The autonomy of morality*. Cambridge University Press. 2008.
18. Larmore C. *Political Liberalism*. Political Theory. 1990.
19. When Larmore wrote *Patterns of Moral Complexity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) he was following the lead of other contemporary liberals, such as Ronald Dworkin, *Public and Private Morality* (1978) and Bruce Ackerman, *Social Justice and the Liberal State*, 1980.
20. Larmore C. *Political Liberalism*. Political Theory. 1990. 18. 358.
21. Larmore C. *What is Political Philosophy?*. Princeton University Press, Princeton. 2020. In his latest book, Larmore redefines the distinctive aims of political philosophy, reformulating in this light the basis of a liberal understanding of politics. Because political life is characterized by deep and enduring conflict between rival interests and differing moral ideals, the core problems of political philosophy are the regulation of conflict and the conditions under which the members of society may thus be made subject to political authority. Larmore analyzes the concept of reasonable disagreement and investigates the ways we can adjudicate conflicts among people who reasonably disagree about the nature of the human good and the proper basis of political society. Challenging both the classical liberalism of Locke, Kant, and Mill, and more recent theories of political realism proposed by Bernard Williams and others, Larmore claims for a version of political liberalism that is centered on political legitimacy rather than on social justice, and that aims to be well suited to our times rather than universally valid.
22. John Paul II. If you want peace, respect the conscience of every person, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1990.
23. Larmore C. *Patterns of Moral Complexity*. Cambridge University Press. 1987. 47.
24. Larmore C. *Patterns of Moral Complexity*. Cambridge University Press. 1987. 95.
25. Larmore C. *Patterns of Moral Complexity*. Cambridge University Press. 1987. 97.
26. Larmore C. *Patterns of Moral Complexity*. Cambridge University Press. 1987. 99.
27. Echeverría Falla C. *Reflections on Liberalism*. Promesa, Costa Rica. 2002; 47.
28. Locke J. *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. Clarendon Press. 1954
29. For Thomas Green, a liberal English author of the early 20th century, a person is free when he is autonomous. "A person is free only if he is self-directed or autonomous. Running throughout liberal political theory is an ideal of a free person as one whose actions are in some sense his own. Such a person is not subject to compulsions, critically reflects on her ideals and so does not unreflectively follow custom and does not ignore his long-term interests for short term pleasures. Th. Green, *Liberalism* (1923). "This ideal of freedom as autonomy has its roots not only in Rousseau's and Kant's political theory, but in John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*. And today it is a dominant strain in liberalism, as witnessed by the work of Gerald Dworkin (1988) and Joseph Raz (1986)". (Cranston M, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1988). Postwar liberalism could be divided into two branches: 1) a utilitarian meaning (Hare RM, Brandt RB, Smart JJC, Mackie JL, Harsanyi JC); 2) a neo-contractualist or neo-Kantian meaning (Rawls J, Dworkin R, Gewirth A, Nozick R, Ackerman B, Scanlon T). (Matteini M, MacIntyre e la *rifondazione dell'etica*, Città Nuova, Rome 1995, p. 148). In this regard, the following are also available: Nino C, *Ethics and human rights. A grounding essay*, Ariel, Barcelona 1989; Rhonheimer M, *Perché una filosofia politica? Elementi storici per una risposta*, «Acta Philosophica», i/2 (1992), pp. 233-263; Rhonheimer M, *Cittadinanza multiculturale nella democrazia liberale: le proposte di Ch. Taylor, J. Habermas e W. Kymlicka*, «Acta Philosophica» I, 15, 2006, pp. 29-52; Naval C, *Educate Citizens. The liberal-communitarian controversy*, EUNSA, Pamplona 1989; George RP, *Conscience and its Enemies, confronting the dogmas of liberal secularism*, ISI Books, Wilmington Delaware, 2013.
30. Taylor C. *Philosophical and the Human Sciences* (Philosophical Papers 2). Cambridge University Press. 1985. 187.
31. People are constituted by their ends or values, and they cannot abstract from these particular ends and social commitments to deliberate on matters of justice from a 'disembodied' perspective. Sandel M, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 1987.
32. Non basta attribuire all'uomo la capacità di conoscere e di amare per giustificare il suo essere persona. Anche i teorici della ragione strumentale riconoscono questa peculiarità dell'essere umano, ma questo modo d'intendere la razionalità umana preclude l'accesso all'ordine dell'essere. E' proprio perché l'uomo 'aperto alla conoscenza dell'essere e all'amore del bene che è persona. Va in lui il bisogno radicale di conoscenza della verità delle cose, che l'impronta del

- pensiero creatore" (Viola F, *Introduzione alla filosofia politica*. Per un filosofia politica d'ispirazione Cristiana, Las-Roma, 1980).
33. Classical utilitarianism fails to be neutral, therefore, because it subscribes to a subjetivistic conception of the good and thus of the good life that many will reasonably not share. For much that is good is not a matter of our experiences, but rather of what we do; and such nonexperiential goods can often be constitutive of some ideal of the good life. The utilitarian principle would force many to understand the value of what they pursue in a manner alien to what makes it of value to them. Larmore C. *Patterns of Moral Complexity*. Cambridge University Press. 1987.
34. What is held to be good may be such that attaining it must result in our having a certain sort of experience; but Sidwick erred in supposing that the goodness of our goal necessarily consists in our having that sort of experience. On the contrary, the satisfaction that we have in something held to be good (e. g., the correct performance of a Bach chorale, by contrast with eating a tasty meal) often depends precisely upon our believing that we have actually done something and not just experienced something. To be a good pianist is not simply to have all the mental states or experiences that a good pianist has. Larmore C. *Patterns of Moral Complexity*. Cambridge University Press. 1987.
35. The ideal of neutrality can best be understood as a response to the variety of conceptions of the good life. In modern times we have come to recognize a multiplicity of ways in which a fulfilled life can be lived, without any perceptible hierarchy among them. And we have also been forced to acknowledge that even where we do believe that we have discerned the superiority of some ways of life to others, reasonable people may often not share our view. Pluralism and reasonable disagreement have become for modern thought ineliminable features of the idea of the good life. Larmore C. *Patterns of Moral Complexity*. Cambridge University Press. 1987.
36. Neutrality understood procedurally leaves open to a large extent the goals that the liberal state ought to pursue. Of course, some ends (e.g., the establishment of a state religion) are impermissible, because there can be no neutrally justifiable decision to pursue them. But any goals for whose pursuit there exists a neutral justification are ones that a liberal state may pursue. Larmore C. *Patterns of Moral Complexity*. Cambridge University Press. 1987.
37. The example is from Mulhall S, Swift A. *Liberals and Communitarians*. Blackwell, Oxford, 1992.
38. The example is from Rhonheimer M, *La imagen del hombre en el liberalismo y el concepto de autonomía: más allá del debate entre liberales y comunitaristas in Más allá del*
- liberalismo, ed. R. GAHL, Madrid: EIUNSA, 2002; and also from the same autor, *Cittadinanza multicultural e democrazia liberale: le proposte di Ch. Taylor, J. Habermas e W. Kymlicka, Acta Philosophica I, 15. 1996.*
39. A more legal observation could be made to this approach. Political philosophy cannot be limited to the idea of neutrality, nor based only on the right and the law, because this concept cannot be defined without the concept of duty: and duties are oriented towards the good rather than A or B. The first principle of practical reason ("do good and avoid evil") as well as other practical principles (the ends of virtues) refer to the good, not to what is fair or to the legal. The other fundamental concepts of political ethics successively follow the idea of obligation or duty, dependent on intellectual perception of good, and coming from objective moral value, not from the law. The legal rule then expresses the specification of the first practical principle in relation to the perception of goods or virtues ends. Only at this time can ideas of law and fair come into play. The notion of law refers to the idea that something is morally due to a person, to one itself, precisely because of the fact that it is a person: "A right is a demand that comes from one itself with respect to something like owned to himself, and of which the other moral agents are compelled in conscience not to deprive him" (Maritain J. *Nove lezioni delle prime nozione della filosofia morale, Vita e Pensiero, Milano. 1979. 220. Translation is mine*). A right of A is a good owned to A. Therefore, if justice is to give everyone their own, that is, their right, the idea of justice implies the idea of right and obligation, which in turn imply the idea of good. The appropriate conceptual sequence of the fundamental concepts of political philosophy will therefore be good / obligation / norm / law / justice.
40. Larmore blames antiliberal political romanticism of committing the error of expressivism, for noting that the political order inevitably expresses a concept of man and of the good. (Cf. Larmore C, *The Romantic Legacy*, Columbia University Press, New York 1996). In making this criticism, Larmore does not sufficiently consider the dynamics of the objective spirit (the *Sittlichkeit*), which claims that in any political system there is an objectified ethics, transmitter of ethical models, as well as a sense of identity and belonging to the group (Cf. Taylor C, *Hegel e la società Moderna, Il Mulino, Bologna 1984, 129-130*). It is almost always inevitable, and experience shows this, the educational influence that men receive from the laws, the State, the social environment, the media, from the institutions, etc. In a certain way, all persons are sons and daughters of their time, which



exerts a notable influence on them, either positive or negative.

41. Larmore C. *What is Political Philosophy?*, Princeton University Press, Princeton. 2020.
42. See, for example, encyclical letter *Centesimus Annus* of 1991, and the other social encyclicals. Also, as an example, the message for the World Day of Peace, delivered on December 8, 1990, one of its paragraphs we have quoted above and the very important Address of Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia on the occasion of Christmas, 2005.