What we have yet failed to achieve:
A study of Charles Taylor's Canadian social criticism

By Andrew Gibson,
Department of Art History and Communication Studies,
McGill University, Montreal
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Abstract

This dissertation examines what the author calls the Canadian social criticism component of the work of philosopher Charles Taylor. An internationally renowned scholar, Taylor's work has been much commented on. Yet there is an imbalance of attention in the reception of his work between the ample commentary pertaining to his more abstract philosophical thought, on the one hand, and the paucity of commentary concerning those aspects of his writing that carry more immediate practical relevance, i.e. his work in social criticism. After introducing a basic framework for 'interpretive social criticism', the dissertation proceeds to situate different aspects of Taylor's criticism within contemporary debates, including the topic areas of democratic decline, consumerism, national unity and egalitarian politics. At one level, each of the different chapters engages with and elaborates on a facet of Canada's common public culture. Yet the central objective in bringing them together in a single program of research is to contribute to our understanding of how this still incomplete culture and political identity can best be achieved. The guiding assumption behind the research is that this would require being faithful at once to the country's social democratic tradition and to its unique potential in reconciling ethnocultural, regional and linguistic diversity. The work of Charles Taylor, as interpreted in the following chapters, helps to demonstrate what this means in the context of specific issues and debates.

Résumé

Ce mémoire examine ce que l'auteur dénomme la composante « critique sociale canadienne » de l'œuvre du philosophe Charles Taylor. Érudit à la renommée internationale, les travaux de Taylor ont maintes fois été commentés. Cependant, l'attention portée à son œuvre présente un déséquilibre entre les nombreux commentaires relatifs à ses pensées philosophiques plus abstraites, d'une part, et ceux, rares, concernant les aspects de ses écrits porteurs d'un intérêt pratique plus immédiat, c'est-à-dire ses travaux relevant de la critique sociale. Après avoir introduit un cadre de base à la « critique sociale interprétative », cette thèse s'attache ensuite à situer les différents aspects de la critique de Taylor dans le contexte de certains débats contemporains sur des sujets tels que le déclin démocratique, le consumérisme, l'unité nationale ou les politiques égalitaristes. Tout d'abord, chacun des différents chapitres se penche sur un aspect de la culture public commune canadienne et l'analyse. Cependant, l'objectif central recherché par l'intégration de ces chapitres dans un même programme de recherche est de nous permettre d'identifier la manière selon laquelle notre identité politique et culturelle encore incomplète pourrait le mieux être atteinte. Le présupposé directeur de cette recherche est que cela requerrait d'avoir foi tant dans la tradition sociale démocrate de notre pays que dans son potentiel unique de concilier sa diversité ethnoculturelle, régionale et linguistique. Les travaux de Charles Taylor, tels qu'interprétés dans les chapitres qui suivent, nous aident à démontrer ce que cela signifie dans le contexte de questions et débats spécifiques.

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

In studying Charles Taylor's social criticism one is looking not just at an aspect of his thought but also at an entire approach to intellectual life. Implicit to this approach, which is perhaps best described as a form of interpretive social criticism, is a notion of what we might understand as a critical contribution to the social and political life of the critic's respective community. Ultimately, such a contribution aims to push forward the best of collectively shared ideals in order to affirm, elaborate and improve upon a common way of life. This general aim can take shape in any number of more specific approaches, including arguing about the 'true' character of collectively held values, as well as assessing them against external challenges constraining the possibility of their realization.

In some cases, perhaps the critic is able to reorient a people towards its historic aspirations. In others, the task may be to revise and modify these aspirations while remaining loyal to their essence. By its very nature, interpretive social criticism is not something that is ever closed or complete. As times change, there is always something more to say. If I've chosen Charles Taylor's writings as the focal point for such criticism it is because I believe he offers a remarkably persuasive critique of Western life and presents a challenging set of alternatives to Canadian men and women in particular.

Taylor's criticism is only one aspect of his work, perhaps a minor one at that. Over his career he has moved between this type of engaged thought and

more abstract philosophical endeavours. The latter, including his recent book on secularism, can hardly be described as social criticism. But nor is such work distant from everyday social and political concerns.[1] The purpose of the present dissertation is to reformulate and extend some of Taylor's central insights in social criticism by situating them within current debates.

The project brings together a set of independent arguments having to do with distinct yet mutually informative areas of research. It thus reads in the style of a series of manuscripts. The conceptual feature that unites the different chapters under a single research program is their focus on a shared Canadian culture and political identity, as articulated in Taylor's criticism. Perhaps the best way to describe this shared identity is with the idea of a specifically Canadian 'political culture'. A similar notion currently used is that of a 'common public culture'.[2] In both cases, what is at issue is an array of institutions, practices, norms and outlooks which are commonly found in liberal democratic political communities.

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[1] His writings on secularism and religion can, for example, go a long way towards helping address the motivations behind religious violence. See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

[2] I will mostly be using the latter term because of the restrictive connotation of 'political culture'. Common public culture makes clear that what is at issue is not just matters of direct political concern, such as elections, party platforms and public opinion polls, but also a way of life that pervades civil society as a whole. Rajeev Bhargava makes a similar distinction between political society, strictly understood, and a wider conception of civil society. See Rajeev Bhargava, Helmut Reifeld, and Stiftung Konrad Adenauer, *Civil Society, Public Sphere and Citizenship: Dialogues and Perceptions* (New Delhi ; Thousand Oaks : SAGE Publications, 2005), introduction.

In their description of the notion of a common public culture, Karmis, Gervais and Lamoureux emphasize the importance of government run democratic institutions, rights and charters, attachment to the principles of legal equality, a climate of tolerance and peaceful conflict resolution, as well as an acceptance of the diverse cultural backgrounds of one's fellow citizens.[3] It is the contours of this social and political way of life, as it develops and changes in any one country or political community, that constitutes the subject matter of the social critic's reproaches and proposals. The institutions and outlooks being referred to are likely to have a much more tangible meaning when specific instances of public culture are being advocated for or defended. Consider, for example, debates about health care reform in Canada, where the idea of 'equality' takes on a wide and complex spectrum of meaning.

The present dissertation focuses on two broad thematic areas of the common public culture in Canada – what can be called the 'cultural diversity' and 'social democracy' facets of Canadian society. The research starts from the premise that while both of these are camped in the above mentioned set of practices and ideals, they are best understood as still yet unachieved aspects of

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[3] Stéphan Gervais, Dimitrios Karmis, and Diane Lamoureux, *Du tricoté serré au métissé serré : la culture publique commune au Québec en débats*, Collection Sociologie Contemporaine (Québec (Québec) : Presses de l'Université Laval, 2008), p. 1. Because their site of analysis is Québec society, they also mention the promotion of French as the common public language. Though the concept of 'culture publique commune' seems to have taken root in Québec around debates over the nature of a liberal democratic Québec identity, I will be using it here to apply to liberal democracies in general and to Canada more specifically.

Canadian public culture. It is this incompleteness, I want to claim, that forms the central problematic of Taylor's Canadian social criticism.

It should be said from the outset, however, that notions such as common public culture or political culture are controversial ones and thus can hardly be taken for granted. First, the very idea of a cultural identity that unites millions of people of diverse backgrounds is itself dubious, especially under conditions of Western individualism.[4] Where such an identity does in fact exist, it is bound to be fraught with tension and indeterminacy. It is likely to be shifting and amorphous, even in tightly knit societies such as those of northern Europe. In Canada, due to the country's intense regional, ethnic and linguistic fragmentation – the Québec factor being the most salient here – talk of 'a' or 'the' public culture is going to be even more tenuous still.

Yet while all this may be true, countless commentators, not to mention citizens far and wide, continue to allude to something akin to a common public culture in Canada. This is the case with Taylor but also with other prominent commentators such as Jeremy Webber, André Burelle and Samuel LaSelva.[5] In

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[4] For a skeptical view of the idea of a political culture based on shared values see Joseph Heath, *The Myth of Shared Values in Canada*, Mythe Des Valeurs Communes Au Canada (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Management Development, 2003).

[5] See Jeremy H. A. Webber, *Reimagining Canada: Language, Culture, Community and the Canadian Constitution* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), Samuel V. LaSelva, *The Moral Foundations of Canadian Federalism : Paradoxes, Achievements, and Tragedies of Nationhood* (Montréal ; Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), André Burelle, *Le Mal*

undertaking the dissertation research, I too have proceeded on the assumption that something like a Canadian public culture exists, one with shared character traits and a unique distinctiveness. Inherent to this assumption, however, is the recognition that this common identity is particularly fragile and complex. The institutions needed to make up a common civic framework in Canada exist, starting with a flexible federal framework, but the cultural basis for this framework is burdened with deep-seated tensions and misunderstandings between regions and 'nations within'. Canadian social democracy, for its part, has not yet managed to firmly establish itself against the more individualistic model of American liberalism.

It is in these ways that the public culture may be understood as unachieved or incomplete. Certainly, it is difficult to speak of something like a common public culture in Canada without having come to an amicable constitutional agreement concerning the basis for cooperation across regions, cultures and sub-nationalities. The discord over the federation's constitutional underpinnings undermines the intelligibility and self-understanding that must be at the core of anything resembling a common political identity. If an amicable agreement were one day to be achieved, the country's understanding of itself would undoubtedly be strengthened and enriched.

Canadien : Essai De Diagnostic Et Esquisse D'une Thérapie (Saint-Laurent, Québec: Fides, 1995).

Canadian social democracy is, it too, yet to be fully achieved, if only in the sense that it is an imperfect work in progress. In the postwar period, the construction of the Canadian welfare state helped to solidify a sense of equality among citizens as well as between the country's different regions.[6] Taylor considers the social democratic underpinnings that helped to accomplish this to be an invaluable part of Canada's political identity. There will always be more work to be done in order to ensure the longevity of egalitarian institutions and public services – an important part of which involves integrating them into an overall industrial strategy. Renewing Canadian social democracy for the 21st Century requires not just backward-looking defensiveness, but also new solutions and strategies stemming from greater democratic mobilization. Indeed, there is a sense, in this regard, that the current era of globalization is pivotal to the fate of Canada's ability to sustain its own political vision while at the same time sustaining the social and economic ties that form the very basis of pan-national cooperation.[7]

I want to say a little more about the idea of public or political culture before reviewing the scant literature that engages with Taylor's work in social criticism. Canadian public culture, like that of most other Western democracies,

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[6] Keith Banting, "Canada: Nation-Building in a Federal Welfare State," in *Federalism and the Welfare State: New World and European Experiences* ed. Stephan Leibfried and Frank G. Castles Herbert Obinger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[7] Donald J. Savoie, "All Things Canadian Are Now Regional," *Journal of Canadian studies* 35, no. 11 (2000).

may at one level be understood to form something like a collective personality, distinguished by roughly shared ways of seeing and doing things. There is, however, an important distinction that needs to be made here between ethnic, linguistic and other forms of non-state collective identities, on the one hand, and the common public culture on the other.

Most large scale identities exhibit some kind of collective personality with shared underlying features. But liberal political identities are, by definition, more encompassing and inclusive than these competing identities. This is because they must, as a corollary to the democratic state, have legitimacy in the eyes of both dominant ethnocultural groups and the numerous minority groups that make up the citizen population. While remaining faithful to some level of linguistic and historic belonging, a truly common public culture must make an equal place for each and all.

Of course, in practice, this kind of openness is not always easy to mediate. Balancing the commitments of the public culture with those held by the plurality of different groups is in theory governed by a principle of ‘state neutrality’. This means that the state must not endorse any particular set of profound moral beliefs that can be linked to any one group, whether religious, atheistic or other – save those of liberal democracy itself. So, for example, the public education system should not privilege any singular worldview above all others.

It remains the case, however, that insofar as the state must endorse the use of a common public language, in Canada's case either French or English (or Inuktitut in the North), it must to a certain extent privilege one group over others. Still, given the centrality of the egalitarian dimension in maintaining a liberal public culture, it is important that host societies such as Canada or Québec try to find ways to make their linguistic and historic identities more open, inclusive and dynamic.[8] In a liberal democracy, all citizens must feel that they are respected and heard in matters of public concern. This needs to happen at the individual level but also at the level of groups, especially those having suffered a history of discrimination and oppression.

Alongside this emphasis on internal equality, Taylor insists that a vibrant public culture also depends on a sense of distinctiveness and historic purpose.[9] The men and women that constitute it, that is, must feel that they are part of a unique common enterprise. Their self-understanding as members of such a project

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[8] To start with, neutrality need not be applied to non-official instances of public life, such that the taken-for-granted visibility of majority groups necessarily dominates public life. As shown by the Canadian and Québécois experiences of 'multiculturalism' and 'interculturalisme', respectively, ethnocultural minority groups can be supported and encouraged to express their profound moral beliefs in public, even if these are religious beliefs. Taylor and Bouchard develop a model of 'open secularism' to characterize how this works and might work better in the Québec case. See Gérard Bouchard, Charles Taylor, and Québec, *Fonder L'avenir : Le Temps De La Conciliation : Rapport Abrégé* (Québec: Commission de consultation sur les pratiques d'accommodement reliées aux différences culturelles, 2008).

[9] Taylor articulates this view in Charles Taylor, *Reconciling the Solitudes : Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism* (Montréal : McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), chapter 3.

is part of what compels them to get involved in activities that extend beyond the realm of private satisfaction. This sense of historic purpose is sometimes understood to be attached to language. This is especially the case when the language is perceived as threatened, as with French in the North American context. The latter is not just a matter of concern to Québécois, for Canada's identity as a bilingual nation is also a stake.[10]

Language, however, is not the only possible manifestation of a distinct political identity. Within the limits of a constitutional framework, liberal democracy allows for a spectrum of possibilities. I have already mentioned Canada's social democratic tradition. It is fairly straightforward to argue that if public health care, unemployment insurance, regional development, equalization or any other element of Canadian social democracy were to disappear, a crucial element of national purpose would be lost. Taylor's argument, in turn, is that in the likelihood of any such occurrence, Canadian public culture as a whole would be weakened. Democratic institutions might not be threatened in the short term, but the patriotism needed to evoke committed participation would be sapped, thus undermining the longevity of such institutions.

When a sense of common purpose is lost, the public culture's democratic strength and richness are diminished. Men and women have less of an idea of what they and their fellow citizens stand for collectively. Their imagined co-

[10] For a passionate account of Canadian bilingualism, see Graham Fraser, *Sorry, I Don't Speak French : Confronting the Canadian Crisis That Won't Go Away* (Toronto : McClelland & Stewart, 2006).

existence with millions of others – what Taylor calls their 'social imaginary' – is drained of its vitality. Taken as an integrative component of public culture, the social imaginary is rooted in the conceptual schemas inherent to a society's institutional practices and underlying ideals. These schemas define the normative images and mutual expectations shared by the people of a common political community. They are not expressed in theoretical terms but are rather "carried in images, stories and legends".[11] These are in turn connected to the historical development of a society's general social practices, what Taylor refers to as a 'repertory' of collective actions.

The repertory that fellow citizens know how to undertake together is quite pervasive, going "all the way from a general election, involving the whole society, to knowing how to strike up a polite but uninvolved conversation with a casual group in a reception hall."[12] In each case it is densely interwoven with the 'imagined' schemas of the common public culture. Thus another way of describing the latter is to say that it is made up of an imagined reality that corresponds to a repertory of practices. The present dissertation researches the Canadian manifestation of this 'imagined reality' and 'repertory of practices' through the critical writings of one of its foremost scholars. The aim is not to depict its nature but rather to address those facets that Taylor considers most in need of reform. Under the umbrella of cultural diversity and social democracy, the

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[11] Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Public Planet Books (Durham [N.C.] ; London: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 23.

[12] Ibid., p. 25.

chapters deal more specifically with those aspects of Canadian public culture that are linked to democratic participation, consumerism, national unity and egalitarian politics.

Before reviewing the limited research that exists on Taylor's social criticism, it is worth considering the wider cross-disciplinary context. The notion of public or political culture does not have the same significance across the humanities and social sciences. It has been an important subject in Canadian political science, beginning with the idea that the central difference between the political culture in the U.S. and Canada is that the latter emerged from the cultivation of a cultural 'fragment' from the European context, whereas the former rescinded this.[13] I am not claiming to make a contribution to this literature, though it is interesting to note that Taylor is seldom cited.

In sociology, while there is much underlying interest in social criticism, the idea that such criticism could be levelled on the basis of something as intangible and amorphous as a public culture has not yet won wide approval. Of note, however, is the growing prominence of the field of 'cultural sociology', for which Jeffrey Alexander's work has been influential.[14] In political philosophy, the

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[13] This is commonly referred to as the Hartz-Horowitz interpretation of political culture, also known as Canadian 'fragment theory'. See Nelson Wiseman, *In Search of Canadian Political Culture* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007).

[14] Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The Meanings of Social Life : A Cultural Sociology* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), but see also Adam Swift, "Would Perfect Mobility Be Perfect?," *Eur Sociol Rev* 20, no. 1 (2004). For a Canadian tradition of something akin to cultural sociology see A. B. McKillop, "Idéalisme, éthique et société: R.M. Maciver et la sociologie à l'université de

social morality inherent to public culture tends to be ignored because of an overriding concern with universal formulas of justice. Normative philosophers tend to be suspicious of the historically contingent 'thick morality' that pervades the social life of actually existing communities. This general dismissal of everyday social morality, which is further discussed in Chapter 1, has the simultaneous effect of eclipsing the relevance of interpretive criticism.

Given the nature of these limitations, the interest shown in communication and cultural studies for the idea of 'popular culture' is promising. The problem, however, is that this notion seems to be defined in such a way that makes it into an exceptional social occurrence having to do with festivals and celebrations, as opposed to a site in which the political community grounds its everyday forms of moral expression.[15] As for what is at some level the more 'official' character of the notion of public culture, it would seem that whenever something like this idea is alluded to in cultural studies it is through more charged concepts such as 'hegemony', 'governmentality' and 'control society'.[16] The way in which these different concepts are used suggests a lesser level of democratic freedom than that

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Toronto," *Cahiers de recherche sociologique (la sociologie anglophone)* 39 (2003).

[15] Although, when considering Mikhail Bakhtin's work on medieval 'carnival culture', there would seem to be room to expand the notion to suit this larger definition. M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

[16] Myron J. Aronoff, "Political Culture," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, ed. Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes (Oxford: Elsevier, 2002).

which is implied by the notion of public culture. At the extreme, anything vaguely resembling democratic freedom is considered to be merely illusory.

In terms of an overall disciplinary approach, my own experience indicates that in working from a cultural or communication studies perspective one is less constrained by methodological restrictions – by, say, a strict empirical methodology in the case of sociology or by elaborate normative justification in the case of political philosophy. Being loosened from disciplinary constraints can work to the advantage of the interpretive critic. For, while such frameworks are useful in offering competing assessments of the world around us, they also tend to cloister academic knowledge in specialist discourses cut off from other disciplines and from the wider public.

Interpretive social criticism, on the other hand, depends on a high degree of social connectedness. The interpretive critic aims to glean insight not just from a disciplinary canon but from the cultural and intellectual dispositions of society at large. This kind of generalist approach doesn't have to mean sacrificing rigour and sustained academic reflection. It's an open question whether the present dissertation succeeds in both rigorously researching multiple scholarly fields and in welcoming the attention of a lay or at least interdisciplinary audience.[17] Far from being a mere matter of style, this has been one of the research objectives set

[17] I feel safe in saying that this is the good use of inter-disciplinarity rather than the bad – the latter of which is the mark of the academic 'player', as described in Darin Barney, "'Taking a Shit in Peace": Players and Workers in the New Academy," *Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 16 (Fall 2006).

out in the project. The work can thus be evaluated in a first instance based on the accessibility of the manner in which Taylor's arguments are articulated, contextualized and elaborated upon.

Ultimately, the dissertation is a piece of secondary literature focusing on Taylor's writings in social criticism.[18] Considering the scope of his academic work, it is not always easy to draw a clear line between his social criticism and his more abstract contributions, whether on the subject of 'strong evaluation', 'atomism', or 'negative liberty' – areas that Nicholas Smith describes in his study of Taylor as "self-contained debates in contemporary political philosophy".[19] Following Smith, I consider Taylor's writings on Canadian unity as an aspect of his interpretive criticism, even though some of them could also be considered as philosophical contributions in the stricter sense. This aspect of Taylor's thought

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[18] The particular texts under study date as far back as the early 1970s. See in particular Charles Taylor, *The Pattern of Politics* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), ———, "The Politics of the Steady State," in *Beyond Industrial Growth*, ed. Abraham Rotstein (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1976). Later criticism includes Taylor's ambitious submission to the MacDonald Royal Commission entitled "Alternative Futures: Legitimacy, Identity and Alienation in Late-Twentieth-Century Canada", as well as his constitutional writings, all found in Taylor, *Reconciling the Solitudes : Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*. Also pertinent are his Massey Lectures, published as Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press, 1991). Finally, a more recent piece that picks up on and extends some of his earlier ideas is also examined, ———, "Cultures of Democracy and Citizen Efficacy," *Public Culture* 19, no. 1 (2007).

[19] Nicholas H. Smith, *Charles Taylor : Meaning, Morals and Modernity* (Cambridge, UK : Oxford ; Malden, MA: Polity Press ; Blackwell Publishers, 2002), p. 172.

and, more specifically, his interpretation of Canadian 'deep diversity' forms the first of the two central themes mentioned above.

The notion of deep diversity is an interpretation of Canadian cultural pluralism where this is understood as 'layered' in a moral and political sense. The immigrant-based diversity stemming from Canada's history as a host society, what Taylor calls 'first level diversity', suggests norms of integration structured around cultural openness within a common framework of allegiance, such as formed by a legal schedule of individual rights. There also exists a second 'deeper' level of diversity constituted by the historic communities of the Québécois and Aboriginal peoples. For citizens of these 'nations within', it is important that their sense of co-existence and belonging coincide with a recognized devolution of power that respects their national autonomy.

If the deep diversity theme is fairly well developed in Taylor's thought, the same cannot be said for his analysis of social democracy. It forms an important aspect of his early work, but is not much elaborated upon. Still, I want to claim that Taylor offers several important insights into Canadian social democracy that have not yet been adequately received. These include his views on the integrative functions of class conflict, the problem of non-participation or political 'acquiescence', and the importance of decentralized democratic control. Related to these is the issue of consumerism, taken as the ever-increasing consumption of private goods. Not only does consumerism narrow the options of what it means to live a fulfilled life, it also strengthens the position of the wealthy at the expense of

those struggling to keep up with the rising consumer standard. This is without mentioning the deterioration of the environment that results from gearing up the economy to the ends of exponential growth and consumption.

This thematic description pushes the boundaries of what typically goes by the name of social democracy. Perhaps it gets us closer to the set of concerns typified by what Taylor calls the 'ecological left'. In any event, providing an account of Taylor's criticism that covers a range of ideas pertaining to both deep diversity and social democracy constitutes the second objective of the present research project. The motivation for contributing to the secondary literature on Taylor is, in this sense, not focused on sorting through certain controversial areas of his thought, as is commonly the case with secondary literatures. So, for example, Taylor's colleague Daniel Weinstock examines the ways in which the notion of strong evaluation may or may not be compatible with the strictures of liberal democracy.[20]

This kind of highly nuanced philosophical work is obviously important. But the motivation behind the present project is of a different sort. It stems from what I want to claim is an imbalance in the reception of Taylor's thought, between the ample study of his abstract philosophical work, on the one hand, and the paucity of analysis on his critique of social and political life on the other. As Smith notes at the beginning of his study of Taylor's criticism, "if we are to form

[20] Daniel Weinstock, "The Political Theory of Strong Evaluation," in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism : The Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question* ed. James Tully (Cambridge ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

a fuller, more balanced picture of Taylor's political thought, we need to appreciate that it is set against a background of political commitment and activism."[21]

Smith then goes on to provide the first sustained account of Taylor's contributions as a social critic and political activist. His study provides a wide ranging view that manages to artfully combine biographical detail with a chronology of substantive ideas. But the overall thrust of his analysis is such that it validates Taylor's thought on the topic of cultural diversity, yet ultimately downgrades those of his ideas related to social democracy. More specifically, he suggests that Taylor himself came to realize that his advocacy of a politics of class polarization was mere youthful indulgence when in fact Taylor never abandoned this position.

In referring to his work of the 1980s and 90s, Smith wrongly claims that Taylor had by this time long since "conceded defeat" as a "protagonist of the politics of antagonism."[22] The casual manner in which Smith makes this error shows that his work is not invested with the same spirit of political commitment and activism as Taylor's own. His analysis follows a general tendency of privileging Taylor's contribution to questions of diversity over those of social democratic politics.

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[21] Smith, *Charles Taylor : Meaning, Morals and Modernity*, p. 172.

[22] Ibid., p. 196. Smith's reference to Taylor on this has no citation or page number.

Mark Redhead provides the only other sustained account of Taylor's social and political criticism in his *Charles Taylor: Thinking and Living Deep Diversity*. His interviews with Taylor show the opposite of Smith's claim about the politics of class antagonism. Indeed, notwithstanding the integrative function of class struggle, it is, as Taylor suggests, precisely this kind of politics that is needed today in order to ensure that Canadian public policy is oriented towards the proper management of the country's resources and thus to secure "some say over the kind of niche we can assume within the global market."[23] Without the creative antagonism of democratic conflict between 'elite' and 'nonelite' segments of the citizenry, policy proposals that are in the interest of the majority will tend to fall to the wayside.

Redhead's research shows the continuity between Taylor's current ideas and those which he defended in his earlier 'social democratic manifesto'.[24] It is noteworthy that Redhead emphasizes how Taylor's interests have never been limited to questions of cultural diversity. He argues for example that Taylor's conception of Canada has always rested on a vision of 'democratic control' involving 1) government deployment of an industrial strategy focusing on developing sustainable niche industries in the global economy and 2) a regionally

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[23] Mark Redhead, *Charles Taylor : Thinking and Living Deep Diversity*, 20th Century Political Thinkers (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Pub., 2002), p. 51.

[24] Redhead is referring to *The Pattern of Politics* here. Ibid., p. 48.

decentralized federation where local democratic involvement becomes the means of cultivating a pan-national Canadian federalism.

In the final analysis, however, despite Redhead's comprehensive appreciation of Taylor's thought, his own critical contribution is in the area of cultural diversity. So although he is one step ahead of Smith in his appreciation of the committed aspects of Taylor's thought he too falls into the general pattern of prioritizing his work on diversity over that of social democracy. For example, he doesn't make any attempt to integrate Taylor's social democratic ideas with those of other contemporary thinkers. Nor does he get at the question of the kind of leftist program that might succeed in mobilizing democratic majorities, thereby uniting a fragmented constituency of reform, which might be taken to include labour and multicultural activists, as well as environmentalists and middle class consumers.

With regard to Taylor's theory of Canadian deep diversity, Redhead feels that it is not inclusive enough, that it does not manage to be, as he says, "open to difference while simultaneously focused on articulating points of commonality."[25] This stands in contrast with Smith's position, who argues that deep diversity cannot realistically serve as the basis for common allegiance and solidarity in Canada.[26] Their opposition, in turn, runs contrary to widespread sympathy for

[25] Ibid., p. 3.

[26] Smith, *Charles Taylor : Meaning, Morals and Modernity*, p. 197. In evaluating the possibilities for common allegiance in highly diverse political communities such as Canada, he goes on to make a false-opposition between the option of deep

Taylor's proposal among both Québécois and English Canadian scholars, ranging from Guy Laforest to James Tully. My own fairly straightforward assessment is that Taylor's contribution to the national unity debate is one of the best out there.

What could be usefully added, as argued in Chapter 4, is some sense of how pan-national Canadian patriotism – an important component of which depends on constitutional renewal at some future date – might in the meantime be bolstered through more mundane instances of democratic activism. This stands in contrast to the contributions of Redhead and Smith, whose analyses remain at the level of philosophical evaluation. While such evaluations are crucial to the academic testing of ideas, they fail to deal with practical alternatives. This brings us to another core objective of the dissertation: not only to provide an account of Taylor's assessment of two still yet unachieved facets of Canadian public culture, but also to follow up on his criticism with a set of topical ideas that share the same spirit of social and political reform.

Summing up, the three objectives of the dissertation are to 1) provide an account of the deep diversity and social democracy facets of Canada's public culture, as understood through Taylor's social criticism 2) to follow up this account with topical ideas that share in a similar spirit of reform and 3) to write in an open and accessible yet rigorous style. In reviewing the literature, the rationale for the research becomes clear. For there is, as I've said, an imbalance in the

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diversity and that of 'constitutional patriotism', when in fact the two can potentially run together, as shown in Chapter 4.

reception of Taylor's work between a focus on his abstract philosophical thought and his more practical critique of everyday social and political life. Further, among the few commentators to have seriously analysed his social criticism, the end result turns towards philosophical evaluation without much focus on practical application. The fact that the set of chapters to follow move precisely in this direction is what constitutes their originality.

Following some of the ideas put forward in this introduction, Chapter 1 presents a more detailed framework for the practice of what I've been referring to as interpretive social criticism. This is the chapter in which there is the most distance from Taylor's own ideas. I want to claim that it captures the general outlook of Taylor's views on interpretive criticism even if it does not reflect the elaborate methodological foundations that Taylor develops.[27] So, for example, in contrast to abstract one-dimensional evaluations of social justice, it is argued in line with Taylor that engaged criticism must be oriented towards a community's pluralistic, at times even contradictory, ethical and political views. The job of the social critic is to interpret these views to their fullest and to try to hold them together in a comprehensive whole. The chapter draws on German scholar Axel Honneth's interpretation of what such a view might encompass in the case of Western democracies.

[27] For instance, I don't get into issues of 'ethnocentrism' and 'relativism', as elaborated in Charles Taylor and Philippe de Lara, *La Liberté Des Modernes*, Philosophie Morale (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997).

Yet it is also within the critic's purview to articulate the greater purpose behind any particular attack on social injustices. One such purpose that is dear to Taylor, as well as to moral philosopher Stanley Cavell, is the romantic ideal of personal growth and 'authenticity'. Thus the pluralistic norms of social justice defended by the left can be understood as various preconditions for what philosophers of Romanticism describe as 'human development in its richest diversity'. Another author that is central to the chapter and whose ideas are returned to in later chapters is Taylor's American contemporary, Michael Walzer.

Chapter 2 begins by reviewing the debate over democratic decline in Western societies. This issue is particularly relevant for the critic of social democracy insofar as a broadly engaged citizenry ultimately forms the constituency base for reforms in the interest of the nonelite majority. While it's true that Canada, like the U.S., is considered an 'activist civil society' with citizens partaking in all sorts of groups and associations, the wave of democratic disengagement has affected North America as well. Indeed, in some ways it has been more drastic here than elsewhere.

Because democracy is itself a complex notion, any serious analysis of democratic decline is also going to be complex. Statistics tracking voter turnout, party membership and campaign involvement are important indicators of the vitality of democratic regimes. Yet they are not the only indicators. Indeed, these practices are crucially connected to the more mundane instances of democratic engagement that form the fabric of civil society – from the activities of tenants'

associations to that of environmental groups and business lobbies. From the perspective of this other facet, the chapter shows that Canadian democracy fares pretty well. But yet while a vibrant civil society is crucial to democracy, Taylor insists that a danger presents itself when the 'broad-gauge' activities of parties and movements are sidelined in favour of more circumscribed 'punctual' forms of engagement.

Following the postwar dissolution of working class communities, a second danger has arisen with increased socialization into consumerist activities. Taylor describes this in terms of the growing importance attributed to practices of 'mutual display', which he sees as being typified by the heightened significance of fashion. There is something perfectly normal about material attachments and the wish to surround oneself with beautiful and task-enhancing objects. But Taylor argues, as shown in Chapter 3, that the aim of material plenitude has come to play too great a role, more than is warranted by the moral foundations of Western modernity. From the perspective of this broad historic view, the notion of leading a fulfilled life must, as a social ideal, draw from a more comprehensive, less singular understanding of personal life aspirations.

Chapter 3 perhaps best represents Taylor's particular style of interpretive criticism. It begins by casting today's quotidian practices of production and consumption against the backdrop of important strands of the modern identity, most notably what he describes as the ideals of 'self-determining freedom' and 'authenticity'. The former has roots in the drive towards human mastery over

nature, to relieve suffering while enhancing freedom, while the latter centres on a romantic notion of personal growth. Each of these moral ideals is distorted by the current drive towards exponential economic growth and rampant consumption. Taylor understands that there are institutional forces at work here, most obviously the capitalist marketplace. His critique, however, remains essentially moral in character, taking aim at what he sees as a conformist set of wants and needs.

Later in the chapter, his approach is contrasted with one that is more institutional in nature and thus more amenable to social democratic politics. By treating consumerism as an instance of 'market failure', Canadian philosopher Joseph Heath is able to show how over-consumption is partly a product of poor market regulation. He also suggests practical reforms for confronting the problem. Chapter 4 then turns to address an issue with regard to which Taylor has invested much thought, energy and emotion – that is, Canadian national unity.

The way the problem is posed in the chapter has less to do with the specifics of regionalism and Québec separatism than is found in most other accounts. The focus, rather, is on the various ways in which the citizens of as diverse a country as Canada can be understood to belong and take pride in a common democratic enterprise. The national unity question is thus addressed as a matter of creating the conditions for pan-national patriotism and solidarity. Taylor suggests, in this regard, that there are two poles of collective identification in modern democracies: the first centers on cultural affinities and community

belonging, while the second is created through engagements in and attachments to common institutions.

Canadian diversity is such that there can be no homogenous form of community belonging. It is however possible that a pan-national 'constitutional patriotism' could take root based on a set of reforms that would make the constitution more reflective of Canada's internal differences. Much like the proposed reforms of the 1980s and 90s, this would have to take into account not only multicultural immigrant diversity, but also the historic community belonging of the Aboriginal and Québécois peoples. In sum, for Taylor, this patriotism would have to be reflective of Canadian deep diversity. The chapter then moves to explore two other ways in which collective attachment and solidarity can be generated. The first is through cooperative engagement in civil society, while the second involves a form of conflictual patriotism developed along partisan class lines.

Finally, Chapter 5 considers the contribution Taylor makes to leftist thought and to the project of social democracy more generally. The chapter takes as its starting point a tension in Taylor's thought between his assessment of the stagnation of political activism (what is referred to as 'postwar acquiescence'), on the one hand, and his advocacy of greater class mobilization on the other. His acquiescence thesis is considered an advance over the radical left's interpretation of elite driven social control, yet it lacks the conceptual tools to posit a vision of renewed class struggle. What is most obviously missing in his thought is a

schematic conflict model that takes into account the plight of stigmatized groups. This lacuna is addressed by drawing on Michael Walzer's use of the ideas of 'countervalence' and 'empowerment'. Finally, the chapter puts forward a sketch of what we might understand as the basis for renewed class struggle and democratic mobilization.

Chapter 1

Just Above the Fray: Social Criticism in an Interpretive Mode

Just recently, while talking with some of my university colleagues, I attempted to come up with a defense of free post-secondary education. Running short on arguments about how lower tuition means greater accessibility to more Canadians, I spontaneously mentioned something about how education strengthens the social fabric and increases general well-being. A rebuttal then came from one of my colleagues, who, with great enthusiasm, claimed that education is only worth supporting because it permits "insurrectionary activity, procrastination, revolt and random displays of poetic terrorism". While taking the comment with a grain of salt, I was reminded of the palpable confusion that presently reigns in the university world with regard to the rationale for social criticism and the aim of greater social justice.

It is perhaps tempting to link the confusion surrounding the practice of social criticism to changes in the political landscape that came about with the fall of the great ideological divisions of the cold war period. My feeling, however, is that the problems of social criticism lie elsewhere. The principal issue has to do with the way in which academics relate to the morality and politics of the men and women they are criticizing. Of the various critical programs and approaches on offer in the humanities and social sciences today, there are important discrepancies between what is being thought up by professors, on the one hand, and the implicit ideals of the everyday social morality on the other.

The move towards 'subversive' and 'transgressive' intellectual contestation in the 1980s and 90s is one version of the type of gulf I am talking about. While popular in some university departments, its esoteric oppositional vocabularies have limited application outside the university.[28] There is a different sort of critical approach, however, that also contributes to maintaining the gulf between intellectual labour and the democratic unfolding of a country's public culture and social morality. This is the prestigious area of philosophy known as 'normative critique'. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the basis for a socially contextualized, interpretive approach to social criticism, one that is less detached and formulaic than normative critique and thus more attuned to the plural and contradictory aspects of what we might understand as social justice. The chapter proceeds in this task by first casting an eye on the shortcomings of the normative approach.

In considering the normative approach to social criticism, the chapter uses the influential work of Jürgen Habermas as a focal point. There are other prominent philosophers who are much less attuned than Habermas to the contexts of different public cultures and social moralities. Consider for example Ronald Dworkin's emphasis on de-contextualized 'abstract justice' or John Rawls'

[28] Richard Rorty (1991) provides an interesting, if schematic summary of an approach he caricatures as that of 'advanced literary theory'. Richard Rorty, "Intellectuals in Politics: Too Far In? Too Far Out?," *Dissent*, no. Fall (1991).

description of justice emerging from behind an ahistorical 'veil of ignorance'.[29] Indeed, Habermas is perhaps one of the more empirically sensitive normative philosophers. Yet it would seem that he too succumbs to the pull of a universalizing, one dimensional theorization of the moral world. When he is theorizing in this mode, he cannot but distance himself from the way in which men and women relate to the ideals and injustices of their respective political communities.[30]

The interpretive approach to social criticism sketched in the pages below is largely a rehearsal of ideas put forth by other scholars – most importantly American philosopher and social critic Michael Walzer and German 'critical theorist' Axel Honneth. Their ideas are brought together here in such a way that a particular kind of interpretive framework is brought to light. Taylor has also written on the methodological premises of interpretive criticism, but his work will not be the main focus of the present chapter.[31]

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[29] Michael Walzer and Richard Dworkin, "Spheres of Justice': An Exchange," *The New York Review of Books* 30, no. 12 (1983), John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971).

[30] Habermas is also the author of excellent 'journalistic' work. Interestingly, the orientation of this work feels almost like the opposite of his normative philosophy. See for example Jürgen Habermas, *Sur L'europe*, trans. Christian Bouchindhomme and Alexandre Dupeyrix (Paris: Bayard, 2006). ———, *Une Époque De Transitions. Écrits Politiques 1998-2003* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), ——, "Crossing Globalization's Valley of Tears," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (2000).

[31] Taylor and Lara, *La Liberté Des Modernes*, chapters 3 and 4.

If we take social criticism in general to mean a range of insight directed towards the affirmation, elaboration and betterment of a common way of life, its interpretive form can be seen as a matter of developing such insight based on the moral sensibilities and practices that have gained a foothold in a specific time and place, in a particular country or political community. In the second part of the chapter I argue that instead of singularly focused, one-dimensional theorizations of social justice, what needs to be developed is an historical, pluralistic view that starts from the premise that any one society will encompass a diversity of norms and moral dispositions – what Walzer calls multiple 'spheres of justice'.[32]

This view coincides with the complex understanding that Honneth has of the notion of social justice. In his reformulation of various Hegelian themes, Honneth sketches a broad yet historically grounded interpretation of the multifaceted nature of social justice. The interpretation is applicable to most Western democracies, though its pertinence will vary from country to country. What is at issue involves not just the commonly emphasized sphere of 'legal equality', which is the main subject area of normative philosophy. For Honneth's view of social justice also involves two other moral spheres: one being 'merit', applicable to the world of work, and the other being the more privatized morality of 'care'.[33]

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[32] Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice : A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York :: Basic Books, 1983).

[33] See Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition : The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Kampf Um Anerkennung. English (Cambridge, Mass. :: Polity

One of the working arguments of the present chapter is that the interpretation and revision of these different spheres of social life should and do at some level form part of the bread and butter of everyday social criticism. Yet insofar as these different spheres developed in conjunction with the evolution of liberal democracy over the last two hundred years, we might also weigh the greater goals and purposes that these different moral spheres can be understood to facilitate. In liberal democracies such as Canada, one such purpose is frequently glossed as a notion of personal freedom. The moral core of what is being referred to here, I want to argue, can best be understood from the point of view of an ideal of personal self-fulfillment and 'authenticity'.[34]

Taylor's definition of authenticity is picked up on in later chapters. But it has much in common with how Stanley Cavell describes this ideal – that is, as an outlook focused on the discovery of what a person is made of and on the

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Press, 1995), Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? : A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London ; New York : Verso, 2003), Axel Honneth, *Disrespect : The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, Andere Der Gerechtigkeit. English (Cambridge : Polity Press, 2007).

[34] One could also describe this in terms of the related moral ideal of 'individual autonomy', as long as the latter notion is given a generous interpretation. So, for example, Honneth and Anderson describe full autonomy as the "real and effective capacity to develop and pursue one's own conception of a worthwhile life." Axel Honneth and Joel Anderson, "Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice," in *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays* ed. J. Christman and J. Anderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 130.

cultivation of what that person is "meant to do, or to be."[35] While the meaning of authenticity has been worked out fairly comprehensively in the literature, this isn't to say that it is wholeheartedly endorsed.[36] Indeed, many commentators including Taylor himself consider that some notion of authenticity and personal distinction plays a pivotal role in fuelling the activities of contemporary consumer society.[37] It would seem, however, that much of this contestation is directed towards debased forms of authenticity and not towards the ideal itself.

The point of including authenticity in the present discussion is to show the important links between the social realization of this ideal and the different moral spheres mentioned above. The third section of the chapter further develops what is meant by authenticity and provides a sketch of how it can be understood as compatible with the collective project of liberalism. Defending this idea requires showing that 'political neutrality' is not incompatible with a view of liberal democracy in which citizens use collective institutions as a means of maximizing the possibilities of personal growth. Finally, the last section of the chapter returns

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[35] Stanley Cavell, *Cities of Words : Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life* (Cambridge, Mass. :: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 446.

[36] Important works on the idea of authenticity include Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass. :: Harvard University Press, 1972), Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Alexander Nehamas, *Virtues of Authenticity : Essays on Plato and Socrates* (Princeton, N.J. :: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[37] See for example Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter, *The Rebel Sell : Why the Culture Can't Be Jammed* (Chichester :: Capstone, 2005), Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford, UK ; New York, NY, USA :: B. Blackwell, 1987), Eva Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia : Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (Berkeley :: University of California Press, 1997).

to the more practical aspects of interpretive social criticism. While emphasizing the importance of the social immersion and connectedness of the critic, the charge of critical circularity that is often held against interpretive criticism is also addressed.

Problems of Relevance and Breadth

What may be seen as a current of cynicism in academia, perhaps even in society at large, has meant that grand utopian narratives have gone out of fashion. There remain forms of social critique, however, that still hold horizons of collective betterment as their measure. Some such critical programs exist in social science departments, but given the developmental path of sociology and like disciplines, it is difficult for such programs to develop critical approaches that go much beyond suggestive empirical description.[38] Consequently, university based social criticism is for the most part confined to philosophy departments.

[38] Such empirical descriptions are, of course, invaluable indicators of what is going on large-scale societies, but their moral and political significance is not always obvious, neither to the sociologist, nor to the relevant political community. As Adam Swift notes, many sociologists "regard what they do as relevant to matters of social justice in general, and of equality of opportunity in particular. They often acknowledge that their research is motivated, at least in part, by a normative interest in such matters. But that interest tends to be rather vague and diffuse. Masters of precision when it comes to measuring and analyzing the empirical phenomena they study, they are, typically, less sure in their analytical control of concepts such as 'equality of opportunity' or 'life-chances'. Moreover, they are sometimes suspicious of attempts by others to treat normative issues with similar seriousness, holding – less or more consciously – that such issues are not amenable to intellectually respectable investigation." Swift, "Would Perfect Mobility Be Perfect?," pp. 1-11.

The problem with this, if we're to believe Walzer's caricature of the critic that has left the cave to go and ponder after truth on the philosopher's ledge,[39] is that philosophical forms of critique seldom take seriously the moral outlooks developed throughout the history of actual communities. Inquiries into the exact nature of justice that aim to develop a universally applicable model of 'justice-in-itself' are, for Walzer, not likely to hold much sway beyond the intellectual milieu in which they are conjured up. Keeping Walzer's contention in mind, I want briefly to look at Habermas's philosophical anthropology and corollary 'discourse ethics', as I believe that it shares some of the same problems.

The aim of most forms of philosophical anthropology is to bring together the research from different disciplines in such a manner as to offer a set of coherent and convincing arguments about human nature.[40] This is undoubtedly an important exercise, if for no other reason than to debunk one-sided assumptions about 'the way humans are', which are often carried into the political arena and which serve to back this or that policy initiative. The problem that besets this form of inquiry from the start, however, is that it is notoriously difficult to substantiate

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[39] Michael Walzer, *The Company of Critics : Social Criticism in the Twentieth Century* (New York :: Basic Books, 1988).

[40] Axel Honneth and Hans Joas, *Social Action and Human Nature*, Soziales Handeln Und Menschliche Natur. English (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York :: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

any kind of human nature argument whatsoever.[41] And we can assume that this is doubly the case for arguments that call on a substantive set of political reforms.

The ideas that Habermas has developed on the moral and practical aspects of human communication – what he calls the 'pragmatics of communication' – has brought him to question and criticize the restrictive biases of democratic debate.[42] The basis of his critique rests on a conception of human nature that is fundamentally linked to our capacities as language users. Crudely summarized, his position holds firstly, that there are pragmatic presuppositions which language use entails and secondly, that we must respect these if we are to live up to the built-in standards of human sociability. Habermas's depiction of the ideal situation that these language based presuppositions entail can be glossed as the unconstrained exchange of 'validity claims'.

In laymen's terms, the argument is basically that the anthropological foundations of language use point the way towards certain requirements of public debate, such that every individual is able to freely express their opinion on matters of common concern. Habermas assumes that more just modes of public debate will bring about more socially just societies. By basing himself on an

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[41] See Honneth, *Disrespect : The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, chapter 7.

[42] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Boston :: Beacon Press, 1984), ———, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought. (Cambridge, Mass. :: MIT Press, 1990), Jürgen Habermas, Ciaran Cronin, and Pablo De Greiff, *The Inclusion of the Other : Studies in Political Theory*, Einbeziehung Des Anderen. English (Cambridge, Mass. :: MIT PRess, 1998).

anthropology of language use, Habermas develops an argument for substantial political reforms in decision making processes, which he believes will in turn lead to a substantial revision of commonly accepted moral norms and thus to a more socially just society. Ultimately, his anthropology of language allows him to make the normative argument that

> "Every valid norm must satisfy the condition that all affected can accept the consequences and the side effects its general observance can be anticipated to have for the satisfaction of everyone's interests (and these consequences are preferred to those of known alternative possibilities)."[43]

This prescription of a single formal rule of ethics is an eloquent one and it has been seductive for a large, if mostly Western, academic audience. Of course the implementation of any such view is really only conceivable in democratic societies, and even in the most democratic of today's democracies the policies stemming from such a proposal would be considered quite radical. My point is not that such a program of reform should be dismissed on this basis. Nor is it to say that Habermas's discourse ethics is without historical grounding in Western democracies.

Rather, I am simply making the point that the political relevance of any such program is not likely to stem from appeals to tenuously far-reaching anthropological claims related to universal criteria of human interaction. For the

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[43] Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p. 65.

likelihood that any such relevance will be gained is dependent on the argument being made in a vernacular that speaks to the shared understandings of a particular political community.[44] This would in turn require drawing persuasive links between the aims of fair public debate, on the one hand, and the moral sensibilities and practices that are already part of the social fabric on the other.

If taken as a form of social criticism capable of addressing the full scope of social injustices, Habermas's approach suffers from another kind of weakness. The problem at the core of his contribution, which essentially requires that each person affected by a collective decision be in equal acceptance of it, emerges from a one-dimensional conception of justice. It is one-dimensional in the sense that it limits itself to a singular normative conception centering on a notion of equality as equal treatment.

The moral framework of Habermas's discourse ethics shares this constrained egalitarian focus with other prominent schools of thought in moral philosophy. For example, the utilitarian logic of the greatest happiness for the greatest number is also limited to a restrictive egalitarian focus based on the equal dignity of each person. The intuitive core of both utilitarianism and Habermas's

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[44] Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, The Tanner Lectures on Human Values ; 1985. (Cambridge, Mass. :: Harvard University Press., 1993), Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country : Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America*, The William E. Massey, Sr. Lectures in the History of American Civilization ; 1997 (Cambridge, Mass. :: Harvard University Press, 1998).

Kantian-inspired ethical formalism is, as Taylor puts it, that "everyone ought to count and all ought to count in the same way."[45]

It is clear that this sort of egalitarian emphasis is present in Habermas's discourse ethics, as well as in his broader critically oriented anthropology of human communication. Without trying to account for the motivation behind this type of egalitarianism, it seems fairly evident that if his approach were more community specific and historic in character it would have to account for a wider breadth of moral sensibilities and practices. It's true that the formalism of the discourse ethics approach implies that each historically situated democracy will sort through its own moral morass on its own terms. But it also implies that the only morally justified way that this can happen is through the unconstrained exchange of validity claims. This presumes firstly, that one can separate out the area of linguistic communication as the linchpin of moral concern and secondly, that this linchpin is subject to both authoritative intellectual prescription and moral universality.

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[45] Charles Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, Philosophical Papers ; 2 (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York :: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 231.Taylor's point is that each of these theories has a tendency to reduce the complex plurality of the moral world to a one-dimensional variation of moral universality. He argues that "one of the big illusions which grows from either of these reductions is the belief that there is a single consistent domain of the 'moral', that there is one set of considerations, or mode of calculation, which determines what we ought 'morally' to do . . . We could easily decide that the universal attribution of moral personality is valid . . . but there are also other moral ideals and goals . . . which cannot be easily coordinated with universalism, and can even enter into conflict with it." Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, p. 233.

Certainly, there is a kind of intellectual intensity that is brought about when a formal rule is devised as a means of achieving greater justice. Further, when one considers the scandalous discrepancies that exist between the highly defendable ideal of equal treatment, on the one hand, and the manner in which certain groups and individuals are actually treated on the other, it is obvious that something needs to be done. Still, the approach defended in this chapter is that social injustices are best addressed by appeal to the diverse moral standards and purposes that citizens of a particular community hold in common. Earlier I mentioned the ideal of authenticity and personal self-fulfillment, but have not yet expanded on the precise nature of the moral spheres and practices that we can understand as facilitating this ideal.

Equal Treatment and What Else?

I will say more about the morality of equality treatment below but first I want to draw a contrast between this moral realm and another, which until recently has drawn much less attention. This other realm of moral practice exists at what sociologists call the 'micro' level of social interaction – in those seemingly unorganized moments of exchange between friends and intimates. The reference here is to a form of moral practice that has taken root over the last several centuries with the institutionalization of a privatized space suited to modern family life. There is a distinctive moral sensibility at the heart of this realm of activity that has often been passed over in liberal egalitarian conceptions

of justice where the focus is typically on each individual being treated with the same anonymous hand of justice.

Over the last few decades, feminist scholars have done the most to describe the precise nature of the sensibility that is woven into private relations of intimacy and family life.[46] An affectionate morality of 'care' has since then gradually been understood as the guiding sensibility of domestic life. Domesticity, in this context, refers to a cherished sensuous realm of privacy that exists in juxtaposition to the instrumental demands of public life. In the caring environment of the family, the romantic partner, child and parent each have their own unique set of vulnerabilities, needs and wants. The morality of equal treatment is not sufficient enough to deal with these highly personal demands. Indeed, the moral feelings that guide this social realm move in the somewhat opposite direction of a type of differential treatment requiring that attention be

[46] The issue of this unacknowledged moral register was first brought to light in the Kolhberg-Gilligan debate in developmental psychology. Carol Gilligan made the argument for a distinctive yet largely neglected form of moral expression which she at first thought to be more prominent in women. Regardless of the psychological validity of her original findings, the door had been opened to another realm of moral concern, the importance of which has since been emphasized by feminist moral philosophers such as Benhabib and Baier. See Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice : Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Mass. :: Harvard University Press, 1982), S Benhabib, "The Generalized and the Concrete Other: The Kohlberg-Gilligan Controvers and Feminist Theory," *Praxis international*, no. 4 (1985), Annette Baier, *Moral Prejudices : Essays on Ethics* (Cambridge, Mass. :: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 18-32.

paid to the idiosyncratic needs and irreplaceable characteristics of the 'concrete other'.[47]

There are fairly straightforward links that can be made between this caring form of justice and the ideal of authenticity mentioned above. Ever since the middle of the 18th century, the affectionate ties of marriage and family life have been increasingly protected from public demands of a more impersonal and instrumental sort.[48] The historical upshot of this has been the organization of a realm of social life infused with the supportive and self-affirming effects of romantic and familial care. It is a realm where childhood has come to be lived out freely, in a largely self-exploratory manner away from the burdens of toil. It is also a realm in which marriage and couplehood has come to be experienced with greater equality and emotional freedom.[49]

The developmental history behind the emergence of this realm of caring activity overlaps in many ways with the history of struggles for social justice. Take for example the succession of 19th Century campaigns aimed at freeing children from the duties of labour or later campaigns geared towards reducing the

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[47] Baier, *Moral Prejudices : Essays on Ethics*, Benhabib, "The Generalized and the Concrete Other: The Kohlberg-Gilligan Controvers and Feminist Theory."

[48] Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood : A Social History of Family Life*, Enfant Et La Vie Familiale Sous L'ancien Régime. English (New York :: Vintage Books, 1962).

[49] For a stimulating analysis of how this newfound freedom was exemplified in Hollywood movies from the 30s and 40s see Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness : The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*, Harvard Film Studies (Cambridge, Mass. :: Harvard University Press, 1981).

number of working hours for adults, partially in the hope that private relationships would become a more meaningful part of the social life of all citizens.[50] There have also been the various waves of feminist activism that sought to free women from the obligation of domestic labour, as well as from the prejudicial role expectations that went along with this.[51] It is only in gradually liberating themselves from these patriarchal expectations that women could conceive in fully partaking in the expression of their personal wants and needs.

This historical sketch opens a window onto a moral realm that is often overlooked in narrowly egalitarian conceptions of social justice. In addition to the important differences that exist between the morality of equal treatment and that of care, I want to draw yet another contrast with what is known as the realm of 'merit' or 'achievement justice'. The distinction may be less obvious at first since the registers of both merit and equality are institutionalized at the 'macro' level of social interaction. Both forms of moral expression are woven into the functioning of large-scale institutions, such as bureaucracies, legal systems and markets.[52]

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[50] Joy Parr, *Childhood and Family in Canadian History*, Canadian Social History Series (Toronto :: McClelland & Stewart, 1982).

[51] Meg Luxton, *More Than a Labour of Love : Three Generations of Women's Work in the Home*, Women's Press Domestic Labour Series. V. 2 (Toronto :: Women Press, 1980).

[52] Jeffrey Alexander's 'cultural sociology' offers a comprehensive grasp of the complex ways in which seemingly invisible cultural structures are woven into societal institutions and practices. Alexander, *The Meanings of Social Life : A Cultural Sociology*.

There are, however, fundamental differences between the two. While equal treatment is a moral standard inherent to the practices of democratic citizenship, merit is a standard that is part and parcel of the occupational division of labour, as both Parkin and Parsons argued some time ago.[53] Citizenship has to do with the way in which each person lives out their rights and responsibilities as a member of a self-governing political community. Merit, on the other hand, pertains to the contribution in labour that each individual makes to the collective. The major, if paradoxical, difference between these two forms of morality is that while the first stems from a fraternal equality between citizens, the latter implies felt differences of worth between these same men and women.[54]

It is a fairly straightforward argument to say that the fraternal bonds of citizenship are crucial to the building of a more socially just society. This fraternal ethic is commonly thought of in terms of 20th Century attempts to institute a basic set of 'social rights'. The underlying rationale for securing these sorts of rights is that all citizens should, as participants of a common democratic project, be provided with the means to material security and social opportunity.[55] Accordingly, it can be argued that the project of securing social rights for each

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[53] See Frank Parkin, *Class Inequality and Political Order: Social Stratification in Capitalist and Communist Societies* (London :: MacGibbon & Kee, 1971), Talcott Parsons, *The System of Modern Societies*, Foundations of Modern Sociology Series (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. :: Prentice-Hall, 1971).

[54] François Dubet, *Injustices. L'expérience Des Inégalités Au Travail* (Paris: Seuil, 2006).

[55] T. H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class : And Other Essays* (Cambridge, Eng. :: University Press, 1950).

and all is both a 'means' and a 'due' for collectively sustaining democratic social conditions.[56]

There are also other ways of picking up the thread of self-understanding that is inherent to the ethics of equal treatment. After the Great Depression and into the postwar period, the institutionalization of social rights was, as Canadian historian James Struthers describes it, a matter of expressing group solidarity in the face of the vagaries of the market.[57] If we go back further in history to the period of the Canadian Enlightenment we find yet another strand of the egalitarian ethic. In the first quarter of the 19th century, the equality question was debated as a matter of 'intellectual equality' in public life. The argument which won the day was that it was not only those few the monarchy selected for office who had 'the capacity to judge'.[58] Rather, it would eventually come to be recognized in law that all citizens had the capacity to partake fully and responsibly in public life.

This particular instance of collective reflection can in a sense be taken as a bridging point connecting the aim of greater equality with the fastening of a foothold for the complementary ideal of authenticity. Such a bridge is significant in that it provided an important steppingstone towards dignified self-presentation

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[56] Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, chapter 11.

[57] James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own : Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941*, State and Economic Life (Toronto :: University of Toronto Press, 1983).

[58] Jeffrey L. McNairn, *The Capacity to Judge : Public Opinion and Deliberative Democracy in Upper Canada, 1791-1854* (Toronto ; Buffalo :: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

in public life. With the protection of the law behind them, men and women would increasingly be able to cultivate an idea of what they were to make of themselves as 'free' individuals.

The links between social justice and legal equality are, as mentioned above, likely to seem obvious enough. What may at first seem more problematic is the idea that the morality of merit must also have a place in conceiving of the socially just society. What is seemingly problematic here stems from a tension inherent to the morality of merit itself. As an aspect of social morality, merit requires, on the one hand, that fellow citizens be recognized for the work they accomplish within the context of a cooperative political community. On the other hand, however, the more specific understanding at play is that some forms of work are worth more than others and must be recognized as such. Consequently, what comes about with this register of moral understanding is a hierarchy of worth between types of work and thus also between individuals.

It's not impossible to imagine a future society in which any such monolithic hierarchy has ceased to exist.[59] From today's perspective, it's plausible to conceive of the particular shape this hierarchy has come to assume as the outcome of a series of emancipatory steps forward. We can only grasp things in this light, however, by comparing the current hierarchy with that which came

[59] Walzer elaborates such a position in his *Spheres of Justice*. He speaks of multiple hierarchies of worth, where none would be predominant over others. In such a situation of 'complex equality', there would as he puts it be no more BMOCs ('Big Men On Campus'). Walzer, *Spheres of Justice : A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*.

before it. To get a rough sense of what came prior, we must look to the social life of medieval Christendom, which was also made up of a hierarchy of worth, albeit of a radically different sort.

There isn't the space to get into the manner in which this hierarchy was set up, except to say that it was based on a highly complex system of orders, ranks and titles, which were fixed by birth and blood while also integrated into an entire cosmological worldview.[60] In the 17th and 18th centuries, this cosmological outlook took root on the shores of New France and British North America.[61] But just as in Europe, this cultural system was beginning to shift and change under the pressures of modernity. With the historic impact of the democratic revolutions of the late 18th century, along with trends in industrialization and urbanization, the Christian hierarchy of worth would eventually be so radically transformed as to give rise to a new moral order.

Perhaps the central element of the new order was that one's general social status was to be determined not by birth and blood, but rather through one's efforts and contributions to this-worldly productive activity. The transformation can be taken as one in which the question of where one stood in the eyes of others

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[60] Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being; a Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, Mass. :: Harvard university press, 1957).

[61] Dale Miquelon, *New France, 1701-1744 : "A Supplement to Europe"*, Canadian Centenary Series. 4 (Toronto :: McClelland & Stewart, 1987), Edith Burley, *Servants of the Honourable Company : Work, Discipline, and Conflict in the Hudson's Bay Company, 1770-1870*, Canadian Social History Series (Don Mills, Ont. :: Oxford University Press, 1997).

came increasingly under the sphere of one's own power, such that one's efforts and abilities formed an important part of the equation. Accordingly, one's social standing was progressively loosened from the grip of outside factors such as social lineage, nepotistic relations and property assets.

Professional social status thus came to form a pivotal criterion for one's standing in the hierarchy of worth. Although the elite have always covetously guarded their status, throughout the 20th Century the spectrum of elite positions was broadened and diversified.[62] This isn't to say that the new hierarchy stopped pitting the worth of some groups and individuals against others, but rather to say that any such hierarchy was increasingly subject to democratic pressures and influences. It's important not to exaggerate the effect of this, for there were clear injustices in the very occasions through which a new schema of worth was being progressively worked out – injustices in impressing upon the public a designated worth to particular people and professions. As Honneth puts it, with reference to this history,

> "The extent to which something counts as an 'achievement', as a cooperative contribution, is defined against a value standard whose normative reference point is the economic activity of the independent, middle class, male bourgeois. What is distinguished as 'work', with a specific, quantifiable use for society, hence amounts to the result of a group-specific determination of value—

[62] Suzanne Infeld Keller, *Beyond the Ruling Class; Strategic Elites in Modern Society* (New York :: Random House, 1963). Michael Hartmann, *The Sociology of Elites*, Elitesoziologie. English (London ; New York :: Routledge, 2007).

> to which whole sectors of other activities, themselves equally necessary for reproduction (e.g. household work), fall victim."[63]

Of course by the 20th Century these injustices were themselves to become the subject of historic contestation. If we consider that the single most important indicator of social worth is the remuneration that individuals receive from their employer,[64] then the history of collective bargaining for higher wages becomes an important instance of meritocratic struggle for greater social justice. The politicization of domestic labour, though more complicated, can also be understood as a struggle against an abysmal lack of social merit. Without equating domestic labour with non-domestic forms of gainful employment, a strong argument can be made for considering the historical devaluation of women's work, both inside the home and in the public realm, as variations on the theme of meritocratic injustice. [65]

Returning now to the ideal of authenticity and personal growth, there are important parallels that can be drawn between it and the merit sphere of activity. While the mastery of an occupation or pursuit of a career is but one avenue through which men and women may find a means of fulfillment, it is nonetheless the socially predominant one. It is of historic significance that each person today

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[63] Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? : A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, p. 141.

[64] Ibid.

[65] See for example Beate Roessler, "Work, Recognition and Emancipation " in *Recognition and Power* ed. B. Van den Brink & D. Owen (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

is in principle free to choose which occupation they should like to learn and practice. Such life changing choices are of course not easy ones to make. The socially organized hierarchy of worth may help to confirm, guide and inspire individuals in their decisions. But this does not preclude the need for democratizing the schema that determines the nature and degree of differences in worth.

In fact, it reinforces this need. For it is essential, in light of the diversity implied by the very idea of individuality, that men and women have access to a broad base of rich and rewarding fields of work. I have been arguing in this section that social justice must encompass more than the sphere of justice as equal treatment. There are other types of sensibilities and practices which have had profound effects in recent centuries and which have led to the development of multiple, mutually irreducible spheres of justice. From the standpoint of social criticism, it is worth considering these spheres in relation to the support they provide for the romantic ideal of personal growth. But stating things in this manner poses the question of the extent to which it is in fact desirable to conceive of political reforms in relation to an ideal of human development – what is known in political theory as an ideal of 'the good life'.

'Human Development in its Richest Diversity'

The standard position among defenders of liberalism is that states should never get involved with the promotion of any particular mode or style of living on

the pretension that it is better than others. Rather, governments should be neutral with regard to the way in which individuals choose to lead their lives. So long as particular lifestyles are not harmful to others, the state should have nothing to do with the ends that individuals choose to pursue. The rationale behind this position of political neutrality, which has unfolded historically from the position of religious tolerance, is that any such state interference risks opening the way towards repression and violence.[66] The 16th century Wars of Religion are an historic case in point. More recently, nationalistic versions of the good life have tended to pit one ethnic mode of life against another, often with disastrous consequences.

Even when conceptions of how individuals should best lead their lives take on more benign forms, such as the notion that in a democracy men and women should engage in collective decision-making processes, defenders of political neutrality caution against any form of state intervention. Besides the danger of slippage from one instance of intervention to another, there is also the more subtle danger of paternalism – that among the diversity of goals and purposes that individuals may hold, the promotion of any one in particular will undermine the happiness of those men and women who do not share it. As Ronald Dworkin argues, "no life is a good one lived against the grain of conviction. It

[66] The founding text here is perhaps John Locke's (1689) *A Letter Concerning Toleration*.

does not help someone else's life but spoils it to force values upon him he cannot accept but can only bow before out of fear or prudence."[67]

Some critics today argue that neutrality and 'tolerance talk' can be pushed too far, such that the excesses of the doctrine begin to mandate new forms of intolerance and state-based coercion. Others argue that neutrality is in fact a cultural artifact – that liberal democracies cannot avoid promoting a particular, if loose knit conception of the good life. The position taken up here is that there is indeed a moderate manner in which Western democratic states work to promote a particularistic form of the good life. Honneth and Anderson describe this as the state endorsement of a "weak idea of the good".[68] The 'weak idea' they are referring to is that of an intersubjectively enhanced notion of individual autonomy, which, I want to argue, has much in common with the ideal of authenticity.

For Honneth and Anderson, autonomy is secured by the three dimensions of social justice mentioned above, i.e. legal equality, care and merit. To live a good life, on this view, one need not just protection from arbitrary violence and material scarcity, but also the capacity both to conceive of and to pursue one's idea of worthwhile life. To ensure the development of this capacity requires the support and respect generated throughout all of the different moral spheres. In the

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[67] R. M. Dworkin, *Life's Dominion : An Argument About Abortion, Euthanasia, and Individual Freedom* (New York :: Knopf, 1993), p. 168.

[68] Anderson, "Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice."

end, it is because this view leaves so much room for individual discretion in devising one's life plans that Honneth and Anderson describe it as weak. Still, the political community has a responsibility, on this view, of ensuring the minimal preconditions for attaining the good life of full autonomy.

This, however, creates a paradox of sorts. For one of the very premises of autonomy and self-fulfillment is that it can take shape in a great diversity of forms. It's true that at the heart of this way of life there lies an ethics of personal cultivation that runs against the grain of 'ascribed' and 'conformist' lifestyles. But there is nothing in the way of a program as to how this cultivation should unfold, nor is there any predetermined notion of what such cultivation will amount to for any one individual. Certainly, there are men and women who serve as admirable examples of such a mode of life, whether in the mastery of a field of human activity or the fashioning of a strikingly original selfhood. But any one of these examples will likely only be admirable in the eyes of a particular kind of person or audience.[69]

In a sense, then, the most we can say about this particular mode of the good life is that it must be discovered for oneself. But if this is the case, how can the political community be involved in supporting it without simultaneously undermining self-discovery? Without getting into the details of this paradox, one can argue, with Honneth and Anderson, that the answer lies in the requirement

[69] Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living : Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault*, Sather Classical Lectures ; V. 61 (Berkeley :: University of California Press, 1998), chapter 3.

that the political community only promote this way of life to the extent of ensuring the conditions needed to make it a real opportunity for each and all.[70] This would require attending to the moral integrity of caring relations in the context of the family, equal treatment under the law and achievement justice in the world of work. As long as greater justice is sought out in these spheres, then the question of how one leads one's life need not be anything more than a matter of private concern.

The cultural outlook at work here, one which prizes 'human development in its richest diversity', is not new.[71] If it is an outlook that we can agree is at the heart of many liberal democratic institutions – from the nuclear family to the institutionalization of the idea of 'careers open to talent', from the fundamental freedoms to the flourishing of the arts, from the welfare state to the public education system – then it is also something that social critics must be attuned to in speaking of the deficiencies and injustices of their respective societies. But how exactly should the interpretive critic go about referring to such a goal and critiquing the unjust conditions that may exist in the different spheres of justice?

Social Criticism in an Interpretive Mode

I began the present chapter by suggesting that one way of lessening the confusion surrounding social criticism would be to move away from overly

[70] Anderson, "Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice."

[71] John Stuart Mill uses the phrase 'human development in its richest diversity' as the epigram to his famous *On Liberty*, which he borrows from the Prussian linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt, as the epigram to his famous *On Liberty*.

abstract, one-dimensional approaches to the question of social justice. I mentioned that interpretive criticism constitutes just such a move, in that it calls on social critics to look to the history and to the full breadth of contradictory tendencies in the everyday morality that permeates their respective political communities. Such an interpretive exercise requires coming to terms with the pluralistic moral sensibilities that infuse collective practices. This exercise will be met with greater success, I have been arguing, if it also pays attention to the more encompassing purposes that citizens have in common, such as the authenticity ideal of personal growth.

While these moral sensibilities and purposes may well constitute the bread and butter of social criticism, I have yet to say something regarding the manner in which critics can be understood to proceed in their interpretations. The first thing to consider in this regard is what Walzer identifies as the requirement of 'closeness' or 'social connectedness'.[72] This seemingly simple requirement is that a proper interpretation of common sensibilities and purposes must be based on an intimate knowledge of their particular social meaning and texture. This requires rich insight of an historical and sociological sort into how the different moral understandings have developed or even somehow failed to develop. It also requires a lived appreciation of what these understandings can mean in the context of a specific society.

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[72] Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*.

A second requirement of critical interpretation, which can really only stem from social connectedness and attachment to a common way of life, is a capacity for 'prophetic idealism' – the critic's ability, that is, to call upon social changes of a utopian but still achievable sort. In order to properly situate this issue of prophetic idealism, I want first to grapple with the main charge that is laid against interpretive criticism: the charge of critical circularity. Simply put, the claim here is that interpretive criticism is too close to the political fray, such that it will inevitably fail to gain the critical distance required to provide a non-redundant critique of the current social order.

It is easy to grant that the social critic can be too close to the political fray, to the point, that is, of being unable to offer a properly critical perspective. Typically, what this will mean is that the critic is too close to certain types of relationships, too close to the seats of political and economic power. This kind of proximity would certainly make it more difficult to see society whole. As Walzer puts it, the "actual wielding of power and the Machiavellian ambition to whisper in the ear of the prince… are real obstacles to the practice of criticism, because they make it difficult to look with open eyes at those features of society most in need of critical scrutiny."[73] But this practical issue has in fact little to do with what is really meant by the charge of circularity. For what is usually being referred to is a different sort of blindness, coming not from egoistic self-interest but rather from the lack of an external viewpoint.

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[73] Ibid., p. 60.

The worry is a fairly straightforward one, as expressed by Dworkin and then more pointedly by Cohen.[74] If the critic is supposed to assess the question of social justice on the basis of ethical standards and practices that are already in existence, then how can the outcome be anything other than a condoning of the status quo? Cohen poses the problem more acutely by confronting Walzerian interpretive criticism, which he describes as inherently 'communitarian', with a fundamental dilemma. This 'simple communitarian dilemma' arises with the interpretive predicament of having but two methodological options for gaining critical leverage: gleaning collective values from existing practices, or gleaning them from the stories we tell of ourselves and then applying them to social practices.

The dilemma is seen to arise because of the redundancy of criticizing the status quo on the basis of status quo values, on the one hand, and from a problem of proof of evidence on the other (the problem here being that it is impossible to know which concrete ethical standards are carried in the stories we tell of ourselves). The way out of this dilemma requires an argument supporting the very existence of such things as common sensibilities and shared understandings. It also requires an argument about how we can move towards greater comprehension of the shape and substance of such diffuse cultural formations.

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[74]Joshua Cohen, "Review of Spheres of Justice by Michael Walzer

" *Journal of Philosophy* LXXXIII no. 8 (1986), Dworkin, "Spheres of Justice': An Exchange."

Finally, it requires an argument for how there inheres within the spectrum of shared understandings a 'surplus of validity' that reaches beyond the status quo.

The aim of this chapter is not to defend the sociological claim that citizens of liberal democratic states typically share certain moral understandings. It will have to suffice to say that while we rarely come upon uncontested terrain as to what these understandings actually are, it is quite plausible to assume a spectrum of meanings, if only in the framing of recurring public debates that are more or less representative of a particular political community. There need not be a consensus regarding these common understandings. For the condition of there being either consensus or cleavage is, as Taylor argues, "a certain set of common terms of reference."[75] Still, the possibility of effective social criticism requires that the critic take a step further onto this interpretive terrain and identify, among these terms of reference, those which are most representative of the community in question – those, that is, which the community would consider to be its finest, most admirable qualities.[76]

This move will inevitably be political in nature, in the sense of being subject to the partisan sensibilities of left and right. This sort of politicization is an inevitable part of the practice of social criticism in modern democratic contexts. There can be no final aim of critical intervention that will reconcile all differences within the pluralistic spectrum of collective meanings. What we see, rather, is a

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[75] Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, p. 36.

[76] Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*.

consistent yet diffuse and evolving set of meanings. And it is within such historical continuities of meaning that there inheres, as Honneth puts it, a 'surplus of validity' or 'validity overhang' that points towards the shared ideals and purposes needed to move beyond the status quo.[77]

Once a political community's finest, most admirable qualities are persuasively portrayed – whether with reference to practices, stories or other moral artifacts a society would do damage to itself to disavow – it then becomes possible to persuade those in power of the need for reform in those areas of social reality which betray those very same qualities. Such a betrayal might be linked to changes in the institutional structure of society. Consider, for example, the prospect of a country whose occupational institutions have been incrementally transformed, such that the conditions of working life are no longer rewarding, not even for middle and upper class professionals.

More to the point, however, with regard to social injustices suffered by specific groups and individuals, the betrayal may be 'cultural' in origin.[78] By this, I mean that the gap between collective ideals and the lived experience of social reality can be traced back to a hypocritical, moral lopsidedness. Taken within the context of plural spheres of justice, moral lopsidedness looms when one

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[77] Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? : A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, chapter 4.

[78] Honneth uses this distinction to refer to two different genres of social criticism: one linked to the diagnosis of civilizational 'pathologies' and the other to the identification of changes linked to *social* injustices. Honneth, *Disrespect : The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*.

dimension of the social morality comes to degrade or undermine another.[79] With respect to the spheres of care, equal treatment and merit, this slippage would constitute a betrayal of the moral logic of the spheres themselves, but also in the sense that the wearing down of any one sphere would limit the possibilities of personal growth and romantic freedom.

To sum up, the chapter sketches a framework for a mode of social criticism which has not yet been sufficiently accounted for in the humanities and social sciences. The very premises of this interpretive form of criticism call into question the divergences that currently exist between the university context and the everyday world of morality and politics. The chapter begins by alluding to the withdrawal of the social critic into an esoteric campus politics. It then turns to the normative approach of Habermas's critically oriented philosophical anthropology. It is noted in a first instance that his universal discourse ethics, while tenuously far-reaching in its empirical claims, tends to distance his critique from actually existing moral sensibilities, thus depriving it of much of its political relevance.

Habermas's approach falters in another sense insofar as it fails to account for the breadth and plurality of moral expression in the Western world. Indeed, given his philosophical anthropology of communication, Habermas makes no attempt to account for the diversity of moral standards that exists in, for example, Germany or Canada. The second part of the chapter juxtaposes the morality of

[79] Walzer describes this as a process of 'invasion', where the agents of authority and argumentation of one sphere invade that of another. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice : A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*.

equal treatment with two other spheres of justice, those of ‘care’ and ‘merit’. This provides a window onto the historical dynamics that have come to shape these different spheres. I draw affinities between each of the spheres by situating them within the context of a collective ideal of authenticity. In the third part of the chapter, I suggest that this personal growth ideal can be defended as a collective purpose appropriate to liberal democracies.

Finally, the last section addresses the method and manner of interpretive social criticism. I mention the requirement of the social immersion and connectedness of the critic, as well as the importance of prophetic idealism. While the need for a degree of critical distance from the political fray is clear enough, I use Walzer to argue the need for a close relation to the moral universe of the relevant political community – if not a closeness to agreed upon values then at least to its common terms of reference. It is by interpreting such common terms of reference that a ‘validity overhang’ rises to the fore. By defending this view, I am also able to defend the coherency of the interpretive approach against the charge of circularity. This allows me to then discuss the implications for the critic of there being different forms of validity relevant to each of the different spheres of justice.

A review of the philosophical basis of social criticism from a specifically Taylorian perspective would have many things in common with the approach developed here. An analysis of Taylor’s methodology would, however, likely show it to be less relativistic, more group centered and perhaps more focused on

the importance of cultural exchanges in elaborating moral truths. Despite these differences, it was felt that it would be fruitful to divert somewhat from Taylor's thought in this chapter in order to a review a broader literature. Ultimately, the basic approach remains similar to Taylor's. Interpretive social criticism speaks directly to the public culture and social morality of the collectivity. It cannot thus be limited to the findings of empirical sociology. At the same time, it rejects the overly theoretic approach of normative philosophy. With these broad stipulations, a framework has been set for grappling with the issues brought forth in the following chapters.

Chapter 2

Democracy's Era of Relative Decline

In many Western countries today, it is common to find facile dismissals of democratic ideals. Belief in the notion that in obeying our rulers we are actually obeying ourselves is felt to be half-hearted. When exchanging political points of view with friends and acquaintances, the conversation is always at risk of taking a cynical turn. There is an underlying feeling of disconnection and indifference. Commentators are quick to disparage undemocratic practices abroad, but an increasing number of them are also beginning to worry about the soundness of Western democracies themselves, Canada included.[80]

A perhaps extreme view has it that elite decision-making in matters of economy and state exposes the falsity of current democracy. In contrast, a more moderate view holds that there isn't the will or the need for 'republican style' democracy. We should rather content ourselves with good leaders, regular elections and the protection of fundamental freedoms. The problem today, however, is that Canadian men and women seem increasingly unwilling to partake in even the most basic democratic duties. An obvious example of this is voter

[80] See for example Susan J. Pharr and Robert D. Putnam, *Disaffected Democracies : What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries?* (Princeton, N.J. :: Princeton University Press, 2000).

absenteeism. [81] So quite apart from what's going on abroad, the decline in voter turnout has led many commentators to ask about the integrity of democracy in its 'erstwhile heartlands'.

It's this question that the present chapter seeks to address. It should be said from the outset that despite declining voter turnout, rule by the people continues to be regarded as a cherished ideal. Thus we find that a lot of ink has been spilt in trying to improve the functioning of Canadian democracy.[82] While offering many important insights, these efforts have not shed sufficient light on the problem of democratic participation. Though public engagement is the engine of democratic vitality, the multiple facets of the issue remain poorly understood. Drawing on Taylor's work, this chapter seeks to question certain approaches to the problem, while at the same time opening new avenues of inquiry.

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[81] Voter participation has been in decline since the 1988 federal election. Public disinterest in politics was an important subject of inquiry in the 1991 Royal Commission on Election Reform and Party Financing. Canada, *Reforming Electoral Democracy : Final Report* ([Ottawa] :: Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, 1991).Canada. For more details on declining voter turnout see Canada Centre for Research and Information on, *Voter Participation in Canada : Is Canadian Democracy in Crisis?*, Cric Papers ; 3 (Montréal (Québec) :: Centre for Research and Information on Canada, 2001).

[82] The 'Canadian Democratic Audit' series is a worthy example of this. As editor William Cross explains "Our purposes are to conduct a systematic review of the operations of Canadian democracy, to listen to what others have to say about Canadian democracy, to assess its strengths and weaknesses, to consider where there are opportunities for advancement, and to evaluate popular reform proposals". Foreword to Darin David Barney, *Communication Technology*, Canadian Democratic Audit ; 8 (Vancouver :: UBC Press, 2005), vii.

Taylor's understanding of democratic engagement shows that the problem of participation needs to be assessed in its various aspects. The focus can't simply be on voter turnout or, say, party membership. Interest groups and the many associations of civil society also need to be considered as important vehicles of democratic expression. What is interesting in this regard is the manner in which Taylor holds various modes of engagement in a common frame of analysis. This allows him to work with a broad idea of what constitutes a functioning democracy and thus to formulate a multifaceted assessment of the vitality of democracy today.

Certain other approaches tend in contrast to develop more narrow assessments. The chapter begins by questioning the premises of two such narrowly focused analyses. The first is concerned with social exclusion and 'democratic divides', while the second is aimed at assessing the deficiencies of official democratic institutions such as parties and legislatures. In calling into question the premises of these approaches, the point is not to say that the analyses are wrong or that addressing the issues they raise is not important. Rather, it's that social exclusion and institutional deficiencies don't tell us the whole story of why Canadians are turning away from the voting booth, or of why they seem less interested in building towards a future vision of the country.

The second part of the chapter turns to Taylor's interpretation of a shift in modes of democratic politics. He describes this as a shift away from 'broad-gauge' politics to more 'punctual' forms of engagement. The former involves

society-wide cooperation on a broad range of issues, while the latter involves targeted intervention by specific groups on single issues. Part of what is behind the shift, the chapter goes on to suggest, is the dissolution of working class identities. With workers' newfound affluence in the postwar period, broad-gauge mobilization loses some of its appeal. Yet for Taylor, what is also at issue is the rise of a different sort of public life altogether, one centered on consumer based practices of 'mutual display'. This is the subject of the last section of the chapter.

Social Exclusion, Institutional Deficiencies

One approach to the problem of participation is to link it to social exclusion. This is essentially a critique of democracy on the grounds that it has failed to include the marginalized and underprivileged – precisely those men and women who could benefit most from having their voices heard. It's hard to disagree that Western democracies suffer from their inability to bring about more equal opportunity. In Canada, as elsewhere, there exist many enduring types of exclusion. Typically, marginalized groups suffer from low levels of education and professional training, but they may also be geographically isolated. They are likely to be discriminated against for reasons of gender, colour, faith or creed. Prejudices tend to work against them when applying for jobs, receiving services and in the mere expression of their views.

The effect of these forces is one of material dispossession, poverty and humiliation. Yet it also involves a failure of meaningful participation. Of course

there have been attempts to reform these conditions. Historically, such initiatives have met with some success. It is hard to discount the moral progress made in egalitarian reforms over the last two centuries. Still, the critique of social exclusion is right to suggest that the egalitarian project remains incomplete. To take a telling statistic, there is roughly the same proportion of poor and marginalized Canadians today as there was a quarter of a century ago.[83] Further, there is no reason to believe that the unlucky members of this 'second tier' of citizens will be able to offer their children a more promising fate. There is no obvious groundswell of egalitarian sentiment on the horizon, nor are there any long-term structural changes to be optimistic about.

Many 'first tier' citizens are baffled by the seeming intractability of the problem. Given the many state initiatives and service groups, they are puzzled by the millions of poor in our midst. Some end up blaming the victims or attributing their bad lack to irremediable facts of nature. On the other hand, there are also those committed groups of activists and professionals who don't find the problem to be that puzzling at all. In their view, community and state-based initiatives have

[83] Based on the Low Income Cut Off (LICO) measurement of poverty, which focuses on families that spend a greater percentage of their income on food, shelter and clothing than the average, the number of Canadian families living in 'straitened circumstances' was "11.6 per cent in 1980 and 10.8 per cent in 2005 after rising to a peak of 15.7 per cent in 1996." Peter A. Victor, *Managing without Growth : Slower by Design, Not Disaster*, Advances in Ecological Economics (Cheltenham, UK ; Northampton, MA :: Edward Elgar, 2008), p. 160.

simply never been creative or compassionate enough.[84] Consequently, there remain vast numbers of Canadian citizens that struggle daily to avoid humiliating deprivation. These are men and women belonging to large families with low incomes, single mothers, the long-term unemployed and those feeling the hard pinch of rapidly devaluing job skills.

Operating on a different plane than official politics their struggles are of a more personal and immediate sort. The worst off, we might assume, are thrown into a protracted crisis-situation involving a "series of exhausting, embittered activities" within which they rely on "forms of opposition extending from confrontations with authorities, to desperate efforts to maintain the integrity of both family and psyche, to the mobilization of aid by friends and relatives."[85] These struggles and conflicts typically have little connection to political parties and social movements. They are often poorly understood by the media and public opinion. The afflicted themselves, finally, often have little time or interest for "politics".

It is on the basis of a general picture of this sort that we find the social exclusion approach to the problem of participation. The main premise, as articulated for example by Elisabeth Gidengil and her colleagues, is that there are simply too many men and women excluded from political activities for

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[84] Historian James Struthers, for example, is of this opinion. James Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence : Welfare in Ontario, 1920-1970*, Ontario Historical Studies Series, 0380-9188 (Toronto :: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

[85] Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? : A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, p. 117.

widespread participation to occur. Of course it's difficult to deny there being an element of truth to this argument. The reasoning is fairly straightforward: the fewer active and able democratic participants there are, the less likelihood there is of there being a general buzz of democratic activity.

The argument could be extended to specify that it is not just a question of institutional exclusion (i.e. lack of education or political knowledge), but also an issue of respect. The marginalized classes may have highly relevant contributions to make to the political debate. Indeed, we might assume that their opinions are of the greatest urgency in a democracy. In the reality of everyday politics, however, their experiences of felt injustice are seldom sought after. Instead, the opinions of marginalized men and women are implicitly devalued and ignored.[86]

Thus the social critique of participation remains crucial. Gidengil and her colleagues are right to suggest that political absenteeism finds 'deep causes' linked to material circumstance, education, gender, region and age – what they call 'democratic divides'.[87] These divides form obvious obstacles to a more fully engaged democracy. But can they really be used as an explanation for democratic

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[86] For an analysis of the systematic moral denigration of marginalized groups see Honneth, *Disrespect : The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, chapter 4.

[87] As they put the point "Canadian society is marked by disparities in income and education and by differences in power and status of groups like women and racial minorities. We cannot overlook the potential of these structural inequalities on the level and nature of citizens' political engagement. We have to ask whether structural inequalities create democratic divides. In other words, are some citizens less engaged than others because they have fewer resources at their disposal?" Elisabeth Gidengil, *Citizens*, Canadian Democratic Audit (Vancouver :: UBC Press, 2004), p. 4.

decline? One cannot help wonder why such obstacles would be any more pertinent today than in previous times. Put differently, we might ask whether there have not always been marginalized men and women and in greater proportions than today, i.e. before the rise of the postwar middle class.

The social critique type of analysis tends to come up short in addressing such questions. Further, if it helps specify who is excluded and why, it does little to address the question of why those who aren't excluded are themselves failing to participate. While the latter are more engaged than the former, their numbers are still low.[88]

There is a second type of analysis which at first seems better able to shed light on these questions. From this alternative perspective, the problem lies in the deficiencies of official democratic institutions. The focus is thus not social exclusion per se, but rather the failing standards of democratic institutions. On this view, it would seem that the daily functioning of these institutions is so ill-perceived by the public that they no longer motivate citizens to participate. Since the 1990s there has been much negative press of this sort at the federal level. But given that voter apathy has struck at all levels of government, calls for reform have also been heard at provincial and municipal levels.[89]

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[88] Besides historically low voter turnout, consider the issue of party membership. Gidengil et al. note that only 24 per cent of affluent Canadians have belonged to a political party at some point in their lives. *Ibid.Citizens*, p. 129.

[89]At the provincial level, take for example William P. Cross, *Democratic Reform in New Brunswick* (Toronto :: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2007).

The main assumption of this approach seems to be that if our institutions were better designed, according to more democratic principles, citizens might once again 'fly to the assemblies'.[90] Some of the institutions in question include political parties, legislatures and parliaments, as well as the electoral system itself. So, for example, we commonly hear that there is too much party discipline and not enough autonomy in the representation of constituencies; that there is too much power and secrecy surrounding Cabinet and an excessive centralization of power in the PMO; that the Senate is a dysfunctional vestige of the old aristocracy and that the first-past-the-post system consistently under-represents voter preferences.

The list could go on, as demonstrated by Jeffrey Simpson's analysis in *The Friendly Dictatorship*, which sums up many of the more detailed academic accounts.[91] Much of Simpson's analysis links public ill-feelings to perceived arrogance among public officials, which is in turn a result of poor institutional organization. With 'friendly dictators' at the helm, it is perhaps not surprising to find what he describes as a "sullen and disengaged citizenry."[92] What is needed for men and women to regain confidence in political leadership, on this view, is a

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[90] This is Rousseau's phrase, referring to the motivation felt by citizens of the good polity (i.e. citizens motivated to fly to the assemblies). See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract* (New York: Dover Publications, 2003).

[91] Such as Donald's Savoie's argument about administrative centralization, for example. See Donald J. Savoie, *Governing from the Centre : The Concentration of Power in Canadian Politics* (Toronto :: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

[92] Jeffrey Simpson, *The Friendly Dictatorship* (Toronto :: McClelland & Stewart, 2001), xiii.

sense that institutions are running as democratically as possible – in a responsive, participatory and inclusive manner.

The point here is not to say that the concerns raised by institutional critics are invalid. Indeed, an awareness of institutional shortcomings can show the way to much needed reforms. Perhaps the problems are less alarming than some critics suppose, and they may be difficult to resolve without creating new ones.[93] But few will deny the importance of sustained reflection about the integrity of democratic institutions. Still, there is something odd about the fervent institutional critique. This is especially obvious when contrasted with the social critique mentioned above. For while institutional criticism seeks structures that perfectly reflect the will of the people, it ignores the circumstances under which the most basic expression of democratic activity might take root.

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[93] Consider Joseph Heath's observations on the matter: "Most of the proposals for reform and the demands for "more democracy" are deeply flawed, and are based on a demonstrably inadequate conception of democratic politics. As a result, it is doubtful that any of these proposals would improve anything in the Canadian system. Furthermore, they exhibit a peculiar blindness to many important features of how the current system works. Thus in many cases these proposals run the risk of destroying elements of the current system that are functioning well, in return for benefits that are, at best, unclear. As a result, I am inclined to view the institutional stasis of the past ten years with significantly less alarm than many other commentators. While there are clearly defects in the current system, all of the proposals for large-scale reform seem to be equally defective. Furthermore, almost every proposal on the table would have the effect, in one way or another, of weakening federal power…In this context, electoral and democratic reform would be far more likely to succeed if one or more provinces were to attempt it first (with, of course, the exception of Senate reform)." From Joseph Heath, "The Democracy Deficit in Canada," *Unpublished manuscript available at http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~jheath/*: pp. 29-30.

If the concern is with mobilizing the voice of the people, redesigning the technical modalities of official institutions will in all likelihood only go so far. Why not first inquire at the local level to find out why, for example, such a small number of men and women participate in local associations, parties and unions? Surely the fact that few people are used to associating with others in committees and workgroups, of generating agreement and organizing for change, should be of primary concern to those worried about democratic voice. It's difficult in this regard not to see a contradiction in drumming up so much concern for institutional reform. Can there really be such a strong link between public disengagement and the exact structure of official democratic institutions? Should we not be more concerned with locally rooted democratic vehicles, such as tenants associations and immigrant advocacy groups, riding associations, worker cooperatives, unions, consumer groups and so on?

Of course if we consider these democratic settings to be within the purview of institutional change, the argument for reform takes on new salience. But this would involve turning the standard institutional critique on its head, such that reforms would look quite different from those mentioned above. We might think, for example, of various programs in 'associative democracy', where unrepresented groups are assured the means and resources for taking democratic action. What needs further inquiry with regard to the institutional critique is the idea that parliamentary reform, for example, will draw greater numbers of men

and women into the democratic fray.[94] Certainly, institutional restructuring might have an important impact in countries where democratization marks a break from the past. The situation is different, however, in older and more affluent Western democracies, where the balance of interest between public and private life seems at odds with mass participation.

Declining and Shifting Participation

At one time in Canadian history elections were hotly contested events that would frequently result in riots. The stakes were understood to be so high that someone could lose a life.[95] In our day, elections have become the minimal expression of willingness to partake in the governance of one's city, province or country. But now even this minimal expression of belonging seems fragile. Over the last twenty years, there has been constant decline in voter participation at

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[94] Consider for example parliamentary reforms in the area of party discipline. Will attempts to relax party discipline and give more freedom to MPs to consult with their constituencies have an effect on public engagement? Perhaps, and thus such reforms remain crucial. But I am inclined to believe that more radical reforms are needed at the level of the 'secondary associations' of civil society: providing more resources and leverage for associations representing the disadvantaged, less for those representing the well off. For interesting insights on the actual impact of parliamentary reform see Peter Aucoin and Lori Turnbull, "The Democratic Deficit: Paul Martin and Parliamentary Reform," *Canadian Public Administration* 46, no. 4 (2003). For a discussion on the problem of democratic engagement in civil society see Michael Walzer and David Miller, *Thinking Politically : Essays in Political Theory* (New Haven :: Yale University Press, 2007), chapter 8. For an analysis that links these two approaches see Miriam Catherine Smith, *A Civil Society? : Collective Actors in Canadian Political Life* (Peterborough, Ont. :: Broadview Press, 2005).

[95] Allan Greer, *The Patriots and the People : The Rebellion of 1837 in Rural Lower Canada*, Social History of Canada, 0085-6207 ; 49 (Toronto :: University of Toronto Press, 1993), p. 116.

pretty much all levels of government in Canada. The absence of youth is perhaps what worries commentators most, as they are the inheritors of a tradition that appears more vulnerable than we once might have thought.

The excitement of an election or lack thereof speaks to the vitality of democratic life more generally. Thus along with high voter participation we might expect a flourishing civil society, with hundreds of thousands of men and women trying to persuade others of the virtues of this or that party, movement or cause. For political scientists, this correlation forms the basis of what is referred to as the 'canary in the coal mine' argument. If the vote is a barometer of democratic activity then dwindling voter turnout may signal a more general decline in a country's democratic vitality.

Some commentators are willing to take the argument a step further. Robert Putnam, for example, claims that voter decline in the US means not only a withering of political activity but also of social life more generally. His research suggests that we've become the shut-ins of a mass media society. We're unwilling, perhaps scared, to engage one another in civic contexts. The public square has become a meaner, less compassionate place than it once was.[96]

Yet there is also research that contradicts such an extreme interpretation. Perhaps it's true that today's mobile society makes it harder to partake in durable civic associations or even durable friendships. On the other hand, there appears to

[96] Putnam describes this in terms of a loss of civic trust and 'social capital'. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone : The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York :: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

be a willingness to adapt to the opportunities of forming 'looser' social connections.[97] Furthermore, social scientists still consider Canada and the US to be 'activist' civil societies. Compared to their European counterparts, there are more people here that partake in the spectrum of social and civic activities.[98] Thus in Canada research suggests that just as fewer people turned out to vote in recent decades, so more of them got involved in one form of association or another.[99]

How is this complex state of affairs to be understood and how does it pair off with the notion of democratic decline? Taylor assesses the situation to mean something other than straightforward decline. This is not to say that the canary in the coal mine argument isn't partially valid. It's hard to see how declining voter turnout would not also signal a weakening of democratic activity. Indeed, evidence suggests that along with voter participation there has also been a decline of membership in political parties. Similarly, there would also seem to be a waning of political campaign activities.[100] There is thus good reason to consider

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[97] See Robert Wuthnow, *Loose Connections : Joining Together in America's Fragmented Communities* (Cambridge, Mass. :: Harvard University Press, 1998).

[98] European countries, as Young and Everitt put it, "tend to have either high levels of group membership or high rates of membership participation, but seldom both. Canada and the United States are unique in that they are 'activist' civil societies that possess widespread group membership and high levels of voluntary activity among these members." Lisa Young and Joanna Marie Everitt, *Advocacy Groups*, Canadian Democratic Audit ; 5 (Vancouver :: UBC Press, 2004), p. 34.

[99] Ibid., p. 41.

[100] These are not uniquely Canadian phenomena. See Susan Scarrow, ""Parties without Members? Party Organization in a Changing Electoral Environment"," in *Parties without Partisans : Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, ed. Russell J. Dalton and Martin P. Wattenberg (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).And Ian McAllister and Martin P.

low voter turnout as a mirror to broader trends.

For Taylor, however, this view only covers part of the transformation underway. For along with the decline in traditional modes of democratic politics, there has been a rise in new forms of engagement – which is not to say that the latter are an adequate substitute to the former. The trend Taylor is most concerned about is towards a politics anchored in single-issue organizations, 'chequebook groups' and litigation campaigns. Coinciding with the rise of strategic groups of this sort is a perception that such alternative means of change are more effective than traditional ones.[101] Taylor describes the shift as involving different modes of 'citizen efficacy'.[102]

When political parties, media outlets and other vehicles of democracy begin to feel inaccessible, committed men and women will turn to other forms of participation. The first of the two modes mentioned above involves what Taylor calls broad-gauge politics, while the second is based on more targeted punctual interventions. The difference between the two is evident in terms of the place social conflict finds in each. Broad-gauge politics involves something resembling a single fault line, such that we can understand there to be a central point of

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Wattenberg Russell J Dalton, "The Consequences of Party Disalignment " in *Parties without Partisans : Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, ed. Russell J. Dalton and Martin P. Wattenberg (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[101] Gidengil, *Citizens*, p. 131.

[102] By this he means the capacity of citizens to effect their purposes. He remarks that "one of the most important faculties of the modern subject is the ability to effect one's purposes. This is what I have called 'efficacy'." Taylor, *Reconciling the Solitudes : Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, p. 79.

cleavage throughout society. Typically, we know of this cleavage as the touchstone of partisan politics, the battle between left and right.

Taylor describes the cleavage as that between elite and nonelite segments of the population. Broad-gauge democratic reforms that break with the status quo are likely to be mobilized by the nonelite majority – what he refers to as the 'demos' or 'people'. As a paradigm example of democratic citizen efficacy, he alludes to the practice of commoners facing off against the elite in ancient Greece.[103] In a sense, it is this opposition that provided the motivation for democratic engagement. When the parallel is drawn to modern democracies, nonelite citizen efficacy is perhaps best understood as passing through the working class and other marginalized groups, although an argument could be made today for including the middle class as well.

Political parties are not the sole vehicles of broad-gauge politics. Certain other groups and associations of civil society are similarly committed to a spectrum of far-reaching reforms of one kind or another. Taylor mentions the manner in which the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) functions in the U.S. We might also think of a group like the Council of Canadians. When likeminded associations join together, sometimes

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[103] In ancient Greece, the demos were not simply understood as all members of the civic body. The term also held an alternative understanding, which referred specifically to the emancipatory core of this body, the populace. It is this portion of the citizenry that had the most to gain from the promise of democracy. Thus the word 'demos' is "used synonymously with common people, ordinary people, or in older French, *le menu peuple*. It contrasts to elites, aristocracy, the rich, the powerful, or some such designation of the hegemonic class or classes." ———, "Cultures of Democracy and Citizen Efficacy." P. 33

with political parties, other times with unions or environmental groups, they are in a sense rallying their members in support of a common 'package' of reforms. What is distinctive about this kind of politics is the broad scope of interests at play and the potential for organic linkages between groups. Taylor describes the participant's view of the broad-gauge model of efficacy as follows,

> "I seek input of influence over the whole governance of my society – that is, not only over the decision on this or that issue but over the whole way these issues are defined, prioritized and related to each other. It makes sense in this picture to pick as my vehicle a party that could aspire to govern or take part with others in a governing coalition or, failing this, a broad-gauge association like the NAACP."[104]

According to the broad-gauge conflict model, the aim of nonelite political parties and affiliate organizations is to win power and concessions from the elite. This objective can in turn be seen as part of the modern struggle to reverse entrenched hierarchies of superiority and subordination. Such historic confrontation is of course not without dangers of excess. We need only consider the egalitarian fervour of Jacobin revolutionaries or later communist horrors. But taken with the framework of established liberal democracies, Taylor defends the somewhat counterintuitive claim that broad-gauge democratic conflict can actually serve to bring citizens together in a heightened common allegiance.

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[104] Ibid.: p. 131.

Democratic conflict, in this context, is the seedbed for arguments and reforms in the interest of the common good. At its best, rallying support for one package of reforms or another is a patriotic enterprise through which the ties of solidarity are strengthened. Even traditional elite parties such as the Liberals and Conservatives must justify their platforms with arguments defending the common good. Inasmuch as they and their opponents believe in their respective visions, there results a unifying struggle which testifies, at least in part, an attachment to a common fate.

The same cannot be said of the punctual mode of politics Taylor identifies as supplanting the broad-gauge conflict model. The punctual mode may be understood as a certain kind of associational politics. Taylor characterizes the associations at issue as 'single-issue organizations'. Their aims are singularly specific; they have little interest in building support for a common package of reforms. Indeed, the success of these organizations depends on their ability to bring strategic pressure to bear on highly focused events and campaigns. The concentration of resources on a single cause is understood to be instrumental in swaying public opinion, politicians and government officials. Such organizations also attempt to effect change through litigation battles.[105]

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[105] On this issue, Young and Everitt observe that "Over the past two decades, litigation has become a much more significant aspect of advocacy group activity in Canada…When we think about advocacy groups engaging in litigation, the first examples that come to mind involve equality-seeking groups like gays and lesbians, Aboriginals and women. While these groups have made considerable use of the courts to achieve some significant policy changes, they are by no means the only groups using the courts. In fact…between 1988 and 1998…corporate

A certain kind of environmentalism detached from traditional partisan concerns might also be taken as an example of this sort of politics. What is distinctive, again, is the lack of interest in a complete set of reforms. In full-fledged punctual politics, the mobilizing issues of the day all stand 'orthogonal' to one another. The men and women advancing them are not joined by any common vision of society. Insofar as the different groups do not need to rub shoulders and compromise with one another, the threat of social fragmentation becomes more acute. Taylor mentions the American cultural wars as a case in which 'identification with the polity' is weakened by punctual politics. In the U.S., he says,

> "The powerful packages have become the lifestyle issues, those that are the object of the present culture wars: abortion, gay marriage, school prayer, sex education in schools. These divisions cut across class, and moreover, they unite very heterogeneous constituencies on each side, and so they do not seem to be able to become the fault line along which a fight that intensifies identification with the polity can take place like the former successful cases of class war." [106]

To be fair, he also finds it important to note that the ordinary supporters of campaigns in support of and against abortions, for example, may not be as divided as the media portrays them to be. Indeed, the majority of campaign supporters may only be so involved as to donate a cheque now and then. This financial

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interests accounted for almost half the legal interventions by groups." Young and Everitt, *Advocacy Groups*, p. 112.

[106] Taylor, "Cultures of Democracy and Citizen Efficacy," p. 133.

support in turn provides the resources needed for professional lobbyists to continue the war of perception in the eyes of the public. Considering the way media representations can spiral out of control and exacerbate latent tensions, the fragmentary effect of punctual politics cannot be underestimated, for this sort of politics can wear on even the strongest political identities, let alone one wrought by the strains of regionalism and sub-state nationalism.[107]

Given these two contrasting modes of political activity, how does Taylor understand the dynamic behind the shift towards the punctual mode? Bureaucratization and the centralization of power may be an important part of the puzzle. Distant and unresponsive bureaucracies tend to create alienating gulfs between citizens and public decision-makers. Certain corporations function as the oligarchic equivalent to this by muzzling the voice of workers in the economy. But for Taylor these problems, while significant, can only go so far in making sense of the shift away from broad-gauge politics. To glean further insight requires an appreciation of the place of affluence in postwar consumer society.

Affluence and Worker Acquiescence

Everyday material needs are understood differently by those living in affluence compared to those living closer to subsistence levels. Accordingly, the postwar culture of affluence relates to the political world differently than did the

[107] For a Canadian example linking media to an exacerbation of 'identity politics' see Maryse Potvin and Marika Tremblay, *Crise Des Accommodements Raisonnables : Une Fiction Médiatique?* (Outremont, Québec : Boisbriand, Québec :: Athena éditions ; Prologue [distributeur], 2008).

working class culture that preceded it. Taylor attempts to identify the effects of postwar affluence on the way that people perceive their socioeconomic predicament. An aspiration towards comfort, independence and control has universal connotations. But with the postwar transition, changing material conditions also meant a shift in common understandings of mutuality and interdependence.

Large numbers of working class men and women could now aspire towards material sufficiency more or less on their own, as individuals. They no longer depended as much on the power of numbers, as they once did. The catalyst was the wave of upward mobility that came with social democracy and postwar economic growth. Increased access to postsecondary education, the expansion of service sector employment, higher personal revenues and a new diversity of life experiences meant that older forms of 'mutual help' began to recede. Individual men and women became more privately autonomous.

A central aspect of these changes was the physical dissolution of traditional working class neighbourhoods. Along with new wealth there came an exodus from these crowded city blocks into the world of suburban home ownership. Thus the tightly knit culture of 'the street' that was so central to the older neighbourhoods also began to dissolve.[108] The move away from conditions of tenancy allowed for a new autonomy and control over extensive private space.

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[108] Richard Hoggart, *Uses of Literacy : Aspects of Working-Class Life, with Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments* (London :: Chatto and Windus, 1957).

With increased financial security, the connected set of ways through which the working class understood their social oppression lost its perceived salience.

It was not only the commitment to public housing which began to be seen differently. Rather, it was the whole spectrum of means through which greater personal dignity could be achieved through collective mobilization. Most emblematic perhaps was the slowed and weakened intensity of efforts to democratize the workplace. With greater command over private space in the home, the goal of fighting for reforms on the shop floor may have lost some of its urgency.[109] Of course the aims of class mobilization were never easily secured. Ironically, such aims became even more difficult to push forward once individuals and families accrued greater autonomy.

Taylor links this fate to a transformed perception of social and political ties. "Objectively" he says "a rise of affluence helps bring about a shift in our understanding of our predicament so that one of the basic retaining walls under the older idea of a class war subsides."[110] Due in part to a changing socioeconomic environment, involvement in politics tends to become a more punctual affair. The shared interests that once linked millions of men and women together by way of their common class predicament cease to carry the same relevance. "Each citizen is cut loose on his or her own, perhaps connected from

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[109] Geographer Richard Harris makes this point with regard to the Canadian context. R. Harris, "The Suburban Worker in the History of Labor," *International Labor and Working Class History* 64 (2003): pp. 8-24.

[110] Taylor, "Cultures of Democracy and Citizen Efficacy," p. 133.

time to time to people with like interests on this or that issue…but without a strong identification to something like a movement. This change of consciousness meant that the older kind of broad-gauge efficacy is going to be much harder to recreate."[111]

Based on this interpretation, it makes little sense to explain declining political participation in terms of exclusion, as suggested above. Disengagement here can hardly be understood as a matter of social disadvantage and lack of political means. In fact, quite the opposite seems to be true. It is the process of inclusion into a once privileged lifestyle that seems to have distanced men and women from political pursuits. Yet it's not as though a degree of middle class affluence signalled the end of elite domination and control. Thus democratic decline may, in one sense, be seen as a failure of the left to make the transition from an egalitarian politics of the old blue-collar working class to one that serves similar ends for a broader nonelite constituency.

The institutional critique may also be of some relevance here. When political institutions turn into inaccessible bureaucracies, the joys and gratifications of private life become more alluring than public involvement. Disengagement should thus not solely be understood in relation to affluence. There is also the institutional smothering of interest to consider. But Taylor wants to dig deeper still by attempting to conceptualize forms of social motivation built around an emergent, consumer based individualism. Far from insignificant, he

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[111] Ibid.

sees the widespread manifestation of consumer forms of identity-formation as constituting nothing short of a cultural revolution.

The Politics of Mutual Display

The cultural roots of consumer based identity-formation are rooted in what Taylor refers to as the ethics of authenticity. The popularization and distortion of this ethics can be dated roughly to the 1960s, but its original sources go back to the Romantic period. Perhaps the main insight of the romantic vision of personal authenticity is that morality is anchored, not in society or the outer world, but rather within oneself. In the late 18th Century, this was understood to be quite a radical way of seeing things. Today, we understand it to mean that each individual must discover his or her own way of being human. Personal discovery and self-expression becomes a form of freedom and is thus not without political relevance.

Whether framed as civil rights or lifestyle liberation, the gains of the 1960s can be understood as facilitating greater freedom to 'become who you are'. No longer would women accept to be fit into the role-stereotype of the domestic wife, nor would gay men and women accept to repress pride in their sexual desires. Moral progress on these fronts was linked to new ethical assumptions. One such assumption was that each person has a unique inner core, unlike anything else under the sun. Individualism itself is of course not new. Even working class collectivism could be said to enable a certain kind of individualism in that social mobilization enabled these men and women to live more freely.

What came about with postwar consumer culture, however, is something quite different. The emphasis here is not just on the affirmation of equality, but also on expressive distinction as against the stodgy conformity of the multitudes. The pursuit of authenticity engages individuals in a transformative process of self-development where, through experience, one gains insight into one's nature and potential. Authenticity, in this sense, is the attempt to bring one's unique set of endowments to fruition. It is perhaps best described with the metaphor of the 'journey'. Stanley Cavell speaks of a journey of ascent "determined not by natural talent but by seeking to know what you are made of and cultivating the thing you are meant to do, or to be." [112]

This life journey sometimes requires retreat into solitude, but on the whole it is unimaginable without the guiding support and encouragement of others. Typically, such mutuality grows out of close relations with friends and loved ones. There is however no reason to think it incompatible with public engagement. Participation is itself not the sign of conformity. Indeed, it is a crucial means to particularistic self-knowledge. It helps map one's world, thus shedding light on one's unique place within it. In a democracy, a vigorous social and political life serves to heighten awareness of the various strengths and weaknesses of each and all. Though not without its challenges, self-discovery helps to see one's journey as a purposeful endeavour, as opposed to mere stumbling in the dark.

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[112] Cavell, *Cities of Words : Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life*, p. 446.

In contrast to this, the consumer form of authenticity that has taken root since the 1960s can lead to altogether antisocial tendencies. Consider a certain 'countercultural' extremism that portrays mainstream culture as irretrievably corrupt and devoid of redeeming features whatsoever. Instead of having personal growth and social change play off one another in the building of a better society, the two processes are set at irreconcilable odds. A narcissistic concern with rebellious distinction is matched by an equivalent detachment from the common public culture. In combination with the dissolution of working class identities, it is not difficult to see how consumer forms of identity-formation could open the way to a dynamic of disengagement.

The virtues of authenticity were once cast against the disciplined productivity that 1960s youth saw as imperilling their world – a world of unprecedented industrial production that fostered competition in the acquisition of new goods, such as cars, domestic appliances, fashion items, etc. Yet while originally critical of ever-increasing production and consumption, the countercultural sensibility has done little to attenuate it in the long run. In some ways, it has only served to exacerbate it. When the search for personal distinction becomes the norm, the demands of authenticity can easily be trivialized. Indeed, in consumer society, the pursuit of authenticity risks being reduced to what critics Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter refer to as 'rebel consumption'.[113]

[113] Potter, *The Rebel Sell : Why the Culture Can't Be Jammed*.

As consumer forms of authenticity become the norm, the production of goods becomes increasingly geared towards meeting countercultural demand. There is something absurd about this, for the countercultural movement originally meant to transform a system seen as excessively corporate. But by the time the utopian hopes of the 1960s had run their course, the countercultural critique retreated into something less than it once was. In some ways, the protest culture was left with little by which to define itself other than the seeking out of new consumer lifestyles. Cachet consumer goods became the markers of distinction and dissent. Ironically, they also served to spur on the cycle of obsolescence upon which capitalist markets now fed.[114]

On the whole, such countercultural forms of consumer based individualism have the effect of sapping democratic politics of precious energies. This is especially true among youth, whose absence from the political scene is

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[114] This description is perhaps an exaggeration, particularly with regard to the baby boomer generation. For the boomers – the old activist segment of which perhaps fits David Brooks' description as bourgeois bohemians, or 'bobos' – still carry some of the 1960s ethic of self-expression. The bobos, Taylor notes "have made their peace with capitalism and productivity but they retain their overriding sense of the importance of personal development and self-expression…Among the things that get lost in the original package are, on one hand, social equality; bobos have made their peace with the Reagan-Thatcher revolution, with the slimming down of the welfare state, and with increasing income inequality where they sit at the upper end. On the other hand, their highly mobile lifestyle has helped to erode community. But there is more than a residual unease about this among many of these highfliers. They want to believe that they are contributing to the welfare of everyone, and they yearn for more meaningful community relations. In fact, this kind of capitalist subculture, which one found mainly in the information technology world, is not unanimously accepted among the rich and powerful. There still exists a culture of the big vertical corporations, and there is a tension between the two." Taylor, "Cultures of Democracy and Citizen Efficacy," p. 139.

paralleled by the development of specialized youth markets. The life stage that has come to be understood as 'youth', somewhere between childhood freedoms and adult responsibilities, is a crucial phase in the unfurling of personal identities. But it's a phase where socialization into broad-gauge political identities is on the wane. Taylor suggests that youth identities are increasingly shaped through small, stylistically defined groups. Though loose knit, these social forms are not without a powerful draw, particularly as concerns one's public self-presentation.

So while democratic public forms are receding in importance, another public dimension is on the rise. Public life doesn't dwindle altogether with consumer based identity-formation. Rather, it comes to be structured by different forms of social interaction. Taylor uses the concept of 'fashion' to define the social dynamic of the consumer dimension. Thus he sees democratic spaces of common action, where confrontation, debate and policy initiatives might take place, as competing with fashion spaces of 'mutual display'. Instead of argumentative political exchanges, mutual display involves its own special kind of social responsiveness, where the meaning of any one fashion gesture depends on the background language of style within which all partake.

In a public culture defined by fashion "it matters to each of us that as we act the others are there as witness to what we are doing and thus as co-determiners of the meaning of our action".[115] While in a sense highly individualized, a fashion based public culture is one in which a general mood or common feeling may be

[115] Ibid.: p. 140.

struck. Consider for example open urban spaces such as parks and malls, where strangers rub shoulders, display their individuality and observe others doing the same. More importantly perhaps, consider the diffuse media spaces structured by corporate logos and other mass-marketed symbols. Not limited to the corporeality of a specific time and place, these 'metatopical' common spaces are structured within national and transnational contexts.[116]

Practices of mutual display are thus able to plug hundreds of millions of men and women into a common language of style, although one mostly dominated by corporate backed fantasies, heroes and stars. These commercialized spaces of identity-formation act as a counterforce to the possibility of genuine authenticity. A fashion based public culture, while not without its particular joys, can hardly contribute to Mill's utopia of 'human development in its richest diversity'. Mutual display, Taylor notes, is ambiguously situated between solipsism and communication, loneliness and togetherness. When such practices

[116] Taylor contrasts 'metatopical' media spaces with 'topical' spaces centred on physical proximity. Nineteenth-century urban spaces, he notes, were topical – "that is, all the participants were in the same place, in sight of each other. But twentieth century communication has produced metatopical variants – when, for instance, we watch the Olympics or Princess Diana's funeral on television, aware that millions of others are with us in this. The meaning of our participation in the event is shaped by the whole vast dispersed audience we share it with…The language of self-definition is defined in the spaces of mutual display, which have now gone metatopical – they relate us to prestigious centers of style-creation, usually in rich and powerful nations and milieus. And this language is the object of constant attempted manipulation by large corporations. My buying Nike running shoes may say something about how I want to be or appear, the kind of empowered agent who can take "Just do it!" as my motto." Ibid.: p. 144-45. For related insights applied to media and digital culture see Joe Karaganis and Council Social Science Research, *Structures of Participation in Digital Culture* (New York :: Social Science Research Council, 2007).

overpower more cooperative forms of mutuality, such as those of broad-gauge or even punctual politics, they become the emblems of democratic decline.

Chapter 3

Materialism and the Self-Image of Western Democracies

An obvious challenge in the governance of capitalist democracies is how to promote greater equality while at the same time ensuring financial and economic stability. In the postwar period, the 1970s oil shock introduced the palpable threat of declining economic performance, on the one hand, with rising unemployment, inflation and public debt on the other. It's this unwieldy predicament that paved the way to neoliberal reforms in the 1980s and 90s, which were justified to the public precisely as a matter of fiscal responsibility.[117] Since then, social democratic proposals for better managing the economy have either been timid or ignored.[118] It is worth noting, in this regard, that few leftist parties have yet to seriously question assumptions about the sacrosanct nature of economic growth.

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[117] The public policy conundrum of the 1970s situation led to various diagnoses known as 'overload theories' of the welfare state. See for example Claus Offe and John Keane, *Contradictions of the Welfare State*, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought. (Cambridge, Mass. :: MIT Press, 1984), James O'Connor, *The Fiscal Crisis of the State* (New York :: St. Martin's Press, 1973), Samuel P. Huntington, *American Politics : The Promise of Disharmony* (Cambridge, Mass. :: Belknap Press, 1981).

[118] If the program of the 'new right' called for less government to solve state overload, centrist 'third way' programs called for investment in education and 'human capital', while opening the way to a diminishment of state responsibilities in other areas. Meanwhile, a more ambitious leftist program of 'associative democracy' has been soundly debated but has yet gained much political traction. For one such proposal, see Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, "“Secondary Associations and Democratic Governance”," *Politics and Society* 20 (1992), Paul Q. Hirst, *Associative Democracy : New Forms of Economic and Social Governance* (Amherst :: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994).

Just as with conservative policymakers, there remains a belief on the left that it is only through every rising economic production and consumption that we can ensure the survival and success of the capitalist welfare state. It is this assumption, of continuous exponential growth, that is today finally coming under scrutiny.[119] In a first instance, the growth agenda and correlative exploitation of natural resources can hardly be reconciled with scientific knowledge about human impact on the environment. The effect of grossly surpassing environmental limits is bound to have negative political repercussions. This is especially worrisome in countries like Canada, where the social fabric is already weak due to national unity problems, the most powerful symbol of which is the 1995 referendum.

Secondly, we are beginning to realize that economic growth is only effective in generating the social changes it promises up to a point. Since the late 1970s, the growth agenda has fallen considerably short of expectations in securing the aims that once served as its underlying rationale: full employment, the reduction of poverty and inequality, as well as increased leisure time.[120] But for

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[119] Though such scrutiny is not entirely new (indeed, it was prominent in the 1970s 'Club of Rome' and 'small is beautiful' movement), scholarly fields such as 'ecological economics' are only now gaining credibility. There is at least one political leader, Caroline Lucas, a member of the European Parliament, who has openly questioned the growth agenda. See Caroline Lucas, ""Localization - an Alternative to Corporate-Led Globalization"," *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 27, no. 4 (2003).

[120] Joseph Heath, ""Should Productivity Growth Be a Social Priority?" " in *The Review of Economic Performance and Social Progress: Towards a Social Understanding of Productivity*

ed. Keith Banting and France St-Hilaire Andrew Sharpe (Ottawa: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002).

Taylor, these two sets of doubts about economic growth, regarding environmental limits and failed expectations of social change, are not the only ones we should be worried about. Another important concern, which is the main subject of this chapter, is that it runs against our self-image as moderns.

At first glance, it may be difficult to grasp what this means exactly and why Taylor believes it to be so important. Ultimately, it means that excessive materialism betrays our understanding of how we ought to go about leading our lives and collectively, to organize our societies. It is similar to accepting to partake in other practices we do not stand behind as Canadians or, say, as Westerners. Take an extreme example such as torture. The point is that engaging in morally dubious practices makes us uneasy, less proud of our identity. Our common practices lack 'legitimacy', as Taylor puts it.[121]

When a country partakes in practices it cannot heartily stand behind, it loses legitimacy in the eyes of its members. It also loses their support and loyalty, as the citizenry has ultimately lost pride and confidence in itself. The growth imperative is itself a reflection of the commitment to an ever-increasing material standard of living. It is thus linked to an understanding of the weight that should be assigned to material affluence in our everyday life. Certainly, the self-

[121] Drawing from Max Weber, Taylor describes legitimacy as designating "the beliefs and attitudes that members have towardss the society they make up. The society has legitimacy when members so understand and value it that they are willing to assume the disciplines and burdens which membership entails. Legitimacy declines when this willingness flags or fails." See Taylor, *Reconciling the Solitudes : Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, p. 64.

understood importance of material plenitude in Western society should not be underestimated. That it carries such widespread attraction is testimony to the important role it plays in democratic life.[122]

Yet Taylor's argument is that it has come to play too great a role, more than is warranted by the cultural foundations of Western modernity. For to lead a fulfilled life, on this view, requires a more comprehensive, less singular understanding of one's identity and aspirations. The first part of the chapter offers a broad brush analysis of certain key characteristics of modern selfhood. More specifically, it looks at the related cultural ideals of what Taylor calls 'self-determining freedom' and personal 'authenticity'. The point is not just to describe these as ideals that define us and for which we strive to achieve at some level, but also to show how they may be reduced to a mere 'consumer standard' of happiness. The second and third parts of the chapter go on to question the liberal credentials of Taylor's critique, as well as its practical usefulness.

Regardless of whether Taylor's interpretation is correct, commentators might object that consumption activities are ultimately within the purview of private autonomy. Why should men and women accept being told what they can and cannot do in their role as consumers? The chapter argues that we must indeed be careful not to infringe on private autonomy, especially on issues where there is

[122] It is noteworthy, in this regard, that Michael Walzer includes consumer plenitude as among the central ideas of the good life in West, alongside engaged citizenship, a passionate work life and a sense of national belonging. See Walzer and Miller, *Thinking Politically : Essays in Political Theory*, chapter 8.

room for reasonable debate. But this is not to say that such debate – that is, debate about how one ought to live – cannot be engaged with vigorously, as is the case with Taylor and others such as Stanley Cavell.

Finally, it is also relevant to ask whether Taylor's way of addressing the drive towards indiscriminate growth and over-consumption is a useful basis for initiating social and political reform. The rest of the chapter explores whether there might not be another, more practical way of posing the question, one that offers more leverage than through a strictly interpretive critique. Taylor has been accused in this regard of relying on a methodological idealism which assumes that we can change the course of society simply by changing our ideas about it. Without attempting to settle the score on this, the chapter acknowledges that institutional analysts of consumerism such as Canadian philosopher Joseph Heath bring an important complement to Taylor's work. By introducing Heath's analysis of 'market failure', it is argued that certain institutional deficiencies, if left unaddressed, tend to exacerbate the distortions already present in Western culture.

Freedom and Authenticity

Industrial growth and the continuous increase of a nation's economic output could be justified in earlier times because of its contribution to equality and well-being. It was thought to be the means through which general affluence and redistribution could be delivered. There were both left and right wing versions of

how growth was expected to do this.[123] In retrospect, it is obvious that the growth agenda did much to improve the standard of living in rich countries such as Canada. But as critics are increasingly apt to point out, the nature of economic growth is such that it is hampered by diminishing returns. Since the 1980s, there isn't much evidence that exponential growth and consumption have improved the conditions of public welfare in Western countries. Indeed, some see this to have had an opposite effect – certainly with regard to the environment, but also in terms of leisure and financial constraints.[124]

Men and women of today's capitalist democracies may, ironically, feel that such issues are largely beyond their control. Yet there is a close connection between growth-oriented public policy and the private lives of ordinary citizens. In fact, the very motor of economic growth is spurred on by consumption decisions each of us at some level chooses to make and thus with regard to the lifestyle we choose to adopt. Though the west has achieved riches no civilization has before, we continue to aspire towards a rising standard of material luxury.

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[123] As Taylor puts it, the "minimal or right-wing hope is that people on steadily rising incomes will not care too much that income disparities are remaining constant or even getting worse – in other words that others are getting richer. The maximal, or left-wing, hope is that a disproportionate share of growth can be steered to the less well-off so that income disparities can be reduced, but painlessly, since this time the rich are compensated (or anaesthetized) by rising incomes for the more rapid progress of the poor". Taylor, "The Politics of the Steady State," pp. 162-63.

[124] Juliet Schor's work on this is particularly insightful. See Juliet Schor, *The Overworked American : The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (New York, N.Y. :: Basic Books, 1991), ———, *The Overspent American : Upscaling, Downshifting, and the New Consumer* (New York, NY :: Basic Books, 1998).

This is perhaps partly due to a deep-seated desire for acquisition that somehow stems from our nature as humans. But in the civilization of Western modernity, Taylor argues, material aspirations have taken on a new connotation.

Material wealth has, for example, come to mean something different under conditions of egalitarian individualism. Its pursuit stands in a complex relation to the cultural ideals of self-determining freedom and authenticity. The modern period has brought about several massive shifts of context, including the decline of a social hierarchy connected to a religious view of the universe. What has followed from this, at one level, is an expansion of individual rights and freedoms. With the onset of modernity, the old pyramidal hierarchy of honour and prestige began to erode. But social hierarchies did not simply disappear. Rather, they were pluralized into multiple spheres and given an egalitarian thrust. There no longer exist strictly formalized standards for what constitute higher social statuses and modes of existence. Instead, the very idea of better or worse forms of existence has become an open question for which there can be any number of answers.

One important consequence of this is that we no longer find the same veneration for 'the heroic life', whether this be the spiritual heights of Greek contemplation, the famed responsibilities of ancient citizenship or the glory of medieval knighthood. Rather, what has developed roughly since the Reformation is an emphasis on the cherished elements of everyday life, such as work and family. At the center of this shift is a notion that these activities should be lived

out under conditions of equality and freedom. Taylor captures the essence of this shift in describing it as turn towards the 'affirmation of ordinary life'.[125] It would come to be understood, if only elusively, that greatness and virtue could now be found in the mundane, among the multitudes, not just in the privileged areas of elite intellectual activity, politics or battle.

To attain the higher modes of ordinary life was a matter of harnessing newfound freedom in the form of self-determination and personal authenticity. The former of these ideals has older roots than the latter. The notion of self-determining freedom, whether individual or collective, rests on a vision of the species that bolsters self-mastery and instrumental control. This has both a moral and material dimension. Humans find their dignity, on this view, by keeping their animal instincts at bay, as well as by controlling the world around them.

At its best, self-determination is not just an ideal of human empowerment but also of what Taylor calls 'practical benevolence' and 'self-responsibility'. Through practical ingenuity we are to quell unnecessary suffering wrought by

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[125] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self : The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass. :: Harvard University Press, 1989), part III. Regarding the influence of modern egalitarianism, it is interesting to note what Taylor refers to as a 'double expansion'. As he puts it, "The presumption of equality, implicit in the starting point of the state of Nature, where people stand outside all relations of superiority and inferiority, has been applied in more and more contexts, ending with the multiple equal treatment or nondiscrimination provisions, which are an integral part of most entrenched charters. In other words, during these past four centuries, the idea of moral order implicit in this view of society has undergone a double expansion: in extension (more people live by it; it has become dominant) and in intensity (the demands it makes are heavier and more ramified)." Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, p. 5.

nature's arbitrary cruelty. Lord Francis Bacon, the great advocate of the early modern scientific revolution, spoke of a capacity to "relieve the condition of mankind."[126] We wield this capacity for ourselves, but also for others – fellow citizens and distant strangers for whom we share sympathy.

At the level of the individual, self-determination requires that one discover for oneself how best to act towards others. This contrasts with blind deferral to custom, habit, and the sayings of local authorities. The goal is one of rational control and personal responsibility. The process of discovery at issue is not entirely different from scientific discovery, in that mastery of the self also develops through experiments of trial and error. In both instances, freedom from nature's rule is understood as the fruit of human reason.[127] Taylor notes that radical proponents of self-determination promote a view that "rebels against nature as that which is merely given, and demands that we find freedom in a life whose normative shape is somehow generated by rational activity".[128] It is sometimes held out to "offer a prospect of pure self-activity, where my action is determined not by the merely given, the facts of nature (including inner nature), but ultimately by my own agency as a formulator of rational law."[129]

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[126] As quoted in Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 104.

[127] In tracing the philosophical sources of this idea, Taylor examines the works Plato, Descartes, Locke and Kant, among others, each of whom he cites at length throughout *Sources of the Self*.

[128] Taylor, *Sources of the Self : The Making of the Modern Identity*, p. 364.

[129] Ibid.

Instrumental rationality and the efficacy it enables are on this view held in very high esteem. When considered collectively, this instrumental outlook is at the core of the pride each nation takes in developing its industrial capacity. In Canada, we need only think of the nostalgic self-aggrandizing of John A. McDonald's late 19th Century 'National Policy'.[130] Parallel to this, instrumental capacity is also an important part of the prestige derived from citizen self-rule. Engaged citizens are subjectively enriched, both individually and collectively, when they feel they can have an impact on the course of the world around them.

Beyond these public instances, the instrumental stance pervades private life as well. If we're to dwell among equals, individuals must be able to exert control over the objects, goods and technologies that surround them. This is the point of slippage, in a sense, between the potential of a responsible and benevolent existence, on the one hand, and an excessively materialistic one on the other, where we indulge in control and acquisitiveness for their own sake. To the extent that this translates into widespread practices of over-consumption and mutual display, it also signals a new form of social conformity.

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[130] See Michael Bliss and Canada Economic Council of, *The Evolution of Industrial Policies in Canada : An Historical Study*, Discussion Paper / Economic Council of Canada ; No.218 (Ottawa :: Economic Council of Canada, 1982). For a sober assessment of remarkable changes in the industrial landscape that developed throughout this period, see Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada 1896-1921 : A Nation Transformed*, Canadian Centenary Series. 14 (Toronto :: McClelland and Stewart, 1976). Consider also Allan Sullivan's novel in praise of human ingenuity and control of nature, set in Sault Ste Marie. Alan Sullivan, *The Rapids*, The Social History of Canada ; 8 ([Toronto]:: University of Toronto Press, 1972).

The second dimension at play in the modern affirmation of ordinary life has to do with our heritage as heirs of Western Romanticism. The most radical innovation of this 19th Century movement of philosophers and artists is the emphasis it put on the inner dimension of moral truth. The answer to the question of how to lead one's life was to found within oneself. At its best, this view is based on a faith that each person has the potential of developing into an original being, something new under the sun, a contribution to human richness and diversity. At the heart of this outlook is the notion that each individual has their own way of being human, something that needs to be discovered or found. As Taylor describes it,

> "The notion that each one of us has an original way of being human entails that each of us has to discover what it is to be ourselves. But the discovery can't be made by consulting pre-existing models, by hypothesis. So it can be made only by articulating it afresh. We discover what we have it in us to be by becoming that mode of life, by giving expression in our speech and action to what is original in us."[131]

In the wake of Romanticism, variations of this ideal have been passed down and popularized.[132] That it is mainly kept alive today through enterprising

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[131] Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 61.

[132] For insights into the Canadian movenment of Romanticism see Maurice Lemire and Laval Université, *Le Romantisme Au Canada*, Les Cahiers Du Centre De Recherche En Littérature Québécoise De L'université Laval. Série Colloques (Québec :: Nuit blanche, 1993), L. R. Early, *Archibald Lampman*, Twaynes's World Authors Series ; Twas 770. Canadian Literature (Boston :: Twayne

self-help experts shows the degree to which it has become trivialized. Taylor worries about the extent to which authenticity has come to mean little more than privatized self-righteousness – what he calls 'atomization'. It's true that romantic poets and philosophers saw private exodus as an important aspect of personal growth. Yet such exodus was only considered worthwhile insofar as it permitted a return to sociability in heightened form. Life halting confusion drives the need for solitary retreat and introspection. But the renewal of sociability among friends, just as in the world of art, sport, politics and religion forms the context without which authenticity has little purpose.

When such renewal fails to take place men and women risk finding their lives impoverished by a lack of meaning. In Taylor's view, this might involve some combination of, for example, "rejecting our past as irrelevant, or denying the demands of citizenship, or the duties of solidarity, or the needs of the natural environment".[133] Despite the threat of slippage from authenticity to privatised individualism, few are those that can bear the burden of true solitude. Atomized men and women are thus likely to engage in shallow forms of social expression. They remain drawn to a notion of happiness as personal discovery and conversation (where conversing is, say, the act of making oneself intelligible to others), but only superficially.

Publishers, 1986), Robert Melançon, "Le Premier Huron," *Études françaises* XXX, no. 3 (1994).

[133] Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 22.

It's the influence of this watered-down romantic ethic that further exacerbates patterns of consumerist display. Individuals seek personal distinction through self-identification with specific consumer goods. Whereas consumption was in an earlier period of industrialization driven by the desire to conform and belong, it's now driven by the need to stand out from the mediocrity of the masses. Critics Heath and Potter have described this emergent pattern as an ethic of 'hip consumerism'.[134] Ironically, they note, while the 1960s counterculture started as a critique of 'the system', it has in the end served to expand consumer demand and thus promote the development of new markets.

To sum up, Taylor links economic growth and consumption first to a lopsided emphasis on the fruits of instrumental rationality. This occurs at the expense of a more comprehensive manifestation of the ideal of self-determining freedom. Instead of cultivating rationality in combination with self-responsibility and practical benevolence, there is a tendency to display ever greater feats of instrumental control. Modern mass consumption also draws from a second cultural source. Modern identity is such that men and women must ultimately define themselves from within. Failing this, they are likely to seek out other reference points, such as may be obtained through perpetual acquisition of self-defining private goods.

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[134] Potter, *The Rebel Sell : Why the Culture Can't Be Jammed*.

‘La Lotta Continua’

The critique of consumer society is seen by some as a form of condescension towards the life choices of others. Taylor thus opens himself to the charge of elitism and moralistic paternalism. In today’s moral climate, liberal economists and political theorists are quick to point out that consumer practices are nobody else’s business but that of consumers themselves. Economists speak of sacrosanct ‘consumer sovereignty’ in purportedly transparent markets. Moral philosophers chime in to argue that individuals must lead their lives by their own lights, lest this life be unworth living. Ultimately, it is difficult for liberal commentators to see why consumers should accept that the critic’s opinion is better than their own when it comes to making consumption choices. It is the whole premise of this approach that they cannot tolerate. Consider how Joseph Heath describes the consumerism critique:

> “The most common objection to consumer sovereignty is simply that…consumers consistently make bad decisions. Of course, this objection would have little force if it was expressed as simply a disagreement - or worse, a difference in taste – between the critic and the consumer. The standard strategy is rather to argue that consumption choices reflect a commitment to some broader set of values, or conceptions of the good, and that these values can be organized into some sort of evaluative hierarchy. It is then

> claimed that the choices made by consumers consistently reflect values that are found towards the bottom of this hierarchy."[135]

For Heath, the problem with such a hierarchy is not just that it belittles the intelligence of others. It's that it opens the way to a political orientation that can slide towards intolerance and the policing of "improper" lifestyles. Thus what appears at first to be a straightforward discussion of consumption patterns can turn into a heated debate over the doctrine of 'state neutrality'. The anticipated danger is that an endorsement of the critique of consumerism would at once imply state-sanctioning of a particular hierarchy of values.

Of course, this doesn't seem so terrible if one considers that the liberal state already sponsors a hierarchy of values. Indeed, individual autonomy, liberalism's core tenet, is itself an historically and culturally specific conception of how best to lead a human life.[136] Consider what full individual autonomy actually means. Full autonomy, as Honneth and Anderson describe it, is "the real and effective capacity to develop and pursue one's own conception of a

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[135]Joseph Heath, "Liberal Autonomy and Consumer Sovereignty," in *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays*, ed. John Christman and Joel Anderson (New York; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 209.

[136] This is clear enough if we consider what full individual autonomy actually means. As Anderson and Honneth put it, full autonomy is "the real and effective capacity to develop and pursue one's own conception of a worthwhile life." Anderson, "Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice," p. 130. Contrasting this with other cultures and civilizations helps to make clear why Taylor states that "liberalism can't and shouldn't claim complete cultural neutrality. Liberalism is also a fighting creed." Charles Taylor and Amy Gutmann, *Multiculturalism : Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton, N.J. :: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 62.

worthwhile life." Developing such a capacity in turn requires a whole complex set of institutions and cultural predispositions, many of which are supported by the state. In Chapter 1, these institutions and predispositions were linked to a framework of social justice spanning the spheres of 'legal equality', 'care' and 'merit'.

It is in this sense that we might understand Taylor's claim that in comparison to the traditions of other civilizations "liberalism can't and shouldn't claim complete cultural neutrality. Liberalism is also a fighting creed." Of course this doesn't in any way diminish the importance of pursuing state-neutrality. Indeed, some form of state neutrality, concerning 'anti-discrimination policies' for example, is needed in order to secure the good life of individual autonomy in a just and inclusive manner. My point is not to provide an elucidation of the paradoxes of state neutrality, but rather simply to suggest that this is the broader context within which the issue of consumerism must be situated.

Heath makes the interesting observation that governments do not seem to have a problem with leading campaigns in promotion of healthy living, by drafting policies to fight obesity for example. This is unproblematic because there is a rough consensus that the impulse to "gorge on fatty foods" is an older adaptation of the species, one that is an obvious "maladaptation in contexts of abundance".[137] But he argues that the same logic cannot apply to consumer based lifestyle projects in general. This is simply because there is often "still room for a

[137] Heath, "Liberal Autonomy and Consumer Sovereignty," p. 211.

great deal of reasonable disagreement about the merits of these different projects".[138] It would be entirely inappropriate in such cases for the state to step in and sanction one set of values over another. Ultimately, Heath's reasoning leaves the door open for anti-consumption policies, but not if such policies are based on a hierarchy of values that pits the virtuous against the crass.

The issue of state neutrality is an important one for Taylor, though not one he has engaged with regarding consumerism. His general position is that a democratic society should have some room to maneuver in mandating its view of the good life, as long as this does not interfere with basic individual rights.[139] It is a fair, although debatable assumption that consumer choice would not fall under the category of a basic right. Consider the use of taxes, for example, or the control of consumer goods that was mandated in Canada and most other countries during

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[138] Ibid.

[139] Taylor speaks of fundamental liberties (i.e. right to life, liberty, free speech, due process, free religious practice) as "those which should never at any time be infringed and which therefore ought to be unassailably entrenched." Taylor, *Reconciling the Solitudes : Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, p. 176. Some societies enforce state neutrality and non-discrimination in much of their public policy. Others make exceptions for key areas, such as language policy in Québec. Based on this alternative style of liberalism, Taylor argues that "a society can be organized around a definition of the good life, without this being seen as a depreciation of those who do not personally share this definition."——, *Reconciling the Solitudes : Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, p. 176. Critics reproach Taylor for not being specific enough about the gray zone between fundamental rights, which are unassailable, and those privileges and immunities which are not. See Dimitrios Karmis, "Cultures autochtones et libéralisme au Canada: les vertus médiatrices du communautarisme libéral de Charles Taylor," *Revue canadienne de science politique* xxvi, no. 1 (1993): p. 95.

wartime.[140] Are these instances of an egregious interference with fundamental liberties?

These reflections, admittedly, are somewhat beside the point in Taylor's case. For his concern is with engaging the debate over consumerist values, not drafting policies. More specifically, his concern is with the ideal fulfillment of modern individualism. He believes that gaining an edge in this debate would help shed light on alternatives to conformist mass consumption. His approach is in this sense largely hortatory. As against both contented 'boosters' and fatalistic 'knockers' of modern individualism, Taylor argues that we need to engage in a process of rescue and retrieval. While the roots and Western individualism are of a rich historical pedigree, their practice remains elusive.

It would seem today that there remains little time and energy for cultivating the environment needed to properly address how free individuals ought to go about leading their lives. The result is a form of collective life that falls below the mark of its own potential. There is perhaps something unavoidable about this in a free society. As Taylor describes it, with individual freedom there is bound to exist at one and the same time "the highest forms of self-responsible moral initiative and dedication and, say, the worst forms of pornography". This isn't as cynical as it may at first sound, for as he goes on to say that,

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[140] For an interesting account of wartime control of domestic consumer goods in Canada see Joy Parr, *Domestic Goods : The Material, the Moral and the Economic in the Postwar Years* (Toronto :: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

> "The nature of a free society is that it will always be the locus of a struggle between higher and lower forms of freedom. Neither side can abolish the other, but the line can be moved, never definitely but at least for some people for some time, one way or the other, through social action, political change, and winning hearts and minds, the better forms can gain ground, at least for a while. In a sense, a genuinely free society can take as its self-description the slogan put forward in quite another sense by revolutionary movements like the Italian Red Brigades: 'la lotta continua', the struggle goes on, in fact forever."[141]

Taylor is engaged in this struggle in much the same way Cavell is, for example, when he speaks of philosophy as the "education of grown ups."[142] For Cavell, a form of hortatory or 'preachy' conversation is essential to the critique of democracy from within, particularly in order to counter its leveling effect. The struggle between higher and lower forms of freedom is, in this sense, a form of mutuality that happens first and foremost among equals, between friends and

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[141] Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 78.

[142] As Cavell describes it, "In this light, philosophy becomes the education of grownups…And for grownups education is not natural growth but change. Conversion is a turning out of our natural reactions; so it is symbolized as rebirth." Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason : Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy* (Oxford : New York :: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 125. Philosophy, in this sense, reconnects with its ancient therapeutic vocation, though this is not distinct from what Cavell understands as Romanticism. Nor is it entirely distinct from what Taylor understands as the 'affirmation of ordinary life'. For as Cavell puts it elsewhere, "Romanticism's work here interprets itself, so I have suggested, as the task of bringing the world back, as to life. This may, in turn, present itself as the quest for a return to the ordinary, or of it, a new creation of our habitat; or as the quest, away from that, for the creation of a new inhabitation." ———, *In Quest of the Ordinary : Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago :: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 52-53.

significant others, but for which assistance might also be sought in the artifacts of philosophy and art.

Such assistance can only awkwardly be termed elitist for the point is not to delegate responsibility for making sense of one's life to another. Rather, these artifacts can assist by providing examples of how admirable figures of the past were able to sort through the confusion that beset them in order to discover what is best in themselves. This need not be limited to canonical works of the past. Just as important, perhaps, is the popular culture of one's day.[143] The history of philosophy provides similar examples, but also broader templates for the creation of selfhood.

Taylor's own concerns lie more in the accurate description of our historic ideals, but also with problematic developments in their realization. So, for example, he identifies a pernicious tension in the ethic of authenticity, as alluded to above, which may have the effect of a persistent anti-social tendency in Western culture. Thus quite apart from whatever individualizing pressures may be exerted through the dynamic of market based consumption, there also exists a morally backed tendency in Western culture towards aversive withdrawal from society. Yet for Taylor, this tendency is itself a distortion of a full understanding of authenticity.[144] The result is a social situation in which men and women remain

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[143] For interesting insights on these matters see Nehamas, *Virtues of Authenticity : Essays on Plato and Socrates*, chapter 13.

[144] In Taylor's somewhat technical definition of authenticity we can see that a certain oppositional character is inherent to the ideal, but only as one strand of it.

shut-in upon themselves while still seeking superficial forms of self-recognition in the display of consumer goods.

Far from being a form of elite condescension, then, Taylor's work seeks to shed light on the historic predicament of certain motivating ideals within Western culture. It's true that there is a hierarchy of value behind Taylor's critique of economic growth and consumer based individualism. But such a hierarchy, it can be argued, forms the background of liberalism itself and is thus not totally incompatible with it. Commentators shouldn't get into the business of telling other men and women what they ought to do with themselves. Individuals must have the last word on this, yet they are likely to be at a lost without the necessary cultural and institutional supports. If these enabling conditions are not themselves cultivated, ongoing materialist conformity is sure to win out.

A Complementary Pragmatism

The second sort of reaction that Taylor's thought tends to elicit is that it suffers from too great a commitment to methodological idealism. This is not idealism in the sense of idealistic or utopian but rather insofar as his whole approach is considered too ideas-centred. That is, it places too much emphasis on

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As he describes it "authenticity (A) involves (i) creation and construction as well as discovery, (ii) originality, and frequently (iii) opposition to the rules of society and even potentially to what we recognize as morality. But it is also true, as we saw, that it (B) requires (i) openness to horizons of significance (for otherwise the creation loses the background that can save it from insignificance) and (ii) a self-definition in dialogue. That these demands may be in tension must be allowed. But what must be wrong is a simple privileging of one over the other, of (A), say, at the expense of (B), or vice versa." Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 66.

cultural outlooks and moral ideals as motors of historical change. The premise of his whole approach seems to be that if we get these right emancipatory transformation will ensue. In the end, it would be difficult for anyone to deny that we must have a certain faith of this kind if we are to go on. But critics complain that such faith, even if combined with the best interpretation of the history of ideas, is not enough. What we crucially need, to get at the heart of many contemporary problems including that of over-consumption, are revealing institutional analyses with alternative proposals in tow.

In response to this 'spectre of idealism', Taylor rebuts that the very premise of this attack is based on a false-dichotomy between 'ideas' and 'practices'. For both ideas and practices are so thoroughly enmeshed with one another that it is impossible to separate them in order to say that one is more significant than the other. Ideas can only arise from practices; but practices cannot take place on a mass scale without our making sense of them through a schema of ideas.[145]

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[145] This is how Taylor responds to the original charge: "I think this kind of objection is based on a false dichotomy, that between ideas and material factors as rival causal agencies. In fact, what we see in human history is ranges of human practices that are both at once, that is, material practices carried out by human beings in space and time, and very often coercively maintained, and at the same time, self-conceptions, modes of understanding. These are often inseparable…just because the self-understandings are the essential condition of the practice making the sense that it does to the participants. Because human practices are the kinds of things that make sense, certain ideas are internal to them; one cannot distinguish the two in order to ask the question Which causes which?" ———, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, pp. 31-32.

This line of reasoning is undoubtedly correct, as far as it goes, but it misses the central point of critics that look closely at the functioning of institutions. For their argument is not that ideas and practices exist on different planes. Rather, it is that with certain large-scale institutional practices the relevant understandings are often illusory. Such practices are motivated by cultural intentions, to be sure, yet the outcomes tend to run counter to these intentions. Thus they are likely to bring about unintended consequences, often of a negative sort.[146]

Heath attempts to grasp the complexity of such practices with the concept of 'collective action problem'. The concept refers to collective contexts in which the sum of private actions posed by broadly self-interested individuals undermines the well-being of the community of which they themselves are a part. As Heath

[146] Heath argues that the problem with a view such as Taylor's "is that it encourages a simplistic understanding of the problems of modern societies. For instance, Taylor treats a variety of perverse of undesirable effects generated by the market mechanism as a straightforward consequence of our excessive commitment to the good of efficacy. The implication is that it is within our conscious control to prevent these outcomes simply by reordering our moral priorities. Rational choice analysis suggests that it is not the way that individuals rank their values that creates the problem, but rather the way in which their actions interact when they attempt to realize these values. The nature of this interaction is often obscured from the actors themselves, so that it is impossible for agents to resolve the problem simply by reorganizing their priorities…In short, it is important to maintain a clear distinction between perverse effects that are generated by having the wrong norms institutionalized, and the perverse effects that arise as a consequence of having nothing institutionalized. By treating all social action as norm-governed, Taylor creates an unhelpful confusion between the two." Joseph Heath, "Rational Choice as Critical Theory," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 22, no. 5 (1996): pp. 57-58.

puts it, a collective action problem is constituted by "interactions with an outcome that is worse for everyone involved than some other possible outcome".[147]

The reason that it is important to look at these types of problems when addressing tensions within the capitalist welfare state is that ideas don't tell the whole story. It may well be that citizens of Western capitalist democracies have certain notions of freedom that, when taken for granted, lead to indiscriminate economic growth and consumption. But what if the latter practices were partly the result of large-scale institutions that locked men and women into patterns of behaviour that actually ran counter to their veritable intentions?

The institution that Heath is most concerned with is that of the market, the development of which he recognizes as being of great historical importance. It is a complex organizational innovation that has simplified economic problems by coordinating activities such that the production and allocation of goods is undertaken much more efficiently than in other economic systems. It is not, however, without serious shortcomings at the level of efficiency (this quite apart from more obvious problems of inequality). For efficiency cannot just be about doing more with less, by a given country simply producing more goods.

[147] ———, "The Benefits of Cooperation," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 34, no. 4 (Fall 2006): p. 313.

Efficiency, Heath argues, is the ability to better meet our needs with the same or less amounts of effort, energy and resources.[148]

The market, while in many ways bringing us closer to this end, also has the potential to lead us astray for various structural reasons. The collective action problems that arise in such cases are instances of 'market failure'. For Heath, there are two cases of market failure that stand out and for which he argues state intervention is a necessary corrective. The first has to do with mass desire for private goods that carry high status value, such as houses, cars, clothing and electronic devices. Certainly these goods are useful in that they fulfill specific functions and accomplish certain tasks. But high status goods are those purchased largely because of the anticipated effects they are thought to have for one's personal reputation and standing. Economists call these 'positional goods'. One of the problems with consumer activity of this sort, quite apart from the ethics behind it, is that it engages consumers in a competitive relation in which there can be no real winners.

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[148] He notes there is "a strong tendency to think of efficiency only in very narrow terms—to judge it by looking at the total value of goods produced by the market. This is deeply wrongheaded. Our economy is not efficient because it produces a lot of stuff. It's efficient because it satisfies our needs. But life is very complex and humans have a lot of different needs. Markets are efficient when it comes to satisfying some of these needs, but they are quite inefficient at satisfying others. Our need for clear air, beautiful surroundings, knowledge, and even protection against risk is generally ignored by markets, but can often be satisfied by governments…The solution is to articulate a broader conception of what makes a society efficient, one that gives due consideration to all the various components of human welfare, one that does not place undue emphasis on the narrow range of goods that are produced and exchanged in private markets."———, *The Efficient Society : Why Canada Is as Close to Utopia as It Gets* (Toronto :: Viking, 2001), xvi-xvii.

Positional goods may bring individual consumers a sense of distinction today only for them to realize a month later that they have once again faded into mass mediocrity. Because nobody wants to be a mere replica they must begin their search anew. As this process sets in, consumers somewhat imperceptibly lock themselves into a giant collective action problem. One may feel a secret pride as a result of their latest purchase, but on the whole a self-defeating pattern of action is created. This is because there is only so much mutual admiration to go around. If one style, person or group is 'in' then others must be 'out'. This massive squirrel-wheel cannot but generate a certain amount of stress, not to mention jaw dropping amounts of waste, as Heath puts it.[149] On this view, it seems pretty straightforward to say that most of us would likely reconsider our actions in recognizing that we've become ensnared in a futile zero-sum game.

[149] For Heath, it is the comparative nature of consumer preferences that gets the squirrel-wheel started in the first place. One of the reasons it is so hard to stop is because of the subtleties of habituation: "Comparativeness is often difficult to detect…simply because people are in general highly adaptive. We tend to judge things big or small, beautiful or ugly, dirty or clean, relative to what we are used to." He uses the example of spacious homes to demonstrate this. As he says, what "counts as spacious is very much dependant upon the size of everyone else's house. Extremely rich people in New York live quite happily in apartments that would seem impossibly cramped by the standards of Palo Alto. These apartments actually *feel* quite spacious when one is in New York, simply because they are quite large relative to what other people have. But because of this comparison, the desire to live in a spacious home generates a prisoner's dilemma. The only way to satisfy such a preference is to buy a home that is above average size, but when everyone does this, the average size creeps upwards. Thus more resources are invested in home construction and maintenance, while the increase in satisfaction associated with the feeling of spaciousness is quickly eroded." Heath, "Liberal Autonomy and Consumer Sovereignty," pp. 221-22.

Based on this example, we can see that market failure is an instance in which goods are allocated in a suboptimal manner. By using a legislative remedy such as taxes, resources could be allocated quite differently. In the case of positional goods, Heath argues, this would be to everyone's benefit. A second example of market failure is the way in which markets distort the conditions of consumer demand. Far from being a transparent response to consumer signals, the market tends to favour the production and consumption of a specific range of products. It is very good, for instance, at stimulating the production of the whole spectrum of products that fall under the range of 'medium-sized dried goods' (e.g. planks of wood or TV sets).

The problem, according to Heath, is that an economic environment structured solely around the market is bad at responding to the demand for other types of goods – large goods, for example, such as bridges or water filtration plants, intangible goods such as knowledge or "natural goods" such as clean air. This is because the market's structural bias is anchored in the system of private property rights. Accordingly, most products that are not medium-sized dried goods can really only exist in the form of non-market public goods.

Over their history, generations of Canadians have worked to set-up public utilities, transportation services and health care, and have made determined efforts to establish parks, museums and other cherished public spaces. This becomes harder to do in a free market environment because of the incentive structure that gets put into place. If markets incorporated the externalities of transactions into

consumer prices, both positive and negative, there would be more incentive to invest in public goods such as light rail and less in private goods such as cars. But this is not something that markets can do on their own.

Heath thus claims that, relative to the price system, the free market systematically overproduces private goods with negative externalities. Likewise, it simultaneously under-produces public goods with positive externalities. Heath cites Galbraith's example of there being much incentive to produce vacuums for the home but little to ensure clean streets. This systematic bias towards 'private opulence' and 'public squalor' forms a collective action problem. For each person has the incentive to purchase more private goods with their extra income, even though this may not be their first choice and is likely to increase the amount of negative externalities, such as air pollution.

In a sense, it is perfectly rational for consumers to respond in this way. They are simply acting on the basis of what appears to be their self-interest. Ultimately, however, it is hard to see how men and women would not be more at ease with some alternative incentive structure, one that did not create such a perverse allocation of resources – where, to use Heath's example, there are more resources spent on SUVs, less on good quality public education. The structural bias in question may not require much in terms of corrective institutional mechanisms. Purposeful adjustment of taxes and government subsidies could already go a long way. To the extent, however, that markets are de-regulated in any particular context, they cannot but exacerbate this systematic bias against

common sense consumer preferences. Securing a more efficient, consumer sensitive use of resources would in such cases be more of an uphill battle.

Heath argues that government intervention can tweak the pattern of demand such that those whose natural preference (under conditions where externalities were internalized in the price system) would be to pay for more public goods are not forced to make consumer choices based on a market-distorted incentive structure.[150] So, for example, the general income tax system ensures that things like education and public transportation, each with strong positive externalities, are offered at something closer to the right price. With regard to positional goods, we might think of a tax on luxury goods or a more radical consumption tax on all income that is spent, as opposed to saved. Failing this, Heath suggests we should consider eliminating tax-deductible subsidies to

[150] It is worth noting that Heath's argument rests on certain assumptions about the things people want and don't want. So, for example, regular consumers don't actually want more and bigger goods (this 'want' is really just an impulsive need to compete with others, for which there exist more appropriate venues). They do want more public goods, along with a higher quality public environment more generally. This assumes in turn, as Jan Narveson argues, that people want more government intervention and that this is an efficient alternative to market inefficiencies, a claim that Narveson finds highly debatable. As he puts it, "In general, while the public-goods argument *for* government may be obvious, it is mirrored by a public goods argument *against* government that is almost equally obvious: given the sort of powers that define government, it is clear that there is an incentive to misuse those powers, and there is every reason to think that they will and generally do so." Jan Narveson, "Professor Heath's Canada," *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review / Revue canadienne de philosophie* 42, no. 2 (2003): p. 369. Narveson's argument here is, in a sense, an old and familiar one. Further, by stating it as he does, he grants that Heath sheds important light on the economic predicament of consumer society.

the advertising industry, for advertising is in large part a symbolic means of enhancing the draw of positional goods.[151]

A purported advantage of Heath's analysis of consumerism, when contrasted with Taylor's, is that it does not assume that one's fellow citizens are constantly making base and immoral decisions. Indeed, for Heath, they are simply acting on what appears to be straightforward questions of economic self-interest. Thus what is needed is not a continuous struggle for higher modes of freedom but rather a quite different, more technical form of enlightenment. The aim here should simply be to clarify the ways in which our institutions are working badly for us (i.e. entrapping us in self-defeating patterns of interaction). The focus should not be on the moral dubiousness of over-consumption, but rather on the futility and damaging consequences of certain specific patterns of consumption.

In sum, where Taylor sees the necessity of hortatory critique, strident liberals such as Heath consider this a type of moralistic elitism that is beside the point. Nor does Heath believe that such a critique, because of its lack of respect for individual autonomy, should justify legislative intervention. Heath nevertheless admits that we could undoubtedly do with a more 'robust discussion' of how to live.[152] And while his critique certainly provides a valuable counterpoint to Taylor's, there is no reason to conclude that the two approaches

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[151] Heath mentions these different options in Heath, "Liberal Autonomy and Consumer Sovereignty.", Potter, *The Rebel Sell : Why the Culture Can't Be Jammed*.

[152] Heath, "Liberal Autonomy and Consumer Sovereignty."

cannot complement each other at some level. Indeed, the tensions within the ideals of self-determination and authenticity help to explain why individuals engage in excessive consumer practices in the first place. This awareness opens the way to a new appreciation of the ideals themselves.

On the other hand, a clear grasp of the collective action problems mentioned above helps to explain the institutional deficiencies of the consumer economy. It thereby opens the way to the possibility of legislative reforms. It's worth speculating a moment on the significance of reforms such as those mentioned above. If combined with a more serious cultivation of the ideals of modern selfhood, the upshot might be to bring about greater clarity concerning how one ought to go about leading one's life given, for example, the unique circumstances one was born into. The question of equality notwithstanding, individuals might begin taking more time to commit themselves to discovering at once 'who they are' and what they might make of themselves. Insofar as a society committed to this end would be a richly diverse one, it might also be one that is strengthened by a heightened sense of mutuality, perhaps even solidarity.[153]

[153] See Honneth for this idea of solidarity Honneth, *Disrespect : The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, chapter 13.

Chapter 4

The National Unity Question

Canadians will probably never feel the patriotism and guttural solidarity of more homogenous, less ethnoculturally diverse nations. This doesn't mean that they lack these dispositions altogether or that they are without the common ways of seeing and doing things that define a political identity and common public culture. But the strength of social ties and the identification of citizens with the entire country are not things that can be taken for granted in Canada. In addition to being affected by the same political apathy as elsewhere in the Western world, Canadians have a complex political identity fraught with conflicting allegiances between province, region, culture and language.

It is no surprise, then, to find that prideful engagement and cooperation across the country as a whole remains an elusive possibility to this day. While most commentators agree that the situation is problematic, their worries are directed mostly at the threat of Québec separatism. Everyone who feels an attachment to the Canadian enterprise understands separatism to be a bad thing, not only for the country's future but also for its present ability to function effectively and to flourish. In this chapter, however, I'll be looking at the problem of Canadian patriotism and solidarity more broadly than through the lens of separatism.

The guiding question has to do with the ways in which feelings of social solidarity and a sense of belonging to the broader Canadian political community can be sustained and developed. Of course, this will require addressing the problem of conflicting allegiances but it need not remain at that. If we consider the issue of citizenship in liberal democracies more generally, we find that there is wide agreement that a sense of collective attachment is essential in generating a willingness among citizens to participate in public affairs, and that this in turn is essential to the longevity of democratic regimes.[154] The problem, however, is that there no clear sense of how to sustain feelings of national belonging in the first place.

Typically, there are two sorts of answers to this question. First, there is the notion that what is needed is convergence around the just and lawful organization of common institutions. If men and women can manage to agree on this, they will at once be bound by collective attachment and loyalty to their political community.[155] Those unconvinced by the force of this argument have come up

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[154] See Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy : An Introduction* (Oxford ; New York :: Oxford University Press, 2002), chapter 6, Michael Walzer, "Citizenship," in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change* ed. James Farr Terence Ball, Russell L. Hanson (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[155] For different versions of this idea see Habermas, Cronin and De Greiff, *The Inclusion of the Other : Studies in Political Theory*, Jürgen Habermas, "Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State," in *Multiculturalism*, ed. A. Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, John Dewey Essays in Philosophy ; No. 4 (New York :: Columbia University Press, 1993), lecture iv. For comments closer to the Canadian situation see Omid Shabani, "“Who's Afraid of Constitutional

with an alternative view of what is needed. The idea here is simply that there exist powerful ties inherent to 'natural' communities, such as those formed through ethnicity and language, and that these ties need to be drawn upon too.

Taylor belongs to this second group. He argues that only in taking both of these poles into account can we ensure a sense of identification that is inclusive and strong. Too much emphasis on natural community ties can lead to various forms of exclusion. Too much emphasis on domestic laws and institutions, on the other hand, is unlikely to sustain strong identification, except in exceptional cases, and is thus likely to incur citizen apathy. Taylor, again, argues that both are needed. Each pole, i.e. 'institutions' and 'community', can assume various forms of collective attachment.

An allegiance to institutions can be formed around something as permanent as a political constitution, just as it can be created through partisan political conflict or in ephemeral instances of local cooperation. Community belonging, on the other hand, usually takes the form of cultural affinities. But these need not only be, say, ethnic or linguistic. They may also be structured around a shared history in which a community of values is worked out in common. Based on the Canadian case, however, it can be argued that the more this community is structurally complex and the more historic tensions are carried

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Patriotism? - the Binding Source of Citizenship in Constitutional States," *Social Theory and Practice* 28, no. 3 (2002).

in its public culture, the more difficult it will be to sustain a sense of community belonging.

The first part of the chapter looks at how the two poles might be balanced given the tensions within the Canadian political identity. It is emphasized that Québécois and Aboriginal claims to community belonging, and thus to a margin of collective autonomy, must be recognized within the federation. But implicit to Taylor's interpretation of the moral and political structure of Canadian diversity, what he calls 'deep diversity', is a broader notion of a pan-national Canadian community. Quite aside from the substantive value orientations of this community, it is argued that it is important today that Canada understand itself to be engaged in what political theorist Jeremy Webber calls a 'national conversation'.

The idea here is that it is only through conversation that Canada's different histories of misunderstanding and resentment can be properly overcome. This doesn't mean attempting to erase all divergences of political outlook that exist in the federation. Indeed, a crucial part of the conversation must involve the acceptance of certain divergences in political values and thus also in the very manner of belonging. Ultimately, conversation will only get us part of the way towards a better integration of Canadian public culture. But it is a step that needs to be taken if the prospect of a new constitutional agreement is to one day sound plausible.

The chapter then introduces what is commonly referred to as 'constitutional patriotism' as an important instance of the institutional pole of collective attachment. It is argued that, on paper, some form of constitutional patriotism remains a crucial touchstone to a more integrated Canadian patriotism. But the highly fraught route of constitutional reform is not the only way in which the institutional pole can be a generator of patriotism – that is, of greater identification with others in a collective enterprise. Indeed, two other less commonly theorized routes are also explored in this chapter.

In the first of these, identification with others is brought about through local instances of cooperation in 'civil society'. The idea of civil society is here understood to include both economic activity and the broader voluntary sector of free association incorporating social groups and organizations. Typically, the self-administration of employment and volunteer activities is motivated by naturally formed interest groups, whether to advance the aims of workers, tenants or, say, the members of a particular immigrant community. But regardless of whether preexisting ties exist or not, the very fact of coming together to pursue an aim in cooperation with others has the effect of strengthening social and political ties. While this understanding of civil society is implicit to Taylor's work, this section of the chapter draws mostly on the ideas of his American colleague, Michael Walzer.

The third area of inquiry on the sources of patriotism and solidarity is more immediately political in nature. The focus here is on the realm of

oppositional politics on a nationwide scale. In contrast with localized cooperation in civic society, oppositional politics involves broad coalitions competing against one another in democratic conflict. Such conflict usually occurs along the traditional battle lines between left and right. The crucial insight Taylor develops in this regard is that when a politics of this sort is based on class antagonism between elite and nonelite segments of the population, each offering competing visions of national betterment, it can actually serve as a powerful integrative force.

The counterargument to this view, in the Canadian case, would suggest that the country is already too divided along other cleavages to bear the strains of class antagonism. Because of Canada's complex set of cleavages, divided along regional, ethnic and linguistic lines, official politics must function as a brokerage system in order to hold the country together.[156] While this is how Canadian politics has often been understood, Taylor argues that it is precisely the wrong

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[156] This is the view known as 'brokerage politics'. As Cross and Steward put it: "Canada's federal party system has traditionally been described using the brokerage model. The principal function of parties, in the Canadian variant of this model, is to act as agents of political integration. Parties do so by competing aggressively in all parts of the country and by including within their decision-making structures representatives of both sides of the most significant political cleavages. Rather than having different parties representing dueling interests, each party attempts to transcend the central cleavages and build accommodative bridges across these societal chasms." William Cross and Ian Stewart, "Ethnicity and Accommodation in the New Brunswick Party System," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 36, no. 4 (2001): p. 33. See also John Meisel, *Cleavages, Parties and Values in Canada*, Sage Professional Papers in Contemporary Political Sociology ; Ser. No. 06-003 (London :: Sage Publications, 1974), ———, "The Dysfunctions of Canadian Parties: An Exploratory Mapping", in *Party Politics in Canada (5th Ed.)*, ed. Hugh Thorburn (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1991).

approach. For, in fact, the circumstances of Canadian diversity are such that something like a class based partisan politics is perhaps the only way to rescue the country from persistent fragmentation.

Institutional Allegiance and Community Belonging

In considering the sources of patriotism, it was suggested above that the best case scenario for liberal democracies is when popular allegiance is built around both institutional and community ties. If men and women of a free country are to understand themselves as bound by a mutual enterprise and common fate, it is important that neither of these poles be stifled.[157] In many societies, the two are indelibly welded together. But in others, such as Canada, they are split and divided into a confusing array.

The institutional pole is commonly linked to the fundamental laws of the land – those set in constitutional documents and which define the principles of equality, for example. Taylor describes these laws as constituting a country's 'political formula of participation'. It is unlikely that ordinary men and women are going to feel bound by the legal formula itself. They identify, rather, with the institutions, practices and common focus that is developed in conjunction with it. Taylor describes the 'pull' of this pole in terms of the civic dignity it provides. As he puts it,

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[157] Taylor, *Reconciling the Solitudes : Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Mass. :: Harvard University Press, 1995), chapter 10.

> "There is an inner connection between the common focus and the dignity that accompanies citizenship: the institutions and practices of equal participation are the common condition of the dignity of each, while this dignity in turn is defined in terms of contribution to the health and survival of these laws."[158]

The instantiation of the political formula that defines the institutional pole thus allows for the expression of personal dignity in collective life, something towards which citizens feel a common attachment and commitment. This connects to the second dimension of patriotism, which requires precisely that the reigning political formula be more than a mere abstract formulation. Indeed, what is needed is for the formula to in fact serve to unite a specific community. For Taylor, this ideally means that there exist other factors of convergence and commonality besides the realization of personal dignity. More specifically, men and women should feel that the laws apply to a social context within which there is the "common sense of a determinate community whose members sense a bond between them."[159]

Modern state-based communities are formed on the basis of ethnic or national belonging, where the latter is typically understood in terms of a common language and history. Because of the intense plurality of Canadian diversity, this second dimension of patriotism is, from the outset, more problematic than the first. Proponents of constitutional patriotism tend to turn away from it altogether.

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[158] Taylor, *Reconciling the Solitudes : Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, p. 98.

[159] Ibid.

Accordingly, they argue that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms presents a sufficient means through which Canadians might understand themselves as bound to a distinct collective entity.

The example of American constitutional patriotism is often put forward as evidence of this. The U.S. is itself a diverse federation and it can be understood to have succeeded in generating a strong allegiance solely around a distinct set of institutionalized rules and principles. As a parallel, it's also true that since 1982 the Charter has succeeded in generating a strong and rapid following among certain groups of Canadians, sometimes referred to as 'Charter Canadians'. But Taylor suggests that the U.S. case is unique, if only in the sense that its civic militancy is founded on a revolutionary political identity. No country should take for granted that it can share the same sources of patriotism that exist in the U.S. Nor is this particular form of patriotism unproblematic.[160]

One cannot say, either, that U.S. patriotism is without elements of common history and communal belonging. Rather, it's that these latter elements have been stripped of the exaltation of a particular ethnicity, at least in

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[160] As Taylor remarks "The United States seems to offer the example of a nation that owes its identity to the common acceptance of a political formula…But the fact that the political formula has been the original pole of allegiance, rather than the institutions, has made a big difference. It has given American liberalism that militant quality which has produced the best and the worst in U.S. history – both the ability to integrate millions of new citizens from other, non Anglo-Saxon cultures and to undertake great reforms like those achieved by the civil rights movements in our time, and also the propensity to persecute deviants for "un-American activities". Taylor, *Reconciling the Solitudes : Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, pp. 99-100.

comparison to European nations. The dangers of promoting an allegiance solely around ethnicity are of course well-known. But Taylor insists on speaking of different sorts of combinations between the two poles, some of which are better than others for sustaining democratic solidarity. He refers to Britain and the Netherlands, for example, as striking the ideal balance.

In these countries, pride in the organization of liberal democratic institutions is an integral component of national pride proper. In contrast to certain Latin European countries where liberal democratic institutions have been historically weak, here the institutional and community elements are naturally fused. One can hardly be thought to exist without the other: national pride cannot be evoked without reference to institutions, yet the institutions are themselves invested with cultural meaning. Taylor thus suggests that "a kind of happy chauvinism can have free reign here, where representative government can be seen as a national invention imitated in more or less botched form by lesser breeds of foreigners.".[161]

Drawing from this perspective, the U.S. example seems an extreme in which the institutional formula is at risk of becoming the icon of a bellicose moral universalism. At the other extreme, we find national histories in which xenophobic chauvinism at home trumps loyalty to liberal democratic institutions. Previous to WWII, *la nation canadienne-françai*se could at times show tendencies of the latter sort. But despite the emergence of a separatist movement since the

[161] Ibid., p. 99.

Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, Québec has now firmly embraced the values of liberal democracy. It has, that is, managed to weld the two poles together and thereby move a step closer to the British and Dutch model.

Of course the Québec predicament is made difficult because of the vulnerability of the French language in North America. At the same time, however, the Québécois can be seen as having more resources at their disposal for sustaining collective allegiance than do most other Canadians. This is mostly because men and women of English-speaking Canada do not form a sociological nation in the same way that Québec does. Nor, due to American proximity, can they draw on a distinctive sense of community through their use of English as the public language of integration.

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English Canada could at one time draw on a sense of communal purpose from its place within the British Empire. But starting with the decline of British dominance, this identity became less and less tenable as the 20th century unfolded. After two conscription crises and the rise of Québec nationalism in the 1960s, Canadian governments started to push for their own homegrown Canadian nationalism. The old assumptions and prejudices of 'Anglo-conformity', as well as attendant forms of racism, began to dissolve as what was once the British-Protestant majority became more open to diversity, whether with regard to French

Canadians, Aboriginals or 'third force' immigrants. Canadian nationalism thus came to include bilingual and multicultural aspects as part of its very nature. [162]

This did not lead to the formation of a unified nation, as was hoped for by politicians and government mandarins. But it did allow for the self-understanding of an autonomous political community to emerge, one which previously did not exist or at least not in the same way. This involved a slow yet important shift in public consciousness towards a re-centering on Canadian territory and identity. Though there remain Canadians today who pledge their allegiance to the Queen, the dissociation from British culture as the dominant ethnicity has been largely successful.

This shift, however, did little to resolve the country's age-old domestic tensions. An obvious part of the problem is that unlike most 'normal' nation-states, Canada has never been able to count on the unifying effect of a truly common public culture. Typically, a common public culture implies that men and women share a level of affinity through their participation in shared institutions and their use of a common public language. In Canada, a unifying culture of this sort has only ever developed in a limited way. This is partly due to the fact of having more than one official public language. But firmly rooted regional communities and high ethnic diversity must also be considered important factors.

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[162] Raymond Breton, "From Ethnic to Civic Nationalism: English Canada and Québec," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2, no. 31 (1988).

These structural barriers, so to speak, are not in themselves insurmountable. It remains plausible that they could be overcome by drawing upon the affinities of a common history – by appealing, that is, to the events and climactic transitions that English-speaking Canadians, Québécois, Aboriginals and others have lived through together – as well as through the ritual expression of shared values and ideals. The problem, however, is that the above structural complexity is compounded with misunderstandings and various forms of resentment between the country's different component parts. This means that the narrative elaboration of Canada's history is bound to remain a difficult and sluggish process, one that is likely to wield more frustration than inspiration.

Further, insofar as misunderstanding and resentment crop up in the federation's everyday social and economic cooperation, they obscure the values and ideals that Canadians hold in common. This is not to say that there aren't important differences at this level throughout the various instantiations of Canadian public culture, but rather to say that such differences are singled out in such a way that overshadows the commonalities. Given this relatively volatile predicament, it is worth considering political theorist Jeremy Webber's idea of strengthening community ties through what he refers to as an ongoing 'national conversation'.

The notion of an enduring national conversation can be understood as connected to the moral ephemeral expression of 'public opinion', yet at the same time existing outside of it. The image of a national or pan-national conversation

suggests that the country's different collectivities still have things to work out with regards to larger questions of their common existence – with regards, that is, to history, language, the aims of federal cooperation and so forth. The idea of national conversation, then, is essentially about taking the time to work these out while not under the fire of constitutional 'mega-politics'.

What is interesting about Webber's way of framing this national image is that it can be understood as a mode of being that is worthy in itself – perhaps even as a particularly Canadian mode of being. Open and reflective conversation is something that can be collectively cherished. Indeed, the idea of a national conversation implies that we can, as Webber puts it, "cherish the conversation between different cultures – we can see that conversation as constituting our community." Thus the conversation itself is a form of community belonging. As he continues to say,

> "A viable allegiance can be compatible with the express recognition of difference as long as we remain willing to continue the national conversation across cultures. That willingness is the very substance of our allegiance. The conversation itself is our national life."[163]

Webber's suggestion then is that the integration of a troubled political identity, one with a complex structure and burdened by historic tensions, can be facilitated by the willingness to converse on matters of co-existence. He insists

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[163] Webber, *Reimagining Canada : Language, Culture, Community and the Canadian Constitution*, pp. 190-91.Webber, *Imagining Canada*, 190-91

that we shouldn't be afraid to come upon political differences in this conversation, as though political identities had to be thoroughly homogeneous. If a truly common public culture is to be formed in Canada, openness has to replace fear of difference. In fact, the point of conversation here might be understood precisely as an engagement with difference to see if we cannot in some cases 'agree to disagree'.

If this is part of the purpose of a national conversation, it will be helpful to have some sense of the general spectrum of agreements and disagreements, including points of resentment and misunderstanding. Taylor's work is particularly insightful on this. In considering pan-national values and ideals, he first identifies a set of uncontroversial tenets around which the Canadian political community converges. He mentions in this regard a commitment to a) law and order b) collective provision and c) the "equalization of life conditions and life chances between regions." [164]

These commitments are not in themselves entirely unique to Canada, but they do open only uniquely textured debates, around equalization payments and health care for example. Further, given the nature of these particular tenets, they function to stand Canadians apart from their U.S. neighbours to the south. In attempting to lengthen the 'list' of commitments defining a distinctly Canadian identity, one finds that both minor and major divergences arise. The next two are

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[164] Taylor, *Reconciling the Solitudes : Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, p. 159.

actually shared at the level of ideas but rejected in their application, particularly in Québec. They are d) Canadian multiculturalism and e) the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The problem is not that men and women from Québec reject the values of multiculturalism and the Charter outright. In fact, Québec has its own progressive schedule of rights and a comparable model of multiculturalism, i.e. *l'interculturalisme*. What the Québécois people reject is the way in which Canadian programs and institutions associated with these values have been implemented to the disregard of their own interests as a distinct society fighting to preserve its language and culture. This is most obviously the case with the Charter's ratification in the Constitution Act of 1982, which remains to this day without Québec's consent. More specifically, however, the problem is that a certain English Canadian understanding of both multiculturalism and the Charter clashes with f) the "survival and/or furtherance of *la nation canadienne-française*."[165]

A comparable pattern of disagreement and resistance exists among Aboriginal nations. If the Québécois insist on a margin of self-determination to preserve their language and culture, Aboriginal claims for autonomy stem from a

[165] Ibid., p. 163. The terminology having shifted, this could be reformulated as la nation québécoise. But it is worth noting that the fading of la nation canadienne-française signals the loss of an important bulwark for French-speakers outside of Québec. See Marcel Martel and Ottawa University of, *Le Deuil D'un Pays Imaginé : Rêves, Luttes Et Déroute Du Canada Français : Les Rapports Entre Le Québec Et La Francophonie Canadienne, 1867-1975*, Collection Amérique Française ; No 5 ([Ottawa] :: Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1997).

more radical departure in shared values. Language issues remain crucial, in Nunavut for example. But Aboriginal leaders also defend a cosmocentric worldview which emphasizes duties to community, as well as to the natural environment. It has been argued that these differences in political outlook are fundamentally incompatible with the individualist orientation of Canadian liberalism.[166]

Political philosopher Dimitrios Karmis, however, shows that the two outlooks are more compatible than skeptics would have it. By contrasting Taylor's work with that of Will Kymlicka, among others, Karmis argues that Canadian liberalism is not fundamentally at odds with collective rights of the sort claimed by mainstream Aboriginal leaders. Nor, for that matter, are most 'tribal philosophies' incompatible with equality and the cherishing of individual rights. Indeed, on the issue of gender equality it can be argued that First Nations were ahead of Europeans – that is, before suffering the consequences of a patriarchal restructuring instituted through the *Indian Act* of 1876.[167]

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[166] See for example Mary Ellen Turpel, "Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian Charter: Interpretive Monopolies, Cultural Differences," *Canadian Human Rights Yearbook* (1989).

[167] Article 12 (1) (b) of the *Indian Act* sets a patriarchal precedent by restricting Aboriginal status to non-aboriginal wives of Aboriginal men and not extending it to non-aboriginal husbands of Aboriginal women. Karmis, "Cultures Autochtones Et Liberalisme Au Canada: Les Vertus Médiatrices Du Communautarimse Liberal De Charles Taylor," p. 72.

In exploring the above set of convergences and divergences, the form that a national conversation might take, if it is to help integrate Canadian nationality, becomes a little clearer. Canada is more united today, in terms of political values, than it has been in the past. During and prior to Duplessis' reign, for example, Québec's liberal democratic credentials had still to be proven. This convergence of values is of great importance, but this is not to suggest that the country must seek out a uniform set of values and modes of belonging. As mentioned above, genuine allegiance in Canada will depend on agreeing to disagree on certain matters.

Ultimately, however, the general pattern of agreement and disagreement must itself be confirmed in a common framework of laws, as articulated in the constitution. In constitutional democracies, it's this framework that defines the political formula of participation mentioned above with regard to the institutional pole of allegiance. Constitutional norms stipulate procedures of cooperation and conflict resolution, as well as set limits on the use of power. Common commitment to these norms can provide a powerful sense of unity.

German philosopher Jürgen Habermas popularized the term 'constitutional patriotism' to describe this form of national loyalty. He describes it as a form of identification with one's country which is not only historic and cultural but is also based on a consensual commitment to a democratic system of rights, laws and

rules of conflict resolution.[168] The precise arrangement will differ from one country to another and thus so will the nature of the commitment. In Canada, as is well known, there is much confusion and disagreement over what this precise arrangement should be.

Taylor proposes that our understanding of Canadian diversity, if it is to draw the greatest overall allegiance, must make room at once for cultural openness and historical grounding. Cultural openness, as framed for example in the non-discriminatory clauses of the Charter, is necessary for the integration of immigrants or 'new Canadians'. Historical grounding, as manifest in the community belonging of the Québécois and Aboriginal peoples, is secured through their greater political autonomy in relation to the Canadian state. Ultimately, for Taylor, an inclusive Canadian patriotism must be built around these two levels of belonging.

Taken together this spectrum of first and second level diversity holds different understandings of what it means to be Canadian – what it means, that is, to be a part of the Canadian political union. Taylor is also mindful of the diverse regional attachments found within the federation, e.g. the Maritimes or the West. These are sometimes strong enough to constitute specific forms of community

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[168] He describes this commitment more specifically as "the rationally based conviction that unrestrained freedom of communication in the political public sphere, a democratic process for settling conflicts, and the constitutional channelling of political power together provide a basis for checking illegitimate power and ensuring that administrative power is used in the equal interest of all.". Habermas, "Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State," p. 135.

belonging. Yet Taylor suspects that there is a willingness across English-speaking Canada to identify with the country through a multiculturalist Charter understanding – that is, as individuals coming from any number of backgrounds who are willing to put their differences aside to collaborate peacefully under the common protection of their equal, inalienable, individual rights.

In contrast to this, there is a clear determination on the part of the Québécois and Aboriginal peoples to understand their allegiance to Canada as mediated through their community belonging. Members of these groups do not relate to the federal government as individual citizens, but rather as members of their respective collectivity. Deep diversity thus gives weight to the idea of the 'hyphenated Canadian'. So, for example, one might consider oneself to be an 'Inuit Canadian' and is therefore free to choose, as the saying now goes, whether one is Inuit or Canadian first.

The promise of deep diversity has been undermined by two recurrent misunderstandings, which in recent decades have led to a climate of bad faith and mutual mistrust. The first of these has to do with a difference of emphasis in the centrality of individual rights. English-speaking Canadians tend to prize these rights more than the two minority cultures, which wrestle to hold them in equilibrium with collective goals. For Taylor, the difference is best understood through the lens of contrasting conceptions of what it means to live in a liberal democracy. In the former, individual rights are pushed to the fullest, while in the latter they are understood as one political aim among others.

In a sense, this issue is perhaps not a misunderstanding as much as it is a lack of empathy for another political outlook. It is possible that there is genuine disagreement on this matter among ordinary men and women. But one fails to see on what this would rest exactly, given that the protection of individual rights remains a constant. The second misunderstanding revolves around the confusing debate over equality, often referred to in terms of 'provincial equality'. Taylor notes that the language of equality is itself ambiguous insofar as a declaration of equality in itself says little about which aspects are to be held under consideration and comparison.

So, for example, equality can require acknowledging the legitimate concern of the West in having more clout at the center. But it can just as well require acknowledging the concern of eastern provinces in their expectation to benefit from the proper functioning of federal institutions such as regional development programs. Taken at another level, neither of these demands is incompatible with greater autonomy for Québec. Given this complexity, there may be a good argument for understanding equality as a question of each province or region being able to fulfill their role within the federation.

This could perhaps dissipate some of the confusion. But Taylor suggests that it is probably best that the language of equality be dropped altogether. For the real problem, in his view, is one of 'recognition'.[169] The Québécois minority, in

[169] Recognition or 'being recognized' can be understood as the opposite of 'being invisible'. It requires the full attentiveness of interaction between equals and

particular, does not feel that they are recognized for the obvious cultural difference they bring to the federation. This means, partly, that they do not feel other Canadians take a sufficient interest in their language and way of life. Without a basic curiosity of this sort, their culture is unlikely to be even remotely understood and thus can hardly be taken into account when considering larger questions of the country's future. In response to this lack of informal recognition, we find militant calls for political recognition, along with threats of separation.

What is frustrating for Taylor about these two misunderstandings is that, although they have caused much turmoil, neither is irreconcilable. It's true that resolving either would require a change of attitude, especially from the English-speaking majority culture.[170] This would not require that members of this group abandon their own cherished ideals, only that they accept living alongside and collaborating with partners whose ideals are not altogether the same. Officially acknowledging that the Canadian union is based on an idea of 'partnership'

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operates at the level of both cultures and individuals. Taylor and Gutmann, *Multiculturalism : Examining the Politics of Recognition*.

[170] Canadians from this part of the country would essentially have to acknowledge the multinational character of the Canadian polity. Taylor is not alone in claiming that a shift of this sort is needed to overcome the current stalemate. Indeed, there is growing consensus among commentators even in English-speaking Canada. See for example Roger Gibbins and Guy Laforest, *Beyond the Impasse : Toward Reconciliation* (Montréal : Institute for Research on Public Policy, 1998).

between its component parts would modify and, quite possibly, enhance the sense of belonging of all Canadians.[171]

Still, reforming the constitution to reflect this does not have to imply a radical departure from current institutional arrangements. Taylor's own preferred formula is something close to the 'asymmetric' proposals put forth in the Meech and Charlettown accords.[172] It is significant in this regard that present intergovernmental arrangements already involve important levels of asymmetry. Consider, for example, the differentiated organization of pension and immigration policy in Québec. What is lacking, however, is official confirmation of the rationale behind these arrangements, which in turn means official recognition of the political autonomy here implied. Ultimately, Taylor believes that if this recognition and attendant constitutional reforms could be achieved, the basis would be laid for an inclusive, pan-national Canadian patriotism.

Cooperative Action in Civil Society

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[171] André Laurendeau defended an idea of partnership in the Blue pages of the report for the Royal Commission he chaired on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. Guy Laforest has recently picked up on the idea of partnership, as well as that of a community of friendship. Guy Laforest, *Pour La Liberté D'une Société Distincte* (Saint-Nicolas (Québec): Presses de l'Université Laval, 2004), chapter 6.

[172] Asymmetry implies that the rest of Canada would remain a federation of provinces, while Québec would be given room for greater self-determination. Failing this, a second possibility could consist in more radical decentralization into three or four regions outside of Québec, each with equal powers. Finally, English-speaking Canada could seek greater unity within itself, federally or as a unitary state, and thus associate with Québec in a symmetric relation. It is noteworthy that Taylor cautions against the more confederative type of arrangements for reason of their inherent fragility. See Taylor, *Reconciling the Solitudes : Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, chapter 7.

Some readers might be doubtful of the extent to which constitutional patriotism and large-scale community belonging can motivate people to take greater concern in the affairs of their political community. This skepticism is understandable, for the type of attachment and solidarity discussed above cannot easily bridge the daily concerns of ordinary citizens. It is towards these more immediate aspects of social identification that I now want to turn. Accordingly, the working assumption of this section is that while governing principles and communal identities matter, we should also be cognizant of the democratic social affinities that emerge from more routine instances of social cooperation.[173]

In contrast to the idea of an attachment to laws and principles, men and women also find belonging through participating in common projects. Taylor refers to a democratic community as a place where members understand themselves as contributing and belonging to a 'vast interdependent enterprise'.[174] It is of course difficult to sustain a collective identity of this sort in societies that define themselves largely in terms of a commitment to individual freedom. Still, the image of an interdependent enterprise is instructive insofar as it emphasizes the significance of everyday cooperation in creating ties of solidarity.

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[173] Axel Honneth, "Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation: John Dewey and the Theory of Democracy Today," *Political Theory* 26, no. 6 (1998).

[174] Charles Taylor, "The Agony of Economic Man," in *Essays on the Left: Essays in Honour of T. C. Douglas*, eds. Laurier LaPierre *et al* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971).

One way of framing this approach to solidarity is with the notion of 'civil society', taken in the strong sense of a network of groups and associations coordinating their activities together while influencing state policy. Civil society thus understood would involve the entire scope of activities and practices needed to sustain the citizenry – save for the activities of family life and the state itself, upon which it is overlaid. The relevant agents of civil society would in this sense include the vast gamut of social groups, associations and corporate enterprises that have an impact, through the activities of their members, on the shaping of society as a whole.[175]

What men and women do for a living, i.e. their 'jobs' will be of primordial importance here. But not all men and women take their jobs seriously or find much reward in them. Thus it is important that civil society be understood to include all those volunteer activities that people do take seriously and for which they understand their involvement as making a significant contribution. But regardless of whether we're talking about paid employment, other forms of work or voluntary activity, the crucial 'mechanism' through which the ties of solidarity and common commitment are created remains the same. It rests on the cooperative consciousness that arises when men and women work together on projects and endeavours that matter to them.

Each individual invests their talents and capacities in a profession or other activity that they feel passionate about. The mutual recognition of each person's

[175] Walzer and Miller, *Thinking Politically : Essays in Political Theory*.

contribution binds members not only to the fate of their respective project but also to the men and women with whom they work, cooperatively and reflectively, to bring their efforts to fruition.[176] These instances of cooperation may be localized and specific. But broader ties of 'reflexive cooperation' are also possible when such activities occur not just within groups and associations but also between them, in coalitions and the like.

As an obvious example, we might think here of the negotiations that occur over wages and benefits in the context of collective bargaining. Or we might consider the efforts of immigrant organizations, perhaps in association with left-leaning community groups and political parties, to change the terms of immigration policy. What becomes quite evident, on this view, is that instances of common commitment in civil society can take on a whole multitude of different forms. In contrast to the large-scale solidarity referred to in the previous section, the 'sense of closeness' referred to here is both more concrete and more diverse. As Taylor's colleague Michael Walzer puts it,

> "The sense of closeness with other people has to be earned - by fighting together or working together for a cause; responding together to difficulty, crisis, natural disaster; studying a common history and literature; celebrating the holidays, enacting the rituals of a common life. In the modern world, however, none of this can be a uniform collective experience…Closeness today can only come from a series of reiterated experiences, different for

[176] See Honneth, *Disrespect : The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, chapter 13.

> different people and for different groups of people, but related and overlapping - so that I fight, work, study, celebrate, and so on, in a variety of social settings, with a (changing) variety of other men and women."[177]

I suggested above that local forms of practical commitment are the necessary starting point for broader forms of allegiance. Through local involvement, one shapes the habit and feeling of being part of a common enterprise. But what is to guarantee that local commitments of this sort will open onto larger instances of patriotism and solidarity? Might the localization of cooperative consciousness not have the opposite effect, isn't it possible that such commitments lead to strong local ties at the expense of broader forms of loyalty? Take the extreme example of religious fundamentalists that want to have as little to do with the secular state as possible. It's easily possible to image a similar dynamic at work in other social groups and associations organized to advance their own interests.

Something similar may be understood to be happening in the case of the American 'culture wars', where each side views the other as mortal enemies. All of these cases present the risk of what Taylor calls political fragmentation. The risk of fragmentation occurs whenever social groups and associations command the primary loyalty of their members, as against broader forms of allegiance. This kind of self-interested politics may result from feelings of exclusion and despair at

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[177] Michael Walzer, "Pluralism and Social Democracy," *Dissent* Winter (1998): p. 5.

the lack of responsiveness of the political system. In such cases, Taylor notes, political life becomes predicated "on the belief that society is at best composed of mutually disinterested citizens, and is perhaps for the most part even malevolent in relation to the group in question."[178]

Sociologist Lewis Coser speaks, in this regard, of 'greedy communities' to refer to those groups and organization that seek to absorb as much of the energy and dedication of their members as possible. Walzer picks up on Coser's notion and suggests that such communities cannot but sap the possibility of broader loyalties.[179] A crucial issue therefore seems to be that while we might understand cooperative consciousness and local identities as important sources of solidarity, there is no reason to assume that this will open onto more inclusive forms. Still, what these small-scale instances of cooperation do nonetheless provide is a general disposition towards engagement with 'otherness', thus serving at once to stave off tendencies towards privatized individualism.

The Complex Identity Conflict Model

I've been arguing that local solidarity in cooperative projects is where social ties first burgeon. The habits and patterns of action of such proximate ties open the way to the possibility of broader ones. There is, however, nothing

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[178] Charles Taylor, "*The Dangers of Soft Despotism*," in *The Essential Communitarian Reader*, ed. Amitai Etzioni (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield,, 1998), p. 50.

[179] Michael Walzer, "*Michael Sandel's America*" in *Debating Democracy's Discontent: Essays on American Politics, Law, and Public Philosophy*, ed. Anita Allen and Milton Regan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

guaranteed about this. In Canada, for example, it is unlikely that such ties can carry much weight in solving problems of national unity. Perhaps only a reformed and inclusive constitutional patriotism can do this job. But this is not to say that there aren't other legitimate ways of fuelling a nationwide sense of belonging. This section focuses on the realm of everyday oppositional politics as one such alternative.

Taylor describes oppositional politics as a contest in building majority coalitions "behind multifaceted programs designed to address the major problems of the society as a whole."[180] The basic dynamic at work involves the engagement of opposing constituency bases in a battle of hearts and minds. It is precisely this democratic battle of hearts and minds that Taylor argues is an invaluable means of strengthening the ties of collective belonging. In the republican tradition of thought, Taylor sources Machiavelli as the originator of this insight. But the idea of integration through conflict has also been developed more recently in the social sciences by Albert Hirschman and others.[181]

In a sense, the thesis is a fairly straightforward one. It states that feelings of patriotism and common commitment are the fruits of the competing aspirations of oppositional democratic politics. The way this works, as everyone knows, is

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[180] Taylor, "*The Dangers of Soft Despotism*," p. 50.

[181] Albert O Hirschman, "Social Conflicts as Pillars of Democratic Market Society," *Political Theory* 22, no. 2 (1994), Marcel Gauchet, "Tocqueville, L'amérique Et Nous," *Libre* 7 (1980). For an broad ranging book on the perennial conflicts of Canadian politics see Roger Gibbins, *Conflict and Unity : An Introduction to Canadian Political Life* (Toronto :: Methuen, 1985).

simply that coalitions of supporters rally around one side or the other of the competing programs proffered by left and right. The programs are each intended to rally a majority of supporters and the goal of committed partisans on either side is to persuade fellow citizens of the importance of their respective programs.

For Taylor, the main axis of cleavage that divides the two sets of constituencies runs along class lines, though he uses the notion of class cleavage fairly loosely. The competing coalitions are understood to be grouped around the interests of the rich and powerful, the elite, on the one hand, and the masses or nonelite on the other.[182] Of course with this view of conflict in mind, the idea that patriotism implies straightforward identification with the national community, its people and free institutions, appears incomplete. After all, those men and women who find themselves perpetually on the bottom are not likely to identify with this community in the same way as those on top, if at all. So there must also be room for an allegiance that is based on plausible hope for change. In a sense, one is committed to the country that one aims to help usher forth.

Taylor is thus referring to an allegiance that is based on class mobilized, collective action for redress. Once this dimension is included, patriotism takes the form of a complex overlay of identities, between national and class based identities. An 'inner link' is formed between the national identity and class

[182] This understanding of class or democratic cleavage is as old as the Greeks. See Taylor, "Cultures of Democracy and Citizen Efficacy.", Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens : Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People* (Princeton, N.J. :: Princeton University Press, 1989).

mobilized ones. Class identities may be understood as galvanized by moments of activism on the part of 'the people' or nonelite majority. The elite class identity then coalesces around a response to such activism.[183] This again reflects the oppositional nature of partisan politics, with its competing coalitions. Taylor describes this model of patriotism, which he calls the 'complex identity conflict model' as follows:

> "We see here a model of a possible vibrant democracy…that depends on the class struggle being canalized through a complex identity, relating class mobilization to patriotic belonging. Each side of this identity strengthens the other: the sense of the Republic gives weight and meaning to the class mobilization, and the fruits of this mobilization make the republic plausible as the matrix of our freedom and efficacy even now, long before the eventual hoped-for realization of the ideal. Where the opposing forces have a similar complex identity, fighting actually brings us together; that is, it strengthens our common commitment."[184]

Of course this is not to say that class conflict is always a good thing for social integration. Indeed, in some circumstances it can lead to the brutal deployment of power and to class dictatorship led by one side or the other. Certain parameters, therefore, need to be safeguarded if class struggle is to be a sustainable component of patriotic belonging. These parameters are most likely to

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[183] There are many interesting example of this in Canadian history. Consider for example the 1988 "free trade debate". For an interpretation of this event as an instance of class conflict see Sylvia B. Bashevkin, *True Patriot Love : The Politics of Canadian Nationalism* (Toronto, Ont. :: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[184] Taylor, "Cultures of Democracy and Citizen Efficacy", p. 130.

be respected in places where there is a longstanding respect for liberal democratic institutions – for the rule of law, the protection of individual rights and fundamental freedoms, for equality rights, citizen consent, and for comprehensive checks and balances in the distribution of power. A strong associational life is also of primary importance, for this tends naturally to grease the wheels of tolerance and social trust.[185]

Canadian society, with its respect for law and order as well as its activist civil society, is arguably well suited for the strains of class conflict. Of course it's also easy for Canadian commentators to argue against the good of any form of social conflict whatsoever. Why shake the boat when the ties of national unity are already fragile, when whole regions and cultural groups are already alienated from one another? But such temerity is not wholly persuasive. For aside from the obvious moral argument for building a more just society, the circumstances of Canadian fragmentation can in fact be understood as a compelling reason in favour of democratic conflict and this precisely along class lines.

According to Taylor, a certain type of nationalist class struggle holds the potential of creating links of shared interest among all segments of the Canadian nonelite majority, thus serving to bridge the chasms of Canada's structure of 'complex cleavage'. The multiple rifts and cleavages of Canada's regional, linguistic and cultural diversity are obvious obstacles to pan national allegiance.

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[185] This is what is called the 'social capital' thesis. See Putnam, *Bowling Alone : The Collapse and Revival of American Community*.

The danger of conflict along these lines of division, as opposed to less rigidly demarcated class divisions, is that particular groups come to be convinced of an ongoing history of injustice against them.[186] More specifically, it is that once this understanding of presumed exclusion sets in, the relevant groups will not consider their demands to have been satisfied unless they are accepted in their totality.

For Taylor, this is a kind of democratic cleavage that needs to be avoided at all costs, for there tends to be "no way to deal with this kind of rift once it arises."[187] He argues that one of the central purposes of democratic politics ought to be precisely to avoid such rifts from arising in the first place. One of the ways in which this can happen is through nonelite coalition building in service of democratic majorities, such that men and women who often feel powerless are able to share in a common agency. Some of the institutions of collective provision that Canadians have built for themselves may be understood in light of democratic

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[186] Québec nationalism comes to mind here, but also the less extreme case of Western alienation, along with the increasing frustration felt by many Maritimers. The latter have often been supporters of the federal government, but there are signs that historical resentment is growing and that they are now beginning to turn their back on Ottawa. Donald J. Savoie, *Visiting Grandchildren : Economic Development in the Maritimes* (Toronto :: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

[187] Taylor, "*The Dangers of Soft Despotism*," p. 49. This argument provides an answer to Will Kymlicka's question regarding why we shouldn't simply consider 'identity politics' as banal as any other political issue. See Will Kymlicka, "Being Canadian," *Government and Opposition* 38, no. 3 (2003).

conflict of this sort. Take Medicare, for example, unemployment insurance and various other 'risk pooling' institutions.[188]

There is, however, an alternative understanding of Canadian democratic politics. This is the view referred to above as brokerage politics, which argues in support of an accommodative, non-conflictual approach to political life. Proponents of this view argue that a necessary feature of Canadian politics is that it consists political parties brokering as many different interests and identities as possible – whether of region, class, language or ethnicity. Parties are considered the central vehicles for this type of accommodative work. Their purpose is to rally the greatest number of supporters from across the country, though precisely through the avoidance of conflict. The tradition of brokerage politics practiced by the dominant parties may have had a nation-building effect at some point in Canadian history but it is unclear that it still serves such a purpose today.[189]

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[188] For an account of the conflict ridden beginnings of Medicare see Robin F. Badgley and Samuel Wolfe, *Doctors' Strike; Medical Care and Conflict in Saskatchewan* (Toronto :: Macmillan of Canada, 1967). For the controversy over single-payer auto insurance in Québec see Pierre Godin, *René Lévesque* ([Montréal] : Boréal, 1994), xx.

[189] Carty, Cross and Young note that in the first part of 20th Century "parties built extra-parliamentary associations that assumed the task of choosing leaders and raising money, and they developed political organizations around a set of powerful regional chieftains. This allowed the parties to operate as national brokers in a system in which the parties key political linkage challenge was to develop the interregional public policy accommodations necessary for Canadian nation-building." R. Kenneth Carty, Lisa Young, and William P. Cross, *Rebuilding Canadian Party Politics* (Vancouver :: UBC Press, 2000), p. 213. Sylvia Bashevkin, for her part, argues that since the days of the Mulroney governments Canada has moved closer to a politics of polarization. Bashevkin, *True Patriot Love : The Politics of Canadian Nationalism*, p. 180. See also

Perhaps omnibus parties and platforms can continue to aspire to serve as balm for regional and cultural rifts. But Taylor argues that insofar as brokerage politics precludes the formation of a nationwide cleavage along class lines, its fragile and unstable coalitions prevent a more lasting form of integration. He suggests that achieving meaningful unity of this sort depends on mobilizing around innovative projects and shared interests, which are bound to elicit struggle and conflict. As he puts it, "people of different regions, backgrounds, languages and cultures can only come together around some common project; and if this is meaningful and not some magic consensus-dream in which we can all project what we want, it is bound to inconvenience somebody and thus raise opposition."[190] In sum, far from undermining national unity, class polarization can be considered as yet another crucial means for building towards a more integrated Canadian patriotism.

Andrew Potter, "Introduction to the 40th Anniversary Edition " in *Lament for a Nation* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).

[190] In this same passage, he continues to note that a "division between left and right would tend to close the gap between French and English, Easterner and Westerner…I have been arguing all along that the politics of polarization, far from being an evil, is the only way in which certain meaningful issues can come to the fore and certain important reforms can be attempted…But in Canada, polarized politics is more than a good; it is an essential condition of a more meaningful unity, and perhaps even of survival." Taylor, *Reconciling the Solitudes : Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, p. 29.

Chapter 5

Egalitarian Politics and Civil Society

Among leftists, Taylor is considered a proponent of social democratic reformism. Faced with the dilemmas of contemporary capitalism, he emphasizes the need to come up with a series of different and creative solutions to help promote citizen equality. He defends this position today against more radical leftists and social critics that are still tacitly banking on a "wholly alternative way of doing things".[191] Perhaps there are few remaining socialists, but there is no doubt many on the left who feel a lingering bitterness over the 'triumph' of capitalism. For Taylor and other social democrats, the main problem with the left today is that an important number of its intellectuals succumb to paralysis when it comes to proposing actual policy reforms.[192] Bitterness tends to sap the intellectual vigour that is needed to come up with what Taylor calls a 'raft' of creative measures to best deal with the changing times.[193]

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[191] Charles Taylor, "On Identity, Alienation and the Consequences of September 11th: Interview with Hartmut Rosa and Arto Laitinen," in *Perspectives on the Philsophy of Charles Taylor*, ed. A. Laitinen and N. H. Smith (Helsinki: Societas Philosophica Fennica, 2002), p. 171.

[192] For a similar argument see Sheri Berman, "Unheralded Battle*:* Capitalism, the Left*,* Social Democracy, and Democratic Socialism," *Dissent* 56, no. 1 (2009).

[193] The American philosopher and critic, Richard Rorty, describes those of his colleagues that have moved on from the traditional democratic activism needed to come up with such proposals as forming an 'academic cultural left'. He mentions Frederic Jamieson as belonging to this camp, but we might also think of Louis Althusser and Theodor Adorno as precursors to this general intellectual sensibility. See Rorty, *Achieving Our Country : Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America*. And also Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural*

On the other hand, however, leftist reformers such as Taylor himself are still faced with the problem of mobilizing the constituency base that leftist legislative proposals are meant to serve. If in the heyday of Canadian social democracy it was at least clear who these men and women were (i.e. blue-collar families of the industrial economy), it is no longer always clear who the constituents of leftist policies are exactly.[194] It's commendable to push for creative solutions to the problem of building a durable and egalitarian prosperity, but such solutions are only likely to come about with the clash of ideas stemming from widespread mobilization.

This paradox manifests itself in Taylor's thought when his advocacy for 'class polarization' is contrasted with his critique of postwar 'acquiescence' – that is, of workers and citizens relinquishing the political activism that once

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Logic of Late Capitalism, Post-Contemporary Interventions. (Durham :: Duke University Press, 1991). Theodor W. Adorno and J. M. Bernstein, *The Culture Industry : Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, Routledge Classics (London ; New York :: Routledge, 2001)., Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1971).

[194] Some suggest that with the postwar transformation of the Canadian economy into a service economy, there has cropped up a growing segment of white-collar 'proletariats'. An alternative view, however, would suggest that while there certainly are many vulnerable workers occupying 'bad jobs' on the corporate side of the service economy, there has also emerged, alongside the postwar expansion of welfare state, a new middle class with good public service jobs. For an overview of this debate see John Myles, "The Expanding Middle: Some Canadian Evidence on the Deskilling Debate," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 25 (1988). Graham S and Lehmann Lowe, Wolfgang, "Labour Markets, Inequality, and the Future of Work," in *Social Inequality in Canada: Patterns, Problems, Policy*, ed. Ed Grabb and Neil Guppy (Toronto: Pearson, 2009).

characterized the Canadian labour movement.[195] So while Taylor emphasizes the importance of mobilized conflict between elite and nonelite, he is also critical of the lack of commitment among ordinary citizens. The tension inherent to this position begs the question of how to reinvigorate an activist-based egalitarian politics in the context of an acquiescent public culture.

The first thing missing in Taylor's thought, in this regard, is an account of the place and role of marginalized citizens, for whom acquiescence is a nonsensical description. How, for example, should we understand the predicament of the stigmatized and permanently excluded, those who hardly benefited from postwar social democracy in the first place? What is also missing, however, is a schematic conflict model that can situate the problem of acquiescence in an historic perspective and which can at once provide some indication of the best way forward.

The chapter draws heavily on the work of Michael Walzer to provide the necessary conceptual additions to Taylor's thought. More specifically, it draws on Walzer's ideas of 'countervalence' and 'empowerment'. Empowerment is actually a version of countervalence, the details of which will be discussed below. The notion of countervalence, for its part, defines an informal system of countervailing

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[195] Taylor uses the term 'class polarization' in his early work, where he identifies the need for sustained class antagonism in the Canadian context. Taylor, *The Pattern of Politics*. He elaborates on the importance of this idea in ———, "Cultures of Democracy and Citizen Efficacy." As for his assessment of postwar acquiescence see———, *Reconciling the Solitudes : Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, chapter 4.

powers that function to "match and offset the power of wealth" and which can be conceived as forming a type of "social constitutionalism".[196]

Just as official constitutions function to divide and constrain the power of office, so in a fully democratic society there must be room for the countervailing powers made up of the groups and organizations of civil society to have a similar effect. The basic structures that ensure the existence of such groups form the very foundations of liberal democracy – not only the rule of law, rights and charters, but also the whole spectrum of democratic institutions, from public education and a free press to open parliaments, legislatures and regular elections. The problem is that the minimal version of these structures is not sufficient to enable the nonelite to offset hierarchies of wealth and power. Thus there remains a need for empowering the most vulnerable groups.

The chapter begins by situating Taylor's critique of acquiescence within the context of the history of the Canadian labour movement. After outlining some of the achievements of the movement, Taylor's notion of acquiescence is introduced as a factor helping to explain its stagnation. His interpretation is contrasted with a more radical view, popular in the 1960s and 70s but still lingering today, attributing the limitations of the movement to quasi-ineluctable structures of elite driven social control. The chapter then proceeds to introduce

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[196] Michael Walzer, *Politics and Passion : Toward a More Egalitarian Liberalism* (New Haven :: Yale University, 2004), p. 25.

Walzer's notion of countervalence as yet another interpretive schema for grappling with the contingencies of political history.

On the countervalence view of political history, acquiescence comes under a different light, one that provides a clearer understanding of its dangers and potential alternatives. For many Canadians, however, acquiescence was never the issue. 'Empowerment' is thus introduced as a special mode of countervalence suited to stigmatized groups suffering from long-term patterns of exclusion. The understanding here is that certain group-related conditions and resources are needed in order for the marginalized to benefit from the opportunities of collective mobilization.

The final section of the chapter looks at how the ideas of countervalence and empowerment can bring out the pertinence of Taylor's advocacy in favour of class polarization. What emerges is a view of egalitarian politics that emphasizes the common ground shared between labour and multicultural activists. It is argued that both these camps are fighting against hierarchies of wealth and power, the best alternative to which is a broad-gauge politics focusing on a common package of reforms. The chapter ends by suggesting that acquiescent middle class Canadians might even have a stake in such a package, insofar as the present organization of consumer markets undermines their quality of life.

Postwar Acquiescence

Serious class struggle between workers and bosses occurred relatively late in Canadian history. It's true that 19th Century craft workers unions were already

setting the foundations for later efforts in labour organizing. But with the onset of the 20th Century, Canadian workers were still very much at the mercy of the 'iron-heel' of the state when it came to confronting employers. Still, when a countrywide class politics finally did materialize, beginning in the 1930s and coming to fruition in the 40s, it was no mundane affair. With soldiers coming back from a war fought in the name of democracy, the depression fresh in mind and public opinion increasingly siding with labour, the Liberal government of the day was forced to reckon with the rise of a new power in society.

As a result of the growing influence of organized labour, the ruling political and economic elite had no choice but to begin to take seriously the complaints of ordinary working men and women. Despite the turning tide, concrete legislative gains were not easily won. As scholars of comparative history put it, "public policy became an object of class politics on a scale that has rarely been witnessed in the western world."[197] Unemployment insurance was only finally introduced at the beginning of the War, once the dirty thirties had already run their course. Following this it took several massive strike waves in the 1940s, along with the threat of electable labour MPs, to get the government to take workers' demands seriously.

In the peak year, 1946, labour historian Craig Heron notes that "strikers shut down the British Columbia logging industry, the Ontario rubber industry, the

[197] William Johnston and Douglas Baer, "Class Consciousness and National Contexts: Canada, Sweden and the United States in Historical Perspective," *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 30, no. 2 (May 1993): p. 290.

central Canadian ports, the Southam newspaper chain, the country's steel industry, and dozens of mass-production plants, in the biggest strike wave Canada had ever seen."[198] By bringing the country's productive activities to a halt, workers and citizens formed a system of countervailing powers to fight against the injustices imposed on them. They felt that the discrepancy between notions of democratic equality and the working conditions developed under industrial capitalism since the 19th Century had become intolerable. The unfair assignment of benefits and burdens, the arbitrary despotism of the factory floor, the preferential treatment and unpredictable practices of foremen and supervisors had become the focal points of popular frustration.

The crux of the battle for greater workplace democracy came to hinge on the legal recognition of unions. Ultimately, state officials had to be made to intervene in order to force employers to sit down with union leaders. Some progress was made during wartime, but full-fledged legal recognition was only finally won in 1948, with the passing of the *Industrial Relations and Disputes*

[198] The paragraph continues "The next year's disputes were highlighted by a national strike of packing-house workers, and in 1949 Québec's asbestos minors fought a bitterly contested battle symbolizing the postwar shift from passive conservatism that has dominated Catholic unionism. The wave ended in 1950 with the first national railway strike on both transcontinental lines. A major social movement had taken shape in these years. In many industrial centers, thousands of workers had maintained mass picket lines for weeks, drawing on wide support in working-class neighbourhoods to feed and entertain them. Their bosses had just as stubbornly refused to budge, hoping to dispense with these young unions or at least to weaken them severely. In the end, most of these workers won significant concessions and consolidated their organizations permanently." Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement : A Brief History* (Toronto, Ont. :: James Lorimer, 1996), p. 75. For a visual appreciation of the times, see Richard Nielsen et al., *Defying the Law* (Montréal :: National Film Board of Canada, 1997).

Investigation Act. The legislation was the fruit of democratic conflict – of the many countering the consolidation of power in the hands of the few. It was by all means an historic achievement. The symbolic meaning behind the act of being able to negotiate over hours and wages was that power no longer flowed unquestionably from the top. It meant that men and women on the shop floor would no longer be the subjects of untrammeled control. Nor would they have to cozy up to bosses as a means of protecting themselves against the risk of being forced to depend on the "miserly system of private charities".[199]

Yet along with the immeasurable gains of unionization, Heron argues that there also came serious limitations. What resulted from 1948 is typically understood as a compromise, where "corporations traded off the higher standard of living provided by better wages and benefits, which would fuel consumer spending, for the ability to use Taylorist management and new technology to intensify work in their enterprises and crank up productivity."[200] As such, severe limitations were imposed on which aspects of the workplace were subject to democratic change. Workers were to have little if any say over the setting of work routines, staffing, cultivation of skill and the use of new technologies. Consequently, their voice was muted with regard to some of the most important aspects of their daily existence.

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[199] Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement : A Brief History*, p. 59.

[200] Ibid., p. 82.

Ultimately, for Heron, the protection of 'management rights' in the *Industrial Disputes Act* was such that oligarchs and bosses still held the upper hand. The compromise was therefore a losing one that would weaken the movement in the long run. Why is it that workers, clearly dominant in numbers, had to settle for a compromise that fell short of their goals? Part of the answer is in a sense circumstantial, in that it has to do with the manner in which workplace democracy was institutionalized. Instead of spontaneous proposals coming from informal responses to redundant, unfair or inefficient activities, workers had to comply with a new "legal and bureaucratic straightjacket".[201]

With the legalization of union life, workers had to sift through a maze of mystifying procedures if they wanted to challenge the 'frontier of control' defended by management. Indeed, due process meant that individual men and women had little recourse for their frustrations beyond the grievance slip and the arcane world of lawyers and bureaucrats. But Heron argues that besides these circumstantial factors, those in power also made strategic moves to break down worker solidarity. The success of the labour movement depended on building mutual support among unions in different factories, sectors and industries. It is through such alliances that wider changes in national consciousness could develop. Yet the political and economic elite ensured that coordinated 'sympathy strikes' between different unions were made impracticable under the new legislation. It is doubtful, Heron notes, "that any other legislation constrained

[201] Ibid., p. 89.

class consciousness as effectively among Canadian workers over the next fifty years."[202]

For leftists of the day**,** this was obviously a regrettable turn of events. What is also regrettable, for Taylor, is the defeatism that grew from the eventual stagnation of the movement among leftist intellectuals. One may grant to radical theorists that the securing of expansive management rights was a clear case of elite driven social control. There are undoubtedly many other examples that could be cited. What bothers Taylor, however, is the way in which such instances feed into a narrative that begins with a dismissive assessment of the very possibility of democratic initiatives, such as that of workplace democracy. This narrative claims not only that there are great injustices inherent to capitalism but also – to caricaturize – that the system's veneer of democracy is in actual fact nothing more than a coercive straightjacket.[203]

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[202] Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement*, p. 79.

[203] Theodor Adorno may be considered one of the founders of this narrative. He develops the notion that the apparent rationality of modern life, ever since the moral and scientific revolutions of the Enlightenment, is in fact an all-encompassing schema of domination. Adorno works this out with his colleague Max Horkeimer in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. As Jay Bernstein describes it in a recent review of Adorno's writing on the culture industry, the book's "central claim is that the very same rationality which provides for humankind's emancipation from the bondage of mythic powers and allows for progressive domination over nature, engenders, through its intrinsic character, a return to myth and new, even more absolute forms of domination…The economic organization of modern capitalist society provides for this final realization of instrumental reason and self-destruction of Enlightenment." Adorno and Bernstein, *The Culture Industry : Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, pp. 4-5.

Both Heron and Taylor see the weakness of the postwar labour movement as a reflection of floundering democratic participation. Yet Taylor moves in a different direction than Heron in order to account for this decline. Whereas Heron tends to focus on factors of systematic control, Taylor suggests that the dwindling of the movement was due at least in part to a lack of commitment on the part of citizens themselves. It is this lack of determination that he describes as a "tacit acquiescence…connived in by the majority".[204]

But how then should the circumstances of political acquiescence be understood? In one sense, acquiescence may be taken as the acceptance of the right-wing view that firms should remain 'masters of their investment' because this is the best way to guarantee material progress and to stave off 'de-industrialization'. In the 1940s, it is worth noting, this was not a negligible argument.[205] Nor is it today, for that matter. Alternatively, however, we might speculate that popular motivation to bolster and defend labour rights was only ever likely to endure as long as it would take to break the oppressive grip of the few and to provide material improvements for the many.

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[204] Ibid.

[205] Consider the material conditions of the average Canadian (not to mention their educational level or life expectancy): "As late as 1941, many standard conveniences, long available technologically, were not common properties for Canadians. Most Canadians (four out of five) still had ice boxes, and the vast majority (nine out of ten) used coal or wood as a heating source. A bare majority (six out ten) had piped water in their houses, but fewer than half had a bath or shower. Even the flush toilet was far from universal; just over half of Canadian dwellings possessed one." K. H. Norrie, Doug Owram, and John Charles Herbert Emery, *A History of the Canadian Economy* (Scarborough, ON :: Nelson Thomson Learning, 2002), p. 387.

To become a permanently active citizen at work, Taylor notes, "would require some commitment to the exercise and the devotion of some of the worker's life energies to this community and its plans and decisions."[206] Not all men and women are prepared to make such a commitment. The pleasures of privatized consumer society have figured more prominently in everyday priorities than early theorists of democracy, such as Montesquieu or Rousseau, might have suspected. Indeed, the ancient ideal of citizenship has proved to be only partially persuasive in modern contexts. Certainly, the notion that "only citizens are full persons capable of acting and making a name for themselves in human memory"[207] appeal to some men and women, but perhaps not to most.

Beyond this, we might wonder whether the narrative of left intellectuals today contributes to or undermines this possibility. Most commentators recognize that Canadian democracy offers at least some degree of political freedom. Heron himself seems to recognize this. A more radical view seems to pervade Canadian cultural studies. In a discussion on notions such as 'governmentality' and 'control society', the editors of a recent reader suggest that the global reach of multinational corporations combined with the anti-democratic effects of NAFTA confirms that the analyses underlying such concepts are sound. They note,

> "For these developments would tip one's estimation of the balance between force and consent at work in the local run of

[206] Taylor, *Reconciling the Solitudes : Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, p. 78.

[207] Ibid., p. 73.

> things considerably in favor of the former, as the social changes we are living through are increasingly planned and administered privately, withdrawn from any public domain of consent."[208]

Of course it's true that most international trade agreements are far from democratic. But are the editors implying that both they and everyone else in a position of equal leisure are committed democratic activists fighting for change? While their argument would suggest as much, this is obviously not the case. It is thus difficult to see the above developments as coercive interventions. For Taylor, it is precisely this kind of broad-brush dismissal of democratic possibilities that belies undue defeatism. He readily agrees that systematic domination was once part of the Canadian industrial scene, along with abominable conditions of "sweated labour and blighted townscape". But he insists that it is "deeply wrong" for the left to dismiss democracy altogether as a complex sham. Indeed, what is especially wrongheaded is to make such a claim on the basis of some "formula imposed on the working masses by the ruling class through a mixture of force, mendacious persuasion, propaganda, control of information, divisive tactics, and so on."[209]

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[208] Sourayan Mookerjea, Imre Szeman, and Gail Faurschou, *Canadian Cultural Studies : A Reader* (Durham [N.C.] :: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 17.

[209] Taylor, *Reconciling the Solitudes : Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, p. 78.

The Countervalence Approach

It was mentioned above that a democratic notion of countervailing powers involves a degree of cooperation among nonelite groups in order to divide and constrain the entrenched powers of the upper classes. The classic example of this is precisely that of workers organizing to oppose the power of oligarchs and bosses. Underlying this pluralistic understanding of group politics is a certain cyclical view of political history. Walzer is more explicit about this than Taylor and is thus able to take the correction of a defeatist left-wing teleology one step further. In a first instance, Walzer's cyclical history represents an endless repetition of the 'establishment' and 'partial disestablishment' of inequality. But as a history of democracy, it also offers the hope and possibility of more successful disestablishments than those previously achieved. As he puts it,

> "Political history, when its telling isn't governed by ideology, is mostly the story of the slow creation or consolidation of hierarchies of wealth and power. People fight their way to the top of these hierarchies and then contrive to maintain their position. The ruling class may be much less coherent than Marxist theory suggests; nonetheless, something like it exists, with more or less self-awareness, and aims to sustain itself…Popular organization, mass mobilization, and group solidarity are the only ways to oppose this aim. Their effect is not to level the hierarchies—at least it never has been—but only to shake them up, bring new

> people in, and perhaps set limits on the differentiations they define and entrench."[210]

On this cyclical view, the issue of acquiescence appears less permanent than it might otherwise. Once power has been divided and constrained, as with the *Industrial Disputes Act* for example, it is not inconceivable that men and women wish to get on with other activities of a more private nature. These may be unfulfilling consumerist activities, as Taylor suggests. But the consumerism critique must be nuanced if it is to be counted as a source of political acquiescence, for an equally plausible view suggests that leftist activism tends naturally to cut away at its own resource base. As Walzer puts it, it would seem that the success of social democracy "undermines its own culture".[211]

While not defeatist or teleological, this view poses a challenge for leftist commentators. For in the arena of civil society, once the division and constraint of elite groups ceases to be defended, older patterns of plutocratic social organization quickly become reconsolidated. This danger is nicely illustrated in a case study of 'industrial adjustment' among pulp and paper workers in northern Ontario. In the particular region in question, employees of a powerful logging conglomerate profited from a strong history of union activism. In fact, the relatively high salaries and benefits they shared made them part of the region's 'labour aristocracy'.

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[210] Walzer, *Politics and Passion : Toward a More Egalitarian Liberalism*, p. 104.

[211] Ibid., p. 36.

As sociologist Tom Dunk observes, the union local served as an exemplary role model for workers from other companies and industrial sectors in the area.[212] But following the gains consolidated several decades ago, the union in question became less active, more 'quiescent'. Its members were thus ill prepared for the downsizing pressures of the 1990s which threatened to 'idle' several factories in the region. Disorganized and lacking solidarity, the workers were unable to hold the political and economic elite to account for the dramatic changes with which they were faced.

Throughout the adjustment process that followed, there is reason to believe that this same elite was instrumental in fostering a passive attitude among workers. For Dunk, there is little doubt that this constituted an instance of elite driven social control.[213] But based on the cyclical view of the history of

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[212] Thomas Dunk, "Remaking the Working Class: Experience, Consciousness, and the Industrial Adjustment Process," *American Ethnologist* 29, no. 4 (2002).

[213] Indeed, Dunk identifies what he sees as an insidious process of 'co-determination' at work in the mill's closing. He is particularly wary of the industrial adjustment agency charged with helping union members find new jobs. In analysing the agency's rhetoric, he found that one of the main themes to come up repeatedly was the importance of 'letting go'. The emphasis was on workers putting the past behind them, which would include their past activities as union activists. Some of the councillors would even make 'bald defences' of the corporate perspective. Much to his credit, though, Dunk admits that 'worker quiescence' was a factor in the union's fall. Hence the notion of a process of 'co-determination' between government and the corporate sector, on the one hand, and workers on the other. Dunk also has some heartfelt insights into the difficult position that critics such as himself are put in. He notes, for example, that dealing with "economic dislocation and industrial adjustment presents a real dilemma for the labour movement and indeed for anyone concerned about easing the pain involved in change of this nature. Unions and other left activists often find themselves having to choose to stay out of the process altogether by not participating in such things as training programs and industrial adjustment

countervalence, the fate of this particular union local can serve at once as an example of the potential success of countervailing powers and of the dangers of acquiescence. The lesson, quite simply, is that certain conditions must remain in place for countervailing powers to effectively constrain the formation of hierarchies of wealth and power. For unions, this implies not just having a legal structure in place, but also benefiting from the active participation of members.

Political acquiescence may be a normal reaction for those who have emancipated themselves from oppression. But such acquiescence is not without long-term risks, or so the schematic conflict model of countervalence elaborated above would suggest. Moreover, a straightforward notion of countervalence does little to account for another lacuna in Taylor's social democratic writings. It does little, that is, to account for the fate of the marginalized and systematically excluded.

Group Stigmatization and Empowerment

Marginalized and stigmatized groups, the 'lower classes', form an important portion of the Canadian population. With the broad based emancipation stemming from the postwar labour movement, those left behind suffer an increased burden of humiliation than those that lived in similar conditions in earlier eras, where personal dignity was not a matter of universal equality. Despite

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committees and, thus, appearing to abandon workers; or participating in structures and processes in which they often have little control over either the form or content of the programs and services workers receive." Ibid.: p. 896.

[213] Michael Mann, "The Social Cohesion of Liberal Democracy," *American Sociological Review* 35 (1970): p. 425.

the heavy burden of such marginalization – indeed, perhaps because of it – stigmatized groups cannot be expected to use the standard tools of countervalence to improve their lot. They cannot, that is, rely on the basic rights of citizenship to organize amongst themselves and work collectively to fight off their oppression.

For given the fact of their stigmatization, they are weakened in their ability to consolidate resources and to press for change in the manner of more integrated groups. This does not mean, however, that they have accepted their marginalization as a just outcome. We might draw here, for instruction, on the distinction between 'moral' and 'pragmatic' acceptance. The latter, which perhaps best characterizes the position of excluded men and women, suggests an acceptance of one's lot on the basis that one "perceives no realistic alternative."[214] Any impulse they might have to protest and clamour for change is dismissed because it is considered a hopeless endeavour, devoid of realistic aims.

This does not mean that such groups and individuals are, as Honneth puts it, without a 'consciousness of injustice'.[215] Honneth speaks of structural prejudices that are built into everyday institutions and which deny the durably marginalized realistic opportunity to articulate and express the substance of this consciousness. It's true that journalists and other commentators occasionally engage in sympathetic forays into the 'hidden lives' of the vulnerable classes. But

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[214] Mann, "The Social Cohesion of Liberal Democracy," p. 425.

[215] Honneth, *Disrespect : The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, chapter 4. Honneth borrows the phrase 'consciousness of injustice' from historian Barrington Moore.

rarely do they seek to gain a serious grasp on the underlying frustration of these people, as concerns the shoddy hand society has dealt them.[216]

Taking the dignity of these men and women seriously would require sustained focus on the consciousness of injustice felt by this stratum of society. Instead of the festering of resentment, this would allow for a more comprehensive expression of their moral outlook, including their hopes for a better life.[217] The absence of this kind of opinion formation is testimony to an implicit social

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[216] Pierre Bourdieu's work is of interest here. In a collection of richly detailed reports and interviews gathered in *La misère du monde*, we find testimonies that consistently show traces of resentful condemnation of the French social context. Whatever peace these men and women have made with their situation is of a pragmatic sort, shot through with daily conflicts and crises, the burden of which they find liberating to share. In referring to the mechanisms of social exclusion, Bourdieu notes that "producing awareness of the mechanisms that make life painful, even unliveable, does not neutralize them; bringing contradictions to light does not resolve them. But, as sceptical as one may be about the sociological message, one has to acknowledge the effect it can have in allowing those who suffer to find out that their suffering can be imputed to social causes and thus to feel exonerated; and in making generally known the social origin, collectively hidden, of unhappiness in all its forms, including the most intimate, the most secret." Pierre Bourdieu, *The Weight of the World : Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*, Misère Du Monde. English (Stanford, Calif. :: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 629.

[217] The National Film Board of Canada ran an exceptional program in the 60s and 70s that attempted to develop precisely this kind of sustained focus. See Zoë Druick, *Projecting Canada : Government Policy and Documentary Film at the National Film Board of Canada*, Arts Insights (Montreal :: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), chapter 6. Consider also the following films, among others: Maurice Bulbulian et al., *Little Burgundy*, Challenge for Change Series ([Montreal] : [S.l.] :: National Film Board of Canada United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, 1968). D Tanya Ballantyne Tree, Canada National Film Board of, and Canada, *The Things I Cannot Change* ([Montreal] :: National Film Board of Canada, 2000).

denigration. It represents a lack of 'recognition', to borrow Honneth's term, which he also describes as a condition of 'invisibility'.

It is becoming increasingly clear for socially concerned commentators that marginalization in rich countries such as Canada cannot be understood simply on the basis of an economic analysis of capitalism. As John Porter noted some time ago in the Canadian context, one's socioeconomic position is consistently interwoven with cultural patterns of group stigmatization.[218] Indeed, it can be argued that the primary markers of durable inequality are largely cultural in character – linked to race, ethnicity and language, for example. As Walzer puts it, one is not a member of stigmatized groups because of socioeconomic exclusion. Rather, one is excluded because of one's membership. "Membership *is* the disadvantage."[219]

Cultural exclusion is thus not just symbolic in nature. Certainly, to suffer from invisibility is a form of moral injury in itself. But matters are considerably worse when this is confirmed daily by one's position in the socioeconomic order. In Canada, the most prominent examples of this sort of stigmatization occur with regard to First Nations groups, as well as with other visible minorities.[220] As

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[218] John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic : Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada*, Studies in the Structure of Power, Decision-Making in Canada. 2 (Toronto :: University of Toronto Press, 1965).

[219] Walzer, *Politics and Passion : Toward a More Egalitarian Liberalism*, p. 30.

[220] Will Kymlicka, *Finding Our Way : Rethinking Ethnocultural Relations in Canada* (Toronto :: Oxford University Press, 1998), chapter 5, James E. Curtis

mentioned above, the problem of group stigmatization and durable inequality is such that a straightforward countervalence option cannot work. For the permanently excluded, the existing social forces are often too pervasive for the relevant groups to come together in association, to pool their resources and fight for change. This is the standard version of countervalence, which can be understood to follow from the establishment of the institutions of liberal democracy, as structured around the institution of citizenship itself.

In the case of durably stigmatized groups, this model will not do. Walzer thus looks to a different model, what he calls 'empowerment'. The best example of this sort of egalitarian politics, he notes, is the case of colonized societies regaining control of their social and political fate. What needs to happen in each case, whether that of an oppressed colony or an oppressed cultural group, is a process of group consolidation and consciousness-raising that will help the group in question to mobilize the most able of their members. As Walzer puts it,

> "The best way, perhaps the only way, to overcome durable inequality is to enable the believers of activists or stigmatized groups…to connect with their peripheries, to accumulate resources, and to provide life-cycle services similar to those provided by more advantaged groups. This is the empowerment model: it begins with individuals associated with a group and

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and Richard C. Helmes-Hayes, *The Vertical Mosaic Revisited* (Toronto :: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

> diminished by the association; it empowers them by strengthening this group."[221]

The practical ramifications here are not only at the level of organization and self-provision. For an important part of collective activities will involve tapping the resources of the state, in the same way that more advantaged groups do. According to Walzer, state provision for stigmatized groups is a 'necessary' and 'permanent' feature of any form of egalitarian politics. Thus the empowerment model requires both activism on the part of the oppressed and periodic intervention on the part of the state through the distribution of resources. This, however, does not yet constitute a program of reform. It is fine to declare a principle of 'egalitarian assistance', but it is something quite different to implement such a principle. Perhaps all that is known in this regard is that what is most immediately necessary "is to provide legal support and professional help to those groups whose demands are not currently effective."[222]

At a more theoretic level, however, Walzer's propositions can go a long way towards complementing Taylor's argument about the continued relevance of class mobilization. For what is missing in Taylor's work is an idea of how those who have the most to gain from class struggle might be understood to actively partake in such a politics. Walzer's work helps not only on this specific point, but

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[221] Walzer, *Politics and Passion : Toward a More Egalitarian Liberalism*, p. 39.
[222] Ibid., p. 83.

also in the schematic characterization of a broader idea of renewed class mobilization.

Mobilizing Democratic Majorities

Given that Walzer's empowerment model is aimed at cultural groups, we might consider it a form of multiculturalism. His approach, however, is sensitive at once to the collective aspects of exclusion and to the material nature of group stigmatization. By linking the two together, he in a sense helps to clear the way for the possibility of a broad-gauge politics. His use of the notions of countervalence and empowerment help to forge a thematic link between what are too often considered rival camps – class activism on the one hand and multiculturalism on the other.

Without denying the existence of important differences between class and culture or between 'redistribution' and 'recognition', Walzer's work troubles any sort of hardened distinction between the two. At a practical level, his conceptualization might help to persuade labour and multicultural activists, who sometimes operate in mutual isolation, that they in fact share certain interests. This is not to suggest, however, that many activists and commentators aren't already aware of such common ground. Indeed, advocates of union renewal suggest that the most important challenge for unions today is for them to open up

to broader causes than those commonly put on the table by rank and file members.[223]

Likewise, influential figures of Canadian feminism emphasize the importance of the working class roots of their movement. They see links, for example, between the sexism of the domestic division of labour and the discriminations experienced in the paid labour force.[224] Historically, we might think of the centrality of economic autonomy in the struggles that constituted Québec's 'Quiet Revolution'. These struggles were those of a cultural minority that had been economically oppressed.

Sociologist Peter Clancy refers to a similar, though less well known 'class politics' between Aboriginals of the Northwest Territories and the white, business-dominated government Council that reigned from the 1950s onward. The issue that triggered the countervailing force of Aboriginal nationalism was the Mackenzie Valley pipeline project. Yet for Clancy this is but one instance of a

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[223] As one labour scholar puts it, "In many instances, unions excuse this lack of social activism with the argument that this is the time for them to focus on bread and butter issues for existing and potential members. It is true that union organizing of the unorganized requires paying attention to the daily workplace concerns of workers. Many of these concerns, however, are linked to broader social justice issues around which unions can and should mobilize, rather than limiting their attention to collective bargaining. And many of the issues ignored by unions—work-life balance, racism, discrimination—are most central to the workers who unions should be organizing, namely women, racialized groups, immigrants and youth.". Charlotte Yates, "Forum: Reorganizing Unions - Rebuilding the Labour Movement by Organizing the Unorganized: Strategic Considerations," *Studies in Political Economy* 74 (Fall 2004): p. 177.

[224] Meg Luxton, "Feminism as a Class Act: Working-Class Feminism and the Women's Movement in Canada," *Labour/Le Travail* 48 (Fall 2001).

northern class politics built around resource megaprojects, land-claim settlements, community cooperatives and anti-trapping campaigns. His analysis of political activism in the north during the 1970s provides an eloquent example of egalitarian multiculturalism. He notes,

> "Without question, the most dramatic political development was the emergence of Aboriginal associations as a counter-hegemonic force. These organizations challenged the legitimacy of the territorial government while asserting the priority of native claims settlement over any other constitutional proposals. At the same time the content of the claims, contesting as they did the right to ownership and use of vast tracts of land, struck directly at the foundation of the megaproject strategy. Consequently, when the courts began to recognize a continuing Aboriginal title, the effect was cathartic."[225]

These examples clearly show the common links between class and identity politics. This is not to say that there aren't also causes that are difficult to integrate into a broad-gauge mode of activism. Nor is it to say that there won't always be self-regarding 'greedy groups' that are incapable of thinking beyond the needs and interests of their own members. Finally, it is hard to deny that democratic majority coalitions, mobilized in support of a common package of reforms, are in practice difficult to build.

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[225] Peter Clancy, "The Northwest Territories: Old and New Class Politics on the Northern Frontier," in *The Provincial State in Canada*, ed. Keith Brownsey and Michael Howlett (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2001), pp. 338-39.

Yet for both Taylor and Walzer, there are nonetheless many reasons to take this potential seriously – at both the level of 'political efficacy', through the mutual enhancement of countervailing powers, and in the Canadian case at the level of consolidating national identity. With regard to the latter, the reader will remember the argument of previous chapters, notably Chapter 4: that a powerful means to counter regional, ethnic and linguistic fragmentation in Canada is for 'the people' to join behind a political program that best represents their combined interests, as against those of the elite minority.

Of course while all of the above may be true, it is likely to be of limited relevance in getting the acquiescent behind a leftist program of reform. It is likely to be of little relevance, that is, in getting those middle class Canadians of the 'lyric generation', who share in a standard of living unknown to their parents and grandparents, to take an interest in political activities.[226] Accordingly, as a republican philosopher in the tradition of Montesquieu and Rousseau, Taylor easily slips into a mode of critique that overestimates both the ordinary appeal of political participation, as well as the latter's necessity for ensuring democratic longevity.

Still, few will deny that some level of engagement is necessary for ensuring the sustainability of democratic regimes, and it is difficult to say where the threshold lies exactly. It is therefore important to take Taylor's point seriously.

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[226] For an interesting study of the baby-boomer generation in Québec see François Ricard, *La Génération Lyrique : Essai Sur La Vie Et L'oeuvre Des Premiers-Nés Du Baby-Boom* (Montréal :: Boréal, 1992).

Perhaps we should even consider it a matter of moral obligation. Canadian political philosopher Will Kymlicka readily admits that there will always be a portion of the citizenry that will have no interest in politics. Indeed, some people "will find their greatest joys and projects in other areas of life, including the family, the arts, or religion." He goes on to point out, however, that where there are injustices and corruption all have an obligation to do their part to root them out.

> "So if there are serious injustices in our society which can only be rectified by political action, then citizens should recognize an obligation to protest against that injustice. So if our political institutions are no longer functioning, perhaps due to excessive levels of apathy, or to the abuse of power, then citizens have an obligation to protect these institutions from being undermined. To sit passively by while injustices are committed, or democratic institutions collapse, in the hope that others will step in, is to be a free rider. Everyone should do their fair share to create and uphold just institutions."[227]

Kymlicka's point is well taken. Yet merely to declare democratic participation a moral obligation is similar to asserting the importance of egalitarian assistance. It does little to help us get from here to there. With regard to democratic engagement, perhaps the surest means of encouraging participation is by appealing to self-interest, much in the way Joseph Heath does in his analysis

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[227] Will Kymlicka, "Education for Citizenship," in *Education in Morality*, ed. Mark Halstead and Terence McLaughlin (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 82-83.

of consumer economics, as described in Chapter 3. Heath's proposals take aim at an unscrupulous reliance on the market mechanism, which ultimately distorts consumer demand and engages individuals in self-defeating consumer practices that diminish their overall quality of life. He makes certain policy suggestions (e.g. consumption taxes, a withdrawal of government funding for advertising firms) regarding how ordinary tax-paying citizens could correct the market-based 'collective action problems' in which they find themselves ensnared.

In the end, such reforms would involve putting the concerns of the people before the vested interests of the political and economic elite. They could thus conceivably form part of a common package of reforms, alongside those stemming from Walzer's egalitarian multiculturalism. It would seem, however, that the very possibility of a loose coalition of this nature is a non-starter for the intellectual sensibility characterized by radical leftist theorists. The problem with the latter view is not that it rests on a deep dissatisfaction with the way things are, which is a feature it shares with the position of most social democrats. Rather, it is the notion that any attempt at trying to change the current system is futile. This cynicism short-circuits the otherwise energetic resistance demonstrated by such intellectuals. It thus blocks the possibility of empowering those most in need of it and impedes the possibility of sustaining a broad base of countervailing powers – not only domestically, but also across borders in global civil society.

Conclusion

The standard model of interpretive social criticism involves the critic drawing attention to a political community's collective self-understanding – the values it cherishes and ideals towards which it is committed – in order to reproach this same community for its shortcomings and to propose avenues of reform. Taylor engages in criticism of this sort with regard to the broad thematic area I've identified as Canadian social democracy. The implicit premise of this type of critique is that social democratic ideals and institutions (notions of equality and public services such as health care) form a crucial part of Canada's historic public culture. This of course does not mean that these ideals and institutions are secure. Indeed, Taylor's criticism suggests that there remains much work of affirmation and elaboration to be done in order to better meet the hopes and aspirations inherent in this tradition.

Taylor's critical writings on the subject of Canadian national unity are characterized by a somewhat different approach. This is because it is aimed at a whole facet of Canadian identity that has not yet been clearly brought into existence. His interpretation seeks to tease out a vision that is present in Canada's common public culture, but which is beset by misunderstanding and historical resentment between the country's component parts. The institutional framework needed to accommodate Canadian deep diversity is partly in place already, with the de facto practice of 'asymmetrical federalism'. But cooperative arrangements

such as this cannot take full flight precisely because of a continuing deafness between regions and provinces, between Québécois and English Canadians, Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals.

The chapters brought together in this dissertation offer a set of analyses that are relevant to each of these two broad thematic areas. Their specific subject matter ranges from the question of democratic decline to consumerism, patriotic allegiance and egalitarian politics. The rationale for using Taylor's social criticism to shed light on these topic areas, besides the force of the ideas themselves, is that his insights on these matters haven't been adequately received. There is an imbalance in Taylor scholarship between a generous treatment of his abstract philosophical thought, on the one hand, and a lack of attention regarding his more practical critique of everyday social and political life. Further, among the work that has been done in this area, no effort has been made towards furthering his social democratic thought. Nor has there been much concern, outside of constitutional proposals, for other practical options in strengthening social unity and patriotic belonging within the context of Canadian deep diversity.

The objectives set out in the dissertation were 1) to provide a summary account of Taylor's thought as concerns the relevant topic areas 2) to push forward different aspects of his social criticism by integrating them with contemporary authors while remaining faithful to the committed nature of his ideas and finally 3) to address these lacunae in an open and accessible form. Some readers may feel that the arguments worked out in these chapters constitute little

more than a set of proposals for a leftist political program. There may be some truth to this, though it is hard to see how it applies to the diversity facet of Taylor's critique, unless one assumes that the model of deep diversity is unusually tolerant and inclusive and further assumes that these are traits reserved for the left. Moreover, the nature of political 'reality' is such that social criticism will always be laying claim to contested ground. One may very well seek the truth, in this sense, from a partisan basis.

It is the contested representation of reality that makes for the competing visions of the national interest that are typically defended by left and right. Historically, as shown in Chapter 4, Canada has been lacking a clear polarization at this level. Accordingly, one of the key contributions of Taylor's criticism has been to advocate for the benefits of precisely this kind of polarization, which he describes as class polarization. Through democratic class antagonism, Taylor argues, we're not only likely to move towards a society with policies that are more synchronized with the interests of the nonelite majority, but we're also likely to see greater pan-national integration.

Taylor's class polarization argument can indirectly be linked to his recent assessment of the problem of democratic decline. While a vibrant civil society with a multitude of groups defending specific issues and causes is itself beneficial for democracy, it is not sufficient. Democratic sustainability in the West depends on the integration of this 'punctual politics' with 'broad-gauge' democratic mobilization in parties and movements. This is as much a matter of democratic

functionality and legitimacy as it is a matter of sustaining a political space of cooperative compromise and active solidarity. The problem today is that while Canadians share an 'activist' civil society, broad-gauge politics is seriously waning. Class polarization, Taylor argues, provides a context for the revitalization of a politics focused on common packages of reform, as opposed to single issues.

At a further remove, Taylor's treatment of class polarization as a problem of mobilizing democratic majorities can also be linked to his analysis of exponential growth and over-consumption. What remains at issue, underlying these phenomena, is the expression of personal and collective 'efficacy', taken as a manifestation of modern autonomy and 'self-determining freedom', as described in Chapter 3. Taylor's argument, in a nutshell, is that when men and women of modern Western cultures are deprived of opportunities to demonstrate their efficacy by political means, they do so through more individualistic practices, such as through 'mutual display' of private consumer goods. A related argument is that these practices also enable the expression of personal distinction under modern conditions of 'authenticity', although certainly not in the manner understood by proponents of Romanticism such as Taylor himself.

Another key component of his criticism comes from his conviction that democracy is best expressed in local instances of involvement – in provinces and municipalities, for example. Only in this way can the motivation to participate be rewarded and sustained, as against the implacable bureaucracies of larger administrative structures. Such motivation is most feasible, however, where there

exist real communal attachments and responsive institutional structures. Fortunately for Canadians, the country's strong regionalism and decentralized federal framework offer a uniquely promising combination. The problem, however, is that Canadians haven't yet been able to take full advantage of this potential precisely because of overriding regional tensions and conflicts of belonging in a culturally diverse federation.

Inherent to Taylor's interpretation of deep diversity is the notion that in Canadian citizenship there lies the potential of accommodating plural modes of belonging – both as individuals of equal legal status, whatever their cultural background, and as distinct communities cooperating together in a federal framework. The latter mode is tailored especially to Québécois and First Nations, who may choose to belong to Canada by way of their prior allegiance to these communities. But it is also open to other historically rooted regional communities throughout the federation. One thinks of Newfoundland, for example. Ultimately, Taylor is convinced that if the deep diversity model of co-existence and cooperation can be made to work, it would serve not only as a uniquely Canadian achievement, but also as an example around the world for democratic openness, tolerance and flexibility.

Whereas the latter points are fairly well known aspects of Taylor's thought, his views on leftist, social democratic politics are less widely appreciated. I mentioned above the importance of class polarization. But a commitment to this idea must be made to cohere with his later assessment of

political acquiescence among activists of the postwar period, whether in the labour movement or otherwise. Insofar as the problem of acquiescence may be understood as a problem that is internal to the constituency of the left, Taylor argues that the best way forward must start with a break from the search for a 'whole alternative way of doing things' – an alternative, that is, to the market economy. The focus, rather, must consist in coming up with a 'raft' of policy options, which may work more or less well in different national settings, for advancing the social democratic goals of greater equality, decentralization of government control and democratization of the economy.

The above ideas are teased out throughout the preceding chapters and provide an account of the basic insights put forth in Taylor's social criticism. Beyond this, I want to claim that the dissertation extends these ideas in a similar spirit of political commitment as Taylor's own – something that has not been done by close followers of his critical work such as Smith and Redhead. The main contributions at this level occur in Chapters 3 and 5 where contrasts are drawn between Taylor's thought and that of Heath and Walzer, respectively.

The issues of exponential economic growth and over-consumption are of interest to Taylor for various reasons. To begin with the obvious, such practices are unsustainable and likely to lead to political strife once natural resource limits have been hit. But Taylor is also concerned about the links between a growth-based economic model and the way in which people lead their individual lives. He argues that the way of life that is encouraged in consumer society trivializes the

potential for personal growth, as understood in the heritage of Western Romanticism. The argument is not an easy one to make, for it has the paternalistic implication that men and women cannot see this for themselves. Nor does Taylor address the practical question of what institutional reforms could help to transform the socialization patterns of consumer society. Heath's contribution to the consumerism debate is particularly pertinent in these regards.

Beginning from radically different assumptions about the relations between individuals and society, and based on a thorough appreciation of the benefits of the market economy, Heath identifies several ways in which the market can fail to benefit the common good. Firstly, he puts his finger on what he calls self-defeating practices of competitive consumption. Due in part to the way in which the market is currently organized, consumers engage in a tiring competition for the acquisition of private 'positional goods'. Secondly, the inherent limitations of an unregulated market tend to distort consumer demand, privileging the funneling of resources into products that people don't actually want – more SUVs, for example, less high quality public services. Insofar as Heath claims that men and women are in a sense entrapped into opting for these consumer outcomes, the paternalistic edge is taken off Taylor's moral critique. Further, Heath proposes various reform measures in order to contain the above instances of 'market failure', from the introduction of consumption taxes to the withdrawal of subsidies for the advertising industry.

As mentioned in Chapter 5, Taylor makes an important contribution to leftist thought by attempting to move beyond social control theories that take little notice of the problem of political acquiescence. Taylor elaborates on this problem in a recent work with a sophisticated account of relative democratic decline in Westerns societies, as shown in Chapter 2. Yet despite these contributions, his work lacks the conceptual tools needed to envision how increased participation in egalitarian struggles can be expected to take shape. There is, of course, no easy solution to the problem of persistent inequalities. But Walzer brings us closer to the heart of the matter with his analysis of civil society and, more specifically, with his ideas of 'countervalence' and 'empowerment'.

Walzer has a different interpretation than Taylor concerning the postwar acquiescence of left leaning constituencies of reform. For him, this can be explained by the fact that the successful achievements in social democracy tend to undermine the activist resource base needed for continued reforms. But just as oligarchs and plutocrats continue to seek to consolidate their wealth and power, the need for countervalence remains as pressing as ever. Leftist ideas of class struggle are still relevant to Walzer, but the clearest forms of oppression today, he argues, occur through group stigmatization. This, in turn, has a powerful impact on economic status, where specific groups are locked into oppressive conditions of inferiority. The most likely way in which groups might get themselves out of this position is through a process of empowerment, involving the pooling of

resources amongst themselves. For the worse off groups, however, this is unlikely to happen without government help of various kinds.

This principle of egalitarian assistance is, as Walzer notes, not yet a program. But the way in which Walzer frames it at least provides a theoretic basis for bridging the divides of a fragmented leftist constituency – that between labour activists and militant multiculturalists, for example. It's not that the struggles of these two groups can be collapsed into one. But ultimately, as argued in Chapter 4, they hold many objectives in common. When combined with the grievances of lower and middle class consumers, themselves caught in a cycle that increases the power of the wealthy, we can begin to see the (perhaps still only theoretical) grounds for taking seriously Taylor's advocacy for democratic mobilization in the form of heightened class antagonism.

With regard to deep diversity, the research remains closer to Taylor's ideas. What gets reiterated in Chapter 4, however, is the link between deep diversity and social democracy. The link rests on the insight that class mobilization, itself a form of social cleavage, holds the potential of reconciling other, more pernicious cleavages of Canadian society, whether between regions, ethnic or linguistic groups. By mobilizing for social democratic reform, nonelite groups and organizations across the country could grease the wheels for eventual constitutional restructuring on more inclusive grounds. Such mobilization would heighten the solidarity and collective understanding needed to secure a constitutional accord that is respectful of differences, but which also rests on a

joint commitment towards the cooperative achievement of long term goals as a federation.[228]

But what might be the linchpin of such class mobilization today? Certainly, elements of Walzer's multicultural egalitarianism would have to be an integral part of any kind of class based democratic mobilization. There is, however, little reason to believe that his principle of egalitarian assistance will draw widespread support any time soon, at least not as a goal in itself. This, we might infer, is due to the fact that such a principle does not appeal in any direct way to the self-interest of the majority of middle class citizens. It would thus need to be combined with a range of other proposals to form a common package. Part of this package could focus on reforming what ultimately must be understood as a nonsensical model of economic production and consumption, as discussed in Chapter 3. Perhaps it is not unfeasible to expect men and women to come together in opposition to the stresses, strains and decreased quality of life caused by an economic model based on exponential growth.

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[228] As mentioned in chapter 4, an officially recognized 'asymmetrical federalism' is Taylor's preferred option, as opposed to the riskier fate of some kind of confederative arrangement.

This is without mentioning the looming threat of environmental disaster.[229] From the perspective of what Taylor calls the 'ecological left', the central issue is a matter of reducing the quantity of natural 'throughput materials' that are used in the economy while at the same time creating more egalitarian social conditions. Any change of this sort would evidently require an important shift in mindset. The pursuit of leisure, for example, as opposed to practices of competitive consumption, would again have to be given high priority in matters of social and

[229] Like most human problems and crises, environmental disaster is something we are only likely to take seriously when it is already upon us. Yet there is no reason to believe that a fateful 'October Surprise' is not just around the corner. The term refers to a fictionalized account of a major hurricane hitting New York City, as recounted in a future American president's diary entry. Among other things, the president has this to say, "I guess the problem was that we counted on this not happening, at least not yet. Most scientists assumed the worst effects of climate change would occur later in the century. Still, enough warned there was a chance of an extreme weather event coming sooner and, if it hit just right, one of our big urban centers could be knocked out. As I remember, most of my advisors thought the chances were pretty low after the last briefing we got on climate change. But we were warned that we needed to decentralize our energy generation and improve the robustness of our infrastructure to withstand extreme weather events…It's not as if this is just happening to us. Truth be told, the problem has been our whole attitude about globalization. When I say "our", I really mean in this context the elite or even the little knot of leaders round the world. We all have been focused on boosting or maintaining greater economic growth. We have a lot to be proud of too in that regard. We have avoided giving in to protectionist urges and managed to reenergize the trade rounds. But we have not prepared sufficiently for the toll that irresponsible growth is having on the environment…The poorest countries have suffered the most from our hands-off approach to globalization. The problem is that some of these are not small, geopolitically insignificant countries. Some—like Nigeria—we in the developed world rely on for needed resources. Because of the encroaching desertification in the north, the religious clash between Muslims and Christians is heating up. Another Biafra-like civil war – only this time along North-South lines—is not inconceivable." National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 2008), pp. 58-59.

economic organization. The problem, however, is that without proper planning a reduction of consumption activities would also lead to economic destabilization and loss of employment.

What is needed to meet this challenge is a 'raft' of creative policy alternatives moving us in the direction of an at once reduced and more efficient use of throughput materials. Though the question of how to do this is obviously complex, a powerful model has been offered by Canadian ecological economist Peter Victor. What he proposes, as a general model to be worked out between federal and provincial levels of government, is the development of green industries using tax levers and other mechanisms, combined with investment in the public service industry (from health care and education to poverty fighting and professional retraining services) and the innovative use of work sharing programs. Drawing additional fiscal resources through the introduction of consumption taxes would help secure the state's role in guiding the development of this alternative economic model.[230]

If phased in gradually, over one or two decades, Victor insists that such a proposal is quite defensible in terms of 'econometric' calculations – that is, in

[230] Victor describes these as "taxes on goods and services that favour those that are more durable, more useful and less harmful to the environment and health". Victor, *Managing without Growth : Slower by Design, Not Disaster*, p. 221. The introduction of consumption taxes would in turn allow the reduction of corporate taxes on green industries and companies that are favourable to workers' rights, thus increasing Canadian competitiveness in these areas. Jean-François Lisée describes this reduction as a "you give-we give" bargain between the electorate and the corporate sector. Jean-François Lisée, *Pour Une Gauche Efficace* (Montréal :: Boréal, 2008).

terms of predictable outcomes in the interconnection of economic variables. Such a proposal would only stand a chance of succeeding, however, if it were able to count on the support of a strong democratic majority. There would be elite interests involved in any such program of reform – those of capital owners, as well as those possessing highly priced skills. The battle of hearts and minds that would have to take place could potentially be won, domestically at least. The problem, however, is that any one country attempting such reforms on its own could trigger a rush of elite emigration. This, in turn, would signal a loss of capital and skill that could quickly lead to a "downward spiral of disinvestment and unemployment".[231]

Under conditions of economic globalization, the likelihood of similar scenarios occurring in different countries, for quite different sets of reasons, has led to a commonly accepted diagnosis of the times. Whereas in an earlier era of 'national capitalism' local enterprises didn't have the option to pick up and move, the threat of disinvestment and relocalization has now become one of the trademarks of economic globalization. With the international elite having decided behind closed doors to liberalize trade and investment rules, firms naturally began to seek the best conditions for their investments – generally, places with as little labour, environmental and tax regulations as possible. It's in this sense that we now hear of a 'race to the bottom' with states competing against one another to provide just this set of winnowed-down conditions.

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[231] Victor, *Managing without Growth : Slower by Design, Not Disaster*, p. 222.

It's difficult to say to what extent this dynamic has had an impact on Canadians society.[232] Certainly, if economic reforms can't be introduced without the flag of elite emigration being waved, then a country's degree of freedom has indeed been restricted. Where does this leave the program of the ecological left mentioned above? What options does Canada have in creating changes that it sees as fit and necessary? Part of the answer must involve taking the lead on these issues at a global level. For a middle-sized power like Canada, this is of course easier said than done. Like most other countries, its influence is bound to be quite limited if it tries to act alone on the international scene.

For some commentators, this predicament has been an important motivating factor in the slow yet steady formation of regional alliances and federations.[233] Not only do 'continental blocs', such as the European Union or Mercosur in South America, have more clout in shaping the agendas of international agencies, but they are better able to control their economic space, as concerns capital investment, trade rules, labour and environmental standards. Taylor warns that one of the dangers of this route is that the promise of greater economic control will be paid for with lesser political responsibility on the part of

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[232] Rodney Haddow and Thomas Richard Klassen, *Partisanship, Globalization and Canadian Labour Market Policy : Four Provinces in Comparative Perspective*, Studies in Comparative Political Economy and Public Policy (Toronto :: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

[233] Habermas, "Crossing Globalization's Valley of Tears."

ordinary citizens.[234] In the case of North American integration, a more obvious danger for Canadian men and women is that of being under the thumb of none other than the global hegemon, which happens to be our closest neighbour and ally.

Earlier generations of Canadian nationalists fought hard against the option of greater integration with the U.S. Developing closer ties with the U.S. has always been risky business. This is especially the case today, given the internal divisions that continue to pit Québécois against the rest of the country, thus making it a more fragmented and fragile political entity.[235] For contemporary

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[234] Charles Taylor, "Globalization and the Future of Canada," *Queen's Quarterly* 105 (1998).

[235] Journalist Chantal Hébert offers a not totally farfetched account of how things could unfold for Canada, given these divisions. Any summary of her futuristic account will of course fall short of the original. But imagine it's 2020 and there is a big election coming up. In fact, it's an American presidential election. Yet it is radically different from all previous elections insofar as there are 19 million newly minted American citizens that will be casting their vote. The new voters come from the Anglophone contingent of the former Canadian federation. It's a big day for multilateralist voices from around the world. There has been a successive wave of isolationist, military-minded Republican administrations in the White House. China and India followed suit, with their own brand of geopolitical narcissism. These countries were able, as a result, to make giant economic leaps forward. But this had devastating effects on poorer nations, not to mention the global environment. Progressive supporters from around the world are hoping that the Canadian vote will tip the balance in favour of the Democrats. For only this, they suspect, can keep the hope of global multilateralism alive. Most Canadian progressives cannot believe that it has come to this. When the referendum for a New American Union resulted in a 66% yes vote in English Canada, many of them moved to what would become the associate state of Québec. The 'no' vote might have prevailed had it not been for the great rallying cry of international voices appealing to the Canadian social conscience, or for the shock of dire economic times that followed the devastating terrorist attacks that paralyzed the three biggest Canadian cities. The attacks led to a number of new security regulations, including American occupation of Canadian airspace. Meanwhile,

Canadian nationalists such as Taylor or international relations scholar Stephen Clarkson, also a nationalist, an alternative to increased continental integration is to affect change by forging alliances with other middle powers that share a position on the so-called 'semi-periphery'.[236]

The agenda for such an alliance, from the point of view of the left, could be structured around the aims of a global egalitarianism that seeks, for example, to protect endangered environments, end child labour, redistribute resources and revise trade agreements. In addition to putting pressure on the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and other international agencies to ensure the protection of public services, workers' rights and the environment, this middle power coalition might also consider revising the mantras of export-led growth. For there is, as Victor argues, a zero sum game when it comes to trade, for which poor countries most in need of growth keep finding themselves on the losing end.

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corporate Canada insisted that there was only one way of avoiding permanent economic disarray. A portion of the older generation still clung to the idea of a distinctly progressive political culture in North America. Some couldn't face the prospect of dying as American citizens. But in the end, a majority of English Canadians were convinced of their world historical importance. They saw themselves as the last best hope to thwart the increasingly aggressive competition between nations – a competition that basically consisted of putting "leading edge technology at the service of feudal values". Chantal Hebert, "Canada Sans Québec, the 51st State," in *Canada in 2020: Twenty Leading Voices Imagine Canada's Future* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2008).

[236] Marjorie Griffin Cohen and Stephen Clarkson, *Governing under Stress : Middle Powers and the Challenge of Globalization*, Globalization and the Semi-Periphery (Black Point, N.S. : London :: Fernwood Pub. ; Zed Books, 2004).

In taking an active role in such a coalition, the greater aim for Canada would be to help shape new global political and economic realities, while at once finding a place for itself within such configurations. Whatever clout Canada has needs to be used strategically in order to help "cope with the ecological situation but also with the dangerous speculative flows of capital and investments, and the adjudication of treaties, questions which are a matter of life and death for us and for other countries."[237] The country is well placed to serve as a leader in these matters, considering both its vast endowment of the world's natural resources and the particularly high standard of living shared by its people.

Addressing these challenges will require greater cooperation among states, but also a better use of international agencies such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, WTO and G20. What is also needed, however, is a much greater level of participation in international society on the part of citizens themselves. Indeed, what is needed is the densification of the global web of civil associations – what is increasingly referred to as 'world civil society'. This must happen at the level of parties, unions and movements weaving ties across borders, but also with the proliferation of NGOs such as Oxfam, Democracy Watch, Greenpeace and Doctors Without Borders. Only if Canadian governments and citizens work in combination to achieve these goals will we manage to broaden

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[237] Charles Taylor, "On Identity, Alienation and the Consequences of September 11th: Interview with Hartmut Rosa and Arto Laitinen," in *Perspectives on the Philsophy of Charles Taylor*, ed. A. Laitinen and N. H. Smith (Helsinki: Societas Philosophica Fennica, 2002), p. 172.

our ideals and "collectively devise the tools that will see us realize our potential as citizens of the world."[238]

[238] Taylor, "Globalization and the Future of Canada," p. 1.

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