

REORIENTING DELIBERATION IDENTITY POLITICS AND GOOD HUMAN CONDUCT

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The sickness of a time is cured by an alteration in the mode of life of human beings, and it was possible for the sickness of philosophical problems to get cured only through a changed mode of thought and of life, not through a medicine invented by an individual. (Wittgenstein, 1964, p.57e)

Introduction

In one of many recent liberal critiques of identity politics, Jeremy Waldron (2000) argues that identity claims undermine the possibility of responsible civic participation. He takes as his starting point Kant's observation that we, as a brute fact of geographical relation, live 'unavoidably side-by-side' others who often disagree about how central life questions ought to be answered (Waldron, 2000). Waldron argues that, given this starting point, individuals have a particular kind of duty of civic participation: we have a duty to come to terms with others who have disparate views and beliefs about societal relations and organization in order to maintain peace and promote justice and human flourishing. This duty requires that citizens engage with each other in a manner that is careful, responsible, and attentive to difference:

In the case of this duty, the burden of responsibility – civic responsibility – has at least two aspects to it. It means (1) participating in a way that does not *improperly diminish* the prospects for peace or the prospects that the inhabitants will in fact come to terms and set up necessary frameworks. And it means (2) participating in a way that pays *proper attention* to the interests, wishes, and opinions of all the inhabitants of the country. (Waldron, 2000, p.155, emphasis added)

Yet our proper attention to difference must stop short of a commitment to identity politics.

Waldron says, "We are interested ultimately in the bearing of identity politics on the way in which people discharge their civic responsibilities in the larger society in which they live"

(Waldron, 2000, p.162). He contends that there is a conflict between the assumptions of identity

politics and both aspects of our duty of civic responsibility specified above. I will argue, however, that this conflict is specious; Waldron misunderstands the nature of identity and how it affects civic responsibility. Waldron's principal concern is that good human conduct will be undermined by the demands of identity politics; however, because he misinterprets how identity ascriptions affect our duty of civic participation, he gives up what would, differently interpreted, better serve the ideal of good human conduct to which his account of civic participation aspires.

The contemporary aversion to modern identity politics among philosophers has been expressed in a variety of ways; however, the dominant critique of identity is, in general, troubled by problems associated with self-other relations that identity politics engenders. "On the one hand, critics are concerned that identities are a form of imposition of the other onto the self, unchosen and therefore unfree... On the other hand, critics are concerned that an emphasis on identities will increase mistrust, conflict, and isolation, and that they will inhibit cooperative and integrated self-other relations" (Alcoff, 2006, p. 113). While I believe that both of these concerns are unfounded, I will deal primarily with the second worry. The claim that identity ascriptions ought to be avoided in political discourse, because they preclude peaceful interaction among citizens of multicultural nations, is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of identity and how it functions in multicultural contexts.

Good human conduct requires the recognition that social identities are of fundamental importance to the self (Alcoff, 2006 and Taylor, 1989) and that they enhance, rather than inhibit, cross-cultural communication. "To recognize the importance of group identity is not necessarily to be opportunistic, essentialist or committed to separatism. It is to recognize the reality of the social nature of individual selves" (Alcoff, 2006, p.121). Waldron's critique of identity politics aligns with the second concern identified above, but his renouncement of identity politics, I will

argue, undermines his stated goal: that citizens in multicultural societies will come to terms with one another in order to set up the social, legal and political frameworks necessary for a peaceful and just society in which individuals can flourish. I will also suggest that interpretations of identity proposed by Charles Taylor (1989) and Linda Alcoff (2006) give Waldron's account the tools required to support civic participation, thus preserving the laudable ideal of conduct after which his view strives. I contend with Taylor and Alcoff that recognizing the importance of cultural identity to the intelligibility of reasons is the first step towards the kind of conversation Waldron envisions.

Cultural Identity and Individual Rights

The conflict between identity politics and civic participation on Waldron's account arises primarily because he associates assertions of identity with claims about individual rights. According to Waldron, modern identity politics represents respect for culture in terms of human rights, claiming that the inviolability of individuals entails that individuals have a right to their cultural identity. Identity politics, on his account, pose a serious problem in circumstances in which various cultures propose different and mutually exclusive solutions to questions central to the governance of a multicultural society:

In response to the enduring question of what rules are to be set up to govern the organization of families and households, culture *A* may answer 'Polygyny', culture *B* may answer 'Polyandry', and culture *C* may answer 'Monogamy'. If the larger society *S* (which includes individuals who self-identify as *As*, *Bs* and *Cs*) opts for monogamy, then clearly it is opting for an answer which directly contradicts the answer given in *A* (not to mention the answer given in *B*). (Waldron, 2000, p.161)

These solutions, Waldron argues, are rivals in that they provide different and competing answers to the same question: how should families and households be organized? All three solutions cannot possibly be accommodated in society *S* because members of each culture *A*, *B* and *C*

think that the solution posed by the other cultures is mistaken or repugnant. Waldron argues, “The strongest demand that is made by modern identity politics is that we should respect the distinctive dignity of the cultural or ethnic background that each individual has or claims as his own” (Waldron, 2000, p.158). Because this demand cannot be met in the circumstance described above, Waldron thinks that the demand is in error: we do not have an obligation to respect cultural norms *qua* individual rights.

Waldron maintains that cultures themselves are not the bearers of ultimate value. Although his Kantian approach emphasizes the inviolability of the individual, and the importance of human rights, cultures do not gain value simply because individuals identify with them. While individuals are intrinsically valuable, cultures are not, and they do not gain value by association with individuals. Waldron maintains that cultural identity is serious politics: “it is played out for high stakes and with serious ramifications not only for who ends up with what, but also for the terms on which the basic social settlement is framed” (Waldron, 2000, p. 158). On his view, however, it is a mistake to interpret this seriousness in terms of individual rights. We ought not to think that respect for individuals entails respect for the culture with which they identify – this misunderstands the relationship between cultures and individuals. Waldron argues that asserting one’s identity in the spirit of a rights claim, that is, as inviolable and non-negotiable, is “the greatest abuse of civic responsibility” (Waldron, 2000, p. 164).

Waldron’s argument suggests that modern identity politics is in conflict with both aspects of civic responsibility previously described. The claims of identity politics, according to Waldron’s analysis, *improperly diminish* the “prospect that the inhabitants will in fact come to terms and set up necessary frameworks”. Moreover, *proper attention* “to the interests, wishes, and opinions of all the inhabitants of the country” does not involve treating cultural identity as a

non-negotiable right. He claims that if cultural identity is asserted as a right it will “undermine or preclude altogether the fundamental settlement which is the goal of civic participation” (Waldron, 2000, p.156). That is, if members of cultures *A*, *B*, and *C* assert their identification with the practices of their respective cultures like a rights claim, resolution will be unattainable because not all cultures are *compossible*. Two things are compossible just in case they are possible together; conversely, two things are impossible when the existence of one rules out the existence of the other. Rights claims, in liberal political philosophy, are appropriate, but limited by a norm of compossibility (Waldron, 2000). The liberal enterprise, Waldron explains, relies on the premise that rights claims are compossible in this way. “If I claim non-negotiably that some interest of mine simply *has* to be respected, my claim is thrown in question – not refuted necessarily, but thrown in question – by showing that it could not possibly be accommodated in a political union along with the similar claims of other people” (Waldron, 2000, p.159). Waldron argues that, in multicultural societies, identity claims do not pass the test of compossibility. When claims of this sort are presented in the spirit of rights, as inviolable and non-negotiable, no society can accommodate the identity claims of all citizens:

It is hard enough to set up a legal framework that furnishes respect for persons as individuals.... But if respect for an individual also requires respect for the culture in which his identity has been formed, and if that respect is demanded in the uncompromising and non-negotiable way in which respect for rights is demanded, then the task may become very difficult indeed. (Waldron, 2000, p.160)

Therefore, according to Waldron, the legitimacy of identity claims in liberal democratic societies is *prima facie* dubious.

Part of Waldron’s unease with identity issues from his belief that modern identity politics is inauthentic and artificial (Waldron, 2000). Waldron argues, in fact, that it is only reasonable for individuals to give up identity claims because “claims of this sort represent quite inauthentic

ways of engaging and identifying with a culture. They not only exaggerate but distort the way in which a person relates to the culture which is part of his identity” (Waldron, 2000, p.168).

Waldron implores us to think about individuals’ involvement in a culture in a non-multicultural setting (Waldron, 2000) and claims that “in this setting it is doubtful whether thoughts about one’s culture – how marvellous it is; how colourful and distinctive; how important it is to the identity of each of us – will loom very large in people’s involvement in the life of their community” (Waldron, 2000, p.169). Waldron’s complaint is that there is a kind of artificiality in the self-conscious identity claims pervasive in multicultural societies, which is absent when individuals are embedded in a culture’s “natural habitat” (Waldron, 2000, p.169). Waldron suggests that the contemporary assertion of identity claims stems from a desire to conform to the norms of one’s culture, full stop. “It seems very odd to regard the fact that this is ‘our’ norm – that this is what we Irishmen or we French or we Maori do – as part of the reason, if not the central reason, for having the norm and for sustaining it” (Waldron, 2000, p. 169). Waldron thinks identity claims are asserted as rights in multicultural societies as a matter of unreflective allegiance, rather than on the grounds of reasons. This kind of commitment to one’s culture is objectionable and inauthentic because it decontextualizes how norms function for cultures and empties them of their significance. “To congratulate oneself on following ‘the norms of my community’ is already to take a point of view somewhat external to those norms, rather than to subscribe wholeheartedly to the substantive commitments that they embody” (Waldron, 2000, p.170).

For Waldron, cultures are functional, not ornamental. He argues that cultures ought not to be uncritically respected simply because they accrue to individuals; instead, cultures ought to be evaluated according to the reasons for which their cultural norms were established.

Waldron's understanding of culture is framed by his view of our civic task as one of establishing norms and institutions that conduce to peace and flourishing. Various cultural norms are understood as offering reason-grounded proposals for proceeding in one way rather than another and thus these norms should not be asserted non-negotiably. Waldon argues that the role played by reasons and reasoning is vitally important to a proper understanding of culture and its function for individuals and societies. "Social norms and practices do not exist in order to make up a colourful, distinctive culture for us to immerse ourselves in" (Waldron, p.170). Cultures ought to be taken seriously and taking them seriously, according to Waldron, involves showing respect for the reasons behind cultural norms, not cultural norms *simpliciter*. Cultural identification does not entail unqualified respect for cultural practices: absolute respect ignores the important function these norms have for a culture and misunderstands the function that they should have, as reason-grounded proposals, within a multicultural civic public

Waldron's charge of inauthenticity, however, meant to move people away from identity, only gains purchase if one agrees with his characterization of identity politics. Taylor (1989) and Alcoff (2006) suggest an alternative conception of identity that avoids Waldron's charge of inauthenticity and does not entail a negative interference with our duty of civic participation. According to Taylor, "my identity is defined by the commitments and identification which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose" (Taylor, 1989, p.27). When individuals from culture *A*, *B* or *C* make an identity claim, they are not being inauthentic, or opportunistic; neither do they blindly identify with a cultural norm devoid of its reasons. Their identification, rather, consists in their positioning in a horizon of intelligibility – a perspectival location that frames their understanding of the world and how they are situated with respect to it

and others. The concept of a horizon represents a substantive perspective from which central life questions Waldron identifies have significance and where the solutions to those problems are comprehensible. Understanding identity as a kind of orientation in a horizon of intelligibility explains how identity politics might factor into civic deliberation without suspending debate or representing inauthentic ways of engaging with a culture. Identities operate as interpretive horizons that enable individuals to make comparative judgements about questions of central importance to their lives. Alcoff explains, “The horizon is just the individual or particular substantive perspective that each person has, that makes up who that person is, consisting of his or her background assumptions, form of life, and social location or position within the social structure or hierarchy” (Alcoff, 2006, p.96). When an individual draws attention to her social identity, she identifies herself as someone who is culturally embedded in a particular frame of reference in which value judgements have relevance for her life. Without this frame of reference, she will be unable to know where she stands on questions of central importance.

Identities, according to Taylor and Alcoff, are fundamental not inauthentic, peripheral or temporarily detachable. The failure to recognize the fundamental nature of cultural identification, by requiring individuals to self-alienate from their cultural identity in order to properly participate in civic deliberation, amounts to “more than just putting aside for the moment one’s ethnic habits, it is having to attempt to at least temporarily erase and even denigrate a fundamental aspect of one’s self” (Alcoff, 2006, p.120). But as well as responding to the critique of inauthenticity, Taylor and Alcoff show how attention to identity is vital to the positive project of civic engagement that Waldron endorses. The remainder of this paper defends their insight that the conditions of intelligibility require more than the structure of reasoning Waldron recommends.

Cross-Cultural Communication: Reasons and Rationality

Waldron argues that cultural norms are best understood as solutions to social questions, such as how to rear children. Different cultures have different answers to significant social questions of this kind. “A *culture*,” according to Waldron, “is (something like) an enduring array of social practices, subsisting as a way of life for a whole people.... It represents the heritage of a particular people’s attempts to address and come to terms with the problems of social life” (Waldron, p.160-161). Identity claims of the sort Waldron discusses are usually made in the politics of a larger multicultural society; the larger society also has its own solutions to problems, and some of those solutions will contradict solutions posed by other cultures. Some solutions are ‘rivals’ in that “they constitute alternative and competing answers to what is basically the same question” (Waldron, 2000, p.161). Waldron argues that when claims made by cultural groups are compossible with similar claims of other citizens in a multicultural society, those claims ought to be accommodated. Accommodation, according to Waldron’s analysis, should always be the first recourse; however, in circumstances of cultural impossibility, what norms individuals ought follow must be decided through a process of civic deliberation, which involves examining the content of the reasons behind cultural norms. Waldron sees interaction between cultures in terms of negotiation rather than categorical respect for cultural identity.

In the process of civic deliberation, according to Waldron, the cultural norms recommended by an individual’s culture are evaluated to on the basis of their content. Waldron suggests asking the following questions in order to assess the content of opinions in civic debate: Is the argument a good one? Are the facts right? Do the major premises of the argument point to values that are of real importance? Could the important values be secured by any other means?

(Waldron, 2000). Thus, his view attempts to avoid “the problem of cultural difference by portraying reason as having only formal rather than substantive content” (Alcoff, 2006, p.50). Reasons, however, cannot be evaluated according to their formal properties only, as Waldron suggests. Evaluative judgements always make use of substantive commitments and qualitative distinctions. Alcoff writes:

It is possible to engage in some amount of self-reflection about one’s framing assumptions of this sort, and to submit these assumptions to thoughtful examination, but the judging that is going on even in this process of examination requires the operation of qualitative discriminations, or in other words, a context within which the reasons one gives for one’s conclusions will be intelligible as well as plausible. (Alcoff, 2006, p.54)

To illustrate the importance of context to intelligibility, Alcoff imagines how most parents in the United States or Canada would react to the decision of one of their children to join a religious sect, like the Amish. The child could explain the *reasons* behind his or her decision in detail and with clarity, but the parents would still fail to understand the decision unless their lives were such that they had previously held, or were open to holding, a particular set of values: “The value[s] of community and having a well-ordered, morally and spiritually meaningful life over the value[s] of individual freedom, autonomy, integrity, or self-determination, and perhaps even over rationality itself” (Alcoff, 2006, p.55). Parents’ failure to understand such a decision would constitute a “gap of intelligibility between the reasons the child gives and what their parents can comprehend” (Alcoff, 2006, p.54), and points to a difference in substantive belief that cannot be bridged by procedural argumentation. Before the child’s choice could be understood as rational, the parents would not simply have to rigorously evaluate the formal content of the child’s reasons; rather, they would have to reorient themselves in qualitative space in such a way as to open understanding of an entirely different set of substantive commitments. On the other hand, parents might understand their child’s decision to join a convent or monastery, even if it is a

choice they would not prefer. “But this is only because such a choice exists *within* the frames of intelligibility that most Christians assume, rather than outside” (Alcoff, 2006, p.55).

Waldron’s account of civic deliberation relies on a modernist ideal of disengaged rationality, exemplified by Descartes and later by Kant, which eschews the substantive concerns Taylor and Alcoff identify as prerequisites for understanding. According to the procedural conception of rationality that emerged in the modern era, reason is a set of operations absent substantive belief. “Against the background of this framework, the aversion to cultural identity can be explained as a result of its conflict with reason” (Alcoff, 2006, p.53). According to the procedural rationality that characterizes Waldron’s model of civic deliberation, it is clear why identity can play no role: cultural evaluation requires the objectification of cultural norms, the purgation of substantive content and the detachment of norms from the individuals who derive meaning from them. Civic deliberation is the process by which individual attachment to a culture is severed, enabling the formal content of cultural norms to be distilled in the form of reasons. According to Waldron’s interpretation, cultural norms are functionally significant and evaluating them through a process of civic deliberation involves examining their functional role from a distance. “The judgement now turns on properties of the activity of thinking rather than on the substantive beliefs which emerge from it” (Taylor, 1989, p.156).

However, as Alcoff and Taylor argue, identity is fundamental not peripheral. “If rationality cannot be made sense of independently of a given horizon, then the dictate to completely disengage one’s prior commitments can never be followed” (Alcoff, 2006, p.56). By misunderstanding significance of social identity, Waldron’s account actually makes less likely the understanding and fundamental settlement that is the goal of civic participation. The values manifest in an ideal of procedural rationality do not promote cross-cultural understanding; rather,

they undermine the intelligibility of reasons articulated by cultural groups with different qualitative orientations. Because the intelligibility of reasons depends on a framework of substantive commitments, identity cannot and ought not to be excluded from civic debate. “Rational deliberation operates on the basis of intelligible reasons, and the reasons are no less reasons because the conditions of intelligibility involve a cultural locatedness” (Alcoff, 2006, p.50).

Cross-Cultural Communication: Horizons of Intelligibility

Waldron’s description of civic deliberation assumes that all reasons can be “transmitted across major differences in framing assumptions or value commitments” (Alcoff, 2006, p.55). It is not clear, however, that he is justified in making this assumption. Drawing from the work of Taylor (1989), Alcoff (2006) argues, “A judgement will make sense only within a substantive frame of reference or horizon of intelligibility” (Alcoff, 2006, p.55). None of the questions that Waldron proposes to guide civic debate can be answered without qualitative judgements, according to which assessments of what is good, worthwhile, admirable or of value are intelligible (Taylor, 1989). Waldron’s argument assumes that intelligibility across differences of cultural positioning will follow from the articulation of reasons, only when identity is, at least temporarily, given up. Cultural identity, on his account, impedes the lucidity to which civic deliberation aspires by preventing citizens from entering the discursive space that cross-cultural communication requires. While Waldron is not sanguine about intercultural communication—indeed, he admits it is a “fragile enterprise” (Waldron, 2000, p.173)—his view is naïve regarding the possibility of intelligibility of reasons across different cultures. His claim that identity ought not to be asserted like a rights claim may be correct, but this does not entail that identity plays only a debilitating role in the process of civic deliberation. Identities *qua* individual rights may

interfere with our ability to discharge our duty of civic responsibility; however, this does not mean that identities are irrelevant or pernicious, only that thinking of identity operating like a ‘right’ is the wrong way to think about identity politics.

Alcoff (2006) parses cultural identity such that it does not entail the problems Waldron envisages. On her account, identities can have a “positive and constructive relevance” for reasoning. They are not mere “drags and hindrances from the realm of the particular on the otherwise universal ‘mind’” (Alcoff, 2006, p.94). Alcoff would agree that identity affects the way in which we discharge our civic responsibility but contrary to Waldron, she would argue that identity is necessary for, rather than limiting to, any hope of cross-cultural intelligibility. Her analysis draws attention to the “interpretive nature of identity” (Alcoff, 2001, p.63):

To attain knowledge in most cases we must engage in a process of reasoning, and to engage in most kinds of reasoning – practical reasoning, moral reasoning – we must engage in a process of judgement.... Judgement involves a qualitative weighing of the evidence; it is not simple deduction, but more akin to an interpretation. (Alcoff, 2006, p.94)

This interpretive account of identity focuses on the epistemic role of social identities as locations “from which knowing and perceptive analysis takes place” (Alcoff, 2006, p.125). Accordingly, good human conduct requires more than the articulation of the reasons behind cultural norms, it requires an attempt to understand the substantive commitments that render the world intelligible to individuals speaking from different social locations. Because identity is a constitutive of how individuals come to understand the world and their place in it, our obligations for learning and respect extend beyond the articulation and examination reasons. Our obligations extend to the identity or interpretive horizon in which reasons are situated. Our obligations involve a stance towards civic debate that acknowledges the cultural embeddedness of rationality and how that

might affect the ways in which individuals from different cultural locations enter conversational spaces.

The concept of horizon does not just have significance for contemporary identity politics. In the history of communication, the distance to the visible horizon has tremendous significance. This distance represented the maximum range of communication and vision before the development of the radio and telegraphs, when the primary method of communication over a distance was through smoke signals and beacons. In Alcoff's discussion of identity politics, the concept of horizon has a similar function: each horizon represents the maximum range of intelligibility that an individual's perspective affords. What is intelligible to a person is a function of her identity because her perspective is grounded in a horizon that sets the range and scope of communication possible from that location. Because the "horizon is a substantive perspectival location from which the interpreter looks out at the world" (Alcoff, 2006, 95), the requirement for individuals to abandon their identity, in order to participate in deliberation responsibly, impedes rather than expands the possibility of communication. Without identity, the maximum range over which individuals can communicate is shortened, making cross-cultural understanding more difficult. Identity, therefore, does not thwart civic deliberation but is a precondition of its possibility. Identity enables cross-cultural communication by expanding the maximum range of intelligibility in cross-cultural debate. A prohibition on identity necessarily limits the possibilities for civic debate by excluding the intelligibility conditions required for multicultural communication.

According to Alcoff's analysis, civic deliberation is not served by the canons of procedural rationality Waldron espouses. Civic debate is a process deeply connected, rather than in conflict, with identity. "Only if rationality is understood to be some sort of process that occurs

ex nihilo will cultural identity prove to be an *a priori* obstacle to rationality” (Alcoff, 2006, p.56). Alcoff’s analysis indicates that the gap between unintelligibility and intelligibility requires more than the articulation of reasons that Waldron’s analysis recommends. Even when expressed in a process of civic deliberation, reasons may remain opaque across different horizons of intelligibility (Alcoff, 2006). Cross-cultural understanding, or the pursuit of such understanding, requires the recognition that reasons are situated within interpretive horizons that are not shared by all participants. The concept of a horizon draws attention to the fact that experience is never epistemically available prior to interpretation. “Because knowledge cannot be completely disentangled from social location and experience, the pretension to abstraction only conceals the relevant context, disabling a productive dialogue between contexts, which is the only means by which true agreement and understanding might emerge” (Alcoff, 2001, p. 65). In order to enable productive deliberation, individuals must not only recognize the importance of identity, they must be willing to reorient themselves towards different interpretive horizons. Learning to understand the substantive commitments, not simply the reasons, which guide choices and value judgements across different horizons, will increase the maximum range of intelligibility among diverse social locations.

It is often a concern about cultural relativism and the attendant impossibility of criticism that leads some to prefer a “contextually transcendent account of reason” (Alcoff, 2006, p.100). But this concern, which stems from the belief that horizons of justification are incommensurable, is unjustified. There is in fact shared content that enables the clarification of disagreements among cultures. “We may have varied ‘lifeworlds’ but we do share an environment, as well as biological dependencies of various sorts, and even a history in broad terms” (Alcoff, 2006, p.97). Waldron would agree that worries about incommensurability are overstated; according to his

analysis, we should not “underestimate the curiosity of human beings and their ability to conduct conversations across the barriers allegedly posed by the most disparate conceptual schemes” (Waldron, 2000, 163). However, while the ability to conduct conversations across conceptual schemes is not impossible, the account of rationality and identity advocated by Taylor and Alcoff demonstrate that cultural identity is a condition of those conversations, rather than an impediment to them. Waldron argues that our first responsibility “is to make whatever effort we can to converse with others on their own terms, as they attempt to converse with us on ours, to see what we can understand of their reasons, and to present our reasons as well as we can to them” (Waldron, 2000, 163). Alcoff’s analysis shows how cultural identity is vitally important to the intelligibility of reasons, which form the basis of the kind of conversation Waldron envisions. We cannot separate our cultural identities from the reasons for which the norms of our culture were established, as Waldron’s ideal of civic deliberation suggests. “The background foreknowledges that one holds are what makes possible the operation of critical reason providing the context within which a claim will appear plausible or inspiring of doubt. We cannot, therefore, stand completely outside of all traditions, freely choosing what will be preserved and what will be relinquished” (Alcoff, 2006, p.96). The idea that reasons can be examined by their formal content alone is a chimerical vestige of the modern era that hampers the intelligibility that is necessary for fruitful cross-cultural deliberation in contemporary society.

The interpretive analysis of identity proposed by Taylor and Alcoff avoids the obstacles entailed by a rights based account of identity Waldron describes by suggesting, “social identity matters because experience and perception matter for the possibility of knowledge” (Alcoff, 2001, p.75). According to the alternative interpretation of identity that I have supported, read through Waldron’s account of civic participation, good human conduct will involve, as Waldron

suggests, certain accommodations, in circumstances of compossibility. It will also involve civic deliberation, in situations of impossibility, where the deliberative space is not characterized by procedural rationality and the detachment of identity but rather by an embedded rationality in which social identities operate as interpretive horizons that are fundamental to the self and enable cross-cultural understanding. “The concept of horizon helps to capture the background, framing assumptions we bring with us to perception and understanding, the congealed experiences that become premises by which we strive to make sense of the world” (Alcoff, 2006, p.95).

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