

Chapter Four

~ The Trouble with Culture

MAKING UP THE DIFFERENCE—IS CULTURE A GOOD?—THE
PRESERVATIONIST ETHIC—NEGATION AS AFFIRMATION—
THE DIVERSITY PRINCIPLE

MAKING UP THE DIFFERENCE

It hasn't escaped notice that "culture"—the word—has been getting a hefty workout in recent years. The notion seems to be that everything from anorexia to zydeco is illuminated by being displayed as the product of some group's culture.¹ It has reached the point that when you hear the word "culture," you reach for your dictionary.

Culture's major rival in its kudzu-like progression is "diversity," a favorite now of corporate CEOs and educational administrators, politicians and pundits. And "cultural diversity" brings these two trends together. It has become one of the most pious of the pieties of our age that the United States is a society of enormous cultural diversity. American diversity is indeed easily granted, and so is the need of a response to that diversity. What isn't so clear is that it is our *cultural* diversity that deserves attention.

Let's begin with a place where the idea of somebody's culture really does appear to explain something. When Jews from the *shtetl* and Italians from the *villaggio* arrived at Ellis Island, they brought with them a rich brew of what we call culture. They brought a language and stories and songs and sayings in it; they transplanted a religion with specific rituals, beliefs, and traditions, a cuisine of a certain hearty peasant quality, and distinctive modes of dress; and they came with particular ideas about family life. It was often reasonable for their new neighbors to ask what these first-generation immigrants were doing, and why; and a sensible answer would frequently have been, "It's an Italian thing," "It's a Jewish thing," or, simply, "It's their culture."

In America, it is striking how much of this form of difference has vanished. The proportion of foreign-born Americans is far less than it was seventy years ago; rates of exogamy among immigrant groups have soared just in the past few decades; fewer and fewer Americans live in neighborhoods with a concentration of people who share their "national" origins. The rhetoric of diversity has risen as its demographic reality has declined. The sociologist Mary Waters has argued persuasively that the cultural residue of that rich immigrant gumbo has become thin gruel.² There are still seders and nuptial masses, still gefilte fish and spaghetti. But how much does an Italian name tell you, these days, about church attendance, or knowledge of Italian, or tastes in food or spouses? Even Jews, who, given their status as a small non-Christian group in an overwhelmingly Christian society, might have been expected to keep their "difference" in focus, are getting harder to identify as a cultural group.

The usual story of immigration doesn't apply to the descendants of African slaves, who have not had the privilege of becoming "white." Yet the striking contrast between black and white stories can lead us to neglect what they have in common. There are, indeed, forms of English speech that are black: even if there are also large regional and class variations in black, as in white, speech. But what we are talking about here are all forms of *English*. Indeed, despite the vast waves of immigration of the last few decades, something like 97 percent of adult Americans, whatever their color, speak English "like a native"; and, with the occasional adjustment for an accent here and there, those 97 percent can all understand one other. Leave out recent immigrants and the number gets close to 100 percent.

Not only blacks and whites, but Asians and Native Americans share the English language. Even Hispanics, the one American ethnic group *defined* by language, prove no exception. People talk a great deal nowadays about the Hispanization of America, and you can indeed hear Spanish spoken in stores and on street corners in places you wouldn't have heard it thirty years ago. But, as the linguist Geoffrey Nunberg has pointed out, the proportion of non-English-speaking residents is just a quarter of what it was in 1890, in the midst of the last great period of immigration. He cites a Florida poll that shows that 98 percent of Hispanics want their children to speak English well; and a RAND Corpora-

tion study showing that in California the vast majority of first-generation Hispanics have native fluency in English, and only half of their children speak Spanish at all.³ If being American means understanding English, then U.S.-born Hispanics overwhelmingly (and increasingly) pass the test. Rates of English fluency run equally high among the children of immigrants from Asia.

Language is only one of many things most Americans share. This is also, for example, a country where almost every citizen knows something about baseball and basketball. And Americans share a familiarity with our consumer culture. They shop American style and know a good deal about the same consumer goods: Coca-Cola, Nike, Levi-Strauss, Ford, Nissan, GE. They have mostly seen Hollywood movies and know the names of some stars; and even the few who watch little or no television can probably tell you the names of some of its "personalities."

The supposedly persistent differences of religion, too, turn out to be shallower than you might think. Indeed, the often-remarked-upon growth of certain orthodox and fundamentalist sects seems to attest to the pervasion of the civic creed, if only by reaction. In the main, American Judaism is, as is often observed, extraordinarily American. Catholics in this country are a nuisance for Rome just because they are . . . well, so Protestant. They typically claim individual freedom of conscience, for example—so they don't simply take the church's line on contraception or divorce.⁴ Above all, most Americans who claim a religion (which means pretty much most Americans) regard it as essentially private, something for which they desire neither help nor hindrance from the government. Even Christian Coalition parents who want prayer in the schools generally just want their own children sustained in their faith; they don't want the public school to set about converting the children of others. In these key respects—the sovereignty of the individual conscience within the confession, and the privacy of religious belief—American religion, whatever its formal sectarian designation, tends to be decidedly Protestant. Many of the religious traditions from Asia that have increased in significance in the present wave of immigration are also quickly Americanizing: much of American Islam, for example, is as happy with the separation of church and state as most Muslims elsewhere are resistant to it.

Coming, as I do, from Ghana, I find the contrast with a nation of a more substantial diversity of folkways to be striking. Take language.

When I was a child, we lived in a household where you could hear at least three mother tongues spoken every day. Ghana, with a population close to that of New York State, has several dozen languages in active use and no one language that is spoken at home—or even fluently understood—by a majority of the population.

So why, in America, which seems so much less diverse than most other societies, are we so preoccupied with diversity and so inclined to conceive of it as cultural? By now, it will come as no surprise when I say that the diversity that preoccupies us is really a matter not so much of cultures as of identities.

As we've seen, the social identities that clamor for recognition are extremely multifarious. Some groups have the names of the earlier ethnicities: Italian, Jewish, Polish. Some correspond to the old races (black, Asian, Indian); or to religions (Baptist, Catholic, Jewish, again). Some are basically regional (Southern, Western, Puerto Rican). Yet others are new groups that meld together people of particular geographic origins (Hispanic, Asian American) or are social categories (woman, gay, bisexual, disabled, Deaf) that are none of these. And, nowadays, we are not the slightest bit surprised when someone remarks upon the "culture" of such groups. Gay culture, Deaf culture, Chicano culture, Jewish culture: see how these phrases trip off the tongue. But if you ask what distinctively marks off gay people or Deaf people or Jews from others, it is not obviously the fact that to each identity there corresponds a distinct culture. "Hispanic" sounds like the name of a cultural group defined by sharing the cultural trait of speaking Spanish; but, as I've already pointed out, half the second-generation Hispanics in California don't speak Spanish fluently, and in the next generation the proportion will fall. "Hispanic" is, of course, a category that's as made-in-the-U.S.A. as black and white, a product of immigration, an artifact of the U.S. census. Whatever "culture" Guatemalan peasants and Cuban professionals have in common, the loss of Spanish confirms that Hispanic, as a category, is thinning out culturally in the way that white ethnicity has already done.

You might wonder, in fact, whether there isn't a connection between the thinning of the cultural content of identities and the rising stridency of their claims. Those European immigrants, with their richly distinct customs, were busy demanding the linguistic Americanization of their children, making sure they learned America's official culture. One sus-

pects they didn't need to insist on the public recognition of their culture, because they simply took it for granted. Their middle-class descendants, whose domestic lives are conducted in English and extend eclectically from MTV to Chinese takeout, are discomfited by a sense that their identities are somehow shallow by comparison with those of their *nonnas* and *bubbeh*s; and so they are busy demanding we all acknowledge the importance of their difference.

Something similar has happened with African Americans. When there were still legal barriers to full citizenship, before the judicial decisions from *Brown* to *Loving* and the civil rights legislation of the sixties, the public recognition of a unique black culture was not exactly the major item on the black political agenda. Black people wanted recognition by state and society of things they had in common with white people: their humanity and those famous "inalienable rights." In part as a result of these legal changes, middle-class African Americans, who were always quite close in language and religion to their white Protestant neighbors, are now in many cultural and economic respects even closer. And just at this moment, many of them have been attracted to an Afrocentrism that demands the recognition in public life of the cultural distinctness of African Americans.

I am not denying—who could?—that there are significant differences between the average experiences of blacks and whites in the United States. We all know of the concentration of the poorest blacks in inner cities with terrible schools and no jobs; the persistence of discrimination in housing, employment, and the legal system; the tendency of whites to flee neighborhoods whose black populations rise beyond a "tipping point." Many poor urban blacks (like just as many poor rural whites) are doing badly in an economy that is supposed to be doing well. All this I grant. But the fact is that the black middle class is also larger and doing better than it ever has; and it is primarily they, not the poor, who have led the fight for the recognition of a distinctive African American cultural heritage, just in a moment when cultural differences are diminishing.

None of this is to say that we shouldn't take seriously the many claims made on culture's behalf; but it does suggest a measure of wariness as we approach a singularly boggy terrain. The culture concept has, of course, been historicized and anatomized within an inch of its life.

These days, in the context of globalization, people have been inclined to fret about the export of Western culture; but among the most successful Western cultural imports has been the concept of culture itself—a concept that has then been mobilized against "cultural imperialism." All over the world, Marshall Sahlins has pointed out, some variant of the Western term has been appropriated by other peoples: this Amazonian and that Solomon Islander find that they have a "culture." As he concludes, "The cultural self-consciousness developing among imperialism's erstwhile victims is one of the more remarkable phenomena of world history in the later twentieth century."⁵ When I was a child, in my hometown of Kumasi, the "Cultural Center" was a place where you could go and listen—and dance—to drumming, and watch our *kēntē* cloth being woven and our goldweights being cast in brass. You could visit a model of a "traditional compound" and see how our ancestors cooked for our chiefs. The idea was that it was *our* culture being celebrated and represented; and when we were setting off there we would say, in Asante-Twi, *yēkō kōkya*, "we are going to culture"—"kōkya" (pronounced "ko-cha") being the way the word "culture" has passed into our language. Many years later I was setting out with a friend who works at the palace of the Asante Queen Mother for some celebration about which he was greatly excited, and I asked him why it mattered so. He looked at me in puzzlement for a moment and replied: "*Ėyē yē kōkya*." It is our culture.

I don't want to reprise a genealogy that has been traced with a good deal of careful scholarship elsewhere, but it's fair to say that our word derives much of its energy from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German romanticism, a formidable Counter-Enlightenment unto itself. At least since Norbert Elias's *The Civilizing Process*, which appeared in German in 1939, it has been customary to contrast the German notion of *Kultur* (which is the possession of a *Volk*, and which aspires to authenticity) to the French ideal of *civilisation* (which is meant to be a universal ideal, and which aspires to progressive rationality).⁶ Yet while "civilization" would fall into conceptual disrepute, "culture" would gain extraordinary intellectual traction. Before long, it came to be taken as a disciplinary subject by ethnologists, notably Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, whose 1871 definition of the word is widely quoted: Culture, he wrote, "is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts,

morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” In the twentieth century, especially after Franz Boas, this social-scientific notion becomes attended by a rapidly proliferating profession of “cultural anthropologists.” In the postwar era, it became common to think of culture as something like a language, something whose codes might admit of systematic explication. Or, perhaps (and this was the postmodern turn), interpretation would always itself remain just another cultural practice: perhaps, then, cultures were more like linguistic expressions, like poems, made things.⁷ But then, nearly every conceivable position has been adopted and critiqued in the course of a century’s debate. So much so that the question arises whether culture, having allowed us an expansive view, should finally, like Wittgenstein’s ladder, be thrown away. The notion has now, as I say, attained ubiquity: but at a cost of conceptual purchase. It is a nearly biblical predicament. What shall it profit a word if it shall gain the whole world and lose its own soul?

IS CULTURE A GOOD?

My particular interest in this chapter, of course, will be the roles it has been assigned in political theory, where, as we’ll see, it has occasioned no shortage of confusion. There are many ways in which culture might matter to political theory—and, in particular, to social justice—but surely the simplest way of bringing the two together has been to categorize culture as a resource, or good. Where this categorizing is defended, rather than simply assumed, you find several lines of argument, and more than one interpretation of “good.” Let me take up two leading approaches in turn.

Culture as Primary Good

For Rawls, of course, goods represent the “satisfaction of rational desire,” and primary goods “are things which it is supposed a rational man wants whatever else he wants.” As “broad categories,” Rawls cites “rights and liberties, opportunities and powers, income and wealth,” but also “a sense of one’s own worth.”⁸ This deliberately sketchy formu-

lation appears to leave the door open to many other candidates—not least among them, Will Kymlicka says, being *culture*. Indeed, he thinks Rawls has not just left the door open to it but sat it down and served it tea. “Rawls’s own argument for the importance of liberty as a primary good is also an argument for the importance of cultural membership as a primary good,” he writes in *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*. That’s because autonomy requires choosing, and culture provides “the context of choice”: it is “only through having a rich and secure cultural structure that people can become aware, in a vivid way, of the options available to them, and intelligently examine their value.” Thus the concern to shore up our culture “accords with, rather than conflicts with, the liberal concern for our ability and freedom to judge the value of our life-plans.”⁹

There are variants of the basic idea to which Kymlicka is also sympathetic. He follows Ronald Dworkin (who invites us to see culture as a public good, like parks and bridges) in the view that culture “provides the spectacles through which we identify experiences as valuable”;¹⁰ and Margalit and Raz (in their paper “National Self-Determination”) in the view that “familiarity with a culture determines the boundaries of the imaginable.”¹¹ Note, again, that Kymlicka’s approach is avowedly individualist, inasmuch as the good involved is ultimately a good to persons, rather than peoples. And this is important to bear in mind because in Kymlicka’s arguments, as in those of so many other writers on the subject, “culture” sometimes refers to the Tylorian package and sometimes refers to membership in a “cultural group” (in other words, to what I have been calling an identity), and the shifting usages tend to be poorly marked.

What follows, politically, from the notion that culture is a primary good? Group rights, of course, are frequently taken to violate the core of liberalism. Isaiah Berlin famously warned against the dangers of expanding the “self” to mean the tribe, race, and other superindividual entities.¹² Certainly the basic move in much “liberal multiculturalism” has been to assign groups the sorts of liberties and protections that are ordinarily understood to be the province of the citizen. But, for all the reasons we’ve seen, Kymlicka believes that the conflict between individualism and group rights is a mirage, and that those rights, at least if they are properly titrated, really serve the ends of liberal individualism.

It's no more illiberal for a society to protect my culture, in his view, than it is for a society to protect my property. Hence his endorsement of what Iris Young calls "differentiated citizenship," of the notion that "some forms of group difference can only be accommodated if their members have certain group-specific rights."¹³ Or as William Blake would have it, "One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression."

Kymlicka has worked out, in commendable detail, a culture-friendly approach that aims to be consistent with the mainstream of liberal thought (which he identifies with Rawls, Dworkin, and Nagel). His paradigm cases center on the aboriginal communities in Canada, to whom he would extend "cultural rights." (For example, these communities would be able to impose residency requirements, regulations as to land sale, and the like.)¹⁴ It might appear that the autonomy of the individual aboriginal is thereby sacrificed, at least in some degree, for the sake of the autonomy of the aboriginal group: but Kymlicka wants us to resist just this conclusion, and to see that, culture being a primary good, the autonomy of the individual indigene depends upon the sustenance of the "societal culture" to which he or she belongs. In the case of immigrants, particularly where they are present in sizable numbers, Kymlicka would provide weaker "polyethnic" measures. These might include positive steps to prevent discrimination, public funding of their "cultural practices," exemption from differentially burdensome regulations, and so forth. "If it is acceptable for immigrants to maintain pride in their ethnic identity," he asserts, "then it is natural to expect that public institutions will be adapted to accommodate this diversity."¹⁵ But here the primary aim is to enable integration. And the sparser the representation of the immigrant group, the lesser its claim to such polyethnic privileges.

It's worth emphasizing that his expressed rationale for such accommodations rests on the conventional liberal values of equality and autonomy. If an individual needs access to his culture to make meaningful choices (and to enjoy self-respect), these sorts of protections are simply in the service of garden-variety liberal individualism. To guarantee citizens some basic level of a primary good is a prerequisite for being a just society. Kymlicka has thus taken great pains to show that his practical suggestions and the points of principle are neatly aligned.

So much so, in fact, that to see the problems in this account, we may find it helpful to start with a peculiar feature of the policy recommendations. Say I am a villager from Kokora, Estonia, who has decided to move to Terril, Iowa, where there are cows and cornfields but nobody else from my part of the world. If "culture" denotes the usual anthropological bundle—encompassing everything from language to nuptial and culinary practices—I shall be hard-pressed to "practice" it. Perhaps this does not strike you as a difficulty: I can practice *your* culture. This will not do: when Kymlicka maintains that an individual, in order to make meaningful choices, needs "access to societal culture," he stresses that what's needed isn't just any culture: it must be "one's *own* culture."¹⁶ Yet if I and my "culture" are Kokoran, and I cannot practice my culture on my own, what will Kymlickan "multicultural citizenship" offer me? Is the state to provide me with others from my hometown? Nobody would suggest such a thing, and not merely because of administrative costs. Only if there were a significant contingent of Kokorans (or, calibrating less finely, of Estonians), with a complement of cooks and priests and other cultural laborers, would he propose those "polyethnic measures"—external protections of my ethnic ways. And only if there were a large and long-settled Kokoran contingent would I be entitled to those stronger measures he calls "cultural rights." Insofar as you take seriously his notion of culture as a resource, though, that's a strange outcome: if culture is a resource, why are remedial measures greatest, as if by some reverse-Robin Hood logic, when I'm least in need? Why, when I am most deprived, am I entitled to the least support? The paradox suggests there is something wrong in the picture of culture as a resource.¹⁷ (Let me be clear that my target is not the particulars of the policy but its rationale. There can be all sorts of reasons—some democratic and responsive to voting power; some prudential and responsive to administrative efficiency—to make greater provisions for sizable ethnic minorities: for having, in a Florida election, bilingual ballots designed for Spanish speakers, but none for Occitan speakers. The Robin Hood *reductio* arises only if you insist that culture is a resource.)

This suspicion is confirmed when we notice that resources, including primary goods, are, in the Rawlsian tradition, things you can have more of or less of; the details of their distribution are something that a just

society is deeply concerned with. And yet (aside from a few highly anomalous instances) I doubt that it makes much sense to speak in terms of the unequal distribution of culture. It is relatively straightforward to compare your household's net worth to mine; I cannot see that our respective "cultures" admit of such ordinal assessment. To refer back to a discussion in the previous chapter, culture, in Kymlicka's account, sounds very much like what Dworkin called a parameter; and parameters, in his scheme, are not among the things that it is proper for the government to equalize. For they are, by stipulation, not resources; they define, rather, the person whose resources are to be equalized. The resource model, *in fine*, raises more conundrums than it resolves.

Kymlicka tries to make headway here by invoking a term that had been used by Margalit and Raz: "decayed culture." Some unfortunates are possessors of decayed cultures, he says, and we ought to try to rejuvenate them. I confess I am not sure how to make sense of this notion.¹⁸ If what we have in mind is a troubled period of cultural transition, though, it isn't obvious that such conditions diminish our liberty or autonomy—our ability to choose among a wide range of options. Indeed, as John Tomasi suggests, a greater degree of personal autonomy may be afforded by a less rigid "choosing context," where there are fewer constraints on what counts as an acceptable life plan than there would be in a more stable cultural community.¹⁹ That culture changes is a commonplace. What's not easy to imagine is a person, or people, bereft of culture. (Culture-as-resource talk is surely not motivated by the freak occurrence of a raised-by-wolves wild child.) "Taken existentially," Tomasi observes, "cultural membership is a primary good only in the same uninteresting sense as is, say, oxygen: since (practically) no one is differentially advantaged with respect to that good, it generates no special rights."²⁰ Indeed, the problem with grand claims for the necessity of culture is that we can't readily imagine an alternative. It's like *form*: you can't not have it.

Now, we could take Kymlicka's defense of culture as a "choosing context" to entail not just that you have a culture but that you have this or that particular culture, in which case the claim goes from being trivial to being untenable. For if what's meant is that the character of a culture—the norms and values and regalia of some configuration of

social forms—must be arrested, laminated, and protected from change, then this is a position that few would wish to endorse (Kymlicka least of all, it should be said). Liberals tend to be sympathetic to a Millian notion of experimentation and social progress; the prospect of freezing existing prejudices and inequities and bigotries—the edict that "whatever is, is right"—is hardly a palatable one.

As we saw, multicultural liberals often speak of culture as an ethico-epistemological lens—a way of seeing, of acting, of being; as something that provides a framework of concepts and values, something that "determines the boundaries of the imaginable." But, as I warned, there is often a slippage between the idea of "culture" *simpliciter* and the idea of "cultural membership." It might be objected that we have focused too much on this first conception, and that the argument for culture as a good gains plausibility if we give proper emphasis to the notion of membership—of *belonging*.

Claims about belonging, I suspect, derive their plausibility from the basic notion that it's good to be socialized, good to have social ties; it's hard to imagine such pleasures of association without a shared social context that looks like a shared Tylorian "culture." Raz, in a 1994 essay on multiculturalism, seems to be upholding something unexceptionable when he states, "It is in the interest of every person to be fully integrated in a cultural group."²¹ Yet if the value we're honoring is ultimately that of sociality, of being integrated into a group, one might fairly ask what work is being done by the "cultural" predicate. More to the point: what's meant by being "fully integrated" in a cultural group?

Much depends on how you construe this requirement. Was Rimbaud—scandalizing *tout le monde* before he went hopscotching through Africa—fully integrated into a cultural group? What about the Sudanese Islamic scholar Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, who was executed for heresy in 1985 because of his opposition to traditional sharia? Some people, it appears, actively resist being fully integrated into a group, so that they may gain some measure of distance from its reflexive assumptions; to them, "integration" can sound like regulation, even restraint—especially to liberals who, by tradition, favor *Freiheit* over *Einheit*. Nor is this merely an affectation of the vauntedly cosmopolitan. One may find this theme memorably expressed by that least cosmopolitan of poets (to go by self-description, anyway), Philip Larkin. In "The Impor-

tance of Elsewhere," Larkin writes of the strangeness of Ireland, at once forbidding and inviting ("the salt rebuff of speech, / Insisting so on difference, made me welcome"), its effect of showing him to be "separate, not unworkable"; and the poet concludes:

Living in England has no such excuse:
These are my customs and establishments
It would be much more serious to refuse.
Here no elsewhere underwrites my existence.

But perhaps all such people—whether poet *maudit* or religious dissident—really are integrated into their cultural group, so long as we delimit that group correctly, on the every-church-is-orthodox-to-itself principle. The itinerant Cynics of fourth-century Greece, on this interpretation, may have sought to hold themselves aloof from all creed and custom but were fully integrated into the cultural group of their fellow Cynics. Perhaps the seemingly marginalized figure is really integrated into his own cultural cohort, correctly defined, his culture being whatever his culture is. But then the "integration" requirement becomes largely emptied of content. "Most people live in groups of these kinds, so that those who belong to none are denied full access to the opportunities that are shaped in part by the group's culture," Margalit and Raz maintain.²² Only, who are these people who belong to none? We should be hard-pressed to find them, even in the squalor of the refugee camp. "The same is true of people who grow up among members of a group so that they absorb its culture but are then denied access to it because they are denied full membership of the group," they continue. But one is again hard-pressed to think of people who fit the bill. The Jews of Admiral Horthy's Budapest—to consider some apparent candidates almost at random—are poorly described in these terms, for the exclusion they faced wasn't cultural, in the first instance (what they lacked proper access to were things like jobs and legal protection, not the national culture); the same holds for Israeli Arabs or Turkish Kurds. We might think of the "half-caste" aboriginal children taken from their homes and adopted by "white" families, or raised in orphanages, in a program that Australian government officials conducted for more than six decades. The enormities are real, but I doubt that they are best seen as "cultural" ones. People are wronged when they are decisively excluded

from the exercise of power, when they are dispossessed and deprived of equal standing under the law. (Also, to state the obvious: when they are kidnapped and taken from loving families.) But what is at issue is, in the first instance, political, not cultural, exclusion. There are perils in mistaking one form of injury for the other. You may indeed ensure that the dispossessed enjoy a stable and distinctive cultural community—if you take that to be a priority—by a variety of means; perhaps the most efficient goes by the name segregation.

Of course, nothing could be further from what champions of cultural membership have in mind. But, as I say, what makes it so easy to sign on to the ideal of cultural membership is simply that the alternative seems to be the condition of abject friendlessness. At bottom, the case for membership is just the case against being a hermit. And precious little of the misfortune in our world has to do with that uncommon condition.

Culture as Social Good

So far we've been exploring an individualist approach to the subject of culture, in which it figures as a resource available (in the way of Rawlsian resources) to individuals. Maybe we've been wrong-footed by that individualism. There's an orthogonal approach to the subject, which centers on the notion that culture is an irreducibly *social* good. And what's meant by a "social good" is something different from a merely public good, like a bridge or a dam, which is justified in terms of the individuals who benefit. Rather, it is a good whose value cannot be reduced to the satisfaction of a collection of individuals' desires. Charles Taylor, who is the most persuasive exponent of this vision of culture, is a vigilant antireductionist. He objects strenuously to the decomposable conception of such goods, in which (as he lampoons it) "a certain proportion of Quebeckers have a 'taste' for the preservation of the French language, and so this is a good, just like chocolate-chip ice cream and transistor radios." To think this way is to think ourselves outside of culture and estrange ourselves from what matters about it. "The spokesmen for nationalism, or republican rule, don't see its value as contingent on its popularity," he urges. "They think that these are goods whether we recognize them or not, goods we ought to recog-

nize.”²³ Others have registered consonant concerns. “Group interests cannot be reduced to individual interests,” Margalit and Raz have argued, in their essay on national self-determination. “It makes sense to talk of a group’s prospering or declining, of actions and policies as serving the group’s interest or of harming it, without having to cash this in terms of individual interests. The group may flourish if its culture prospers, but this need not mean that the lot of its members or of anyone else has improved.”²⁴

For Charles Taylor, the argument is a simple one. “As individuals we value certain things; we find certain fulfillments good, certain experiences satisfying, certain outcomes positive,” he observes. “But these things can only be good in that certain way, or satisfying after their particular fashion, because of the background understanding developed in our culture.” A conclusion follows swiftly: “If these things are goods, then other things being equal so is the culture that makes them possible. If I want to maximize these goods, then I must want to preserve and strengthen this culture. But culture as a good, or more cautiously as a locus of some goods (for there might be much that is reprehensible as well), is not an individual good.”²⁵

Taylor’s caution serves us well, for the difference between being a good and being a locus of goods is not a negligible one. The existence of a monetary system is, in the relevant sense, a locus of wealth; it is not a form of wealth. And your wealth can still be an individual good even if the monetary system is not.²⁶ Even if we thought that culture—by which Taylor means “the background of practices, institutions, and understandings” that give meaning to our actions—was a locus of goods, *its* social nature wouldn’t vouchsafe that those goods were social.

Indeed, the very existence of irreducibly social goods remains controversial. Some philosophers, notably James Griffin, have argued that there aren’t any genuinely communal goods, valuable not just to the individuals in a community but to the community itself, as a distinct entity. On this line of argument, the “value thesis” subsists on borrowed plausibility. The goods that we think of as social (or “communal,” in Griffin’s nomenclature) are defined in terms of a relationship among persons—they are defined in terms of a group. They are goods an individual cannot enjoy by himself; they depend upon social inter-

actions. Where we go wrong is to move from these unexceptionable definitional and causal propositions to the proposition that this or that value cannot be accounted for by reference to the role it plays in the lives of individuals.²⁷

Culture, Taylor writes,

is not a mere instrument of the individual goods. It can’t be distinguished from them as their merely contingent condition, something they could in principle exist without. That makes no sense. It is essentially linked to what we have identified as good. Consequently, it is hard to see how we could deny it the title of good, not just in some weakened, instrumental sense, like the dam, but as intrinsically good. To say that a certain kind of self-giving heroism is good, or a certain quality of aesthetic experience, must be to judge the cultures in which this kind of heroism and that kind of experience are conceivable options as good cultures. If such virtue and experience are worth cultivating, then the cultures have to be worth fostering, not as contingent instruments, but for themselves.²⁸

But who is the “we” in this passage? Suppose, first, that it is someone outside the culture in question. And consider, by way of example, the officer-class ethic of honor that underwrote the dueling practices of Arthur Schnitzler’s Vienna. Suppose you were brought by reading *Leutnant Gustl* to understand it, to sympathize with the dishonored junior officer and his desire for vindication. (This would be an extremely odd response: but we are engaged in philosophical conjecture.) Does this count as seeing the dueler’s heroism as good? If so, then Taylor seems to be just wrong: one *can* recognize something as a good embedded in a certain culture without remotely mourning this culture’s passing. If not, then, presumably, to count it as good is to count it as good oneself. But then one’s own judgment shows that this culture is not necessary to sustain *this* value. Suppose, then, that the “we” is someone *inside* the culture. The fact that one values what one values isn’t an argument for anything, let alone an argument for “fostering” some culture or other. Any form of life would be self-validating in that sense. To belong to a moral culture is to hold this or that as a good; it would be an exercise in narcissism, not to mention *petitio principii*, to declare that your culture is good because it contains things you have identified as good.

Now, a value is like a fax machine: it's not much use if you're the only one who has one. So if one thinks that "a certain kind of self-giving heroism" is a value, one would do well, as Taylor suggests, to try to promote self-giving heroism of that kind. Perhaps, though, the culture that surrounds and sustains it contains lots of things one disapproves of. So we have to proceed cautiously here. For one thing, it's unclear how we are to bound the thing called "culture"; in the holistic Tylorian conception, we'd be required to sustain absolutely everything, which can't be quite right. And so we end up moving between culture writ large (this great sea of practices, conventions, concepts, values) and culture writ small (often denoted by attributive phrases: the "culture of" this or that). Suppose you were an American who valued chastity and worried that, after the sixties, it was no longer generally valued by your compatriots. You might then wish to promote a culture (writ small) of chastity—to spread an abstinence movement, and hope that it acquired adherents. But you wouldn't be promoting the culture (writ large) of 1880—or whenever you thought chastity was last adequately appreciated—because you wouldn't be concerned with the countless other things that it might have come with (such as, well, the particular culture of honor that led to dueling). That a good is embedded in a way of life may suggest a reason to *record* that way of life; it does not suggest a reason to promote it. (Then again, the fact that you are driven to change the culture suggests that an individual can, solitarily, hold to a value no longer in general circulation.) For all these reasons, culture as a social good proves to be a shape-shifting target.

THE PRESERVATIONIST ETHIC

What worries many advocates and activists, a fair number of political theorists among them, isn't culture's conceptual shiftiness; what worries them is the perishability of actual cultures. In their view, we can't take cultures seriously—whether as an individual or a social good—without concerning ourselves with their preservation. Indeed, the words and images with which people speak of cultural destruction—or, more neutrally, cultural change—typically refer to the destruction of human life. Assimilation is figured as annihilation. The

Karens, in Burma, worry about their "gradual extinction as a community"; the Bihar, in India, worry that they may become "extinct like the American Indians"; the Sikhs, if not enabled to live as equals, face "virtual extinction"; Pakistan's Sindhis fear being "turned into Red Indians." Donald Horowitz, in his magisterial study *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, has had no difficulty in compiling a long list of such descriptions, each equating cultural and physical survival.²⁹ So perhaps we should not be surprised when William Galston likens the liberalizing of illiberal communities to the My Lai massacre, casting Kymlicka, of all people, as the William Calley of culture. Few issues arouse such strong emotions, and the more abstractly the issue is cast, the stronger those emotions are. As a rule, however, the preservationist ethic is simply posited, not defended.

A rationale might be found in Ronald Dworkin's proposal that we see ourselves as trustees of our culture: "We inherited a cultural structure, and we have some duty, out of simple justice, to leave that structure at least as rich as we found it."³⁰ But to say this is not to endorse, let alone provide a defense of, the preservationist ethic, which is to say, a concern for the survival of a particular culture. Nothing forbids a responsible trustee to trade the Union Carbide shares in his portfolio for U.S. Steel shares, and nothing in the trusteeship model would forbid us to switch our national language from English to Spanish or Esperanto. Margalit and Raz come closer to a defense when they insist that "encompassing" cultural groups do better when they run themselves. But the winds between political autonomy and cultural differentiation blow in both directions; each is bound to affect the other. And it's perfectly possible that when ethnic groups are submerged into larger entities—when the *Napolitani* start to think of themselves as *Italiani*—individuals may do better. From the point of view of ethical individualism, the question we must pose is, So what if Provençal—or Savoyard or Neapolitan—identity loses its salience as power ascends to a more overarching level? Is it morally troubling that the peoples of the Champa kingdom were long ago absorbed into what's now thought of as Vietnam? That formerly distinct populations of Madi and Bari have coalesced into the Lugbara in northeastern Uganda? Might it not be better if Hutu and Tutsi all became Rwandans or Burundians?

"Most indigenous peoples themselves," Kymlicka writes, understand that "the nature of their cultural identity . . . is dynamic, not static." Indeed, he has argued that societal cultures are "not permanent or immutable," for otherwise "group-specific rights would not be needed to protect them."³¹ Yet if cultures are impermanent and mutable, if they are understood by their possessors as dynamic and not static, you may wonder how group-specific rights (whether membership or collective) can be founded on the goal of their preservation.

Often, the issue is resolved through the invocation of a sharp distinction between inside and outside forces. Avishai Margalit and Moshe Habertal, in "Liberalism and the Right to Culture," argue that people have an "overriding interest" that sponsors a right to culture: in particular, a right that it survive, untrammelled by outsiders. Kymlicka, too, seeks to insulate cultures from "outside" forces while permitting them to respond to internal ones. Only in the face of outer-directed change should we speak of "the culture itself being threatened," he says. "It is one thing to learn from the larger world; it is another thing to be swamped by it, and self-government rights may be needed for smaller nations to control the direction and rate of change."³²

If you're wondering what counts as "swamping," in his account, and how, precisely, it harms, you're on your own. And yet, especially in the context of immigration, we ought to recall that the notion cuts both ways. Mrs. Thatcher favored the term, it will be remembered, in her complaints about the threat represented by the influx of dark-skinned foreigners. It was precisely what Charles Moore, then editor of the *Spectator*, appealed to in his notorious remarks of a decade ago:

You can be British without speaking English or being Christian or being white, but nevertheless Britain is basically English-speaking and Christian and white, and if one starts to think that it might become Urdu-speaking and Muslim and brown, one gets frightened and angry. Next door to me live a large family of Muslims from the Indian subcontinent. We are friendly enough to one another and they have done us various small acts of kindness. During the Gulf War, however, I heard their morning prayers coming through the wall, and I felt a little uneasy. If such people had outnumbered whites in our square, I should have felt alarmed. Such feelings are not only natural, surely—they are right. You ought to have a sense of your identity, and part of that sense derives from your nation and your race.³³

Once you elevate protection against swamping to a principle, then, you need to think about who may feel entitled to its protection. I do not say that it's illegitimate to worry about swamping—I can imagine ways of making sense of it, and we rightly abhor policies, like those of the Chinese in Tibet, that are motivated solely by the desire to weaken a way of life.³⁴ But the argument against it should be laid out, not assumed.

Yet perhaps this is all wrong. Perhaps asking people to make the case for wanting cultural survival is like asking them to make the case for craving bread: it is just because people have these strong desires that we must strive to ensure their fulfillment. The wish is self-validating. This is something like Taylor's perspective when he spells out the situation of Québécois nationalism. "Policies aimed at survival actively seek to *create* members of the community, for instance, in their assuring that future generations continue to identify as French-speakers," Taylor writes.³⁵ In culturally plural states, such societies—by which he means groups whose continuity through time consists in the transmission, through the generations, of distinctive institutions and values and practices—may legitimately seek to guarantee their own survival. And he claims that the desire for survival is not simply the desire that the culture which gives meaning to the lives of currently existing individuals should continue for them, but requires the continued existence of the culture through "indefinite future generations." As he elsewhere says, once "we're concerned with identity," nothing "is more legitimate than one's aspiration that it never be lost."³⁶

And yet the Québécois example reminds us that the political rhetoric of survival is often too modest, for what's involved is creation rather than mere preservation. As the anthropologist Richard Handler shows, in his *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (1988), the content of Québécois identity is inseparable from the ongoing discourse of Québécois nationalism:

To be Québécois one must live in Quebec and live as a Québécois. To live as a Québécois means participating in Québécois culture. In discussing this culture people speak vaguely of traditions, typical ways of behaving, and characteristic modes of conceiving the world; yet specific descriptions of these particularities are the business of the historian, ethnologist, or folklorist. Such academic researches would seem to come after the fact: that is,

given the ideological centrality of Québécois culture, it becomes worthwhile to learn about it. But the almost *a priori* belief in the existence of the culture follows inevitably from the belief that a particular human group, the Québécois nation, exists. The existence of the group is in turn predicated upon the existence of a particular culture. . . . the assertion of cultural particularity is another way of proclaiming the existence of a unique collectivity.³⁷

This isn't to say that Québécois identity is an empty urn, only that its content is in some sense incidental to the larger task of national self-definition, and that this task is more naturally seen in terms of change than of preservation.

And the same goes for other societal cultures. In the previous chapter, I pointed to the formation of ethnicities through antagonism; it is as easy to point to ethnicities whose existence, at least as distinct, singular entities, is largely the product of concerted state action. Johannes Fabian has explored the way certain ethnicities in the Congo were created precisely by colonial policies of recognition. David Laitin points out that "Hausa-Fulani" was "largely a political claim of the NPC in their battle against the South," and that, only a few decades ago, "Yoruba" would not have been a common predicate of political identity. In Ghana, an Akan political identity arises in opposition to a freshly forged Ewe identity.³⁸ The colonial-era management of "tribes"—in ways explored in David Cannadine's entertaining study, *Ornamentalism*—often led to the creation of official subject ethnicities sponsored by official "ethnic" leadership elites.

In America, too, the political existence of indigenous groups has an intimate relationship with the mechanisms of government recognition. Contemporary Pequot identity, inasmuch as it exists, or is coming to exist, is a product of federal and state policies of recognition and exemptions, in particular, tax exemptions. For, in addition to the Pequot-owned Foxwoods casino (and allied enterprises, such as the Pequot Pharmaceutical Network), there is now a two-hundred-million-dollar "state-of-the-art" Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, which has dispatched teams of archaeologists to further deepen our knowledge of a once extinct tribe, advancing the sort of project that Richard Handler referred to. I wrote earlier of the Medusa Syndrome, but sometimes Midas has a hand in things, too. The Ramapough

Mountain tribe, one of about 250 groups in the United States who identify themselves as Indians, has applied to the state of New Jersey for designation as New Jersey Indians, despite the fact that the federal government has rejected the group's claims of origin. (In 1995, the Bureau of Indian Affairs ruled that they were descendants of freed slaves, not, as they maintained, the Munsee. In the 2002–3 session of the New Jersey legislature, bills to recognize the Ramapough, among others, were introduced in the assembly and the senate.) How the state responds may well determine whether the tribe survives as such. Clearly commercial interests have conduced to the revival of once defunct ethnic identities, in a phenomenon that cynics might call casino-culturalism (even if economic motives only amplify the underlying drumbeat of insistence that "culture matters"). But what legal exemptions have called into being can readily come to command heartfelt identitarian allegiances. In the garden of cultural identities, silk flowers quickly grow roots.

Even if you grant cultural nationalism its terms of argument, however, survival can't always be squared with ethical individualism. When, in the Québécois context, Taylor writes of the "indefinite future generations," he refers to descendants of the current population. The desire for the survival of French Canadian culture is not the desire that, for a long time to come, there should be people somewhere or other who speak that Quebec language and practice those Quebec practices. It is the desire that this language and practice should be carried on from one generation to the next. A proposal to solve the problems of Canada by paying a group of unrelated people to carry on French Canadian culture on some island in the South Pacific simply would not meet the need.

Why does this matter? Because it is far from clear that we can always honor such preservationist claims while respecting the autonomy of future individuals. Parents sometimes want their children to persist in some practice that those children resist. This is true for arranged marriage for some women of Indian and Pakistani origin in Britain, to take the example I discussed earlier. In this case, the ethical principles of equal dignity that underlie liberal thinking seem to militate against allowing the parents their way because we care about the autonomy of these young women. If this is true in the individual case, it seems to me equally true where a whole generation of one group wishes to impose a

form of life on the next generation—and a fortiori true if they seek to impose it somehow on still later generations.

And once we attend to these vistas of descent, it may strike us that culture talk is not so very far from the race talk that it would supplant in liberal discourse. As I've mentioned, Kymlicka seeks to reconcile the preservationist ethic with what he concedes is the dynamic nature of culture by distinguishing between exogenous and endogenous change. "It is natural, and desirable, for cultures to change as a result of the choices of their members," he says. "We must, therefore, distinguish the existence of a culture from its 'character' at any given moment."³⁹ But to establish the identity of a culture without reference to the nature of the culture—to speak of its *existence* without recourse to its *character*—leads us toward something conceptually congruent to race. What is left without character is just the fact of descent: and while the significance of descent does not have to be seen in terms of biology, in general, or genes, in particular (as is required for a descent-based account to become a fully racial one), there is a tendency, in our scientific age, for a biological story (and usually a false one) to take over. Even if descent-based accounts resist the temptations of racialism, there remains something morally arbitrary about basing identities on the scale of thousands or millions on the bare assertion of genealogical relationships. Family rhetoric makes the best moral (and ethical) sense when it is on a family scale.

A similar problem arises when Margalit and Raz stress that membership in an "encompassing culture" is a matter of status, or belonging, rather than accomplishment: "Given that [members] are identified by a common culture, at least in part, they also share a history, for it is through a shared history that cultures develop and are transmitted."⁴⁰ But, as I've had occasion to observe in other contexts, we should not want to demarcate the group by reference to this shared history. Just as, to recognize two events at different times as part of the history of a single individual, we have to have a criterion of identity for the individual at each of those times, independent of his or her participation in the two events, so, when we recognize two events as belonging to the history of one group, we have to have a criterion of membership of the group at those two times, independent of the participation of the members in the two events. Sharing a common group history can-

not be a *criterion* for being members of the same group, for we need something by which to identify the group in order to identify *its* history; and that something cannot, on pain of circularity, be the history of the group.⁴¹

In just this vein, Walter Benn Michaels suggests that without some racialized conception of a group, one's culture could only be whatever it was that one actually practiced, and couldn't be lost or retrieved or preserved or betrayed. Thus, when Taylor says that nothing is more legitimate than one's aspiration that identity never be lost, we should ask why we speak of *loss*, rather than change. "Without some way of explaining how what people used to do but no longer do constitutes their real identity, while what they actually do does not, it cannot be said that what the former French-speakers, current English-speakers have lost is their identity," Michaels says. "My point, then, is not that nothing of value is ever lost but that identity is never lost."⁴²

Of course, speaking abstractly, a concern for survival is perfectly consistent with respect for autonomy; otherwise every genuinely liberal society would have to die in a generation. If we create a society that our descendants will want to hold on to, our personal and political values will survive in them. But here there is the difficult question of how a respect for autonomy should constrain our ethics of education. (I will explore this matter further in chapter 5.) After all, we have it to some extent in our power to make our children into the kind of people who will want to maintain our values, beliefs, and customs. Precisely because the monological view of identity is incorrect, there is no individual nugget waiting in each child to express itself, if only family and society permit its free development. We have to help children make themselves: and we have to do so according to our values because children do not begin with values of their own. To prize autonomy is to respect the conceptions of others, to weigh their plans for themselves heavily in deciding what is good for them: but children do not start out with plans or conceptions. It follows, therefore, that in education in the broad sense—the sense that is covered by the technical notion of social reproduction—we must appeal to and transmit values more substantial than a respect for liberal procedures. Liberal proceduralism is meant to allow a state to be indifferent among a variety of conceptions of the good: but what conceptions of the good there will be will

depend on what goes on in education. Teach children only that they must accept a politics in which other people's conceptions of the good are not ridden over, and there may soon be no substantive conceptions of the good at all.

In most modern societies, the education of most people is conducted by institutions run by the government. Education is, therefore, in the domain of the political. This is not just an accident: social reproduction involves collective goals. Furthermore, as children develop and come to have identities whose autonomy we should respect, the liberal state has a role in protecting the autonomy of children against their parents, churches, and communities. I would be prepared to defend the view that the state in modern society *must* be involved in education on this sort of basis: even if you disagree with this, however, you must admit that it currently does play such a role and that, for the reasons I have been discussing, this means that the state is involved in propagating elements, at least, of a substantive conception of the good. But to say all this is not to say that the state is properly concerned with the survival of specific ethnic subgroups (as opposed to their members) as an end in itself.

NEGATION AS AFFIRMATION

Earlier, I said that the carapace of "cultural preservation" often conceals a project of cultural construction; and that, as a general rule, state recognition does not leave its object untouched. That much can be taken as read. What I wish to focus on now is a special case of the general rule, one that will provide us with an illustrative paradox. What happens when a society undertakes to support a group that defines itself, in no small part, through its opposition to that society? What happens when (with apologies, once more, to Blake's "Marriage of Heaven and Hell") opposition really is true friendship?

Joseph Raz's account of a liberal multiculturalism provides a good starting point, precisely because he's aware that harmony has its limits. "One's culture constitutes (contributes to) one's identity," he writes. "Therefore slighting one's culture, persecuting it, holding it up for ridicule, slighting its value, affects members of that group"—particularly

so, he adds, "if it has the imprimatur of one's state." At the same time, Raz acknowledges that some enmity between cultures is inevitable and that "conflict is endemic to multiculturalism."⁴³

What this misses is that such enmity may constitute (contribute to) the cultures in question. That's not just a Robbers Cave observation about ethnogenesis. Cultural norms are, after all, constituted not only by what they affirm and revere, but also by what they exclude, reject, scorn, despise, ridicule. To forbid the latter set of social practices is to change the nature of the relevant social forms. Perhaps an Igbo who doesn't find the Yoruba brash and excessively self-assertive will have lost some of his Igbo-ness; certainly a Pentecostalist who found nothing objectionable in contemporary mass culture would be scarcely recognizable to his peers. To favor one thing may entail disfavoring another thing. It isn't strictly incoherent to value modesty and admire grandiosity, but it may be hard in practice to reconcile them. In their paper on national sovereignty, Margalit and Raz say it is "mere common sense" that "individual dignity and self-respect require that the groups, membership of which contributes to one's sense of identity, be generally respected and not be made a subject of ridicule, hatred, discrimination, or persecution."⁴⁴ It is common sense, but I doubt it is quite correct—I doubt, in such contexts, that we can require "respect," as opposed to simple tolerance. As I said in the preface, the sphere of "respect" is where liberal abstraction shows its strength, for the encumbered self—whom advocates of community would substitute for the abstraction of the liberal individual—is not someone we can, as a rule, be bound to respect.

The Hegelian concept of recognition, as we've seen, looms large in discussions of multiculturalism; and yet to shed light on the paradoxes of cultural support, we might invoke another Hegelian concept, that of internal negation.

But thou wilt lose the style of conqueror,
If I, thy conquest, perish by thy hate.
Then, lest my being nothing lessen thee,
If thou hate me, take heed of hating me.

So John Donne writes in "The Prohibition," a poem that Jon Elster aptly cites by way of illustrating the dynamic. "A person whose inde-

pendence requires the destruction of an external object, depends on that object in his very being and hence cannot without contradiction desire its destruction," Elster says. "Once we start thinking about it, the phenomenon is ubiquitous. It explains why militant atheism cannot do without believers, just as a certain kind of communism lives symbiotically with private property"; it explains, he adds, the nostalgia for the Cold War that some anticommunists feel—a yearning not for the stability it provided but for meaning they derived from it.⁴⁵

Imagine, then, a cultural group, the Dyspeptics, that thrives on rejection. Perhaps it had its origins in some sixteenth-century heresy, and ever since the heretics were expelled from the community they once belonged to, they have sought to remain aloof and isolated. Accordingly, the Dyspeptics behave in ways odious to others, ensuring that they will be constantly rejected, gaining strength from the hostility of outsiders, and so keeping their way of life uncorrupted by external influence. Now, however, they find themselves within a regime that welcomes them and lavishes governmental largesse upon them; and as a result the younger members of the group are beginning to question the basic tenets of the Dyspeptic creed. Of course, you might think this was a good thing. You might even take it as a vindication of your hug-a-Dyspeptic-today initiative. But such a policy cannot have as its rationale the *protection* of Dyspeptic culture. You haven't protected it; you've eroded it. The way to preserve its character would have been to encourage your non-Dyspeptic citizens to treat them with contempt. For it was under such conditions that the Dyspeptic culture arose, and under such conditions that it will best perpetuate itself.

Given that ethnic or tribal traditions often arise in adversarial circumstances, there may be no easy way to reconcile the preservationist ethic with the liberal ideal of respect for humanity. Say violin playing is common among some Romani groups because it's one of the few money-making activities a landless, migrant group can maintain: grant them some ethnoterritorial entitlement, and the violins get turned into hoes. Kymlicka dodges the issue when he claims that decayed, weakened cultures can be rejuvenated: "indigenous groups [can] become vibrant and diverse cultures, drawing on their cultural traditions while incorporating the best of the modern world, if given the requisite preconditions." We can't expect much purchase from this decidedly ad hoc, difference-split-

ting approach. Let me put aside, for a moment, the question whether we should legitimately desire this or that culture to be "diverse" (what it means for a culture to be internally diverse will be the subject of a later discussion). It should be apparent that cultural sustenance and cultural support are not the same. Often one must choose. There is no shortage of liberation movements that call for the erasure, or, anyway, transformation, of the very identities they serve—as appears to be the case with some versions of radical gay politics and, indeed, with some Dalit liberation movements in India.⁴⁶ To make sense of such a politics, we must see it as advancing the interests of its constituents as persons, in the first instance, not as identity holders. A movement for poor people does not seek to affirm their identity *as* poor people. Here the object isn't preservation but cultural or socioeconomic change. Of the Devourer and Prolific, Blake says, "these two classes of men are always upon earth, & they should be enemies; whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence." Where negation *is* affirmation, in this Blakean sense, one must finally decide whether it is culture or people who are owed respect: and this is one difference that cannot be split.

THE DIVERSITY PRINCIPLE

Here are two touchstones of English political thought:

But the inclinations of men are diverse, according to their diverse Constitutions, Customes, Opinions; as we may see in those things we apprehend by sense, as by tasting, touching, smelling; but much more in those which pertain to the common actions of life, where what this man commends, (that is to say, calls Good) the other undervalues, as being Evil; Nay, very often the same man at diverse times, praises, and dispraises the same thing. Whilst thus they doe, necessary it is there should be discord, and strife: They are therefore so long in the state of War, as by reason of the diversity of the present appetites, they mete Good and Evil by diverse measures.

If it were only that people have diversities of taste, that is reason enough for not attempting to shape them all after one model. But different persons also require different conditions for their spiritual development; and can no more exist healthily in the same moral, than all the variety of plants can

exist in the same physical atmosphere and climate. The same things which are helps to one person towards the cultivation of his higher nature, are hindrances to another. . . . unless there is a corresponding diversity in their modes of life, they neither obtain their fair share of happiness, nor grow up to the mental, moral, and aesthetic statures of which their nature is capable.

The first is from Thomas Hobbes's *De Cive*, where we learn that what causes "discord, and strife" is not so much that men fail to seek the good as that they have conflicting notions of it. The second, of course, is a passage I've already invoked from Mill's *On Liberty*.⁴⁷ For Mill's precursors—for Hobbes, quite emphatically—diversity was a problem to be solved, not a condition to be promoted. It is only with Mill that a sense of diversity as something that might be of value enters into mainstream Anglo-American political thought. Mill, influenced by the romantic fascination with difference, by Wilhelm von Humboldt's "holistic individualism," celebrates diversity as both a condition and a consequence of individuality.⁴⁸ Yet Mill's diversity doctrine really has two faces. Here, diversity is an anterior fact about human beings, which must be accommodated by a society conducive to their well-being. But diversity is also implicated in those "experiments of living" he called for; in this sense, diversity would beget diversity, for a population exposed to a variation of circumstances would grow more various. How we should be treated depends on who we are; but who we will be must be affected by how we are treated. Accordingly, it was not merely the dead hand of custom that Mill feared; there was much in modernity that concerned him, too. Indeed, to a startling degree, he anticipates contemporary complaints about the putatively flattening, homogenizing effect of mass communication and mass culture, of globalization:

The circumstances which surround different classes and individuals, and shape their characters, are daily becoming more assimilated. . . . Comparatively speaking, they now read the same things, listen to the same things, see the same things, go to the same places, have their hopes and fears directed to the same objects, have the same rights and liberties, and the same means of asserting them. . . . And the assimilation is still proceeding. All the political changes of the age promote it, since they all tend to raise the low and to lower the high. Every extension of education promotes it, because education brings people under common influences, and gives them access to the gen-

eral stock of facts and sentiments. Improvements in the means of communication promote it, by bringing the inhabitants of distant places into personal contact, and keeping up a rapid flow of changes of residence between one place and another. The increase of commerce and manufactures promotes it, by diffusing more widely the advantages of easy circumstances.⁴⁹

And he goes on to denounce the rising role of public opinion in the affairs of state, or what is now familiarly condemned as "poll-driven politics."

The tree Mill planted (we may as well honor his own fondness for arboreal metaphors) has grown up to be mighty indeed. In contemporary political theory, the notion that diversity for its own sake is an important value—what we can call the diversity principle—represents a powerful strain. It has been said that Mill was a transitional figure between an old liberalism, wherein freedom was important because it enabled people to discover truths about morality and metaphysics, and a new liberalism, wherein freedom was important because there were no such truths.⁵⁰ The emergent skepticism, needless to say, has itself become a powerful dogma, and some of its adherents have noted with disapproval that Mill's defense of diversity takes fullest form in a book called *On Liberty*: his enthusiasm for diversity was great; it was not boundless. He had no love for theocrats and despots, for ways of life where individuality was stifled. His commitment to diversity did not displace his intertwined ideals of human well-being and self-development. "The progressive principle," he wrote, "is antagonistic to the sway of Custom."⁵¹ Is the progressive principle, then, the ultimate yardstick of success? As far as contemporary diversitarians are concerned, Mill may have led the tribe of political theorists through the deserts of homogeneity, and pointed the way home, but, like Moses, he did not enter the Promised Land.

Menaced by Monism?

Many theorists—among them William Galston, John Gray, Bhikhu Parekh, and Uday Singh Mehta—hold the great enemy to be *monism*, and, in particular, the philosophical monism they associate with the classic texts of liberalism, not excluding Mill himself. The monist tradi-

tion that Parekh has painstakingly traced, in his *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, starts with Plato and haunts us still; it is characterized by a belief in the universality of human nature and (in Parekh's rather abstract formulation) an ontological and moral preference for similarities over differences. Rawls is faulted for his metaphysical entanglements, the unacknowledged sectarianism of his liberal commitments; Raz is faulted for his bigoted emphasis on autonomy; Kymlicka is faulted for the requirement that national minorities must, at least in some measure, respect liberal principles of individual liberty. The trail of the monist serpent is over them all. None of these approaches, Parekh complains, takes diversity *simpliciter* to be the value; all see sameness where they ought to recognize difference.

And Mill, naturally, is a chief offender here, with his culpably individualist conception of diversity; indeed, Parekh and others insist, he gives himself away when he intolerantly suggests that the ways of John Knox are not as worthy of admiration as those of Pericles.⁵² The gravamen of the indictment, of course, is the familiar point that Mill was an autonomist, and that autonomism is an ethnocentric preference, ruled out by pluralism.

In fact, Mill is truly ethnocentric precisely where he suspends the requirement of autonomy. In the first chapter of *On Liberty*, Mill says: "The only purpose for which power can be exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others." So far, so autonomist, you might think—but then he offers this qualification: "It is, perhaps, hardly necessary to say that this doctrine is meant to apply only to human beings in the maturity of their faculties," and so excludes children and "those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage."⁵³ In this, Mill anticipates precisely the concessions urged by strong pluralists like John Gray. The Mill who says that even the despotism of an Akbar or a Charlemagne can be beneficial for backward societies cannot be accused of foisting the ethic of autonomy upon cultures for whom autonomy is not a value.⁵⁴ It is not the smallest of ironies that these critics of Mill accept his arguments at their weakest—and reject them at their strongest.

For inasmuch as Mill was guilty of "monism," it was expressed in his belief that all humanity should be given the opportunity of self-development. Mill's monism, if we are to call it that, underwrote his fierce oppo-

sition to American slavery, that "scourge to humanity." With its insistence on the ultimate similitude of humankind, on the ultimate oneness of human nature, the language of monism stipples his writings on the subject. "I have yet to learn that anything more detestable than this has been done by human beings towards human beings in any part of the earth," he wrote, and the force of his condemnation flows largely from that echo, his insistence upon the essential sameness of victim and victimizer: *by human beings, toward human beings*. In an article published in *Fraser's Magazine*, in 1850—rebutting Carlyle's "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question"—Mill wrote that had Carlyle less disdain for "the analytical examination of human nature," he would have

escaped the vulgar error of imputing every difference which he finds among human beings to an original difference of nature. As well might it be said, that of two trees, sprung from the same stock, one cannot be taller than another but from greater vigour in the original seedling. Is nothing to be attributed to soil, nothing to climate, nothing to difference of exposure—has no storm swept over the one and not the other, no lightning scathed it, no beast browsed on it, no insects preyed on it, no passing stranger stripped off its leaves or its bark?⁵⁵

Mill's polemic, tellingly, uses the word "human" fully twenty-eight times: it is his argument distilled into a predicate. Slaves are, as he says elsewhere, "human beings, entitled to human rights."⁵⁶ The universalizing rhetoric could not be clearer, nor his violation of Parekh's prescriptions more blatant. If this is monism, should we be so quick to cleanse ourselves of it?

Parekh, we saw, denounces those who would assert the universality of human nature, but the adversaries of such universalism are not always the best of company. It hardly needs to be remarked that liberal universalism, or what's sometimes derogated as "essentialist humanism," did not have the field to itself in the Enlightenment. Among the principal dissenters from such universalism were the early theorists of racial difference, and their ideas were inevitably enlisted to justify slavery and colonialism, as they later justified genocide. In the history of ideas, then, one should not assume that it's universalism that has the most to answer for, or that ascriptions of diversity should always command our admiration. Let me go further. Our moral modernity consists chiefly of extending

the principle of equal respect to those who had previously been outside the compass of sympathy; in that sense, it has consisted in the ability to see similarity where our predecessors saw only difference. The wisdom was hard-won; it should not be lightly set aside.

Someone might object that it was a contingent fact that the abolitionists operated under the "logic of similarity." Perhaps they could have said that the Negro was radically Other but still should be the subject of liberal rights; or that slavery was wrong because it was a form of domination, corrupting of the master. In truth, many abolitionists did think that that the Negro was inferior to "the white man," and that the two could not live side by side in circumstances of equality. That is, the typical abolitionist didn't look at the black man and see a mirror of himself. But his arguments invariably drew on the basis of some point of similarity: that, like the white man, the Negro was a child of God; or that, like the white man, the Negro was capable of suffering. They saw, and insisted upon, some fundamental resemblance. Had they not done so, it is hard to see how they could have persuaded anyone.⁵⁷ And the logic of abolition (as Catherine Gallagher and others have pointed out) would go on to sponsor the campaigns against "wage slavery" during the Industrial Revolution. This is why I say that the progression of our moral modernity is the expansion of what Parekh decries as the logic of similitude. Parekh gives us no reason to suppose that denial of similarity has anything of this sort to recommend it. Is the assumption of a universal human nature (that mainstay of egalitarians, of levelers, of campaigners against slavery) necessarily a malign one? Is it even, properly construed, untrue? If Mill, Raz, Kymlicka, and the others fail to recognize diversity *in se* as an ultimate value, as Parekh alleges, then so much the worse for diversity. Mill's ardent, if not limitless, devotion to diversity requires no further belaboring; nor does the centrality of pluralism to Raz and Kymlicka. Any version of "monism" so weak that they can all be charged with it is surely a version of monism which liberals should happily defend.

Diversity Counted Out

The diversity principle can refer to two different maps, in a manner of speaking. In one, we are charting a *modus vivendi* among various

culturally disparate communities, perhaps even sovereign polities; in the other, we're charting the diversity *internal* to a society or a way of life. Although there can be no sharp and stable distinction between them, the first I shall call "external" diversity, the second "internal" diversity. The two versions of diversity can complement each other, as Mill hoped they would; but they are as likely to be at odds. The two versions are at odds when, say, a liberal state takes measures to preserve the authentic character of a subsidiary theocratic community, enabling it to purify itself and reducing its internal diversity. The two versions are at odds, conversely, when such communities are liberalized, becoming more internally diverse, but also more like other communities. Whenever diversity involves not persons but peoples—whenever it carries associational depth—we can expect a conflict between the two ways of talking about diversity.

The case for internal diversity usually echoes the Millian case for diversity in the service of well-being. Bernard Williams has put the matter with elegant simplicity: "if there are many and competing genuine values, then the greater the extent to which a society tends to be single-valued, the more genuine values it neglects or suppresses. More, to this extent, must mean better."⁵⁸ Notice that the comparison is not between a world with one culture and a world with many; the comparison is between a rich, variegated culture and a narrow, pinched one. The implication is that persons require real choices, adequate options, in order to achieve their individuality. (The position also dovetails with the notion that "experiments in living" are likely to be valuable.)⁵⁹ But how diverse do you have to be to qualify as diverse?

To get the answer to this question right, we must make a distinction among kinds of value. Williams is right, in my view, if by "genuine values," he means those universal values that matter independently of our projects and identities. There is a determinate (if as yet unmapped) list of these, and a society that makes more of them available is, in virtue of that fact, better than one that does not. But I have already suggested that our identities are a further source of value (and in chapter 6 I shall say more about this topic, under the rubric of "project-dependent" values). Once we grasp this, we can see that sometimes we could increase the range of values available in a society by making new projects and identities available; and that this is a process that can proceed effectively

without limit. To insist that a society's offering more values *this* way is a good thing is to make a much more controversial claim.⁶⁰

Earlier in this book, I referred to Gerald Dworkin's observation that more options are not necessarily better: we don't necessarily want the option to take heroin; we may be grateful for guardrails.⁶¹ "What does have intrinsic value is not having choices but being recognized as the kind of creature who is capable of making choices," Gerald Dworkin says. "But, of course, that it is better intrinsically to be a creature that makes choices does not imply that it is always an improvement to have more."⁶² And the same would apply to the notion that more values are necessarily better, understood as a claim about project-dependent values.

But maybe the trouble here is more basic: Can diversity be measured by enumerable features? Does it really make sense to describe societal cultures as having more or fewer values? Recall Charles Taylor's reference to "a certain kind of self-giving heroism"; is that one value, or the intersection of two (an ideal of self-giving plus an ideal of heroism)? Plainly, this isn't a conversation anybody should want to start. If pluralism urges us to see that values are not comparable, common sense surely suggests that values are not countable. We simply don't know how to line up two societies and say that one "contains" (and the key verb here is "contains," not "tolerates") more values; there are no determinate numbers here, no sums that can be stacked against each other in some scalar fashion.⁶³

Galston, enlisting Williams's argument, casts his defense of internal diversity in a classical mode. He supposes that the "diversity of human types" exists prior to cultural self-determination. Then "narrow-valued societies"—his example is the Sparta of legend—"will allow only a small fraction of their inhabitants to live their lives in a manner consistent with their flourishing and satisfaction."⁶⁴ But how did Sparta get Spartan in the first place? The transition from some prepolitical arrangement of happy diversity to the straitened city-state has to be spelled out if we're to share Galston's concerns. For perhaps it happened that people of Spartan disposition gravitated together and formed Sparta, in which case the claim of general misery becomes implausible. Perhaps, that is, the polity has the character it has because it legitimately reflects and expresses their preferences. Without an additional premise, we can't assume that Sparta denied the diversity of its

inhabitants. Even if we suppose that Sparta is not populated by Spartans and only a small fraction of its inhabitants happily accept the Spartan way, then what we have isn't a case for diversity *simpliciter* but a case against the legitimacy of this particular social order, for it is evidently rejected by most of its citizens. Then again, if Sparta isn't populated by Spartans—if it is populated, instead, by Athenians—we can't describe it as a "narrow-valued society." What's hard to imagine is a legitimate, transgenerationally stable Sparta that meets his description.

Now, imagine a region—call it Monomania—in which people assigned themselves into congenial groups: the warriors flocked with the warriors; the lazy pastoralists flocked with lazy pastoralists; the industrious worshipers of Apollo cohabitated with their ilk. We would thus have many narrow-valued societies, perhaps trading goods and services among them, each (let's stipulate) governing itself according to liberal-democratic principles, and each, pace Galston, allowing all their inhabitants to "live their lives in a manner consistent with their flourishing and satisfaction." Lest this sound like a remote fantasy, let me venture that some measure of such value segregation is a familiar feature of liberal polities: there is Main Street and there is Castro Street; there is Greenwich and there is Greenwich Village. Our recognition that people who share values and aspirations will seek each other out is one reason we take freedom of movement and association so seriously.⁶⁵

Spectatorial Diversity

So far I've been discussing the challenges posed by talk of internal diversity; when we fix our gaze upon external diversity, we encounter a separate set of challenges. For one thing, once we have reconfigured the social realm into a confederacy of difference, a grid of communities hewing each to its own customs and creeds, we have to ask for whom diversity is a value. Now, the diversity principle calls for the promotion of diversity for its own sake. To hold that diversity *simpliciter* is of value, you will not need reminding, is a very different thing from saying that a range of social forms is good because people are various, or that the preferences of individuals should be respected, or that the freedom of association among them should be given wide berth, or that different forms of sodality are important in human affairs. Obviously, too, exter-

nal diversity does not describe a society filled with diversitarians. For whom, then, is the principle a principle? Plainly, its implicit constituency is the tribe of liberals. If the principle is more than a simple peacekeeping expedient, that is, one must conclude that the vista of diversity—the spectacle of the emperor's zoo, so to speak—is essentially there for our appreciation.⁶⁶

Accordingly, the problem with many arguments for “diversity” as an ideal is that they do not respect what Ronald Dworkin calls the “endorsement constraint,” which says that you cannot make someone better off by forcing her to do something she does not herself endorse as valuable. In *The Spirit of the Laws*, that charming compendium of cross-cultural commentary, the baron de Montesquieu warned that one must be “careful not to change the general spirit of a nation” because

If the character is generally good, what difference do a few faults make?

One could constrain its women, make laws to correct their mores and limit their luxury, but who knows whether one would not lose a certain taste that would be the source of the nation's wealth and a politeness that attracts foreigners to it?⁶⁷

But spectator-sport diversity would seem to have more aesthetic than moral force. I may fervently want there to be Amish driving buggies, Mennonites milking cows, and Shakers shaking on their exquisitely crafted furniture; but it would be a moral error to take measures, therefore, to discourage members of these picturesque communities from leaving and joining ours. *We're* not the ones getting up at four and cleaning the stables, and they're not doing it for our delectation. The decision of whether to uphold “tradition” is for them to make, not for us.

Now, many theorists have cast the diversity principle in terms of biodiversity, taking Mill's analogy of plants and their climates almost literally. Thus David Ingram, after warning us about a “global monoculture of mass-produced and mass-consumed commodities,” concludes, “cultural diversity, then, is not simply a spiritual or existential issue but a matter of physical survival.” (To illustrate the idea that “emancipation from tradition” may be “unhealthy and destructive of a genuinely human form of existence,” he adduces the Ik people, made famous by Colin Turnbull's ethnographic account. For Ingram, the

Ik “represent an extreme example of an individualism that has increasingly come to the fore in our own profit-oriented society.”)⁶⁸ On a planet afflicted by massive inequality, a planet whose richest country spends only derisory amounts in foreign assistance, you have to wonder about the biodiversity analogy: it seems to call for retreat, a roping-off, when the important struggle is for humanitarian engagement. The larger trouble with the analogy, though, is that it denies agency. Although there are Mennonite farm boys who have elected to become East Village disk jockeys, yellow larkspurs, as a rule, do not decide to become daisies; nor is there any dissent in the social order of the giant sequoia.

It should be said that there are villages that receive government subvention to preserve their quaint cultural differentia. These range from the show villages of the Palóc in Western Hungary to certain Hmong communities in Vietnam, which are allowed to participate in a revenue-generating tourist program so long as they agree to abjure running water, consumer electronics, and other such appurtenances that would spoil the Westerner's enjoyment of their “authenticity.” What has been created by this programmatic promotion of diversity is a sort of Epcot ethnicity for the curious traveler.

Uniformly Different

I don't say this by way of condemnation; people have to make a living. But as these instances suggest, upholding differences among groups may entail imposing uniformity within them. As I mentioned earlier, this is one of the ways that internal and external diversity can be in tension. For culture is a Tree of Porphyry: differences and distinctions go all the way down. In the real world, the entrenchment of uniformities happens through the authorization and appointment of elites and “representatives” within the group; through the mobilization of state resources on behalf of such representatives; through the whole apparatus of “cultural autonomy.” You will recall that Avishai Margalit and Moshe Habertal, in “Liberalism and the Right to Culture,” argue that people have an “overriding interest” that sponsors a right that their culture remain unmolested by outsiders. But much depends on precisely who counts as an outsider. Just because, as Locke said, every

church is orthodox to itself, when we accommodate the dissenting church, we may—from the perspective of that church's dissidents—be fortifying another orthodoxy.⁶⁹

Indeed, when multiculturalists like Kymlicka say that there are so many “cultures” in this or that country, what drops out of the picture is that every “culture” represents not only difference but the elimination of difference: the group represents a clump of relative homogeneity, and that homogeneity is perpetuated and enforced by regulative mechanisms designed to marginalize and silence dissent from its basic norms and mores. From a historical perspective, nationalism might be described as imperialism with contiguity. Like treason, tribalism never prospers, as Ernest Gellner dryly noted; else none dare call it tribalism. Hence when a metropolitan *francité* is imposed upon adjoining regions—regions where a little earlier a salient identity might have been Savoyard, Gascon, Burgundian, Provençal—we celebrate the birth of a nation. “While liberal pluralists celebrate legitimate diversity among cultures,” Galston notes, “they suspect that diversity will almost always exist within culture as well and that a culture’s smoothly homogeneous public face reflects the covert operation of power.”⁷⁰ The intriguing question, though, is how “legitimate” diversity is to be qualified.

For the erasure of differences within social groups is not necessarily something to be condemned. Rather, it raises the question of whether there are certain norms or uniformities that are useful in preserving a benign social order—whether some measure of homogeneity is a good thing. I began this section by juxtaposing two passages on diversity, one by Hobbes and one by Mill. We make a mistake if we assume that wisdom reposes in only the second.

Hobbes was a conventionalist: he thought we could promulgate a true moral philosophy because the truth, in this realm, was something that human beings made up. It was the responsibility of the polity, the educative state, to rear its citizens with such norms and values that they could together find what he called the “highway to peace.” Much on the Hobbesian menu will have little appeal to us; but, as I’ve said, it seems that we do want our public schools to promulgate some values, some kind of social rationality. I’ll have much more to say about this in the context of “soul making” in the next chapter.

Accepting value pluralism means we must set diversity among other values cherished by other communities, including the value of imposing ethical uniformity. “We might argue that richness, variety, and difference are goods in themselves,” John Tomlinson points out with his customary clarity, “but then, under other considerations, so are order, uniformity, and universality. Babel and Esperanto both have their enthusiasts.”⁷¹

Certainly, if you care about autonomy—or even, for that matter, about the promulgation of social rationality—you cannot take diversity to be the ultimate good. “Talk of diversity and difference too often proceeds without taking adequate account of the degree of moral convergence it takes to sustain a constitutional order that is liberal, democratic, and characterized by widespread bonds of civic friendship and cooperation,” Stephen Macedo writes. “Not every form of cultural and religious diversity is to be celebrated, and not all forms of what can be labeled ‘marginalization’ and ‘exclusion’ are to be regretted or apologized for. Profound forms of sameness and convergence should not only be prayed for but planned for without embarrassment.”⁷² Macedo is surely right, even though the amount of convergence required may be rather less than you might think. But, to circle back to the observation with which this chapter began, the United States has never been less culturally diverse, and never more celebratory of cultural diversity: and these two things are not unrelated. Those who want everyone to embrace diversity have themselves imposed a substantial monism.

Often, when we worry about homogeneity—if I may venture a diagnosis—it’s because we take it to be evidence of a previous crime against autonomy, rather as the vistas of a grassy plain may be less pleasing if taken to be the result of recent deforestation. Conversely, it may be that many of us value diversity not because it is a primordial good but because we take it to be a correlative of liberty, of nondomination. But if autonomy is the sponsoring concern, the diversity principle—the value of diversity *simpliciter*—cannot command our loyalty.

The boundaries of Millian diversity—diversity in the service of individual well-being—should cause no embarrassment, then. It is a strength, not a weakness, of Mill’s conception of diversity that it did not prevent him from making judgments about cultural practices—

whether those related to his own heritage, like the murderous rampages of John Knox and the subjection of women in Victorian England, or those utterly foreign to him, such as the foot-binding customs of the Chinese. Indeed, nothing more persuasively vindicates Millian diversity than those very moments in his writing that have been castigated by those intolerant of intolerance of intolerance. To insist that liberals, qua liberals, must abstain from judgments of this sort is to exile them from genuine human engagement.

Chapter Five

~ Soul Making

SOULS AND THE STATE—THE SELF-MANAGEMENT CARD—
RATIONAL WELL-BEING—IRRATIONAL IDENTITIES—SOUL
MAKING AND STEREOTYPES—EDUCATED SOULS—CONFLICTS
OVER IDENTITY CLAIMS

SOULS AND THE STATE

In Mill's view, the excellence of government was to be gauged by the excellence of its citizens—by its success in promoting “the virtue and intelligence of the people themselves.”¹ This is one of the themes in his work that seem very old and very new. It was Plato who first taught that politics was the art of caring for souls. But the notion that the state should concern itself with the character of its citizenry could hardly be more current. It is a mainstay of the so-called republican revival, which draws inspiration from a Roman civic humanism that connects Cicero, Machiavelli, and the American Founders, and which holds that society must reproduce itself by producing good citizens. It is a mainstay, too, of the recent accounts of liberal perfectionism that challenge the ideal of liberal neutrality.²

But should the state really encroach upon the souls of its citizens? When the question is framed this way, many of us recoil at the prospect; and there are sound reasons for this response. For talk of soul making seems all too redolent of the sort of intrusive government interference that Popper rightly feared, of all those fateful attempts to transform human nature in pursuit of some utopian vision. Hobhouse, in a grandly martial image, called freedom of thought the “inner citadel,”³ and we do not lightly trespass upon it. But, as a moment's reflection will remind us, this can't be the whole story. There has never been a state without some influence upon the character of its citizens. That inner citadel can feel more like a coffeehouse, alive to every group that