RECOGNITION AND COMMUNITY IN THE THOUGHT OF CHARLES TAYLOR

A Study of the Relation between Charles Taylor's Communitarianism and his Theory of Recognition

by

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ABSTRACT

TOPIC: Charles Taylor's Communitarianism versus Liberal Political Philosophy.

ABSTRACT: An aspect of Charles Taylor's vast philosophical output has been his political philosophy, which consists of a number of loosely related strands. Two of these are: 1) His rejection of contemporary liberal political philosophy - especially the Rawlsian tradition - as an adequate model (both normatively and empirically) for human societies, and 2) His emphasis upon the value of minorities, together with his insistence that their proper defense requires not only concrete anti-discrimination measures, but more significantly a concern for their self-esteem and "identity" (i.e. his Theory of Recognition). The relationship between these two themes is complicated, and includes aspects of which Taylor does not seem to be fully aware. This Thesis argues: 1) that the standard communitarian critique of liberalism (including Taylor's contribution) is about "General" rather than "Minoritarian Communitarianism", in the sense that the debate is usually concerned with the choice between individual autonomy and our embeddedness in a single all-encompassing "community". 2) That the development of a truly minoritarian communitarianism - although essential - will present political philosophy with a number of emergent (and largely unanticipated) problems. 3) That Taylor's Theory of Recognition raises (unacknowledged) ontological issues, in the sense that how we "recognize" a community influences what that community is, rather than simply what rights it possesses or esteem it enjoys. The Thesis concludes with the thought that although Taylor's treatment of these matters is inadequate, his version of communitarianism at least points us in the right direction.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Abstract. .......................................................... i
Acknowledgements. ........................................... ii
Chapter Summary. ............................................. iv
I. Introduction. .................................................. 1
II. "Social-Embeddedness" in the Liberal/Communitarian Debate. .......................................................... 12
   1) The Ontological Construction of Identity. .... 14
   2) Identity as a Sociological Entity. .............. 24
III. Emergent problems of Minoritarian Communitarianism. ......................................................... 49
IV. "Recognizing" a Community. ............................ 68
V. Conclusion. .................................................... 90
Bibliography. .................................................... 105
Vita. ............................................................... 109
CHAPTER SUMMARY


CHAPTER 3 - EMERGENT PROBLEMS OF MINORITARIAN COMMUNITARIANISM: General communitarianism and the problem of minority communities -- Emergent problems of minoritarian communitarianism: i) individual/community relations, ii) intercommunity relations, and iii) community/society relations -- The problem of "identity/community divergence" -- Some examples: i) "communalness", ii) "plurality", and iii) "self-perception" -- "Subjective" versus "objective" factors in the definition of "community" -- Taylor on the role of language -- Some difficulties with Taylor's view -- Self-conception and recognition.

CHAPTER 4 - "RECOGNIZING" A COMMUNITY: Recognition as a symbolic good -- Taylor's Theory of Recognition -- The ideological space of recognition -- The problem of significance -- Some difficulties with Taylor's problematic: i) recognition and the entity recognized, ii) relatedness versus other-dependence -- Conclusion: recognition and civic unity.

CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSION: Liberalism as an "extreme case" on the liberal/communitarian continuum -- Social-embeddedness and the failure of liberalism: i) individual "identity" implies a collective locus, ii) "cultural structures" are not mere aggregates -- Emergent issues associated with minoritarian communitarianism -- "Recognition" as an acknowledgement of "significance" -- Taylor's work as a point of departure for these issues.
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Any attempt to single out for scrutiny Charles Taylor’s contributions to political philosophy, from the larger contexts of his general philosophical position and concrete political commitments, can go wrong in one of two ways. Either it can fail to recognize the unusually deep links between Taylor’s political thought and his views on what are conventionally considered as “metaphysical” topics -- in particular, his unorthodox epistemological and ontological opinions -- or else it can wrongly assume that his politics can be safely ignored as both too trivial and too distant from the scholarly concerns of the philosophical critic to warrant serious consideration. In terms of Taylor’s concrete political involvements, the critic must always bear in mind the extent to which the Canadian scene has shaped his political philosophy both as to form and as to content. In terms of his general philosophy, it is important not to forget that Taylor’s political ideas are partly a reaction against the epistemological legacy of the seventeenth century, which Taylor regards as having stultified the development of the human sciences.¹

Whether this project can successfully isolate Taylor’s political philosophy without distorting it, is something which, ultimately, only the reader can judge. What can be said, at the outset, is that the two aspects of his thought which we shall examine -- his critique

¹ This conviction is constitutive of what Taylor modestly describes as his “monomania” -- i.e. his obsessive opposition to all attempts to study social reality based upon the model of the natural sciences. For those interested in discovering something like the “Unity” of Taylor’s thought, perhaps this slogan (his “one big idea”) is as useful as any other. Still, it is important not to forget that this particular hedgehog has ranged over the entire territory of modern philosophy. See: "Introduction" to Parts I & II in Charles Taylor, Philosophical Papers I & II, Cambridge, 1985, p.1.
of liberal political philosophy and his recently promulgated "Theory of Recognition" — both bear the imprint of these wider influences. While his critique of liberal "atomism" represents the continuation in the political sphere of his opposition to the model of "disengagement" inherent in both rationalism and empiricism, his "Theory of Recognition" can best be seen as an attempt to articulate his long-standing minoritarian sympathies in philosophical terms. Yet despite coming from opposite sides, as it were, of Taylor's political persona, these two aspects of his thought are, in a number of respects, profoundly interconnected. In part, this is due to the arguments which Taylor himself furnishes from among his more abstract reflections upon liberalism's shortcomings, and then subsequently applies — occasionally somewhat tendentiously — to particular instances of minority recognition. But this interconnectedness is also a product of the inherent logic of these two strands of his thought, which, when touching upon the same themes, interact in ways of which even Taylor does not seem to be fully aware. This project will concentrate on one such theme: the place of cultural minorities in society. In particular, we shall be pondering the general question of how minority recognition affects communitarian theory.

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2 The Canadian reader who does not already share Taylor's personal panacea for the national-unity problem — full recognition of Quebec as a distinct society plus radical decentralization of Federal powers — is bound to find his philosophical constructions arbitrary both in themselves, and in their application to the Canadian case. In the first place, many of his concrete accusations — that English Canada is a "rights-society", that it has so far failed to accommodate "deep diversity", etc. — hardly strike one as incontestable. But in the second place, these accusations seem theoretically vacuous even if we lay to one side the question of whether or not English Canada is guilty as charged. Are "rights" and "participation" really inversely related, or is their interaction rather more complex? Here Taylor's usual gift for subtle philosophical nuance is surprisingly absent. One cannot help feeling that, when pondering the Canadian case, the strength of Taylor's political opinions tends to dull his philosophical sensibility.
"Identity" in the Liberal/Communitarian Debate.

Although the issues of communitarianism and recognition undeniably intersect in the area of minority relations, the minoritarian version of communitarianism is something which must nevertheless be reconstructed from, rather than discovered in, the writings of Taylor and other communitarians. This is principally due to the fact that, as things stand, communitarianism is largely negative in orientation; being first of all a refutation of what communitarians see as liberalism's excessive individualism. Indeed, it was Taylor's polemic against "atomism", and the disengaged model of the human agent in general, that led to his being recruited into the communitarian camp in the first place. In spite of some minor differences in terminology, the liberal/communitarian debate can be said to hinge on the notion of "identity" — an entity about which both traditions are in agreement on the need to protect politically, while taking very different views of its ontological nature.

For liberalism, each individual ought to be left free to assemble his own identity in his own way. Any outside interference in this process, particularly state interference, is bound to distort the true development of human individuality, since each individual's own unique conception of the good life constitutes the only reliable standard of what is really best for that individual. It follows that public policy, in a liberal society, ought to be directed towards the goal of maximizing the individual's capacity for choice. Behind

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Taylor is regarded on both sides of the liberal/communitarian debate as belonging to the communitarian camp, and this study will adhere to the general consensus. However, it should be pointed out that Taylor himself has certain reservations about the label. His concern is that these terms encourage us to overlook the distinction between the "ontological" and "advocacy" issues which he defines in his essay "Cross Purposes". We shall examine this important distinction in Chapter Two. See: "Cross Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate" in Charles Taylor, Philosophical Arguments, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995.
these political recommendations lies an understanding of the individual agent as prior to any definite decision about the content of his identity; in other words, as always able to revise his ends. This minimalist conception of the individual as a choosing agent is the only "substantive" notion of individuality which liberalism feels constrained to defend. Not surprisingly, the communitarian critique of liberalism tends to begin by challenging the plausibility of this picture of the human agent.

In addition to their attack upon this abstract model of individual identity, communitarians (including Taylor) point out that "identity" also involves a collective context, inasmuch as the realization of one's personal identity depends upon a community to sustain it. This observation would seem to give a prima facie advantage to the communitarian account, since the health of such collectivities lies outside the horizon of choice of any one individual. Recently, however, Will Kymlicka has tried to defend liberalism against the charge that it cannot deal with those threats to individual identity which might emerge at the level of the community. Without departing from the liberal individualist ontology, Kymlicka makes an elaborate argument to the effect that individual identity is intrinsically linked to various "cultural structures", which under certain circumstances might deserve political protection. This notion of a "cultural structure", as a sociological rather than an ontological category, is sufficient (Kymlicka believes) to remove an embarrassing discrepancy between liberal political practice -- which is sympathetic to minority claims -- and contemporary liberal philosophy -- which on the

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whole is not. For his part, Taylor replies that Kymlicka’s solution, although clever, cannot deal with the one thing — “survivance” — which is of decisive significance to minority groups: i.e., their survival into indefinite future generations. But whatever else one might think of it, Kymlicka’s account means that communitarians are no longer in uncontested possession of the minoritarian field.

Communitarianism and Minority Communities.

Taylor’s Theory of Recognition embodies the insight that what is needed to satisfy minority aspirations is not simply minority rights (such as anti-discrimination measures) but some positive acknowledgement of their worth. Respecting a minority’s “identity” is neither just respecting its capacity to choose, nor merely protecting its cultural structure, but rather respecting its way of life as an intrinsically valuable one. In Taylor’s opinion, it is a profound mistake simply to accept minoritarian rhetoric at face value, as being concerned with nothing more than those “rights” which are their due. What minorities really crave is esteem, which can only be attained dialogically through interaction with other cultural communities. The actual realization of this kind of “recognition”, however, takes us beyond liberal pluralism’s framework of “tolerance”, to the idea that such “recognition” must somehow be ratified politically.

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Because communitarian critiques of liberalism, including Taylor's, are chiefly focussed upon refuting its ontological assumptions, they tend to inherit — in spite of their own vehement objections — liberalism's universality. Such "General Communitarianism" has been important at various times in the history of political philosophy, in its defence of the "Commonwealth" — i.e. the entire political community — against liberal individualism. However, the need to modify General Communitarianism to fit the minoritarian case raises the question of how subcommunities might affect the communitarian problematic. Can minorities merely take over the categories of General Communitarianism, and apply them to their circumstances, or are there emergent issues involved? And assuming that minoritarian communitarianism can offer a viable solution to these difficulties, can "recognition" simply be overlain on the relevant minorities, or are there emergent issues here too? In particular, does the Theory of Recognition involve ontological commitments, in the sense that its form partly determines the very existence of the entities deserving of recognition?

This project will not, of course, attempt anything as ambitious as the restatement of both the communitarian problematic (suitably modified) and the Theory of Recognition in a more defensible form, let alone try to follow up these stupendous achievements with something like a Grand Synthesis. Rather we shall content ourselves with merely observing some of the formidable difficulties which stand in the way of this sort of enterprise -- an enterprise which must be undertaken at some point by any communitarian theory that aspires to a measure of pluralism. However, it should not be concluded that because I shall be dwelling upon these difficulties, I am in some way hostile to Taylor's
basic philosophical orientation in these matters, or to the larger minoritarian project suggested by his reflections. On the contrary, I am broadly sympathetic to the communitarian critique of liberalism, especially Taylor’s assault upon the liberal ontology. It also seems to me that communitarianism must inevitably evolve a minoritarian form, if it is authentically to address precisely that sense of cultural belonging which motivated its initial creation. In addition, although I am not entirely sure what Taylor’s notion of “recognition” would normally involve, I am prepared to believe that the “psychic” dimension of minoritarian politics is the fundamental one. Such “psychic” considerations would, after all, be inextricably linked with the subjective sense of community — both consciously and unconsciously. A properly worked out problematic of recognition may well set the direction for the future of communitarian thought, and perhaps also for that of political philosophy in general.

At the same time, the very success of such a ramified communitarianism might also reveal, paradoxically, some of its major theoretical limitations. The correlation which Taylor rightly identifies between the sacrifices we can expect from an individual and the degree of positive freedom prevalent in a given society is not univocal throughout its entire range. It is not simply a question of whether or not there exists a background equilibrium which limits what the individual — even a socially-situated one — will be prepared to contribute. The problem is rather that a fuller cultural citizenship might, beyond a certain point, come at the cost of an impoverished political one. In minoritarian

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communitarianism, the danger of an overly sectarian understanding of community — if it is countenanced theoretically — would negate the very advantages which communitarianism is supposed to bring. In this dilemma, communitarianism confronts the counter-claim of liberal pluralism: that cultural goods are better pursued in the context of our private lives, outside of the framework of our common political citizenship.

Plan of the Work.

Describing how Taylor's critique of liberalism and his Theory of Recognition might fit into a larger minoritarian problematic will require a number of steps. Obviously, the notion of "identity" will be a central one, in that, for Taylor, "identity" is the reason why liberal models of the self are insufficient; it defines what one's community is, and it determines the entity which is to receive "recognition". Indeed, Taylor's interest in the modern identity is a fundamental theme in his general philosophy, and includes aspects which are beyond the scope of the present inquiry. The relation of "identity" to the "self" is the main issue at stake in the liberal/communitarian debate because of its relevance to the nature of "individuality", and to whether (and to what extent) this is detachable from the nature and purposes of the community. The first part of Chapter Two will therefore examine what sort of entity "identity" is ontologically. As we shall see, there is a lot to be said for the communitarian view — especially Taylor's version of

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9 This study is only tangentially concerned with (and thus will do scant justice to) Taylor's passionate interest in the origins and development of the modern identity. Yet this theme is actually more prominent in Taylor's thought than is communitarianism, and is the subject of his massive tome Sources of the Self. Our focus prevents us from rectifying the discrepancy, but it is worth mentioning just to keep things in the proper perspective. See: Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity, Cambridge, Mass. 1989.
it – that “identity” is not separable from the “self” in the sense that liberalism requires it
to be.

The second part of Chapter Two will take up Kymlicka’s suggestion that the
liberal account of individual identity is sufficiently robust to generate a collective
expression – a “cultural structure” – which is in turn capable of modelling all of the
important collective-level difficulties which a community might encounter, and then
resolving them from within the resources of liberal theory. Potentially, this kind of
formulation could bypass entirely communitarianism’s ontological reservations, in so far
as these have political consequences, by showing that communitarianism’s political
concerns can be adequately captured by a purely sociological category. Although I shall
be expressing some scepticism about whether Kymlicka has really succeeded in his
demonstration, he does raise an interesting issue with his notion of “cultural structure”;
in that such structures undeniably have a certain sociological presence (whether or not
they are also “ontological”), and their dynamics are obviously of decisive significance for
the fate of any particular identity. Clearly, both sides of the debate need to articulate
their separate understandings as to what a “cultural structure” is, and why it might matter
to political theory.

Chapter Three will explore some of the difficulties that emerge when we decide
that the community in which we are socially embedded is a cultural subcommunity, rather
than the “community” which corresponds to the existing political expression. This is a
strictly communitarian conundrum in that liberalism – even Kymlicka’s variety – is free
to stress the universality of political citizenship. Still, one is inevitably driven to it; in the sense that once one accepts the reality of social-embeddedness, and once one acknowledges a "thicker" citizenship than mere political allegiance, then one is obliged to consider the case of cultural subcommunities even if one does not also have the cause of minority recognition on one's agenda. Taylor does have the cause of minority recognition on his agenda, and thus it is doubly important that the cultural subcommunities in which our identities are implicated, and which can only be fully realized through recognition, can be somehow reconciled to the political order.

In Chapter Four we shall try to come to terms with what it might mean to "recognize" a community. Taylor says surprisingly little about the content of recognition, beyond emphasizing that "it" is essential to the self-respect of minorities, and that "it" is a pre-condition for their willing acceptance of political society. His essay on the "Politics of Recognition" largely consists in refutations of (anticipated) liberal objections to the whole idea. It is thus difficult to determine what, concretely, we are being asked to endorse -- although Taylor seems to intend "recognition" as a purely symbolic good: one that can be conceptually distinguished from any "real" constitutional powers. Nevertheless, we are hardly condemned to silence in the absence of further revelations. The mere fact that some social entities are to be singled out for special honourable mention reproduces many of the same difficulties, on the symbolic level, which we encountered on the "material" level of minoritarian communitarianism. How are we to

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10 All the same, he clearly believes that recognition ought to be followed up with substantial "concrete" powers, but "recognition" itself is not defined as including those powers.
identify the community to be recognized? And how would this "recognition" affect the legitimacy of the larger society? The answers to these questions may lead us to a better understanding of the sort of public space constituted by recognition.

In Chapter Five we shall attempt to derive some tentative conclusions about this kind of project. It seems clear that there is something fundamentally wrong with the liberal construction of individuality. Social-embeddedness and collective life have to be taken seriously. The liberal ontology, which is bound up with the traditional picture of the disengaged agent, has to be abandoned in political philosophy. The truly problematical nexus in communitarian thought is not between the ontological status of the individual and that of the collectivity, but between the cultural community and the state-community. Finding the appropriate vocabulary to negotiate this chasm would require an entirely new articulation of communitarian theory – one considerably beyond the scope of the present investigation. This project will have been successful if it at least helps us to glimpse the contours of such an articulation.
CHAPTER 2

"Social-Embeddedness" in the Liberal/Communitarian Debate

The Unjoined Nature of the Liberal/Communitarian Debate.

Historically, communitarian opposition to liberalism has been rooted in the feeling that liberals are insensitive to the legitimate claims of the community upon the autonomous individual. Although in the course of their debate this accusation has undergone many changes in formulation, the sensibility that gives rise to it seems as elusive as ever. There remains something curiously "unjoined" about the liberal/communitarian debate -- as if the two contending parties were unable to articulate in words the concerns which divide each from the other.

Recently, Charles Taylor has offered us an intriguing explanation of why this should be so. According to him, the liberal/communitarian debate is at cross purposes because of the failure of most commentators (particularly the liberals) to distinguish between the "ontological" and the "advocacy" issues involved. By the "ontological" issue, Taylor means the question of that in which our "individuality" consists, and its dependence, if any, upon our social context. Under this general heading come problems such as "atomism" versus "holism", which debates whether or not societies are best understood as collections of individuals, and whether the social good can usefully be conceived of as a mere concatenation of individual goods. Against this stands what

11 "Cross Purposes".
Taylor calls the “advocacy” issue of “individualism” versus “collectivism”, which concerns the more normative question of the degree to which decisions with significant social consequences should be brought under collective control.\textsuperscript{12}

In Taylor’s view, the quality of the liberal/communitarian debate has suffered due to our failure to realize that the “ontological” and “advocacy” issues, although strongly related, are nevertheless distinct questions. The resulting confusion has obscured the fact that the connection between these two issues is something that itself needs to be theorized, rather than simply being taken as determined by the stance which one adopts on the other issue. Instead of being thought of as merely an alternative formulation of the “advocacy” question, the “ontological” issue ought to be viewed as a “condition of possibility”, which limits the range of positions that are realistically available on the individualism/collectivism continuum. In itself, such an approach does not preclude such idiosyncratic combinations as the “holist-individualist” -- that is, someone who believes both that we owe our very humanity to our interrelations with others, and that the pattern of these relations is best left to each individual to decide -- or the “atomist-collectivist” -- i.e., someone who subscribes to the principle of methodological individualism, while simultaneously advocating a high degree of public accountability. Indeed, Taylor actually cites Wilhelm von Humboldt as an example of a “holist-individualist”, and B.F. Skinner as an example of a “atomist-collectivist”. What a clear grasp of the ontological base of the advocacy issue can achieve, however, is a heightened awareness of the forms of

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid. pp. 181-182.}
social-embeddedness which the various existing stances on the "advocacy" question presuppose.13

**Part I: The Ontological Construction of Identity.**

**Social-Embeddedness as an Ontological Problem.**

It is Taylor's contention that the form of social-embeddedness presupposed by modern liberal political philosophy -- especially by John Rawls and his followers -- is not very plausible.14 It is not enough to respond -- as liberals are wont to do -- that leading proponents of modern liberalism, such as Ronald Dworkin and indeed Rawls himself, make explicit mention of our social interdependency as the essential context in which true individuality is realized.15 For what concerns Taylor here are not the social prerequisites for having an "identity" -- the presence in society of inspiring exemplars, the existence of an adequate range of lifestyle choices, the material means to pursue them, etc. -- but the ontological assumptions about human individuality that liberals make concerning the entity which is supposed to possess these "options". When we look at liberal political thought with Taylor's distinction in clear view, we can see that a particular conception of social ontology has shaped the liberal tradition from the very beginning.

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14 "Atomism" in *Philosophical Papers, II*.
For liberalism, "Rights" are both the fundamental object of public policy and the ontological point of entry of the individual into society. Much of what is most characteristic of liberal theory can only be fully understood through an awareness of this dual role. The elaborate superstructure of the Rawlsian system, for instance, with its famous maximin principle and its carefully wrought original position (fortunately a heuristic device, not an actual historical event) is designed to "rig" society as it were, that is, to bring about a social outcome with a legitimate, but limited, scope for public intervention. The only social-level goods which liberalism is prepared to accept are those which are either assumed in its axioms or else derived from them. Even contemporary liberalism's unmistakably deductivist flavour -- as compared with, say, Aristotelianism, which believes in a plurality of goods -- can be traced to this insistence upon taking the problem of political obligation as the point of departure for deciding what "public goods" ought to be pursued.

If the essence of Taylor's objection -- and communitarianism's unease with liberalism more generally -- is ontological in nature, then liberal protestations of their own sociological awareness may fall importantly wide of the mark. The problem hinges on what one takes the philosophical significance of social-embeddedness to be. Liberalism's indignant counter-claim that they not only acknowledge, but positively affirm, "social-embeddedness" -- based upon their previously expressed desire for the greatest possible latitude for the individual chooser -- suggests an understanding of that term which does not touch upon the concept of individual autonomy. The argument which liberals believe they are countering is the claim that a ludicrously unrealistic view of
human self-sufficiency comes part and parcel with the liberal package. They are thus at some pains to emphasize their own commitment to a social matrix of choice out of which citizens might fashion their individual identities. In so arguing, they are indeed contesting an accusation commonly hurled at liberalism. But the point which communitarians are trying to make with respect to "social-embeddedness" is an ontological one concerning the liberal construction of "individuality", not a psychological one about our need for the companionship of others, nor a material one about our dependence upon what they can provide. What is really at stake, in the communitarian critique of liberalism, is whether such crucial notions in the liberal repertoire as "identity" and "choice" adequately capture both our self-understandings as members of a community, and our intuitions as to what "community" means.

Identity and the "Unencumbered Self".

With regard to our self-understandings, perhaps, liberals may well ask whether it really matters. After all, liberalism -- being principally concerned with procedural matters -- consciously seeks justifications which avoid reference to the individual's motivations and desires. Liberal theory defends a given individual's pursuit of his ends on the procedural ground that individuals ought to be free to choose their own goals, not because of any intrinsic merit which those goals may possess. Yet it goes without saying that to the individual concerned -- even one who subscribes to liberal political philosophy -- those choices will be justified by reasons internal to themselves (to the extent, of course, that they have "reasons" at all), not by any philosophical celebration of the faculty of
choice. In other words, a certain distance between philosophical justification and our self-understandings is built into the very structure of liberal theory, and is considered by liberals to be one of their theory's main advantages.

Indeed, at times liberals seem almost to revel in their ingenuity in deducing new indirect justifications for common human aspirations. Thus, Will Kymlicka's renown in liberal circles comes from his having discovered a way to defend minority cultures from within the framework of Rawlsian liberalism. His solution -- that assimilation might impose unequal disadvantages upon members of minority communities -- is one that could not possibly be affirmed by the members of those communities themselves, who presumably view their way of life as intrinsically valuable. 16

But the divorce between our self-understandings and our philosophical justifications, although a tempting simplification from an argumentative standpoint, cannot really be carried through. In the human sciences, our consciousness of social reality is not only an alternative (and possibly mistaken) description of that reality; it is also partially constitutive of what we are attempting to understand. Though philosophical analysis may legitimately seek to challenge, and even to modify, this consciousness, it cannot simply overturn or ignore it. Our self-understandings, as members of a community, are not merely definitions which we typically give for "social-embeddedness" -- they are how we experience our "individuality".

The liberal model of "identity", which gives communitarians so much trouble, is one that understands it to consist of the set of options actualized by a choosing "self".

16 ibid. pp. 162-205.
This picture of human agency as “unencumbered” has struck many communitarians as counter-intuitive and has occasioned a number of attempts to repudiate it in favour of a more robust conception. But one misses the full force of the communitarian objection, if one interprets it purely as a “negative” attempt to undermine a fundamental liberal premise. The sense of “identity” -- as it is understood and felt by most human beings -- seems to implicate us in various collectivities in a manner which is much more profound than mere “choice”. What Taylor has described as the “love of the particular” is a sense of belonging to a specific cultural community (often, but not exclusively, a national one), and an emotional concern with its historic fate. This contrasts sharply with the liberal view, which believes (implicitly, at least) that a “community” is a group of people with a common conception of the good life, who share access to certain cultural resources. The peculiar form of attachment known as “a sense of belonging” involves the ability to experience what happens to “my” community as in some sense happening to “me” and is thus essentially non-instrumental in character.¹⁸

At first glance, the communitarian model -- in which “my identity” does not correlate with “my person” -- seems every bit as counter-intuitive as its liberal counterpart. Indeed, the apparent incoherence of the above formulation might have something to do with the liberal tendency to misinterpret the communitarian ontology in the light of their own: i.e. as essentially the liberal “self”, but with certain basic “choices”

¹⁷ This theme in particular has been central to the work of Michael Sandel. See his: "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self". Political Theory, v.12. 1984.

permanently affixed to it. In trying to adjudicate an issue of this kind, it is important to remember that our intuitions, being different for different philosophers, can only take us so far. Mere comparison of the liberal and communitarian ontologies with our intuitions is likely to leave the discussion no further ahead than when we started. What the liberal/communitarian debate needs, if it is to escape the labyrinth of "incommensurability", are potential points of appraisal beyond the raw statements of their respective ontologies. Fortunately, there are a number of strategies available for "joining" the debate in this way.

The Conflict with Popular Intuition.

The first is the consideration already mentioned: namely, the claim that the communitarian model better describes most people's experience of individuality. This is not the appeal to intuitions which we have just agreed to lay aside, but rather the bald assertion that most people in fact hold this intuition. If true, then the liberal rejection of the communitarian model involves denying the legitimacy of the inchoate sense of identity felt by the majority of the population, in favour of what liberals believe that sense of identity ought to be. While not in itself fatal to the liberal position -- they might, after all, exhort us to be "rational" -- it certainly would count as a serious blow against it.

The Nature of Public Goods

A much more decisive test, however, is available in the fiercely-contested area of the so-called "public goods". In spite of their divergent opinions as to the philosophical
significance of such goods, the *prima facie* fact of their existence is conceded by both liberals and communitarians; and indeed, it is difficult to see how they could do otherwise. A phrase like "in the interests of the community" is not incoherent on the face of it -- even for those who prefer to render it as "in the interests of most members of the community" or some similar circumlocution. Now, one of the most important communitarian criticisms of liberalism is the claim that liberals are unable to offer an adequate account of these goods.

This claim can be taken in (at least) two ways. On the one hand, the failure of liberalism to account adequately for public goods could be seen as damaging to its credibility in the sense that an acceptable social theory ought to be able to find a place for such ubiquitous social phenomena. On the other hand, and more crucially for our purposes in this section, the existence of public goods could pose a problem for the liberal subject in the sense that they might require a socially-situated "self" not merely for their realization but for their very definition. Because of its relation to the "self", this latter interpretation is distinctly communitarian; whereas the former, as it were, straddles the liberal/communitarian divide since there are forms of the "public good" which might be compatible with the definition of the liberal subject, but cannot necessarily be realized by the liberal subject.

This possibility that the definition of the "public good" might be consistent with the definition of the "liberal subject" and yet still be unattainable sociologically is one that we will want to consider when we examine what is involved in sustaining a "cultural
structure. In the meantime, we need to focus upon the specifically ontological component of the debate, and ponder the communitarian accusation that liberalism's failings in this regard are built into the very structure of liberal theory. Liberals, of course, believe that the prima facie existence of public goods is quite easily accounted for, and deploy essentially three strategies for doing so. The first is reductionism: the claim that a given "public good" is actually just an aggregation of individual goods.\textsuperscript{19} For example, as noted above, the phrase "in the interests of the community" might plausibly be reformulated as "in the interests of most members of the community". Obviously, a solution of this kind can only be carried through successfully if the reformulated version does not distort the meaning of the original.

The second basic strategy is the disarmingly simple one of claiming that the public good in question is not desirable (or, at least, not indispensable) in a liberal society. Indeed, this particular strategy is not just a debating-point available to liberals: it is actually a restatement of one of the fundamental goals of liberal theory. By and large, liberals dislike collective justifications, and the elaborate superstructure of liberal political philosophy was specifically \textit{designed} to exclude them. The success of this kind of strategy hinges on the critic's intuition as to whether a given public good can be disavowed, and is thus a little more fluid than the other strategies. In practice, policies to promote the "public good" such as state support for the arts are thought to be

\textsuperscript{19} For a trenchant critique, see: "Irreducibly Social Goods" in \textit{Philosophical Arguments}.
dispensable (with Ronald Dworkin dissenting), while those associated with democratic governance or minority rights are not.

The third basic strategy is to claim that a given public good can be deduced from the “principles of justice” (or some similar set of fundamental assumptions) and is thus a legitimate exception. Quite reasonably, liberalism needs to make some collective claims in order to lay down its basic conceptual infrastructure. Traditionally, the liberal formula has involved restraining individual self-interest in the name of individual self-interest — usually through some sort of contractarian device. Much of the philosophical energy that goes into liberal political philosophy is expended in grounding this substratum of obligations in order that above it a profusion of liberal choices might flourish. Thus in Locke’s “Social Contract”, for instance, one trades away an optional course of action (e.g., stealing from one’s neighbour) in exchange for a collectively-secured “right” (protection from one’s neighbour). Similarly, in the Rawlsian system, one rationally opts for its proposed insurance scheme because one is hypothetically denied knowledge of one’s own circumstances in life. The success of the third strategy is a question of whether a particular public good might repose upon such fundamental premisses without undue arbitrariness.

Upon pain of an embarrassing counter-example, liberalism must account for every single public good which communitarians put forward by means of one (or more) of these three strategies. Whether they actually succeed in doing so is inevitably a matter of judgement; suffice to say that, in communitarian eyes, liberal explanations often seem

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either "reductive" in the worst sense of the word, implausible in what they propose to do without, or else absurdly tendentious in what they claim to have anticipated. Various specimens of the "public good" have been submitted by communitarians, each occasioning a controversial reply from the liberals. But with his concept of "survivance", Charles Taylor may have found liberalism's Achilles heel.

By "survivance", Taylor means the desire on the part of members of a given culture that their community survive into future generations. This desire has a subtle ontological aspect which makes it especially damaging to the liberal case. But first it should be noted that its minoritarian subject-matter already poses a challenge for liberalism. Minority communities, *qua communities*, qualify as "irreducible social goods". Moreover, they are social entities towards which liberal politics -- if not always liberal political theory -- are disposed to be sympathetic. Two of the strategies available to liberals for coping with the problem of public goods thus appear to be ruled out from the very beginning.

Yet the difficulty goes much deeper than this. What is at stake in Taylor's example of *survivance* is not simply the existence (and legitimacy) of minority communities, but the unexceptional desire on the part of the members of those groups that their community outlive them. This aspiration raises ontological issues in the sense that its justification cannot be traced to the self-interest of those who hold that aspiration. It

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raises doubts that the liberal defence of minority communities can pass the ontological test even if it can pass the sociological one. But can it pass the sociological test?

**Part II: Identity as a Sociological Entity.**

While Taylor is indubitably right that their debate is at cross purposes, the ontological construction of identity by no means exhausts the important issues at stake between liberals and communitarians. Whether we conceive of “identity” as a complex relation — *insinuating* the individual into the community — or simply as a set of cultural goods which the individual has “assembled”, it is undeniably also a definite *sociological* entity, linking together the many individuals who partake in it. Such “cultural structures” — as Kymlicka calls them — provide the necessary infrastructural support and participant networks for the social realization of “identity”.\(^\text{23}\) Without such structures, an individual’s “identity” (however conceived) would be a species of personal fantasy, not a potentially viable social force. This consideration applies to the most banal, as well as to the most exalted, instances of “cultural structures”. Thus, a large-scale identity like “being Italian” presumably involves the many *obvious*, and even more numerous *intangible*, aspects of Italian Civilization. On the other hand, a rather more mundane identity like “being a Tennis Player” nevertheless implies the existence of tennis courts and other tennis players.

At its most basic level — that of a set of institutional arrangements — the existence of such “cultural structures” is completely uncontroversial. Both liberals and

\(^{23}\) Kymlicka, *op.cit.* pp. 165-166.
communitarians (whose social ontology already incorporates elements of communal life in its definition of "individual identity") happily concede that such supra-individual entities provide the fundamental context in which individual identities are realized. The difficulties only begin to emerge when we inquire as to the formal properties of these "cultural structures". Does Kymlicka intend the latter term in "cultural structures" to live up to its connotation of an ordered interrelation between the elements of a system, or merely to name those elements considered collectively? To take a physical analogy: does the term "human body" mean the functioning of bodily organs within a living human being, or does it simply provide a convenient term for referring to the sum total of all human organs? Certainly Kymlicka gives us ample grounds to suspect that he adheres to the latter interpretation as far as "cultural structures" are concerned.24

As a generic term, the concept of "cultural structure" remains valuable for two reasons. In the first place, a great deal of sense can still be made of notions like "cultural decline", etc. — even with a conception of "structure" that treats it as a mere agglomeration of its components. Secondly, with regard to the sociological nature of "cultural structures", an assumption of diversity must prevail. There are no prima facie grounds for supposing that entities like a nation, an ethnic group, a form of religious life, a sporting activity, and so on, possess a common systemic structure.

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24 Although the term is certainly useful, it is not at all clear that Kymlicka himself thinks of "cultural structures" systematically. On one occasion he refers cryptically to "collective action problems", but this usage is ultimately in conflict with his own resource-based understanding of that term. [Ibid.] p. 194.
Kymlicka's invention of the concept of "cultural structure" forms the centrepiece of his attempt to defend minority cultures from a liberal perspective. The strictly minoritarian nature of his enterprise is, of course, one of its chief advantages from the liberal point of view, which desires a means of addressing the perceived absence of an adequate defence of minority rights within liberal theory, while side-stepping the more general claims of traditional communitarianism. In itself, however, the idea of a cultural structure is every bit as applicable (if not more so) to the larger society as it is to its constituent minorities. What is specifically minoritarian about Kymlicka's theory is not the mere existence of such structures, but the moral lesson which he draws from their vicissitudes.

The Idea of "Cultural Decline".

Because Kymlicka is principally concerned with the unequal disadvantages which a given minority might experience relative to other minorities, he is not particularly troubled by (if indeed, he can even attach meaning to) forms of "cultural decline" which a community might experience historically -- i.e. relative to itself. In principle, though, there seems to be no reason why a differently conceived moral account might not make use of "cultural structures" within general communitarianism. Ironically, such an account might regard -- and in Taylor's formulation does regard -- the instrumental stance taken by liberalism as itself a symptom of cultural decline.

Traditionally, communitarian theory has been deontological in the mode of assessment which it has brought to moral questions. In this respect, it contrasts sharply
with modern liberalism, which has tended -- almost as a polemical matter -- to insist upon a purely consequentialist perspective. Whatever one might make of the deontological approach, it is clear that as a mode of assessment it is better suited to the evaluation of cultural mutations without a readily identifiable victim or beneficiary.

The problem of cultural decline really involves two distinct questions: what exactly is meant by the idea of "threatening a cultural structure", and how this state of affairs acquires moral significance. Of course, notions like "cultural threat" and "cultural decline" are hardly value neutral, and therefore the distinction cannot be portrayed as one between an empirical and a moral issue. But we must, at any rate, draw some kind of distinction between how the social environment for a given community might evolve in ways it considers disadvantageous, and how this particular evaluation becomes a matter for universal moral concern which ought to be binding upon society at large. As we have seen, liberalism does not permit us to say that a community's unfortunate circumstances become a matter for more general concern because that community's way of life is intrinsically valuable. All that we are allowed to do, within liberalism, is to show that these unfortunate circumstances compromise the rights of each member of that community to "equality" -- in the liberal sense that they contravene the famous "principles of justice". In this way, a community-level problem is comfortably relocated within the liberal/individualist repertoire. Obviously, one of the fundamental lines of attack available to communitarians is the critique of this account of the moral significance of cultural decline.
The Deontological View.

The question of what actually constitutes "cultural decline", however, is presupposed by any such account, whether liberal or communitarian. And in spite of the intuitive reasonableness of the notion, communitarians have always had enormous difficulties in supplying a precise formulation of this concept. The original "communitarians" (if we can even call them that), against whom early-modern liberalism reacted, believed in a transcendent moral order where the appropriate mode of assessment was properly deontological. In this respect, it may indeed be a little misleading to describe them as "communitarians", since what was at issue was not one's embeddedness in the community, but rather one's attunement to a divine "order of ideas". Communitarian thought has been marked ever since by its transcendental origin. Part of even contemporary communitarianism's conceptual difficulties stems from this desire to maintain some sort of "objective" standard in addition to those more narrowly based upon the community.

The Definitional View.

The echo of this deontological "order of ideas" is still clearly audible in the comparatively recent writings of Lord Devlin, where the liberal-consequentialist

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25 This point is discussed at a number of places in Taylor's work. For example: "Rationality" in Charles Taylor, Philosophical Papers, II.

26 Rorty, for instance, presents the issue as a choice between a transcendent standard for deciding moral questions (Moralität) and historical standards drawn from the mores of particular communities (Sittlichkeit). He then discovers that communitarianism is based upon a confusion of these alternatives. But perhaps all this goes to show is that communitarian theory must take a Hegelian form.
aspirations for the English legal system are criticized in relation to the traditional goal of that system -- i.e. the "enforcement of morals". Yet Devlin's communitarianism is nevertheless recognizably "modern" in the emphasis which he places upon popular morality -- that is, the community's interpretation of the moral law -- as the standard against which to measure instances of cultural (or moral) decline. He thus lands himself in the difficulty that "cultural decline" can have no definite trans-historical meaning; rather, it refers merely to a proposed innovation which a particular historical community judges negatively. But what exactly is this "community" which is "declining"? It is already a commonplace that liberalism claims there is no such "community", in so far as "community" is taken to refer to something beyond the aggregate of the individuals who constitute it. As argued above, however, this is also in a sense true of the strictly deontological view, where "community" is a poor cousin -- a kind of earthly executor -- of the sole ontologically-significant entity: the Divine Will. What then is Devlin's view?

Rhetorically at least, Devlin gets off to a good start. "What makes a society", he tells us, "is community of ideas". Moreover, "every society has a moral structure as well as a political one". These declarations might suggest that Devlin is operating with a conception of "cultural structure" with emergent characteristics: i.e. those which are not present at the level of its constituent individuals. But a closer scrutiny of his arguments

29 ibid. p. 9.
especially his exchange with H.L.A. Hart reveals that the ontological breakthrough has not yet occurred. Devlin allows himself to be bullied into accepting a "definitional view" of this moral structure, according to which a "society" is simply identical with the moral dogmas which it happens to affirm. On this view, all change is necessarily for the worse (since the status quo is its own criterion of goodness), and "cultural decline" occurs merely with the popular rejection of one of these dogmas.

Cultural Decline: Deontology and Definition.

The "deontological" and the "definitional" views both suffer from the obvious disadvantage that their postulation of the "community" is entirely arbitrary; in the former case, as an artefact of the Order of Nature, and in the latter case, as a tautology. Yet they at least offer us two models, albeit tentative, of how our earlier questions might be answered. Both the meaning of "cultural decline" and its moral significance can be accounted for using these models. For the deontological view, "cultural decline" consists in a given community's descent in the Cosmic Order, which, being an "objective" moral order, also accounts for its universal moral significance. For the definitional view, "cultural decline" consists in a major departure from a community's more-or-less arbitrary conception of the Good (Devlin thinks minor departures might be taken in stride), which, regardless of its "objective" moral significance, human communities are fated to combat.

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But it is as communitarian theories that they fall short, due to the arbitrariness noted above. Although we can still obtain answers to our questions without a robust collective ontology – as Kymlicka's modified version of liberalism amply demonstrates – the credibility of these answers partakes of the purely assertive quality of their premisses. A plausible communitarian account of "cultural decline" must be annexed to a non-trivial theory of cultural structure, where "decline" is understood in terms of damage to that structure. Furthermore, as a communitarian account, its theory of cultural structure must also take us beyond liberalism's purely aggregative understanding of that concept. One of Taylor's not inconsiderable achievements has been to show communitarians a promising way of meeting these challenges.

Taylor's Hermeneutic Method: Inter-Subjective and Common Meanings.

In his defence of the hermeneutic approach to the social sciences – as opposed to the "empirical" approach, which (he thinks) is characteristic of natural science – Taylor points out that the basic units in the study of human communities are "inter-subjective meanings" rather than, as the empiricists would have it, "brute data".\(^\text{32}\) Epistemologically, the difference between these "ultimate units" has two fundamental consequences. In the first place, "inter-subjective meanings" are always susceptible of reinterpretation: there is no pretence of having broken through the "hermeneutic circle" to some kind of "primitive", presuppositionless observation. Consequently, the "Truth" about

\(^{32}\) *Interpretation and the Sciences of Man* in *Philosophical Papers,* II.
inter-subjective meanings is always relative to the background assumptions that frame a given discussion in the social sciences, and provide that discussion with operational criteria as to what is even to count as a "fact". Questioning those criteria is certainly possible, but to do so merely moves the conversation to another level framed by another set of background assumptions. Under these conditions, contributing to a given debate in the social sciences becomes a matter of determining the level of abstraction appropriate to it. In the second place, certain sets of inter-subjective meanings are "constitutive" of human communities, in the sense that they influence their self-understandings (not necessarily consciously) and thereby become incorporated into their "social reality". To understand such communities as communities, therefore, requires (at least in the first instance) an attunement to that level of abstraction in which these "inter-subjective meanings" can be taken as a datum.

This picture of "community" as an entity largely "constituted" by ideas, existing against an irreducibly meaning-laden background provided by a particular historical culture, bears obvious resemblances to the mediaeval "Order of Ideas" which liberalism superseded. Yet it lacks the arbitrary theological overtones of that conception, resting instead upon an eminently "realistic" (if not perhaps "positivist") account of the socially-formed nature of the individual as a "person", as distinct from a biological organism. It thus retains most of the advantages of the deontological view, whilst extending its insights in a number of important ways. One of these, clearly, is the

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33 *ibid*, pp. 38-39.
emphasis which it places upon *language*. In the old deontological view, although it certainly made allowances for entities like "languages" and "nations", etc. (cf. the "Tower of Babel"), the position of language was not really central.\(^{34}\) In a social world constituted by "meaning", however, the primary means by which such meanings are articulated -- i.e. language -- is obviously of decisive significance. For this reason, Taylor's model is also more *communitarian* than the deontological view, in that this means of articulation corresponds to socially-delimited communities of language speakers.

Inter-subjective meanings, scaled to the appropriate level of abstraction, are for Taylor the *an sich* aspect of what makes a community: the preconscious background assumptions by which a group of people order their lives. But for Taylor, a genuine community must also be *für sich*: it must possess some consciousness of itself as a community.\(^{35}\) This aspect of collective existence is provided for by what he calls "common meanings", which are those inter-subjective meanings that a given community both possesses *and knows itself to possess*, and which provide a touchstone for its life as a community.\(^{36}\) The knowledge that others in one's community share a commitment to a cherished value is, of course, a "public good" which is not reducible to the level of individual preferences.


\(^{36}\) *Interpretation and the Sciences of Man*, pp. 38-39.
For communitarian theory, Taylor's model represents an important advance inasmuch as it provides an understanding of "community" which is neither trivial nor purely aggregative, and which, in addition, offers us a plausible view of how such a community might be said to have suffered "damage". It goes beyond liberalism's purely aggregative conception in the sense that not only are individuals expected to express "external preferences" (a liberal taboo), but they are also expected to derive satisfaction from the fact that others in their community share those preferences. This formulation allows us to visualize "damage" to the community in terms of the dis-integration of its common meanings and values – not in the sense that these things "define" the community, but in the sense that the individuals who comprise the community can no longer realize their second-order desires based upon the old pattern. And while Taylor's theory may yet be too abstract for some (liberal) critics, it is undeniably a "sociological" one: being based upon the very real (if often ephemeral) facts of public opinion.

The Liberal Conception of Community.

Still, whether through sustained moral and substantive disagreement or merely the failure to grasp the essence of Taylor's argument, many liberals remain suspicious of any theory that attempts to blur the distinction between the "individual" and the "community" – even if that theory rests upon a plausible sociological basis. For such critics, Taylor's model does this by allowing for "external preferences" -- that is, preferences that I might have respecting the circumstances or dispositions of others -- which erode the distinction
between what the individual desires for himself, and what the community can be said to “desire” based upon the outcome of a complex process of collective decision. What the individual thinks that collective decision should be -- if consistent with the “principles of justice” -- will be a legitimate personal opinion, but not one that (liberals believe) confuses individual desires for the community with the democratically-determined desires of the community.

The persuasiveness of this line of attack will no doubt depend upon the reader's prior attitude to the liberal/communitarian dispute over the nature of "individuality" discussed previously. It is perhaps not surprising that the communitarian conception of "community" should encounter resistance similar to its notion of "individuality" -- given the deep-seated belief in the autonomy of the individual in our culture. Although Taylor's formulation can hardly be dismissed as "metaphysical" (as an earlier generation of analytical philosophers would have been inclined to do), it does conflict with this very fundamental aspect of our philosophical tradition -- as Taylor himself recognizes. Yet misguided or not, the liberal critique of the very idea of "community" does land them in something of a dilemma when it comes to the defence of minority rights -- a central concern of liberal political practice. Because liberalism proposes to avoid any kind of collective ontology -- to the point of insisting that the individual adopt an ultimately instrumental stance towards the question of his social participation -- the entity that assumes the mantle of "community" (by default, as it were) is none other than the political unit itself. For cultural minorities within that larger "community", this creates
the obvious difficulty that the "lifestyle choices" constitutive of their way of life are evaluated with respect to a "universalist" criterion in which they play no part. Even if this state of affairs did not raise serious doubts about the credibility of the liberal conception, it would nevertheless conflict with the principled commitment to minority rights characteristic of liberal politics.

Kymlicka on Cultural Decline.

The attempt to overcome this troubling discrepancy has been the whole point of Will Kymlicka's justly acclaimed philosophical writings. And as the most plausible of "liberal" efforts to wrestle with this issue so far, Kymlicka's answer will no doubt become the major alternative to communitarian theories such as Taylor's, which feel constrained to defend our communal involvements by defending the idea of "community" itself. The sheer ingenuity of Kymlicka's solution will make his work an important milestone even for those of us who do not believe that the Rawlsian system can be rescued by mere amendment. For Kymlicka has shown us that it is indeed possible to arrive at some sort of understanding of "cultural decline", and its moral import, without postulating any kind of collective entity with independent moral claims. Furthermore, while Kymlicka acknowledges (indeed, emphasizes) the sociological fact of the existence of "cultural structures", he neatly avoids any ontological consequences that these might have. Regardless of whether or not we consider the resulting theory to be adequate in the final analysis, we can at least pay homage to Kymlicka for his initial achievement.
The agenda for a liberal theory of community is clear enough. What must be affirmed is that many of the most fundamental choices with which an individual constructs his identity -- the activities in which he engages, the people with whom he associates, and so on -- are systematically clustered in patterns of behaviour which we correlate with his "ethnicity". To the extent that these patterns possess an institutional expression, they attain sociological reality as "communities". What must be avoided is any suggestion that the community thereby becomes a "self-originating source of valid [moral] claims"\(^\text{37}\), any movement, in other words, from sociological reality to ontological legitimacy. And that the central issue is one of moral ontology (as Kymlicka quite properly stresses)\(^\text{38}\) -- and not necessarily one of opposition to the content of some community-based proposal -- is an expression of what is truly distinctive about the liberal position. What liberals find objectionable about communitarian claims is not, in the first instance, their perniciousness, but rather the presumption that the community -- *qua community* -- is the sort of entity which can experience moral preferences. Liberals are ever mindful of the widespread tendency to *personify* collectivities, as if a phrase like "the interests of the nation" referred to something other than some aggregation of its inhabitants' interests.

Kymlicka's attempt to come to terms with "community" as a social fact, without making any concessions regarding the priority of the individual, is largely successful in meeting our earlier criteria for a viable theory of community. He offers us a non-trivial

\(^{37}\) Kymlicka, *op.cit.* p. 140.

\(^{38}\) *ibid.* p. 162.
account of "cultural structure" (in this case, of course, intentionally an aggregative one), some suggestions on how such a structure might be "damaged" or "decline", as well as his own special explanation of how that decline might give rise to moral claims. In so doing, he remains ontologically faithful to the tradition that he upholds, refusing any view of community beyond that of a set of cultural resources and any definition of the individual as other than a consumer of those resources. But although it is certainly possible to avoid overtly defining "individuality" in terms of "community" (and vice versa), the liberal ontology nevertheless places very definite limits on the sort of sociological account of "community" that one might give. And although Kymlicka by and large respects those limits (perhaps to his credit), the fact that he does so merely shows that his success is relative to the strictures which liberalism has laid down, not that the theory of community implied by those strictures is itself adequate.

Problems with Kymlicka's Model.

As argued above, a theory of community, if it is to be consonant with the liberal ontology, must reject (or otherwise explain) "irreducible public goods": i.e. goods which it is impossible to account for in terms of individual preferences and desires. Taken as a moral proposition, this means that liberals are free to lay aside such goods on the grounds that they presuppose an ontologically-suspicious foundation. The only recourse available to an opponent of liberalism (apart from pointing out the sheer intuitive implausibility of some of these denials) would be to demonstrate the "irreducibility" of certain values to which liberals remain passionately committed. But the attempt to
provide a sociological characterization of "community" does not permit liberals this degree of latitude. While the notion of "community" is indubitably a somewhat nebulous one, allowing for a number of reasonable characterizations, the object to which it refers is nevertheless empirical in nature, and thus susceptible to comparison with "reality" -- however ill-defined. If the social entities which we are attempting to capture by the name of "communities" possess irreducible features -- aspects which cannot be devolved upon the individual -- then the "health" of those entities once again exceeds liberalism's grasp -- even in the absence of an ontological reason for doing so. The challenge for Kymlicka and other would-be proponents of a liberal theory of community is thus twofold: to generate an definition of community which is consistent with the Rawlsian tradition, and to demonstrate its ability to account for the empirical aspects of "community" considered as a sociological phenomenon. It is not at all clear that Kymlicka does an adequate job of discharging the latter obligation.

The examples which Kymlicka gives of possible threats to a cultural structure suggest an understanding of "community" as a kind of finite pool of resources, access to which must be inevitably restricted. He begins by showing (plausibly) that the value of cultural membership can be defended from within the Rawlsian framework if we view it as a "context of choice". Such a "context" is indispensable both pedagogically and for the role-models which it provides, but consists in the mere capacity of a community to make meaningful choices, not in any particular pattern of choices. Kymlicka cites

40 ibid. p. 167.
French Canada in the face of the Quiet Revolution by way of illustration. According to Kymlicka, French-Canadian culture underwent a fundamental transformation in the early 1960s which overturned many of the traditional choices which had been made by that society, but without at any time truly threatening its existence *qua* French-Canadian cultural community. (This is actually a linguistic definition of community, although Kymlicka does not appear to be fully conscious of the fact).

In any event, granting this "context of choice", we need to discover what kind of dangers Kymlicka thinks it is likely to encounter in order to get a better grasp of what sort of entity it is. Kymlicka offers two examples, corresponding to the "market" and "political" mechanisms envisaged in the Rawlsian system. In his view, these dangers consist in being "outbid" and "outvoted". In so far as these dangers emanate from a minority's circumstances, rather than being a product of its choices, Kymlicka believes that they are *unfair* (in the sense of being violations of the "principles of justice") and call for corrective political action. The danger of being "outbid" might be addressed, he thinks, by giving the minority in question an initially larger than proportionate share of society's resources. The danger of being "outvoted" might be similarly rectified, he suggests, by such things as residency requirements (whether in the form of restrictions

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41 *ibid*. p. 167.
42 *ibid*. p. 183.
43 *ibid*. pp. 182-205.
upon land-ownership or the right to vote), which limit the influence of members of the majority culture in certain jurisdictions.\(^{44}\)

Considered as policy options, these might well turn out to be effective measures for preserving the stability of certain minority communities — particularly the aboriginal ones which Kymlicka has principally in mind. But they also reveal, more theoretically, something of Kymlicka’s assumptions as to what a “minority community” is, and as to the form the threat of assimilation usually takes. To begin with, the threat of cultural decline as Kymlicka understands it bears an intimate, but entirely arbitrary, relation to the political unit. In the case of the danger of being “outvoted”, this is clear enough: the political unit is the entity to which the outsider is denied access. But the role of the political unit is no less important (at any rate, as a bounded territorial entity) in the case of the danger of being “outbid”. What is not made sufficiently explicit in Kymlicka’s analysis is that the additional share of society’s resources which minorities are slated to obtain must be spent on certain, very specific goods, and for a purpose which is clearly infrastructural. It does not address any obvious human disparity, nor answer any recognizable “principle of justice”, if the Inuit, say, decide to spend their share not on shoring up aboriginal title, but on prime beachfront property in Malibu. What our intuitions require, in other words, is that the extra share of society’s resources be invested or consumed precisely in their communities — that is, their designated territories.\(^{45}\)

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\(^{45}\) This does not preclude, of course, the possibility that a cultural community might want to make some foreign investments. But in such cases, they are precisely that — “investments”. Their justification stems from the dividends which flow back to help sustain such communities in their primary mission.
The territorial dimension of this model of cultural decline makes it highly unlikely that it is generally applicable, notwithstanding the claims to universal validity which Kymlicka makes on its behalf. This will be the more evident when we reflect that the apparent aptness of his model for cases like Quebec is in fact illusory: the result of overlooking the purely contingent nature of the French Canadian minority’s concentration in, and dominance of, the Province of Quebec. There is, in general, no reason to expect that national minorities and administrative structures will always line up in so convenient a manner. But the territorial dimension of Kymlicka’s thought also exposes another weakness in his theory, and that is the problem of the threat posed by “outsiders” to a minority’s way of life. In Kymlicka’s model, “cultural decline” is something done to one’s culture by outsiders, for the simple reason that it is outsiders who do the “outbidding” and “outvoting”. For theoretical reasons, the threat to a “context of choice” must arise from outsiders, since the decisions of insiders are precisely “choices” which Kymlicka’s formulation is designed to protect. But this paints too absurdly one-sided a picture of their interaction, as if a minority’s relation to the dominant community could ever be entirely without any element of collaboration.

Kymlicka and the Rawlsian System.

The unavoidably “static” quality of Kymlicka’s description of the process of assimilation is a product of his fidelity to the “equality of resources scheme”, which envisages (hypothetically) an initial “fair” distribution that would take into account any
differences between the circumstances of individuals -- and by extension between the circumstances of the cultural structures to which they belong.\textsuperscript{46} The liberal intuition behind this scheme is that while justice is supposed to be inherently procedural, it can only generate just outcomes if the situation which prevailed at the beginning was itself just. Liberalism's morbid fascination with all manner of contractarian devices is, in part, a reflection of the attraction most of them feel for this idea of a one-time compensation payment which would equalize all foreseeable human disadvantages. In the original formulation of Rawls and Dworkin, the enemy to be overcome takes the form of "natural endowments" which are, of course, possessed by individuals.\textsuperscript{47} However, Kymlicka's minoritarian concern with the very different viabilities of different cultural structures applies essentially the same principle. The temporal presupposition behind this aspect of liberalism is that "circumstances" are either fundamentally fixed, or else, in the case of an evolving state of affairs, can be traced to mutations in the original circumstances. On the other hand, "choices" -- because they result from Free Will -- must be seen as discrete events occurring through time, with consequences for which an individual can be held responsible.

Whether the version of liberalism propounded by Dworkin and Rawls can successfully maintain the choice/circumstances distinction, with its distinctive temporal structure, is an interesting question having to do with how tendentiously (and perhaps how vacuously) they can break down complex human capacities into their hypostatized

\textsuperscript{46} ibid. pp. 182-191.

categories of "endowment" and "ambition". The question for a minoritarian theory that seeks to exploit this distinction is whether the vulnerability of a "context of choice" can be similarly assigned to either "unequal circumstances at the beginning" — which would require redress from the larger society — or "inappropriate choices over time" — which would not. Kymlicka's example of two unequally-sized communities, settling upon an uninhabited island, provides us with a clue as to his general position, inasmuch as he abstracts from such considerations as demographic history and the economic vicissitudes of different ways of life, in order to concentrate exclusively upon the "resources" which each community brings to the island.\textsuperscript{48} In doing so, he portrays "cultural decline" as being somehow analogous to losing out in a bidding war, rather than as the gradual undermining of a community's internal cohesion and cultural self-sufficiency \textit{in relation to other cultural formations}. The dynamics of assimilation are thus characterized in terms of an initial misallocation of resources.

If we instead view assimilation as a \textit{temporal} process — one that crucially involves \textit{interaction} with other communities — then it is difficult to see how Kymlicka could account both for the full complexity and historical contingency of these, without resorting to a determinism that would itself be anti-liberal. It is not enough to reply, as liberals are wont to do when confronted with this kind of criticism, that the "original position" (and its consequences as they unfold) is not intended as a concrete piece of empirical historiography, but rather is a hypothetical construct designed to bring out our intuitions.

\textsuperscript{48} Kymlicka, \textit{op. cit.} pp. 188-189.
about "fairness", uncontaminated by the facts of historical possession. For the point being argued here is that this temporal process is implicated in the very definitions of "choice" and "circumstance", that is, they are not simply atemporal idealizations which can be merely applied to the historical process. Whether the vicissitudes of individual biography can be meaningfully illuminated by such hypothetical constructs is something in which liberals have perhaps more confidence than their critics. But the attempt to do so in the case of communities merely results in an oversimplified and misleading account of the sort of challenges which they typically encounter, on the one hand, and a reductive belief that these challenges can plausibly be traced back to some (fully anticipated) "initial conditions", on the other.

These shortcomings of the "resourcist" model (which Kymlicka confesses to find so attractive)\(^49\) are, of course, ontological in origin. To define "cultural structure" as a "context of choice" does indeed succeed in preserving the liberal view of the content of "community" as something generated by a "social choice function" -- i.e. as a mere aggregation of individual preferences. However, Kymlicka's achievement is purchased at the unacceptable cost of a drastically reduced diagnostic purview. Defining "cultural structure" in the manner which Kymlicka recommends does not yield a model robust enough to capture the sheer historical contingency of the situation in which most minorities find themselves, let alone provide us with a realistic portrayal of the seductions, as well as the dangers, of assimilation. To achieve the latter would take us

\(^{49}\) Ibid. p. 185.
into territory which liberalism refuses to enter: namely, the appraisal of individual
decisions from a social point of view. And it is precisely this “internal” understanding
of a cultural structure -- that is, a communitarian understanding -- that we need, in the
final analysis, in order to make sense of minority communities as distinct sociological
phenomena existing apart from, but in interaction with, other communities.

Summary.

We began this chapter by taking up Taylor's suggestion that the
liberal/communitarian debate -- as it currently stands -- suffers from a confusion of
“ontological” and “advocacy” issues, and pondered his claim that further progress requires
that these concepts be properly distinguished. By the “ontological” issue, Taylor meant
that concerned with the nature of the individual/community relation -- that is, with the
problem of “social-embeddedness” -- and how this relation limits the range of social
configurations which are truly feasible. By the “advocacy” issue, Taylor was referring to
the preference of any particular writer for a society which is more or less “individualist”
(or “collectivist”) -- an aspiration which he believes ought to be disciplined by one's prior
stance on the “ontological” issue. Because our interest is primarily “ontological”, we
accordingly set out to examine what the question of social-embeddedness involved and
discovered that there are good reasons for sharing Taylor's scepticism regarding the
feasibility of the liberal solution. These have to do chiefly with the inability of liberalism
to account for certain "public goods" — the value of which to any one individual depends upon their being valued by other individuals.

Next, we explored the question of social-embeddedness in relation to an influential liberal proposal — that of Will Kymlicka — for justifying the protection of minority rights from within the framework of Rawlsian liberalism. This approach involved granting the liberal ontology (in spite of our misgivings), but nevertheless defending minority interests by means of an alternate, and hitherto unsuspected, route. Of course, one might still believe, as Taylor does, that the collective "good" of minority identification is an irreducibly "public good" — one that is distorted in its very essence by being conceptualized in liberal terms. But Kymlicka, if nothing else, has revealed a quite different sense in which something can be (or fail to be) a "public good": namely, in terms of its viability as a sociological entity. Kymlicka's analysis holds out the possibility that liberalism might simply bypass the ontological issue, but nevertheless provide the cause of minority rights with an adequate philosophical foundation.

Unfortunately, Kymlicka's account is not convincing. No doubt, this is partly due to his overly simplistic view of "cultural structure": a defect which could, however, be redressed by others. But there are also good reasons to be sceptical about his entire enterprise inasmuch as such "cultural structures" appear vulnerable to intractable problems of "collective action". It is highly unlikely that policies designed to cope with these problems could be justified from within the liberal ontology.

The failure of liberal theory in relation to minority communities raises the question of the viability of the communitarian alternative. How does communitarian theory
measure up ontologically? In one sense, the task confronting communitarians is much easier because they are not obliged to construct their social ontology out of discrete individuals. Yet ontological problems beset communitarians in a different way, because of the need to explain how our social-embeddedness is *particularized* in minority communities. It is this *emergent* difficulty of minoritarian communitarianism to which we now turn.
CHAPTER 3

Emergent problems of Minoritarian Communitarianism

General Communitarianism and the Problem of Minority Communities.

The argument that our social-embeddedness precludes "atomist" models of society — whether in the name of authentic individuality or irreducible communities — in effect addresses only the "negative" side of the communitarian agenda: namely its critique of the liberal alternative. The elaboration of a genuinely "positive" communitarian theory would involve working out the implications of this social-embeddedness in terms of the forms of individuality and community which it makes possible. This consideration is especially true of a communitarian project such as Taylor's, which demands that we affirm not only the irreducibly "communal" dimension of our social existence, but also that we discover this dimension in particular communities — the very ones that would qualify for "recognition" in Taylor's special sense. Indeed, it is the minoritarian version of communitarianism which best illustrates the enormous gulf that still remains in communitarian theory between the bare affirmation of the principle that human beings are socially-embedded creatures, which lies at the heart of the liberal/communitarian debate, and the concrete defence of the "collective rights" of cultural minorities, which is characteristic of communitarian politics. Between these very different discourses lies the relatively unexplored terrain of how it is that the principle of social-embeddedness
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demarcates certain cultural subcommunities (and not others) out of a myriad of other possibilities.

On the whole, these discourses have been sustained by different personalities who, while perhaps claiming to draw inspiration from either philosophical insight or the various movements for the defence of minority rights, have been largely unaware of each other's activities. In this respect, Charles Taylor has been a notable exception, making important contributions both to the controversy surrounding social-embeddedness and in the area of minority politics -- in the form of his own proposed "Theory of Recognition". But while the need for a theory that bridges this gulf might be obvious in Taylor's case, it raises the question of whether a more sceptical General Communitarianism might not dispense entirely with minoritarian concerns and the "bridging theory" they necessitate. True, legal academics working in this area frequently claim to be operating with an understanding of "collective rights" at some variance from the liberal tradition, but General Communitarianism is under no obligation to endorse these claims, and indeed for most of its history has had nothing to do with minoritarian issues.

The plausibility of this kind of disassociation is implicated in the questions of what exactly the consequences of social-embeddedness are, whether these can be captured solely within a political category like citizenship, and whether a political unit can simply inherit the mantle of "community". General Communitarianism thus confronts the issues raised by a "bridging theory" in a slightly different (and essentially "negative") guise. In

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50 "The Politics of Recognition".
order to show that the state-community can be equated with the “community” without further ado, it is necessary to demonstrate that the qualities which we identify as “social-embeddedness” emanate from the arbitrary circumstances of the political unit itself. If, on the other hand, these qualities emerge from some sort of cultural entity, such as the "nation", then we are still dealing with a problem analogous to that of minoritarianism — albeit one where, occasionally, the cultural nation has the good fortune to coincide with the territorial boundaries of the state. Although an interesting case could perhaps be made for a purely “statist” General Communitarianism based upon such “irreducibly social goods” as republican self-rule, it is in the end untenable to maintain that something as ineluctably social as “social-embeddedness” — a phenomenon conventionally identified with something profound like the language or mores of a community — could be reduced to so conveniently political a factor as the manner in which a given society is governed.

For an overtly minoritarian project such as Taylor’s, of course, doubts about the need for some sort of “bridging theory” do not even arise. All the same, the relative neglect of this topic suggests a confidence in the tractability of minoritarian issues which is almost certainly misplaced. The differences between General and Minoritarian Communitarianism cannot be resolved by merely applying considerations drawn from General Communitarianism to the case of subcommunities. It is not enough, as Taylor seems to believe, simply to designate language as the new criterion of what is to count

51 A favourite example of Taylor’s. See for instance: *Irreducibly Social Goods*, pp. 141-143. Alas, for his critics, he cites others.
as a "community". For Minoritarian Communitarianism does not only multiply the number of entities that might qualify for "community" status, it also gives rise to the problem of intercommunity relations, and the issue of the distribution of "individual identity" among several communities. In a nutshell, Minoritarian Communitarianism greatly complicates the picture that emerges from traditional communitarian accounts by posing the apparently simple question: Which community?

**Emergent Problems of Minoritarian Communitarianism.**

In this chapter, we shall not undertake the daunting task of attempting to resolve the difficulties implicit in this query, but shall instead outline some of the obstacles which communitarian theory faces in its effort to particularize itself. Our examination of these obstacles will concentrate upon the more usual minoritarian case of this effort at particularization, even though, as noted above, it also includes the special case of the movement from a "statist" to a "cultural" version of General Communitarianism. About the latter case, we shall only note that there are important differences between it and Minoritarian Communitarianism, such as, for example, traditional communitarianism's concern with the decline of a civilization's moral tone versus the distinctly minoritarian fear of assimilation. To return to the minoritarian case, it is evident that -- as a matter of logic -- the division of "society" into two or more "communities" immediately gives rise to three conceptual complications, each of which deserves further analysis. We may designate these categories as: i) individual/community relations, ii) intercommunity relations, and iii) community/society relations.
Some of the emergent difficulties associated with minoritarianism are a good deal more subtle than what these three categories would initially suggest, but it is useful to begin by explaining how they would inevitably arise from any communitarian account that aspires to a measure of pluralism. To say that a given political/territorial entity -- what we shall call a "society" -- consists of more than one community, is immediately to shatter two of the fundamental nexuses that are assumed, as a matter of course, in General Communitarianism. These are the relation between the individual and the entity in which his individuality is presumed to be embedded -- i.e. his "community" -- and the relation between such a "community" and the entity diagnosed to contain "communities" -- i.e. the "society". The problematic of General Communitarianism is greatly simplified by the contingent circumstance that it acknowledges only one community, which thus permits the absorption (more or less) of the interests of the individual into those of the nation-state, once the thesis of "social-embeddedness" is granted. This allows General Communitarianism to offer the promise of a fuller citizenship than what liberalism affords, without compromising the universality that liberalism attained by abstracting from cultural considerations. Once Minoritarian Communitarianism enters the picture, this "fuller citizenship" becomes a "problem" -- to be resolved, if at all, by theorizing some sort of organic link between the political saliency of "community" and its realization in the larger "pluralist" society. If communitarians wish to argue, contrary to liberalism, that cultural "community" is relevant to political "society", then they need a theory connecting the locus of social-embeddedness to the locus of political decision -- where these might differ.
Our three basic categories of conceptual difficulty are thus in a sense “dictated” as soon as we introduce a complication into the fragile set of concepts that comprise General Communitarianism. Although the names which we have given our three categories are mostly self-explanatory, it is nevertheless worthwhile to say a little about each. What we are calling “individual/community relations” deals not only with the obvious point that there are now a number of possible “communities” in which individuals might place themselves, but also with the subtler issues of “identity/community divergence”: that is, with the distribution of “individual identity” amongst several communities. The category of “intercommunity relations” would ordinarily be subsumed under the more general heading of “community/society relations”, except that there is usually a considerable degree of overlap, reflecting incommensurable views about how society should be divided up. This is the case, for instance, with “Black” as against “West Indian” identity, or (to cite an interesting recent example) “Afro-American” identity, which implies the re-emergence of a “Pan-African” dimension of self-definition. In many ways, the cluster of issues that fall under the rubric of “community/society relations” might prove to be the most difficult for communitarians, because of the implied contradiction between cultural identity and political citizenship — the very dichotomy which communitarian theory sought to overcome in the first place. In any event, under this category fall such questions as: whether a consociational solution is feasible, or even

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52 If the so-called “Afrocentricity” movement really gets off the ground (which will require, of course, scoring more than purely rhetorical successes), then this form of consciousness could one day assume a place of honour next to such historically important precedents as Pan-Slavism and Pan-Turkism. Anthony Smith provides an interesting taxonomy of such movements. See Anthony D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism*, New York, 1983. One factor that might influence the success of this movement is its degree of authenticity.
normatively consistent with the goals of communitarian theory; whether a “society” can also be a “community” (as in a traditional nation-state containing a dominant ethnie, but also minorities); whether citizen loyalty can be somehow divided; and whether this division would reflect or depart from the underlying configuration of social-embeddedness.

Identity/Community Divergence.

The latter consideration indicates that the problem of identity/community divergence has profound consequences not only for the communities whose membership allegiances are thereby reapportioned or qualified, but also for the entire pattern of communal relationships within a communitarian society. Once again, we shall not attempt a resolution of these exceedingly difficult issues, but shall instead consider some examples (not by any means comprehensive) of the sort of obstacles faced by a project such as Taylor’s. We shall confine ourselves to examining three instances of identity/community divergence, which we may call “Communalness”, “Plurality”, and “Self-Perception”. Each of these forms of divergence arises because there is no longer just one community which inherits our socially-embedded selves.

i) “Communalness”:

We may employ the term “Communalness” to designate those aspects of the “social” that emanate directly from a particular community. This concept needs to be sharply distinguished from those aspects of the social background which are merely
expressed in a particular community. There is much in social life that appears to be infrastructural to a given cultural identity, but which is not normally considered a part of it. A useful illustration might be the form of political economy that obtains within a given community. The anthropological category “hunter/gatherer” presumably expresses nobody's self-definition, including that of our aboriginal peoples. But it is likely that aboriginal people -- if shorn of this feature of their traditional way of life -- would regard ordinary urban existence as a mockery of their identity, even if other aspects of their culture remained unaffected.

Another, rather more notorious, example, would be fundamentalist Islam’s resistance to “westernization”, but reluctant acquiescence in “modernization”. Assuming that “westernization” can be polemically identified with a given set of values, and then subsequently rejected, merely raises the question of the relation of “modernization” to “westernization”. Can a society merely opt for Western technology and economic development -- which indeed are probably essential in order to resist “westernization” on a global scale -- but at the same time avoid the cultural assumptions and practices which have accompanied them historically? The frequently-encountered contention that it cannot, that there exist powerful subterranean influences linking the two processes together, is an acknowledgement that our notions of “identity” and “community” repose upon an all-pervasive “social” background -- the existence of which we are largely unconscious.

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53 This theme is rehearsed in Smith, op.cit. pp. 85-108.
ii) "Plurality":

The set of issues which we are calling "Plurality" addresses the familiar modern problem of multiple identifications and loyalties.\(^{54}\) The distribution of individual identity can differ not only in its bewildering variety of possible objects, but also in a number of other significant dimensions. There is, in the first place, the dimension of multi-community identity, where an individual defines himself as belonging to two or more discrete communities. One might have inherited, through the intermarriage of one's parents (or forebears generally), several ethnic identities which one can then practise with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Of course, there is no reason why such identities need be ethnic in character, as demonstrated by the persistence of religious identities and the emergence of identities based upon gender and sexual orientation. The point about this dimension of "identity distribution" is that an individual can fasten upon (not necessarily inauthentically) any number of subcommunities that exist in a given society.

A second dimension in which the distribution of individual identity might differ is in the case of overlapping identities. One example of this dimension would be the case of "Black" and "West Indian" identity discussed previously. This type of distribution could be considered as merely a ramified version of the multi-community case of distribution, except that overlapping identities are often thought to qualify or limit their component identifications in some way. Thus, to be Black and West Indian might be interpreted in such a way as to enlarge one's identifications, as implying belonging to two

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\(^{54}\) This can be called a "modern" problem because it is only with modernity that these identifications and loyalties became as it were "self-generated". See: Charles Taylor, The Malaise of Modernity, Toronto, 1991. Of course, the cosmological unity implicit in the mediaeval "order of ideas" did not prevent mediaeval society from being riven by complex (and conflicting) relations of fealty.
separate communities which just happen to possess certain cases in common. This kind of overlapping identification would indeed be analogous to the multi-community case of distribution. But on the other hand — to cite a tension that is an unfortunate fact of life in many Caribbean societies — such an identity might be understood in a rather more sectarian sense, as implying a distancing from those West Indians who trace their descent to the Indian Sub-Continent. This type of qualified self-understanding is closer to the usual case of overlapping identities.

A third way in which individual identity might be "distributed" is along the lines of the ubiquitous modern phenomenon of "hyphenated identity". This frequently-encountered (and just as frequently discussed) predicament of the modern identity is essentially the attempt by such individuals to negotiate their own personal balance between their ethnic identities on the one hand, and their citizen loyalties on the other. It thus corresponds to the category which we described above as "community/society relations". To be a Ukrainian-Canadian, for instance, involves sorting out the importance which one attaches to that particular cultural community in relation to the larger multiethnic society of which it forms a part. That many individuals agonize over the relative weight which they feel they ought to give these identifications is a useful reminder that the larger society enjoys emotional, as well as purely legal, allegiances.

iii) "Self-Perception":

The category of "Identity/Community Divergence" which we have labelled "Self-Perception" addresses the fact that there may well be a difference between the entity
which an individual perceives as his community and the social group which our a priori theory of social-embeddedness would define as his community. This is merely the translation, in communitarian terms, of the traditional controversy in the theoretical literature on nationalism as to the relative weight of "objective" versus "subjective" factors in the definition of a "nation". Because communitarian theory seeks to draw upon the insight that human beings are socially-embedded creatures, it cannot opt for a purely "subjectivist" understanding of community. Community cannot be a "choice", as in liberalism. But it is equally true, as Taylor points out, that a community must be für sich, in addition to being an sich. As Taylor would argue, the sense of belonging to a community is partially "constitutive" of what it means to be a community. If this is so, then any plausible communitarian account of "community" must somehow combine features of both a "subjective" and an "objective" nature.

But why, precisely, does Taylor believe that a sense of belonging should be "constitutive" of the being of communities, and are we obliged to follow him in this? As we saw in Chapter Two, Taylor's view of human reality is essentially a linguistic one. A human community is, in a material sense, delineated by a particular language, which in turn provides the local idiom in which the meaning-laden background of all human life is played out. This meaning-laden background is inescapable for all human beings (and

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55 Anthony Smith credits Friedrich Meinecke for the original formulation of this distinction. See Smith, op.cit. xii.

56 "Why Do Nations Have to Become States?", p.56.

57 Taylor believes that social science can profit from a generalization of John Searle's distinction between "regulative" and "constitutive" rules. See: "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man", pp. 34-40.
the social scientists who study them), and implicitly divides the world into social
groupings possessing incommensurable discourses. The term “inter-subjective meanings”
refers to those meanings which are comprehensible within one of these discourses. There is no reason to suppose that being “comprehensible” should also imply that these
meanings are either conscious or explicit, let alone objects of consensus. Taylor uses the
term “common meanings” to refer to those “inter-subjective meanings” which meet these
additional requirements. According to Taylor, a genuine “community” is a social
grouping which shares certain “common meanings”, and which (since all human reality
is ultimately constituted by meaning) is therefore constituted by them.

Of course, to do this model justice would oblige us to trace Taylor’s argument
back to its epistemic source in his advocacy of the “hermeneutic” as opposed to the
“empirical” method of doing social science. Certainly, there is room for debate on the
details of many of Taylor’s contentions along the way. But in terms of our earlier
question, we must surely concede that some sense of belonging to a community is part
of what it means to be a community. It would be strange indeed, if communitarian theory
were to accept a specification of “community” which operated entirely below the level of
consciousness, and thus necessarily dispensed with those relations of mutual responsibility

\[\text{58}\] "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man".
\[\text{59}\] ibid, pp. 38-39.
\[\text{60}\] loc.cit.
\[\text{61}\] loc.cit.
\[\text{62}\] "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man".
which were part of the ostensive goal of that theory. What communitarian theory is searching for, in straddling the objective/subjective divide, is some sort of base/superstructure model in which "community" enjoys a plausible sociological foundation, but is realized in consciousness. As far as our interest in "Self-Perception" is concerned the mere fact that communitarian theory requires the existence of both "subjective" and "objective" factors is sufficient to show that self-perception is one possible form of identity/community divergence.

Subjective versus Objective Factors in the Definition of Community: Taylor on Language.

However, the manner in which this objective/subjective dichotomy is reconciled, constitutes — in its own right — one of the fundamental conceptual difficulties which the minoritarian version of communitarianism brings to the forefront. Subjective factors are essentially conscious factors, and constitute an "interpretation" of one's social-embeddedness. It is highly unlikely that this "interpretation" — in the everyday, tacit sense in which it is held by ordinary members of the community — reproduces the social scientist's "theory" of social-embeddedness. What we are dealing with is neither a "representation" of social reality, nor a "theoretical statement" of our social-embeddedness, but rather a definite ideological structure which nevertheless coincides with our "objective" community.

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63 The way I have defined them here suggests that inter-subjective meanings are not "subjective factors". Since all I am doing is pointing out some conceptual difficulties, I don't want to be nearly so definitive. An equally good case could be made for including them.
Perhaps the dual role of language as, simultaneously, a readily-understandable marker of identity, and an “objective” organizer of humanity into separate life-worlds, accounts for its popularity amongst communitarians as an explanatory principle. Certainly, it is Taylor’s favourite example — though he clearly wants to keep his options open as far as non-linguistic definitions of “community” are concerned. And his reticence is justified, since too absolute a commitment to the linguistic definition would render impossible the explanation of the many intensely self-conscious societies where the linguistic dimension is absent, not to mention the degree of cohesion sometimes achieved by multi-community societies. Still, language may well be the best vessel with which to navigate the many conceptual difficulties inherent in the communitarian project.

Taylor, of course, shares this typically communitarian view of language as a “marker” and an “organizer”, yet what is really distinctive about his work is the extent to which he sees the “meaning-ladenness” that flows out of a particular language as central to our humanity as such. As a matter of fact, our interest in the communitarian aspect of his work in a sense distorts his main focus, which could be better characterized as a concern with the origins and development of the modern identity — if indeed, we choose not to adopt the still-more-general self-description of his project as that of freeing social

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64 For one thing, Taylor’s thought retains a disabused, but nostalgic, enthusiasm for decentralization for its own sake. This accounts for the somewhat ‘Proudhonian’ resonance of some of his writings. Thus, he at one point urges Canadians to decentralize power to the provinces since they are closest to the people, but then expresses regret that we cannot further decentralize to still more local bodies since these lack the sense of citizen allegiance which the provinces possess. This is of course consistent with Taylor’s view of the importance of consciousness in the definition of “community”, but it also reveals: i) that the English provinces are legitimate (non-linguistic) “communities”, and ii) that one can meaningfully deplore the fact that the population does not bestow its allegiances upon such local entities as its workplaces or municipalities.

65 “Self-Interpreting Animals” in Philosophical Papers, 1.
science from the stultifying effect of a method drawn ultimately from the natural sciences. This essentially Heideggerian position sees all human life as one of being amidst an inescapable horizon of meaning, which can only be articulated in stages, against other aspects of the background. We must bear in mind this broader context of Taylor's thought when we examine those features of his thinking which are relevant to a strictly communitarian problematic.

As we have seen, Taylor's model of community begins with this idea of "meaning-ladenness" as a fundamental given of all properly social reality and notes that language is the primary medium for expressing it. This medium divides the world into particular language groups, a subclass of which understand each other, and thus can be said to possess "inter-subjective meanings" in common. A subclass of this subclass possesses "common meanings" — that is, those "inter-subjective meanings" which are known to be shared and valued by a given group — and thus constitute, in Taylor's eyes, a "community". Although this model merely presupposes a solution to the problem of identity/community divergence, and does not at all address the issue of how this community relates to other entities in society, there nevertheless is a lot to be said for it. In the first place, it offers a straightforward theoretical transition between the anthropological universal of Man as a "language-animal", and his immersion in

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66 *Introduction* to Parts I & II in *Philosophical Papers*.


68 The phrase was apparently coined by George Steiner. Taylor cites him in "Language and Human Nature" in *Philosophical Papers*, I, p. 217.
particular speech-communities. Secondly, against the backdrop of this "material" particularization, it provides a plausible role for consciousness in the determination of community, and thus maintains the balance between "subjective" and "objective" factors which is essential to any authentic communitarian project. Thirdly and more subtly, it inculcates an appropriate sense of the "fatedness" of community, as something that resides deeply within the human personality, which is much more profound than mere "choice".69

There are times when Taylor's depiction of the individual as trapped within his linguistic horizon becomes almost Sapir-like in its ineluctability.70

Some Difficulties with Taylor's View.

However, while Taylor's model is an enormously suggestive one, it is, in the final analysis, inadequate (or perhaps just insufficiently elaborated) to account for the phenomenon of "community" as it is actually experienced. For one thing, the two-stage process by which consciousness enters the picture considerably oversimplifies the complex, often contradictory, ways in which this ideological phenomenon relates to its

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69 The absence of a sense of "fatedness" is what is ultimately wrong with liberalism in general and Kymlicka's defense of it in particular. This can be seen from his attempt to bypass Sandel by arguing that liberalism can operate with an "encumbered self", provided only that any particular "choice" which constitutes this self be revisable. In the first place, this claim is simply untrue, as the case of sexual orientation shows. There are aspects of ourselves which we are simply stuck with. But even those deep "choices" — "the stuff of great literature" — which are revisable, are profoundly misrepresented by being thought of as merely "lifestyle options" which happen to be of greater subjective importance to the individual concerned. For this formulation fails to distinguish between those "choices" which define our being, and those which are purely instrumental to it. Liberalism lacks a notion of "strong evaluation". See: "What is Human Agency?" in Philosophical Papers, I.

70 The Sapirian view of language as structuring our apprehension of the world, provides another example of "fatedness" which does not sit well with liberal political philosophy. That is to say, not only are our personalities constituted by deep, identity-conferring commitments ("choices" in the liberal jargon), and by "instincts" (if that is the word) like our sexual orientations, but also by unconscious structures which shape our experiences. See: Edward Sapir, Language, New York, 1921.
material counterpart. Instead of viewing "community" as something achieved in consensus, for example, it might be more accurate to see it as something presupposed in discord. Certainly a social group constituted by "inter-subjective meanings" already seems to be a community of sorts, inasmuch as what is at stake is precisely its collective future. Moreover, the "common meanings", which Taylor holds all genuine communities to possess, presumably cannot have as their content just any item of consensus -- such as a belief that something needs to be done about the federal deficit -- but must be concerned rather with more existential matters -- such as the desire to continue to exist as a community, and the aspiration that the community should retain a certain moral or ethnic character. These substantial existential concerns -- especially the latter -- suggest yet another form of divergence: between the bare acknowledgement of one's community and the desire that it be endowed (by oneself and one's fellow citizens) with the functional prerequisites for its stability and growth. The desire to avoid assimilation is indeed a general -- though not universal -- aspiration, but the question as to what character the community should have is, notoriously, a subject of significant dissention within many of them.

Summary.

As we have seen in this chapter, the communitarian account of the relation of the individual to his cultural subcommunity, while perhaps superior to that of liberalism,
not without serious difficulties of its own. The need for a theory that partitions social-embeddedness gives rise to a number of emergent problems (which, however, had been lurking in General Communitarianism all along) and these complications merely show up the naivete of much contemporary political theory. The goal of this chapter was just to catalogue some of these difficulties; and it is to be hoped that we captured the most obvious ones. Certainly the issues discussed under the headings of "individual/community", "intercommunity" and "community/society" relations fall under this category; since they merely reflect the fact that multiple communities imply relations among themselves and to the whole -- rather than just to their constituent individuals. The issues discussed under the rubric of "identity/community divergence" though, may prove to be more recondite since they imply a distancing of the notion of "identity-bearing communities" from that of "identity" itself.

We do not claim to have attempted (let alone achieved) any kind of resolution on these matters beyond noting that Taylor's understanding of language offers an interesting way of bridging the gulf between "objective" and "subjective" factors in the definition of "community". One thing which we can predict, however, is that the "internal" problem of consciousness -- of a community's conception of itself -- will likely prove to be a central one in any communitarian treatment of this matter.

However, whether Taylor's model can resolve the difficulties internal to the definition of a community is, as we have seen, secondary (in minoritarian communitarianism at least) to the external issues of how that community is related to
other communities and entities within society. And just as a community requires an *internal* self-understanding which is in turn "constitutive" of its being and character, so too in its *external* dealings it requires an analogous kind of "recognition", not only as an indispensable psychic good (as Taylor would claim), but arguably also as an expression of a tacit, inter-communally sanctioned consensus as to its role in society. If this latter suspicion is correct, then the issue of consciousness parallels the entire "material" extent of the minoritarian problematic, and not simply the question of the individual's auto-location within a particular subcommunity. Either way, Taylor is right to emphasize the importance to political thought of the manner in which a minority's self-conception is reinforced or challenged by the larger society. Indeed, the Theory of Recognition — although relatively neglected by the mainstream philosophical tradition — is an important topic in its own right for any branch of political theory which concerns itself with minoritarian issues. In Taylor's hands the Theory of Recognition is not even principally concerned with communitarian theory *per se*, but instead addresses such controversies as the debate surrounding the canon and the resurgence of minority-rights activism and self-assertion in many parts of the world. Taylor's significant contributions to this wider debate are not in the least impaired by the shortcomings of his account of "recognition", when applied to the minoritarian version of communitarianism, which is the subject of the next chapter.

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72 *Why Do Nations Have to Become States?*, pp. 53-58.
CHAPTER 4

"Recognizing" a Community

Recognition as a Symbolic Good.

The proposition that our identities are largely formed in the context of our interactions with others -- "dialogically", as Taylor would put it\(^73\) -- is sufficiently general and unobjectionable a truism as to be affirmed by liberals and communitarians alike. If allowed to float untethered to any more restrictive communitarian definition of the self, the proposition can even be regarded as an elaboration of the liberal injunction that we respect the autonomy of the individual -- so that the individual might be unharassed as he goes about the business of assembling his identity from out of the resources and social transactions which his society affords. The respect due to a collective context of identity, such as a racial or ethnic group, is similarly consistent with both traditions. An anti-discrimination right, for instance, is generally regarded as a possible legal resource for protecting an individual against unjustified discrimination, but it could equally be thought of as a reassurance that the racial animosities that lead one individual to discriminate against another will not be endorsed by political society. Indeed, the very intimacy with which these two aspects of our civil liberties are associated has tended to promote their confusion. For example, Dworkin's fundamental axiom -- that each of us

\(^73\) The Malaise of Modernity, p. 33.
is entitled to "equal concern and respect"74 -- is a claim that, although formulated in a language concerned with our positions in the symbolic order, is actually intended to be the foundation for our other rights and, ultimately, for our redress in the courts. From this perspective, it is perhaps not surprising that the dimension of our civil liberties concerned with "recognition" has been relatively neglected by the mainstream philosophical tradition, as has the concomitant possibility that it might diverge in certain cases from the function of "rights" as a legal resource.

Taylor's attempt to resuscitate what little remains of the alternative tradition is motivated by a variety of concerns -- the communitarian not being the most prominent. Although his essay "The Politics of Recognition" begins very broadly, by diagnosing a "number of strands" in contemporary politics which turn upon the demand for recognition -- including such movements as nationalism, feminism, and "multiculturalism"75 -- his main focus throughout the work is upon two issues which were vexing him at the time: the recent failure, in Canada, of the Meech Lake Accord, and the acrimonious debate on many American campuses surrounding the teaching of the western canon. Nevertheless, the problematic which he introduces, while certainly sketchy and incomplete, is one with significant implications for all aspects of political thought. For "recognition", although running parallel in places to the natural rights tradition, covers a much more extensive range of issues -- including both how we treat each other in our private lives, and those

74 Dworkin, op.cit., p. xii.
75 "The Politics of Recognition", p. 25.
"psychic" aspects of public life which have been ignored by the mainstream preoccupation with the limits of legitimate public intervention.

Taylor's Theory of Recognition.

The discourse of recognition thus occurs on two levels: public and private. This fairly common distinction is related to, but should not be confused with, the difference between the individual and collective contexts of identity mentioned above, inasmuch as a collective context can overlap one's private life -- for instance, if one is discriminated against at one's workplace on the "collective" ground of race or ethnicity. Nevertheless, in the public sphere, "recognition" generally does take the form of a collective context of identity, and it is this form with which Taylor's analysis mostly deals. The public side of the politics of recognition is driven, Taylor believes, by two historical tendencies which are in conflict with one another. On the one hand, the move from an ethic based on honour to one based on dignity has brought in its train the politics of universalism, in which "equality" is understood in terms of the equalization of rights and entitlements. On the other hand, the emergence of the modern notion of "identity" has brought with it a politics of difference, where "equality" has a quite different sense, that of recognizing each of us for what we authentically are. Identity politics thus embraces a seeming paradox: everyone has an identity, but that identity is unique.

76 ibid. p. 37.
77 ibid. p. 37.
78 ibid. p. 38.
Perhaps because of the "committed" nature of Taylor's enterprise — in which the abstract side of the "recognition" problematic is hurriedly developed with a view to his intervention in current controversies — Taylor never tells us why we ought to legitimate the politics of difference, or, if we do, what balance we should strike. All that we can divine from his concrete observations is that he wholeheartedly supports Quebec's drive for "distinct" status, but is more sceptical of opponents of the canon, insisting that they are still subject to standards — albeit de-provincialized ones. On a more theoretical level, this presumably means that a group's desire for recognition is a sufficient reason for their deserving it — with the proviso that the form of recognition they receive must respect the limits which give it its meaning. Such a limitation is by no means devoid of significance. It frequently happens that a particular piece of minority activism would benefit from a more perspicuous sense of the actual situation which would result if it were fully implemented, that is, whether its formulation is not ultimately in conflict with the goal it is trying to achieve. But it is equally clear that this kind of proviso is hopelessly insufficient, being oblivious to the interests and self-conceptions of those who are expected to do the recognizing.

As we shall see, the type of public space inaugurated by "recognition" is rather more crowded than that of liberalism, and consequently it will not do simply to reply that because "recognition" is a right, the interests and self-conceptions of the rest of society are irrelevant to the question of whether and how a given minority group should be

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79 Taylor's basic position vis-a-vis the canon (to which I refer rather cryptically here) is essentially a Gadamerian one. That is, he hopes that other literatures and cultural products will be studied with a view to enlarging and de-provincializing our Eurocentric standards — not simply to abandoning them. Indeed, he makes a cogent argument to the effect that to abandon standards entirely would be deeply Eurocentric and patronizing. ibid, pp. 61-73.
recognized. All the same, a "rights perspective" at least captures that sense of entitlement which the Theory of Recognition wants to convey (somewhat ironically, given Taylor's views on the matter), and allows us to understand "recognition" as emanating from an ethical imperative rather than from a prudential calculation based upon the threat which a given minority might otherwise pose. Granting then that each minority has a right to be recognized, what does this "recognition" entail?

In Taylor's opinion, authentic recognition involves essentially the recognition of an identity, and thus must be sharply contrasted with the inauthentic version allowed for by liberal political philosophy, namely, the recognition of individual autonomy. On this view, it is far from coincidental that the schedule of rights sought by most liberals has a correlative dimension of recognition. The vision underlying such schedules, which gives the activities of enumerating and entrenching their point, is one that accords supreme value to the individual as an autonomous agent. This autonomy, Taylor thinks, embodies its own distinct species of "recognition", in the sense that it pays homage to the traditional view of the individual as possessing a "universal human potential for reason". It follows from this "Kantian" understanding of human dignity that what is fundamental

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80 I say "ironically" because of Taylor's well-known opposition to rights-discourse. But perhaps my formulation in this section is somewhat unfair, since Taylor himself does not use the term "rights" in this context. All the same, Taylor's view of political obligation is rather confusing. Presumably when we speak of extending recognition to minorities, we are not talking about something which the majority might idiosyncratically opt to do, but rather about something which it is morally obliged to do. Does not this claim which a minority has against the majority amount to a "right"? Possibly Taylor might reply that our moral language has become impoverished, and that we need a way to speak about moral entitlements which do not amount to "rights" in the full-fledged sense. But to adopt this line of argument would endanger the claim that the modern world has fallen prey to rights-discourse.

81 *ibid.* p. 41.

82 *ibid.* pp. 57-58. See also: *Kant's Theory of Freedom* in *Philosophical Papers. II.*
is the bare potential for reason — that is, the faculty of “choice” itself — and not anything which the individual manages to make of that potential. Although he does not develop the point in his Theory of Recognition, Taylor is already well known for his scepticism about such “potentialities” that do not find expression in “capacities.”

The autonomous individual rapidly assembles something that amounts to an “identity” (even if it technically fails to qualify as such), which raises the question as to why Taylor judges this mode of “recognition” to be insufficient. Why should not the psychic rewards which accrue from recognition arise from the “How” of identity, rather than the “What”? Part of the answer, obviously, is that liberal recognition is not particular recognition. In so far as the “recognition” which minorities crave relates to their characteristics as minorities, rather than to the political circumstances which tend to promote the continuing allegiance of their memberships (almost invariably not “choice”), the recognition of individual autonomy fails even to get off the ground. But Taylor would also reply that such an acknowledgement misrepresents the quality of the recognition sought, which has little to do with the affirmation of a right, and everything to do with the respect with which a given minority’s culture is held in the eyes of others. Put differently, the problematic of (authentic) recognition requires the existence of genuine, substantive respect on the part of “others”: i.e. those who do not “choose” to belong to the minority culture in question. This is made abundantly clear by his stance on a related issue: the controversy surrounding the teaching of the western canon. A

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83 See: “What’s Wrong with Negative Liberty?” in Philosophical Papers II. Taylor’s argument, contra Berlin, is that what is protected (and worth protecting) in our negative liberties — i.e. in the various schedules of rights — is precisely a capacity which can only be fully realized under positive liberty.
demand to be properly recognized for one's cultural achievement, whether issued by an individual or a group, cannot in principle be met by an *outward* form of words, but must involve an *inward* understanding and appreciation of what that contribution represents for society (and perhaps humanity) at large.\(^8^4\)

**The Ideological Space of Recognition.**

Any political theory in which recognition plays a fuller role is thus bound to be minoritarian, since being "public" it will tend to involve a collective context of recognition, and being "substantive" it will tend to engage us at a deeper level than that of our political citizenship. The theory of recognition, therefore, runs parallel to the minoritarian version of communitarianism in exactly the same way as it does with the liberal schedule of rights. Indeed, it constitutes the inevitable ideological dimension of the problem of subcommunity relations addressed in the previous chapter. Regardless of the manner in which these difficult, "emergent" issues are resolved theoretically (and then put into practice), it is reasonable to expect that the *ideological space* occupied by "recognition" will form a crucial component of the ultimate *modus vivendi*. Yet "recognition" is, once again, a broader concept than the concrete arrangements which it emulates. Whereas the question as to how a subcommunity relates to individuals, other subcommunities, and society implies something like a *constitutional understanding* (even

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\(^8^4\) *The Politics of Recognition*, pp. 69-73.
if only tacit), the ideological space of "recognition" goes far beyond that understanding to embrace issues such as how minorities are perceived within the general culture.

Most of Taylor's essay on "The Politics of Recognition" is devoted to a tentative examination of the kind of complications one is likely to encounter when one divides up ideological space in this way. These have to do chiefly with forms of "other-dependence" which emerge once we move beyond liberal pluralism's laissez-faire attitude to cultural diversity. But one issue which Taylor glosses over deserves special attention because of the difficulty it portends for even *formulating* an appropriate statement of recognition. At a crucial point in his argument, Taylor contrasts "recognition" with "non-recognition" and "misrecognition", asserting that the latter two inflict grievous harm.\(^8\) It is worth asking how these concepts differ, even if Taylor himself does not pursue the matter.

Presumably, "non-recognition" represents an absolute denial of difference, or else its formulation in a deliberately dismissive way.\(^9\) "Misrecognition" would then be a more or less sincere — albeit somehow "incorrect" — attempt to acknowledge a given group, based upon an alternate vision of how that group fits into the larger society. An example might be the divergent connotations of "Québécois" and "French-Canadian" as possible descriptions of Canada's Francophone population. These terms *denote* (generally speaking) the same people, but they embody very different conceptions of the relation of the Francophone community to the Canadian State. While the term "French-Canadian"

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\(^8\) ibid. p. 25.

\(^9\) For instance, the official Turkish practice of referring to the Kurds as "Mountain Turks" (ülü-bilâr?) presumably amounts to a refusal to acknowledge any important ethnic difference, and thus constitutes "non-recognition". But if the practice were rather to claim them as a vital ethnic component of the Turkish nation, we could at most allege "misrecognition".
implies a linguistic (or ethnic) minority possessing an integral relation to Canada, the term “Québécois” suggests a minority *nationality*, complete with its own territorially-defined homeland and local administration, which merely *happens* to be a member of the Canadian Federation. Taylor’s naivete on precisely this example points to a larger problem with his general position.87

The Problem of “Significance”.

The notion of “recognition” cannot repose upon an ostensive definition: it cannot simply *refer* to a cultural entity, but must necessarily take a stand on the *significance* of that entity. This difficulty is entirely overlooked in Taylor’s problematic of recognition, which is exclusively concerned with *balancing* the respect shown to the various cultural communities of which society is composed — where each community is taken as a discrete entity which pre-exists its proposed description. Yet it is clear that minorities are to some degree “constituted” by some such proposed description.

There are two issues unacknowledged by Taylor which bear directly upon the question of “significance”.88 The first is that recognition partially defines the community recognized, in the sense that it contains an interpretation of what *kind* of minority it is.

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87 Taylor explains the terminological shift from “la nation canadienne-française” to “la nation québécoise” (and presumably, from “Canadiens-Français” to “Québécois”) as reflecting the sense that the only really survivable parts of the Francophone community lie in Quebec. This account of the fundamental change in terminology leaves out the crucially important strategic dimension. Surely part of the reason for the shift is that the latter term envisage and prepare the ground for a future outside of Canada. See: “Shared and Divergent Values” in Recoupling the Solitudes, p. 163.

88 My use of “significance” here is not to be confused with Taylor’s concept of “significance”, which he employs in his Heideggerian critique of cognitivism in general and the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Project in particular. This topic, of course, is considerably beyond the scope of the present inquiry; but is worth mentioning as a reminder of the breadth of Taylor’s philosophical interests. See: “Cognitive Psychology” in *Philosophical Papers*, I.
In the above example, "misrecognition" would presumably consist in our identifying as a linguistic minority ("French-Canadian") what is "in fact" a minority nationality ("Québécois"). In other words, the shortfall of respect inheres not in our failure to use a more up-to-date term (which is the impression Taylor leaves us with), but rather in our failure to locate their difference within the appropriate sociological category. The second unacknowledged issue is a continuation of the first, in that it emerges from the policy import of these categories. Recognition influences, and often complicates, the achievement of a common "civic" identity. Whether we think of a given community as a "race", a "religion", a "culture", a "linguistic minority", or a "national minority", discloses our vision of how that community might best be reconciled to the larger society — whether we think that what is called for is full assimilation, toleration of a specific practice, respect for diversity, some sort of package of collective rights, or some measure of separate administration.

Indeed, the causal link between authentic recognition and its policy implications often runs in the opposite direction to what we would expect, due to the tendency of minority elites to define themselves with a view to the policy responses which they wish to evoke. The politics of nationalism provide the best illustration of this tendency. To describe a particular community as a "nation" involves, as it were, a double attribution. On the one hand, one is characterizing a specific group in terms of a sociological phenomenon which is, however nebulously, "out there" — a language, a race, a religion, etc. But on the other hand, one is simultaneously investing that characteristic with a peculiar saliency and importance: one is making it into a marker of nationality. If, as
often happens, the motivation of a minority elite for seeking "national" status is significantly autonomist or even separatist, the possibility of achieving a meaningful "civic" identity may well be eliminated entirely. Indeed, the elimination of this possibility is quite frequently a strategic goal of separatist nationalism. Taylor's tragic blindness to this sort of outcome, especially in the Canadian case, could literally be called "wilful", inasmuch as he refuses to see separatist agitation as resulting from anything other than a "misunderstanding".

Some Difficulties with Taylor's Problematic.

Taylor's problematic of recognition is essentially about "equality", in the sense that he is principally concerned with parrying the liberal objection that group recognition is inherently inegalitarian, and with working out how such recognition might fairly be apportioned between groups. But as the question of "significance" shows, there exist considerations which are likely to be of decisive importance in any viable theory of recognition. The cluster of issues staked out by Taylor is not without formidable difficulties. If we start from the idea that society consists of a number of definite social groups, each having a right to be recognized according to the appropriate verbal formula, we are left with the problems of properly identifying these groups, and with determining what policy consequences the enactment of their recognition presupposes. These difficulties could be described as "internal" to Taylor's problematic, not only in the sense that he seems (partially) to anticipate some of them, but also because they arise from
within the limited assumptions which frame his investigation. Our examination will concentrate upon two of these "internal" difficulties: i) recognition and the entity recognized, and ii) "relatedness" versus "other-dependence".

i) Recognition and the Entity Recognized:

The problem of properly specifying the entity to be recognized is, of course, the "recognition" counterpart to the issue of "intercommunity relations" discussed in the previous chapter. But whereas the question of intercommunity relations is addressed primarily to the theorist of communitarianism, and to a lesser extent the minority-rights activist, the problem of specifying community boundaries for the purposes of recognition involves taking a public stand on the entities which compose society. This public stance will inevitably push into the background, if not repudiate entirely, alternate conceptions of the political community. Thus, not only does selecting "Québécois" over "French-Canadian" involve opting for a national as opposed to a linguistic description of Canada's Francophone population (as we saw above), it also involves enfranchising some people and disenfranchising others. In the former schema, Francophones outside of Quebec are reinterpreted as a "diaspora" community, whilst non-Francophone Quebecers are incorporated -- not without reservations to put it mildly -- into a putative Quebec "nation". In general, the choice of one description for a minority, rather than another, will suggest different criteria of inclusion and exclusion.
ii) **Relatedness versus Other-Dependence:**

We shall coin the term "relatedness" to deal with those aspects of intercommunity recognition not captured by Taylor's concept of "other-dependence". To demonstrate that such a terminological innovation is necessary will require showing that the difficulties surrounding "other-dependence" -- so illuminatingly addressed by Taylor -- nevertheless form merely a subclass of the general problem of otherness. But in order to reach this stage of the argument, we must first get a better sense of what Taylor means by "other-dependence" and what the resolution of this issue might involve.

Taylor's discussion of "other-dependence" emerges in the context of his attempt to rebut the liberal view of group recognition as implying "special privileges". This position he regards as having arisen historically in the Enlightenment's suspicion of "preferences": that is, rights granted only to a small section of the population. Against this conception, early modern liberalism developed an understanding of "rights" as defined by their universality. Such rights promoted equality in the obvious sense that they were granted to everyone; but they also promoted it in another, more subtle, sense. Because they were distributed equally to everyone, such rights could not function as *positional* goods. Every individual, *qua* individual (or perhaps *qua* citizen), was exactly balanced off against every other individual, with nothing left over that could serve to entrench any degree of differential treatment into the legal order.

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89 *The Politics of Recognition*, pp. 44-51.
The reason Taylor believes that group recognition reintroduces the issue of positional rights has to do partly with the "substantive" nature of such rights and partly with the psychic dimension of recognition. For Taylor, as we have seen, group recognition is essentially public recognition, which, if it is to be authentic, must necessarily be "substantive" and therefore also particular. Although in principle every group can be extended recognition, the substantive character of such recognition must — by definition — vary from case to case, and thus the question of whether one group enjoys greater status than another inevitably arises. Furthermore, the psychic dimension of recognition principally consists in how one's cultural identity is regarded in the eyes of others; that is, they determine one's position in the symbolic order by their view of the amount of respect to which one is entitled. This potentially humiliating reliance upon the good opinion of others is what Taylor calls "other-dependence". The dangers of such a reliance can be seen as twofold. First, there is the obvious danger that the proffered judgement might in fact be negative, and that a socially-ratified hierarchy might emerge in which some people are more equal than others. But second, it remains possible to deplore a situation in which one’s self-concept lies in the hands of others, even if their judgements turn out to be favourable. Needless to say, the latter danger is considerably less menacing than the former, but it nonetheless generates, among followers of Rousseau at least, an aspiration to transcend the problem of psychic interdependency entirely.

In Taylor's opinion, these considerations were what ultimately prevented Jean-Jacques Rousseau — whom Taylor credits with originating the modern discourse of

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recognition — from endorsing the politics of recognition as compatible with his ideal of a truly egalitarian society. And whatever conclusions one might draw from the matter, the challenge of reconciling recognition with both genuine equality and a dignified measure of self-sufficiency is certainly a formidable one. Yet Taylor himself is much more optimistic than Rousseau. Although he does concede that other-dependence brings with it the potential dangers of inequality and beholdenness to others, he nevertheless feels that these might be creatively addressed by what he calls “balanced reciprocity”. His idea is simply that “substantive” recognition will be accorded to every group in society, in such a way as to give each group exactly that which is its due, thus assuring (he thinks) a stable condition of mutual respect. This kind of balance, of course, is a much more difficult thing to achieve than it is with its “procedural” (and individualized) counterpart — where the issue is one of the distribution of juridical equality. Still, Taylor's argument seems to be that, in the final analysis, no group in society has an interest in withholding respect from any other group.

As Taylor points out, Rousseau implicitly acknowledged that balanced reciprocity is at least possible in his examination of the public spectacles and ceremonies characteristic of ancient republics. The honours commonly bestowed upon specific individuals at these events, Rousseau maintained, in no way compromised the political liberty and civic equality of those societies. Because such communities were founded upon a real equality and an absence of role-differentiation (according to Rousseau), the

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92 ibid, p. 47.
93 ibid, pp. 46-47.
spectators at such ceremonies were in a sense really honouring themselves. Because the spectators were also simultaneously participants, and because there existed a real unity of common purpose, such festivals reinforced, rather than dissipated, the General Will. Where Taylor parts company with Rousseau is in his confidence that balanced reciprocity can be made compatible with significant (cultural) role-differentiation, provided only that a sense of common purpose be retained.

If this sort of reconciliation can be affected, it will no doubt owe something to Taylor's conviction that the dominant culture of any given society has nothing to gain by withholding recognition from the minority cultures which surround it. This line of argument also originates with Rousseau, but only really achieves its proper formulation in Hegel's famous dialectic of the master and the slave. Hegel's basic contention is that, ultimately, hierarchical honour is self-contradictory. In situations where social recognition is fundamentally unequal in its incidence (like the master/slave relation, but also more generally), those that receive the lesser recognition are automatically demeaned by the very fact of their inequality. Yet those who attain superior recognition in these circumstances also fall short, in a more subtle sense, because their recognition must come from their social inferiors, whose opinions are accordingly less valuable. While acknowledging the conceptual nature of his argument, one cannot help wondering if Hegel (and Taylor) would really want to claim that the positions of the master and the slave are
equivalent. In any case, Hegel concludes that the only truly viable recognition is that which occurs between equals, where, in the end, what is actually recognized is not an "I" but a "we".  

So granting that — in the undifferentiated case at least — balanced reciprocity is possible, and granting that enlightened self-interest will push all parties to desire it, can we share Taylor's confidence that such a solution could be implemented between highly differentiated groups within a larger communitarian society? Unfortunately, Taylor provides us with few reasons for sharing his optimism. Instead, his argument veers off at this point to rebut various liberal objections to recognition, which, although preparing the ground for balanced reciprocity, does not really make a positive case for its feasibility. Perhaps we can get a better sense of what is at stake by asking whether there is something about "substantive" recognition which helps to generate its own consensus behind it. Unlike in the case of undifferentiated recognition, "substantive" recognition differs in kind rather than just in degree, and thus raises the question as to what actually constitutes "equal recognition". Put differently, is there an underlying reality as to what each culture is properly due; or, failing that, is there a common pattern of recognition which all sides can be brought to acknowledge as equal? These questions point to an even more serious difficulty.

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98 ibid, p. 50. cf. Taylor on "We-Identities".

99 In particular, he criticizes the liberal claim that a truly free society must be neutral between different conceptions of the good life; which, if true, would certainly cast doubt upon substantive recognition. We have, however, already considered this claim.
Taylor’s interest in balanced reciprocity as a potential cure for “other-dependence” in fact addresses only one dimension of the possible inequities that could emerge with group recognition. This is the familiar charge of “special privileges”, which Taylor proposes to meet by granting recognition equally to everybody. The diagnosis here is that an inequity might arise if we recognize only the more vocal of minority groups. Obviously, this approach is not without special problems of its own — such as the difficulty, noted above, of discerning equality in incommensurable forms of recognition. Nevertheless, over-emphasis on this particular difficulty may obscure the fact that the inequities associated with group recognition might arise in other ways as well.

We may now specify “relatedness” as pertaining to those aspirations for group recognition which incorporate some vision as to the kind of recognition which other groups ought to receive. This type of relation differs from that which Taylor discusses under the heading of “other-dependence”, inasmuch as it is not concerned with “recognition” as set off against a general background — in which it is a matter of indifference whether other groups receive recognition or not — nor, as in the case of hierarchical recognition, is it a question of “how much” of a fixed (homogenous) stock of recognition various social groups are to be accorded. Rather, what is at issue here is whether, in recognizing an aggrieved minority, we are obliged to impose an interpretation upon the significance of the other groups of which society is composed. This is a sense in which minority groups are in “competition”, which Taylor neither considers in his discussion of other-dependence, nor indeed makes much provision for in his specific meditations upon the Canadian case. Yet it is evident that even with Taylor’s favourite
illustration of the relation between the French majority versus the English minority in Quebec, it makes an enormous difference to the recognition of the former how the latter community is interpreted.

In fact, the larger theoretical shortcomings of Taylor's numerous interventions in the debate on national unity, lend to his specifically Canadian writings a more than purely parochial relevance. In this context, it is interesting to note a certain tension between Taylor's views on the recognition of minorities and his defence of the "participatory society". Taylor's passionate commitment to special recognition for Quebec, as a solution to the Canadian constitutional impasse, seems to be responsible for his sympathetic attitude towards minoritarian recognition more generally. Yet when it comes to the question of the rights of Quebec's Anglophone minority, Taylor is at some pains to stress their accountability to the collective decision of Quebec society. In other words, while the English-Canadian majority are expected to recognize the minority rights of the Québécois, the Québécois bear no similar obligation with respect to their linguistic minorities! Even if Taylor were able to remove this glaring contradiction by appealing to the peculiar circumstances of the Canadian case (and he cites no specific principles which would enable him to do so), we would still be left with a general philosophical framework in which the decision would be purely arbitrary as to what qualifies as a

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100 Taylor's notions of the 'rights-society' and the "participatory society" are introduced in "Alternative Futures: Legitimacy, Identity, and Alienation in Late-Twentieth-Century Canada" in *Reconciling the Solitudes*.

101 This commitment has been a consistent theme in Taylor's thought from the time of his earliest writings on Canadian politics. However else Taylor's views may have evolved over the years, this is one respect in which they haven't. Compare the earlier with the later essays in *Reconciling the Solitudes*.

rights-bearing minority, on the one hand, or a minority which must submit to the will of its majority, on the other.\(^{103}\)

The problem of English/French relations in Canada is only one example (albeit Taylor's favourite) of how what we are calling "relatedness" influences the potential distribution of recognition within the larger society. We must not be misled into thinking that such instances are unusual hazards of recognition, which might bedevil a minority group that has formulated its aspirations in an unfortunate manner. For the "projection" of what a minority claims to be explicitly onto what the majority must therefore be implicitly is in fact a ubiquitous feature of minoritarian politics. Another illustration of this phenomenon would be the Afrocentricity movement in the United States, which rightly or wrongly involves the insinuation that American society as a whole is Eurocentric. Still more generally, a minority intent on describing itself as a national minority is simultaneously asserting the multi-national character of its host society and thus denying the claims of those who would prefer to define it as "multiethnic". These forms of "relatedness" suggest that achieving an authentic state of mutual recognition is a much more difficult proposition than what mere "other-dependence" would lead us to believe, in which the implicit projection of each identity onto the others is in harmony with the explicit recognition which each receives and desires.

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\(^{103}\) My point here is not to contest Taylor's views on the Canadian case (although, indeed, I vehemently disagree with them), but rather to draw attention to their utter lack of generality. Thus, it may well be that a factor like Canada's federal character (for example) explains why Quebec qualifies for special recognition, while English Quebec does not. But in that case, minorities across the world had better pray that they happen to live in a federal state, and that they happen to dominate one of its component sub-governments.
Recognition and Civic Unity.

It is possible, of course, that a given society might already enjoy such a consensus, but clearly for those societies that are not so fortunate "mutual recognition" will involve more than just an openness to diversity. What we are talking about, in the case of most societies, is not simply a capacity for tolerance, but a very real compromise of identity on the part of some or all of that society's constituent communities. And the problem of exactly which compromises are required is subsumed by the prior question as to whether the parties involved would even be willing to offer such concessions in exchange for the promise of a common understanding. No doubt, identity is to some extent mutable -- since, as Taylor points out, it is arrived at diallogically, in the context of our interactions with others. But is there any reason to suppose that it is also teleological -- in the sense of being negotiated with a view to achieving a common understanding, which could in turn serve as the basis for mutual recognition?

Here the problematic of recognition makes contact with our earlier discussion of community/society relations, where the issue was whether our identities could somehow bridge this fundamental divide so as to maintain the host society as a functioning entity. It would now appear, however, that such a common understanding is the necessary foundation not only for civic unity, but also for that authentic state of "balanced reciprocity" which Taylor is trying to promote. To succeed in doing so, though, is not a question of overcoming a certain obstinacy towards extending equal recognition to one's fellows, but of theorizing whether, and under what conditions, the dialogical development of group identity will tend towards a harmonious outcome. Whether the theory of
recognition can meet this challenge is likely to be the decisive test of its continuing viability.
Although Charles Taylor would not necessarily endorse the framework of the "project" into which we have organized his ideas in this thesis, he would certainly agree that communitarianism, like liberalism, stands or falls to the extent that it can provide an adequate account of the place of cultural minorities in society. Social-embeddedness, as it is conceived of in communitarian thought, is inextricably linked to "identity"; which is in its turn bound up with the fate of those collective-level structures -- i.e. cultural subcommunities -- in which it finds expression. If we add to this insight Taylor's contention that what is needed, by both individuals and communities, is a measure of self-realization -- which can only be achieved "dialogically" through interaction with others -- then we are well on our way to affirming something like the problematic which we have been investigating in the previous chapters. Whether we conclude, in the face of the formidable difficulties occasioned by that problematic, that we would be better off wrestling with the contradictions of liberalism, might appear at first sight to be a function of our initial ideological dispositions. Even worse, should we choose to abide by the communitarian cause, our decision runs the risk of seeming to be a purely arbitrary one -- a kind of "committed" leap into the theoretical void.

However, as Taylor's work has shown, such epistemic pessimism may be unwarranted. Though the liberal/communitarian debate will no doubt continue for some
time to come, and though the ultimate resolution will indubitably be some sort of compromise between the two positions, there is reason to suppose that the eventual consensus will represent an understanding that we should characterize as "communitarian". For although in a sense the liberal/communitarian debate can be thought of as encompassing a spectrum of possible views, it is also the case that, in a number of respects, "liberalism" represents an extreme position. On the question of social-embeddedness, for example, liberalism differs in kind, rather than just in degree, from communitarianism, in the sense that the liberal formulation requires that the "self" be entirely -- not merely predominantly -- prior to its "ends". Similarly, liberalism requires that "cultural structures" -- whether considered in a sociological or an ontological sense -- be fully reducible to the decisions and desires of individuals. And on the psychological plane, liberalism assumes that individuals and groups can comfortably coexist within a framework of mere tolerance, where at best an atmosphere of mutual indifference is cultivated, while the philosophical emphasis is placed upon the ethical inadmissability of all attempts to actualize inter-group hostilities. The slightest compromise on any of these issues would shatter the context of Rawlsian liberalism, even if it otherwise conceded little to the communitarian perspective.

I hope that in this thesis, I have succeeded in vindicating Taylor's belief that some such concessions will have to be forthcoming on each of these matters, and that political philosophy will therefore converge upon a solution which will, to a greater or lesser extent, be communitarian in nature. And in spite of the rather severe difficulties that such a solution is likely to encounter, which I also hope this thesis has disclosed, it is clear that
any communitarian theory which wants to do justice to the cultural aspects of our social-embeddedness will have to assume a minoritarian form. Nevertheless, the ease with which the liberal position has hitherto been able to bypass these inevitably rather complex areas, has made it a formidable alternative to communitarianism -- one that, indeed, has even substantially been able to set the terms of their debate. Accordingly, it is worth emphasizing once again that liberalism is best understood as a "limiting" or "degenerate" case on the liberal/communitarian continuum.

I

What we call an "identity" is a complicated sociological structure which straddles the notions of the "individual" and the "community". Liberalism does not dispute the fact of "identity", but rather places it in a slightly different position -- conceptually and temporally -- in relation to the "self". For liberalism, "identity" can, at least in principle, be "chosen". Who we are, is ultimately what we choose to be; even if, as liberals happily admit, we generally take over unexamined the roles and possibilities inherited from our culture. Apart from an innate human capacity for choice, liberals insist that all ends are, and ought to be, revisable. All legitimate collective arrangements, in their view, must be built upon this basic foundation.

What Taylor calls "common meanings" are not merely the foundation of "community"; they also make various individual desires possible. Some of these desires -- those for the so-called "public goods" -- might actually be irreducible, in the sense that they are either undesirable, or even meaningless, when understood in an individuated
form. Individual identity, to the extent that it partakes of such goods, has an inescapable "we"-structure, which implicates social-embeddedness at both the levels of the "individual" and that of the "community". As we have seen, the liberal ontology demands that such "public goods" (which he also calls "irreducible social goods") be either denied or foregone. Taylor makes a convincing case both for the implausibility of the former strategy, and for the impossibility of the latter.

The challenge facing minority communities provides another interesting, albeit potentially misleading, illustration of such an "irreducible social good". As Taylor's notion of "survivance" shows, it certainly qualifies as such an illustration, in the sense that the desire for one's cultural identity to survive into indefinite future generations is not meaningfully understood as a desire for oneself. But this example is also potentially misleading, in the sense that it encourages us to think of social goods infrastructurally. In other words, we might be misled into thinking that the issue at stake is merely that a larger and healthier community makes more services possible, rather than that an esteemed and viable identity makes its members more committed to holding on to it.

II

All the same, the infrastructural perspective does indeed point to another obstacle, which must be overcome by both liberal and communitarian theories, even if the threat to liberalism is particularly acute. The credibility of liberal theory would be severely compromised if the cultural choices which many individuals judge to be essential are plagued by intractable problems of collective action. The feasibility of any particular choice in relation to its infrastructure must be in approximate proportion to the number
of individuals desiring it. If communities, as the collective referents of such individual choices, require instead something like a “critical mass” — a not unheard of minoritarian problem — then the realistic options confronting individuals are profoundly circumscribed by their fellows.

It is in this sociological — as opposed to ontological — sense that Kymlicka wishes to defend the place of cultural minorities from within the liberal problematic. His motivation for doing so, of course, is less that of answering communitarian critics of liberalism, than of removing what he rightly sees as a troubling discrepancy within the liberal tradition, namely, its wholehearted support for the rights of minorities in practice, combined with its considerable hostility to their claims in theory. Minorities are obtrusive enough phenomena in the social world, and must be accounted for somehow by any political theory that aspires to be taken seriously. The insight, which underlies Kymlicka’s important contribution to liberal thought, is that political philosophy needs to be elaborated in such a way as to come to terms with such intermediate phenomena — those lying between the individual and the state. This Kymlicka dutifully proceeds to do from within the framework of the Rawlsian tradition. But this challenge is equally applicable to communitarianism, not only in the sense that communitarian theory must be rescaled appropriately to account for minority communities, but also in the sense that its ontology must be made, as it were, to “matter” sociologically. The challenge of the infrastructural problem is not met, in other words, if the version of social-embeddedness which communitarians eventually adopt, offers only “metaphysical” grounds for assessing a particular change in a minority’s fortunes. As far as the “sociological” side of the issue
is concerned, it is necessary to show that such a development would have some effect upon the range of choices available.

"Mattering sociologically" involves a number of things. First, the "community" in question must qualify as an entity in more than a purely nominal sense. It might happen, of course, that the entity is thought of – as the liberal ontology requires – merely as an aggregation of individuals. But the notion of community must be given a content which differentiates it from just any imaginable statistical category. A "community" cannot, for instance, be defined as all males between 5'6" and 5'10" with an allergy to horseradish. Second, the aforementioned understanding of "community" must allow for some meaningful notion of "cultural decline" (or "improvement"). That is, it must be possible in principle for a cultural structure to change from one state to another, which might then be judged "worse" (or "better") according to some standpoint. Third, some such judgements of cultural decline must pass -- with proper theoretical warrant -- from being mere expressions of personal disappointment into becoming a matter of more general moral concern, which must then generate grounds for corrective political intervention. Taylor's definition of "community" as constituted by common meanings meets all three of these requirements, albeit perhaps too abstractly for some liberal tastes.

Although Kymlicka's model does not really respond to communitarianism's ontological objections, his formulation also meets the above criteria, and thus provides a plausible starting point for the issue that actually interests him -- reconciling the estrangement between minority rights and liberal political philosophy. Kymlicka has indubitably discovered the general pattern into which any liberal attempt to affect the
above reconciliation must fit; that is, affirming a minority's rights through affirming the
rights of its participant individuals. However, the question naturally arises as to whether
such models are adequate to capture the phenomenon of "community" as it is actually
experienced. As we have seen, Kymlicka’s model does not meet this additional criterion;
nor, indeed, does the aggregative view in general.

III

So the circumstances of minority communities give us reason to believe that any
defence of their claims must also be theorized in communitarian terms. This remains true
whether we approach them ontologically -- through an analysis of their relation to the
nature of “individuality” -- or whether we approach them sociologically -- through an
analysis of the sort of entity a “community” is, and of the kind of social factors which
influence its dynamics. All the same, this realization enormously complicates
communitarianism's itinerary. Traditionally, communitarian theory has focussed upon our
embeddedness in the social world, and has thus implicitly left the mantle of “community”
to be inherited by the existing political unit. The multiplication of the number of entities
that might aspire to “community” status has shattered this purely illusory centrality. In
the place of a single point of reference for the wide diversity of individual identities
found in any reasonably pluralistic society, we have a bewildering variety of strands,
emanating from individuals (not necessarily one per person), and referring -- in varying
degrees -- to several identity-bearing communities.

In Chapter 3 we attempted a very general overview of this difficulty. Needless
to say, this overview does not amount to anything like a comprehensive treatment of the
subject, but only to an introduction to the sorts of issues which communitarian theory will ultimately have to face. The emergence of "community" as an intraworldly entity to be explained, rather than as a mere redescription of the social totality, implies at least three new kinds of relations. First, we have to rethink the relationship between the individual and the community. This is now primarily a relation between the individual and a cultural subcommunity, but it retains, to a greater or lesser extent, the original political link between the individual citizen and the territorial state. Second, we must now theorize the emergent relationships between communities, in so far as these represent alternate (and conflicting) conceptions of how society ought to be divided up. Third, we must now explain how the community fits into the larger society (and the territorial state) in a manner compatible with the citizen/state relation.

The problem of "identity/community divergence" we also pursued (non-exhaustively) under three headings. In our discussion of what we called "communalness", we considered the question of whether -- and to what extent -- it even makes sense to think of the sum total of our social influences in terms of some definite "group", which also happens to be politically and culturally relevant. Perhaps there are aspects of our socialization which elude identity politics. Certainly there are aspects of our personal development which, while taking place in the setting of a particular community, we do not owe to that community. The "communal" would seem to be a subset of the "social".

Next we examined "plurality". Often, in modern multicultural societies, "identity" is distributed amongst several cultural subcommunities. Whether this is due to
intermarriage (possibly through a couple of generations), or because one's original "ethnicity" was itself complex, the result is likely to be an idiosyncratic mixture that varies randomly from individual to individual. It is virtually inconceivable that a society could incorporate this reality in the form of composite communities; rather, what is required theoretically is a further disassociation of the concepts of "identity" and "community".

This consideration led naturally to the question of "self-perception". There is no guarantee, in minoritarian communitarianism, that the forms of social-embeddedness discovered by philosophers will inevitably line up with what individuals perceive to be their community. This problem can be avoided, to some extent, by defining the community in terms of its members' perception of it. Taylor's notion of "common meanings" is a case in point. But such an approach could only work with those aspects of social-embeddedness which present themselves to consciousness.

IV

So the advent of minoritarian communitarianism, by multiplying the number of entities (and relationships) to be explained, and by promoting a certain disassociation between the phenomena of "identity" and "community", enormously complicates -- or, to be a little more optimistic, enriches -- communitarian theory. When we posit, under the influence of an important stream in Taylor's thought, a need for "recognition" -- this complicates the picture even further. If by "recognition" we mean the external validation of a community and its achievements, we pass from a community's self-understandings
to the societal ratification of those understandings. It is not at all clear, as Taylor apparently assumes, that this can be done in a way that is both consistent and satisfactory to all groups.

Without quite realizing it, Taylor comes perilously close to identifying the problem. Although his mention of "misrecognition" occurs in a throw-away line which ordinarily should not be made to bear much philosophical weight, it does raise an intriguing question. Apparently, it is possible for a society to make a sincere effort to recognize a given community (its givenness being itself something of a problem), but nevertheless fail in the attempt. Evidently, true recognition is "recognition as". In his preoccupation with criticizing liberal recognition (such as it is) and rebutting the (anticipated) accusation that group recognition conflicts with equality, Taylor overlooks this fundamental property of the discourse of recognition. For "recognition" is not a question of naming, and then bestowing approval upon, a pre-existing community, but of endorsing that community's conception of its role in the larger society. The public space of "recognition" is not, accordingly, constituted by the sum total of such acts of recognition - with perhaps some aggrieved communities outstanding - but by an intergroup consensus as to their respective positions in the larger scheme of things.

In a public space flooded by "as-recognition", the problem is more complicated. We saw (in Chapter 4) that merely agreeing on the boundaries of a community is insufficient. One can have a properly delimited entity to be recognized, together with a social disposition to recognize that entity, but still fail short due to the failure to include such intangibles as the political saliency of its difference or its rights vis-a-vis other
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communities. These issues figure in actual minority group advocacy, even if they are absent from Taylor's problematic of recognition.

The rights and symbolic position of a community vis-a-vis other communities, of course, is the "as-recognition" analogue to the aforementioned problem of achieving a common civic identity. Unlike in the simpler case, reaching this objective is not a question of theorizing a level of connectedness beyond that binding the individual to his cultural subcommunity. It is not enough, in other words, to come up with a formula like "deep diversity". On the contrary, whether a society can attain such a level of harmonious co-existence is very largely a question of whether a durable social consensus can be found.

This consideration makes nonsense of Taylor's reflections on "equality", as it pertains to the issue of group recognition. As Taylor understands the issue, the threat which recognition poses to equality is essentially twofold. In the first place, extending recognition to some groups, but not to others, might be seen to be "unfair" -- especially since such recognition, being substantive, would be unquantifiable as to degree. Taylor's reply seems to be that -- since we all shall be recognized -- our notion of "equality" must be reconfigured somehow to eliminate any hint of special treatment. By this means, any discrepancy might be made to vanish, just as giving Quebec more powers than any other province might not conflict with "equality" if we pass from a conception of ten equal provinces to that of "deux nations".
In the second place, the threat to equality might come from the opposite direction in the form of "other-dependence". Here the danger menaces the community which actually receives the recognition (as opposed to those which are ignored) in the sense that it might develop a kind of psychic dependency upon the approval of others. Taylor's answer to this source of difficulty is "balanced reciprocity". Drawing upon Rousseau-esque themes, Taylor argues that the drawbacks of other-dependence might be mitigated if we all recognize each other. In this civic-republican solution, we are simultaneously recognizers and recognized, and thus the issue of "inequality" cannot arise; any more than the issue of "subjugation" can arise where we are both rulers and ruled.

Although Taylor's observations on these subtle ramifications of "equality" are unquestionably illuminating, they are nevertheless based upon a naive conception of the sort of public space which "recognition" occupies. In each of the above cases, Taylor sees the potential inequality as arising from the mere act of recognition. If instead the inequality emerges in a recognition-space characterized by an inherent "as-structure", then the kind of balancing which Taylor proposes will be ineffective. Or rather (to put the point somewhat differently), the attempt to find a balance under such circumstances already presupposes what it is setting out to establish -- that there exists an underlying equilibrium which can be "reached". The phenomenon of "as-recognition" thus enters the picture in two places; first, on the micro level of what it is to recognize a given community authentically; and second, on the macro level of whether all communities can be recognized harmoniously.
If we wish to address the problem of inequality from within a public space characterized by "as-recognition", we need to ask whether, and to what extent, the self-understandings of the various communities which make up a society are consistent — in the sense that these understandings of their relative positions are shared. In answering this question, our concept of "relatedness" may prove to be more useful than that of "other-dependence", since it squarely faces the fact that "inequality" might arise from a discrepancy in the content of a community's sense of its position vis-a-vis another, rather than just from its magisterial status as a "recognizer". In general, a community's demand for recognition will incorporate at least an implicit notion of the appropriate configuration of statuses within society, and thus also of the potential sources of "inequality". A minority group might, for instance, demand "equality" with all other groups in the context of a multicultural society; or then again, it might demand "national" status on its home territory. The latter sort of demand points to a conception of "equality" which is qualitatively different from that which is proper to a multicultural society.

The understanding of "recognition" as involving an attribution of significance — in other words, "as-recognition" — raises the distinct possibility that many, perhaps most, societies will not enjoy the sort of seamless consensus that would permit every subcommunity to be recognized authentically. Such societies are inevitably condemned to a certain degree of tension and ambiguity. A similarly pessimistic conclusion confronts the possibility of a rational ordering of communities under the conditions of "identity/community divergence" examined in our discussion of minoritarian
communitarianism. Both successful recognition and a rational ordering would seem to depend on there already being a background agreement as to which communities exist in a given society and what roles they ought to play. Viewed in this manner, Taylor's enterprise looks like an exercise in question-begging. And indeed there is much in Taylor's work that would support such an interpretation. His Canadian writings in particular are marked by an almost unlimited faith in the potential curative power of a single grand gesture of affirmation.

V

But if we look at the possible role of philosophy a little more modestly -- as helping to clarify the alternatives before us, rather than as supplying the conceptual resources for a final a priori solution to all minoritarian problems -- then the contribution of Charles Taylor appears in a much more positive light. His own conception of that contribution, after all, is not that of trumping liberalism with civic republicanism, or negative liberty with positive, but to bring the two traditions -- liberalism and communitarianism -- into their proper balance by correcting the exaggerated claims of the former. Such a rebalancing, he rightly insists (and as argued above), would amount to a refutation of contemporary liberalism -- in the sense of the followers of John Rawls -- since it represents an extreme position, one that is incapable of accounting for those "irreducible social goods" which are nevertheless indispensable. His theory of recognition, in spite of its ultimate shortcomings, effects a similar refutation, by drawing our attention to the importance, and pervasiveness, of public space. This is a
phenomenon that is poorly served by the liberal invocation of "tolerance", with its connotation of the harmlessness of those attitudes which do not issue in political action.

These are significant achievements, even if they represent only the very beginning of the theoretical work that remains to be done on the question of what happens when public space is particularized in the form of minority communities. And in spite of Taylor's occasionally excessive hopes for "recognition", such setbacks are perfectly consistent with (and only to be expected in) this conception of the role of philosophy. Even if the prognosis for minoritarian theory turns out to be limited by -- and conceptually dependent upon -- the historical pattern of minority self-understandings and conflicts which obtain in a given society, there is still an important role for philosophy in articulating what those conflicts are about, and in suggesting possible avenues of reconciliation. No doubt, in many societies, this reconciliation will take the form of a more rigorous assertion of fundamental human rights and the enhanced protection of the individual against unjustified discrimination. But where the modern identity aspires rather to a fuller, more authentic recognition from its fellow citizens, there will always be a need for philosophical formulations which hold out the possibility of meeting these aspirations.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

This bibliography contains both works actually cited in the text and those which I have found helpful in making sense of Taylor and the liberal/communitarian debate. To confine myself exclusively to the former would give the reader a misleading impression of the range of issues touched by Taylor's work. On the other hand, the more inclusive policy has necessitated drawing a somewhat artificial line between those works which were infrastructural to this project and those which formed a part of my general background reading. Inevitably, a certain number of arbitrary decisions had to be made. It should also be noted that Taylor frequently recycles his articles, often making substantial changes in accordance with the interests of his audience. I have tried (with one exception) to avoid such repetitions here.

WORKS BY TAYLOR

I. BOOKS:


II. ESSAY COLLECTIONS:


III. IMPORTANT ARTICLES. (Not Mentioned Above):


WORKS BY OTHERS


