

LIBERAL EGALITARIANISM AND THE CASE FOR SUPPORTING NATIONAL CULTURES[*]

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1. Kymlicka's Project

Liberal egalitarians agree that the state should protect and promote the freedom of the individual and strive to establish equality of opportunity and resources. They tend to disagree, however, about what these principles entail concerning the state's attitude to the success or failure of the different national cultures which co-exist in many modern political communities. To some it seems obvious that, given the profound importance of culture in shaping a person's identity and outlook, treating people in accordance with liberal egalitarian principles means ensuring the equal survival and success of the cultures to which they belong. Actual practice seems to accord with this conviction to at least some degree in many places in the world: in countries like Canada, Belgium, Spain, and the United Kingdom, to mention just a few, minority cultures are provided with at least some of the political and financial resources needed to ensure their own survival and flourishing.

To others, however, it is just as obvious that treating people according to liberal egalitarian principles means adopting a policy of *laissez-faire* with respect to the success or failure of the different national cultures which co-exist in the community. It is argued that intervention to prop up ailing cultures may violate the basic rights and liberties of some individuals and will almost certainly involve redistributing certain resources and opportunities from non-members to members of the culture in question, thereby disadvantaging non-members and creating an inequality. This conviction has also influenced actual practice--for instance, in Canada where opponents of Quebec's cultural and linguistic policies have frequently adopted the rhetoric of both liberty and equality.[1]

Resolving this dispute is one of the most urgent priorities for a liberal egalitarian theory of nationalism. Nationalism is often defined as a doctrine about how politically meaningful boundaries should be drawn. But it is clear that many nationalists also affirm a doctrine about how the state, in the context of a given set of boundaries, ought to exercise its power and authority: they hold that the state has an important responsibility to preserve and promote one or several of the national cultures found within its borders. Indeed, the nationalist claim that national and state boundaries ought to coincide is sometimes premised quite explicitly on this latter view. One reason why state and national boundaries should coincide is that this will help to ensure the preservation of a threatened national culture.[2] In line with this idea, cultural preservation is sometimes cited as one of the legitimate grounds for secessionist projects.[3]

It is important, then, for an evaluation of nationalism from a liberal egalitarian standpoint to try to adjudicate between the conflicting claims about the legitimacy of state intervention on behalf of struggling national cultures. Over the past decade or so, the

most important intellectual contribution to this debate has almost certainly been the work of Will Kymlicka. In a series of books and articles Kymlicka has managed to refocus the attention of contemporary political theorists on the problem of minority cultures and to define the terms in which much of the debate is now conducted.[4] His central thesis is that liberal egalitarian principles can be shown to ground a substantive set of group-differentiated entitlements or cultural rights. Examined from the perspective of protecting and promoting individual freedom, or from the perspective of establishing equality of opportunity and resources, liberal egalitarian principles can be employed to defend a set of rights, policies, and institutional mechanisms which help to ensure that national cultures survive and flourish.

An important objection to Kymlicka's project is that it grounds the right to national cultures in liberal egalitarian values which members of some of those cultures may not themselves endorse. It has been argued, for instance, that it is pointless to defend the rights of aboriginal peoples by appealing to a connection between secure cultural membership and individual freedom, since those peoples do not themselves place the same value on individual freedom as Western liberals.[5] Although I will not attempt to argue it in any detail here, I do not think that this objection to Kymlicka's approach is decisive, even if it does limit the scope of the project more than Kymlicka concedes. One important reason to develop arguments that can appeal to liberal egalitarians is that people attached to, or influenced by, liberal egalitarian principles are often powerful opponents of cultural rights.[6] A second reason to do so is that many of the themes which arise in Kymlicka's work--themes such as anomie and the loss of valuable cultural options--have implications not just for individual freedom but for a broader range of values and ideals some of which are likely to have resonance in traditional, non-Western cultures.

My aim in this paper will not be to question the liberal egalitarian framework in which Kymlicka operates. Instead, I want to explore and assess Kymlicka's claim that a commitment to liberal egalitarian principles can be shown to ground a substantive set of cultural rights. I will show that there are several distinct ways in which Kymlicka's statements about the connections between freedom, equality, and culture might be construed and that none of these, in their present form, lead to his desired conclusion. I will then go on to develop a revised version of Kymlicka's argument which I think can generate the conclusion he wants--what I shall term the argument from linguistic incapability. Finally, I indicate several important limitations faced by the revised argument that point to the need for further research in this area. The result is a mixed assessment of Kymlicka's attempt to reconcile liberal egalitarian principles with support for minority cultures. In its present form, Kymlicka's argument does not go through. It does provide resources out of which a more successful argument can be constructed but even this argument faces important limitations.

2. Locating the Problem

At the beginning of the paper I contrasted two different kinds of policies that a liberal egalitarian might endorse with respect to the survival and flourishing of the different

national cultures in the political community: a policy of intervention and a policy of laissez faire. Before examining Kymlicka's position further it is important to set out and refine the distinction between these two approaches, since it turns out to be quite problematic.

The main problem is that the distinction seems to ignore the fact that the state cannot comprehensively avoid intervening in the domain of culture. As Kymlicka points out, decisions about which languages will be used in government, education, and the courts, how political boundaries will be drawn, and who can have access to radio and television airwaves, to mention just a few examples, all have a profound impact on the capacity of different cultures in the community to survive and flourish.[7] It might seem more accurate, then, to say that the real debate is not between interventionist and laissez-faire approaches to culture but between different positions on the scope of legitimate state intervention in the domain of culture. The members of endangered minority cultures can be seen as demanding parity of treatment with those in the majority: they would like to enjoy the same official advantages and protection as the majority culture, through policies of official bilingualism for instance. Their opponents, on the other hand, can be viewed as opposing this extension of official advantages and protection to minority groups, often on the grounds of efficiency and social unity.

I think that the debate about minority cultures does take this form in a number of real world political controversies. In the United States, for instance, the debate about extending greater cultural recognition to Hispanics often unfolds along roughly these lines. In certain other realworld controversies, however, there do seem to be recognizably "interventionist" and "laissez faire" approaches opposing one another. In Canada, for instance, this is illustrated by both the debate over Quebec's language policies and the controversies concerning native land claims. Many francophone Quebecers argue that policies such as official bilingualism are unlikely to secure their distinctive language and culture and hence that a more interventionist approach, involving (for instance) minor restrictions on the use of English in certain contexts, is required as well. Similarly, what many native people would like is not to have the same land entitlements and legal framework as the majority population but to have a special set of entitlements and regulations which allow them to secure their distinctive traditions and way of life.

An unhelpful way of understanding the interventionist/laissez-faire distinction, then, is to view it as a distinction between an approach which advocates some intervention in the domain of culture and an approach which advocates no intervention: it is inevitable, and probably desirable, that the state's policies and institutions will have implications for the different cultures in the community. On the basis of the examples I just mentioned, however, it is possible to construe the distinction between the two approaches in a second, more analytically useful way. The laissez-faire approach can be viewed as (a) striving to confer the same official advantages and protection on all cultures in the political community in those areas of policy where it is difficult for the state to refrain from intervening but (b) refusing to intervene on behalf of a culture in other areas of policy, even where that culture is faced with decline or extinction. This can be contrasted with an interventionist approach which calls for special, group-differentiated

entitlements, policies and institutional mechanisms designed to protect cultures if and when they face decline or extinction.

A great strength of Kymlicka's most recent work is that it draws attention to the incoherence of the interventionist/laissez-faire distinction when it is interpreted in the first way suggested above. This being said, his main argument--the argument connecting freedom and equality with secure cultural membership--is best viewed as a critique of laissez faire in something like the second, more sophisticated sense that I have just outlined.[8] Starting from liberal egalitarian principles, Kymlicka thinks he can defend the legitimacy of group-differentiated entitlements designed to protect endangered cultures against arguments for a laissez-faire approach that emphasizes both parity of treatment for all cultural groups in the community and a refusal to intervene at all in certain spheres relevant to cultural success or failure.

3. The Structure of Kymlicka's Argument

The main representatives of liberal egalitarianism in Kymlicka's writings are almost invariably John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin. In setting out the details of his own position, Kymlicka tends to opt for Dworkin's version of the theory and to keep the exposition as simple as possible. I will do the same in this paper. Although I will not be able to show it here, I very much doubt that Kymlicka's argument would be any stronger if he opted for the Rawlsian variant of the theory instead.

According to Dworkin, the liberal view of equality requires both that each individual enjoy an extensive set of rights and liberties and that a certain distribution of resources be in place, which he terms "equality of resources." [9] Equality of resources is established in the distribution of a society's material goods and resources only when the value of each person's bundle of goods and resources measured in terms of the opportunity-cost it imposes on others is the same. The basic idea is that if I appropriate some resource that is relatively precious to other people then, for equality to be established, they should be able to appropriate other correspondingly valuable resources instead. The idea works most smoothly in a one-period world in which people have identical talents and handicaps and there is no production. But there are reasons to think that it could be extended, more or less imperfectly, to apply to more complex societies like our own. [10]

Kymlicka's question, then, is this: What should we think about support for struggling cultures if we adopt Dworkin's view of equality? At first glance, the answer seems clear. As Dworkin shows, if each person starts with equal purchasing power, the opportunity cost metric of equality lends itself naturally to the use of market prices to measure equality. [11] For instance, all else being equal, if I prefer to consume a relatively scarce good which others would also like to consume, and there are no significant economies of scale in the provision of that good, then, in a market, I would have to pay a relatively high price for that good and would have fewer resources left over to spend on other things. This seems right because I am asking others to forgo something they would like to have and make do with something else. If I were to be permitted to pay less than the market price for the good in question, then not only would others be forgoing a good

that they would also like to consume but they would still have to compete with (more of) my resources in acquiring other things they want.

In this vein, it could be argued that the fact that some cultures are difficult to maintain, and may well disintegrate if left to the cultural marketplace, is a reflection of the fact that they are relatively "expensive" to maintain. The members of a disintegrating culture are unwilling to pay the high cost of the activities, or the scarce resources, needed for the culture to survive. To impose some of this cost on others through a subsidy, or a restriction on certain rights, liberties, or opportunities, would be to create an inequality: not only would those others be foregoing scarce resources they would themselves like to enjoy but they would still have to compete with members of the culture for remaining resources. In effect, some people would be paying less and others would be paying more than the full cost of their respective ways of life measured in terms of social opportunity cost.

At first glance, then, Kymlicka's claim that support for minority cultures can be grounded in liberal egalitarian principles seems to fail, at least for Ronald Dworkin's version of the theory: endorsing Dworkin's liberal egalitarianism seems to mean that one should opt for a policy of *laissez faire*, rather than support, for imperilled minority cultures.

Before declaring the matter to be closed, however, we should recall that it is crucial for Dworkin's position that equality requires not only the establishment of a market but also that individuals bring to the market equal assets or endowments.[12] Where individuals start life with different endowments of capital, or with different talents, handicaps, and so on, then, on its own, the market cannot establish equality or justice. This is not to say that liberal egalitarians like Dworkin oppose all material inequalities, since some inequalities will reflect different ambitions that people have and different choices that they make: people have different preferences for labour and leisure, enjoy different degrees of good and bad luck in the gambles they take, and so on. What liberal egalitarians do hold is that no individual's share of resources should be diminished simply because of bad luck in the natural and social distribution of endowments: an equal distribution of resources should, in Dworkin's phrase, be "ambition-sensitive" but "endowment-insensitive."[13]

The concern to compensate for endowment inequalities means that liberal egalitarians like Dworkin do not advocate a policy of pure *laissez faire* but instead think that the state should intervene to equalize the assets that individuals bring to the market. It is precisely this idea which Kymlicka hopes to exploit in attempting to reconcile liberal egalitarianism with a policy of supporting imperilled cultures. His claim is that security of cultural membership is one of the assets or endowments that individuals bring to the marketplace and thus is something which members of different cultures in the community should enjoy equally. Because the members of endangered minority cultures do not enjoy the same secure cultural membership as their majority culture counterparts, there is a good liberal egalitarian case for intervention to support those cultures grounded in the aim of diminishing the effects of bad luck in the distribution of endowments.

Kymlicka's argument involves three central claims:

(i) Secure cultural membership is an important good.

(ii) The good of secure cultural membership is something which is enjoyed to greater and lesser degrees by the members of different cultures in the community.

(iii) The disadvantages associated with insecure cultural membership require and justify intervention to support struggling minority cultures.[14]

He needs to establish (i) in order to show that someone lacking secure cultural membership is suffering from a disadvantage. He needs (ii) to persuade us that there are members of endangered minority cultures who do suffer from this disadvantage. And (iii) is necessary if he is to show that this is a disadvantage that liberal egalitarians should compensate for by providing support for endangered minority cultures. Kymlicka argues for (i) on the grounds that secure cultural membership is an important condition of individual freedom. He thinks that (ii) follows from the fact that members of some minority cultures are lacking this important condition of their freedom or are able to secure it only at great expense. And he defends (iii) by arguing that whether or not one is placed in this predicament is a question of the circumstances one finds oneself in rather than the choices that one makes and in this sense is part of the endowment which one brings to the marketplace.

In effect, then, Kymlicka's suggestion is that, looking at the problem from the perspective of either of the main elements of liberal egalitarianism, a case for supporting struggling cultures can be made. Because secure cultural membership is a condition of individual freedom, the liberal egalitarian commitment to freedom is consistent with a policy of supporting endangered cultures. And because insecurity of cultural membership is a predicament that one finds oneself in and not the result of a choice that one makes, the liberal egalitarian commitment to compensating for unchosen inequalities is also compatible with a policy of intervention. In fact, the two parts of Kymlicka's argument are meant to work together: the fact that individual freedom is at stake shows why insecurity of cultural membership is so disadvantageous; and the fact that insecurity of cultural membership is part of one's unchosen circumstances shows why this is a disadvantage which calls for liberal egalitarian intervention.

4. Freedom and Culture in Kymlicka's Argument

As I will show in Section 7 below, I think it is possible that an argument having this structure might be successful, at least under certain conditions. But I do not think that Kymlicka's argument works and will try to show that first. Two different reasons given by Kymlicka for thinking that cultural membership is an important condition of freedom will be explored. I then argue that, depending on which of these reasons one takes Kymlicka to be appealing to in defending (i), either his argument for (ii) is unsuccessful or his argument for (iii) is unsuccessful: that is, he either fails to show that anyone is disadvantaged with respect to the good of cultural membership or he fails to show that secure cultural membership should be treated as a compensable part of an individual's endowment. Whichever reason is focused on Kymlicka's argument does not go through

and the case for reconciling liberal egalitarians to supporting minority cultures has not succeeded.

In defence of (i) Kymlicka claims that one's culture is a "context of choice." He explains this, in turn, by arguing that "freedom involves making choices amongst various options, and our societal culture not only provides these options, but also makes them meaningful to us." [15] Cultural membership, he says, "is a good in its capacity of providing meaningful options for us, and aiding our ability to judge for ourselves the value of our life-plans." [16] These and other remarks made by Kymlicka suggest that secure cultural membership is an important condition of freedom, and therefore a good, for two distinct reasons.

One is that it is in virtue of being a member of a secure culture that the different options facing an individual chooser have meaning. What makes options "valuable" or "meaningful" is the fact that they are "identified as having significance by our culture, because they fit into some pattern of activities which is culturally recognised as a way of leading one's life." [17] Without the "beliefs about value" that I internalise from my culture, Kymlicka thinks, I could not be free because I would have no perspective from which to guide and construct my life.

The second reason suggested in these passages why secure cultural membership is an important condition of freedom is that an individual's culture makes available the options corresponding to his or her beliefs about value. As a member of a culture I not only develop certain beliefs about value--marriages should be arranged by parents, Sundays should be a day of rest, and so on--but I also have access to institutions and practices that make it possible for me to realize those beliefs in my day-to-day life. If none of the options that are meaningful to me were available, then I would have no way of following my own perspective in guiding and constructing my life and I could not be said to be free.

Let us call the first reason for thinking that secure cultural membership is an important condition of freedom, or "context of choice," the meaning-providing reason and the second reason the option-providing reason. As I indicated above, my strategy will be to evaluate steps (ii) and (iii) of Kymlicka's argument in the context of an exploration of each of these reasons in turn.

5. The Meaning-Providing Reason

The meaning-providing reason explains the importance of culture for freedom not in terms of the options provided by a culture to individual choosers but by focusing on the ways in which cultures imbue those options with meaning and value. Can this explanation provide a basis for steps (ii) and (iii) of Kymlicka's argument?

To consider this version of the argument it is necessary to make one further distinction, this time between two ways in which a culture could fail to provide meaning to the options confronting its members. [17a] A culture (let's call it Small) might fail to provide meaning to the options faced by its members because its members increasingly look to

some other culture (Big) for interpretation of the value and meaning of the options they face. That is to say, exposure to Big might cause members of Small gradually to change their beliefs about value so that at some point the culture which provides their options with meaning is no longer Small but a transitional amalgam of Small and Big, and eventually it might make sense to say that their meaning-providing culture is Big. Alternatively, it could be the case that Small fails to provide meaning to the options faced by its members because its members gradually cease to have any beliefs about value and enter into a state of anomie. I shall call these the assimilation and anomie cases respectively.

Kymlicka gives conflicting signals about the assimilation case. On the one hand, he rejects the suggestion that changes in the character of a community--including, presumably, changes in beliefs about value--represent a threat to the security of individuals' cultural membership. For instance, French Canada's "Quiet Revolution" of the 1960s was a massive change in the character of French Canadian culture but, according to Kymlicka, it never represented a threat to the existence of that culture; "the existence of a French-Canadian cultural community itself was never in question, never threatened with unwanted extinction or assimilation as aboriginal communities are currently threatened." [18] On the other hand, he expresses sympathy with "the desire of national minorities to survive as a culturally distinct society," [19] suggesting that he would be concerned about the assimilation case described above in which members of Small lose their distinct culture.

The point worth emphasising, however, is not the ambiguity in Kymlicka's position but the fact that nothing in the meaning-providing reason for (i) allows him to appeal to the assimilation case in defence of (ii). According to the meaning-providing reason, secure cultural membership is an important condition of freedom because cultures provide meaning to the options faced by individual choosers. But in the assimilation case individuals never go without beliefs about meaning and value. Their beliefs change from those associated with Small to those associated with Big, perhaps with a transitional phase in between showing influences of both Small and Big, but individuals always have some beliefs about value. [20] For this reason, cultural assimilation (in the sense described above) is not a threat to individual freedom and should be of no concern to Kymlicka.

It is worth lingering over this conclusion for a moment since it is precisely the distinctiveness of their culture that many advocates of support for minority cultures are concerned to protect. They do not want to see their culture gradually blend into the more powerful majority culture to which it is exposed and they attach particular importance to preserving their language and political institutions as a barrier to this kind of assimilation. From what we have seen so far, however, nothing in Kymlicka's argument should give this kind of advocate of support for minority cultures any comfort. Kymlicka fails to show that there is any important connection between protecting individual freedom and preserving the distinctiveness of minority cultures against assimilatory pressures.

The anomie case seems much better equipped to lend support for (ii). It is not at all inconceivable that members of a disintegrating culture could find themselves slipping

into a sense of hopelessness and despair in which nothing seems valuable or worth doing. There may be nothing they can do to prevent this, or, if there is, they might have to use a relatively high proportion of their resources to keep the culture secure. Unlike the assimilation case, the anomie case is arguably one in which freedom is at stake: someone ending up in this predicament seems to be left with very little in the way of an inner life or perspective from which to manage and direct his or her own life.

It would be a mistake to ignore this case altogether, but I have some doubts about its empirical applicability. The evidence of depression, despondency and suicide in some indigenous cultures in the New World suggests that there has been some tendency for members of these cultures to slide into a state of anomie after prolonged exposure to European cultures.[21] But even here it is difficult to distinguish the effects of generations of poverty and treatment as second-class citizens from the effects of cultural erosion per se. Moreover, even if the anomie case does approximate the experience of certain indigenous peoples, its application to other minority cultures seeking support looks less promising. For example, in the cases of Quebec, Scotland, and Catalonia, it would seem faintly hysterical to argue that people are in danger of slipping into anomie if they are not given the means of preserving their cultures. The assimilatory attraction of neighbouring majority cultures seems to pose a much more real danger to these and other similar cultures.

Setting these empirical speculations to one side, we might ask why it is, in the anomie case, that individuals are losing their beliefs about value, given that it is not because of the attraction of the beliefs about value of the majority culture (for this would turn it into the assimilation case). Kymlicka's main explanation of this phenomenon involves the claim that, because of the actions and decisions of members of the majority culture, the members of the minority culture lose control over resources and policy decisions crucial for the survival of their culture. The minority culture, he says, may be outbid for important resources (e.g., the land, or means of production on which their community depends), or outvoted on crucial policy decisions (e.g., on what language will be used, or whether public works programmes will support or conflict with the culture's work patterns).[22]

Why should control over resources and policy decisions be necessary to prevent loss of one's beliefs about value? One reason is that, if members of the majority culture control key resources, or have key decision-making functions, then they may, intentionally or unintentionally, influence the character and development of the beliefs about value of members of the minority culture. Think, for example, of the potential impact on a group's beliefs about value of the introduction of international satellite television into the local community. This, however, is not the anomie case but the assimilation case discarded earlier: there is no absolute loss of beliefs about value; just a change from one set of beliefs to another. A second reason why control over resources and policy decisions may be necessary to prevent loss of one's beliefs about value does seem compatible with the anomie case. Outside control of a culture's resources and policy-making apparatus may mean that the options and practices corresponding to the culture's beliefs about value become unavailable. For example, where some resource, such as land, is particularly

important to the realization of a culture's beliefs about value, it becomes possible that the market activity of non-members of the culture could make that realization impossible, or at least very expensive: even in a democratic and basically equal society, members of the culture might be outbid or outvoted by non-members wishing to use the land for their own purposes.[23] And if members of the culture are unable to reaffirm their beliefs about value by realising them in their day-to-day choices, then it would not be too surprising if after some time they began to lose those beliefs about value.

I think this second case could lead to anomie--although, as I noted earlier, I have some doubts about how empirically likely it is, particularly outside of the aboriginal case which Kymlicka concentrates on. Setting this empirical worry aside, however, we have now found a way in which the meaning-providing reason might provide a basis for (ii): it is conceivable that members of some minority cultures could be differentially advantaged with respect to the good of secure cultural membership. Having made the step from (i) to (ii) of Kymlicka's argument, the question now is whether the step from (ii) to (iii) can also be taken. If, as I have been suggesting, the anomie case arises when the options corresponding to a culture's beliefs about valuable become unavailable, then, to answer this question, we need to turn our attention to the option-providing reason: for the question now is whether the possibility of anomie arising from the non-availability of the options and practices corresponding to a culture's beliefs about value is sufficient to justify special support for that culture.

6. The Option-Providing Reason

It should be pretty clear, I think, that (ii) is quite plausible if we focus on the way in which cultures provide options for individuals which correspond to their (culturally conditioned) beliefs about value. There is nothing mysterious about the suggestion that members of some minority cultures could find it much more difficult than their majority-culture counterparts to find and afford options that are meaningful to them--and to this extent to enjoy freedom. This is illustrated, as we have seen, by the case of cultures which place value on ways of life which require vast amounts of land.[24]

The problem for the option-providing reason arises not at (ii) but at (iii). If he is going to rely on the option-providing reason, Kymlicka needs to show not only that members of some minority cultures find themselves at a disadvantage with respect to the availability of meaningful options, but also that this good provided by cultural membership should be treated as part of an individual's endowment and thus as something which a liberal egalitarian should be concerned to equalise.

The main difficulty with the step to (iii) is that it seems vulnerable to the same offensive and expensive tastes objections that are often made against the ideal equality of welfare.[25] Whether or not one is free on the version of Kymlicka's argument being considered depends on whether one has a range of options corresponding to one's beliefs about value to choose from. And this, of course, partly depends on what one's beliefs about value are. If one has offensive or very expensive beliefs about value, then one would need, on this account, a range of corresponding options in order to be free. And

according to liberal egalitarians like Rawls and Dworkin, at least, this hardly seems like a good argument for providing (or subsidising) an expensive or offensive way of life for anyone.

Consider, for instance, the stock case of someone with "champagne" tastes and beliefs about value.[26] Imagine that this person's idea of a good life involves control over a large estate, drinking expensive claret, having a large retinue of servants, possessing a townhouse in the city, and so on. In a society guided by liberal egalitarian principles, it seems safe to say, the options corresponding to his beliefs about value will be unavailable, or at least very expensive, and to this extent his freedom will be threatened. But even if beliefs about value are unchosen in the relevant sense (e.g., they are the product of upbringing and it is not possible for the individual in question to "school" himself out of them), liberal egalitarians hold that it would be wrong to think that this person is owed special support, or even that he is entitled to any kind of special compensation. To this extent, it would seem, Kymlicka's claim to have grounded the case for minority rights in the principles of liberal egalitarianism cannot be judged a success: liberal egalitarians think that people should be held responsible for their ambitions and beliefs about value, but Kymlicka's argument for minority rights seems to suggest that they should not be.

Nor does it help to return to the meaning-providing reason and insist that members of minority cultures will suffer the unfreedom associated with anomie if they are unable to realize their beliefs about value in their day-to-day choices. It is conceivable that someone with champagne tastes might sink into a state of anomie because of his inability to reaffirm his beliefs about value in his everyday life. To this extent, his freedom might be at risk. But it would still seem wrong to a liberal egalitarian to think that he is owed any special compensation for his predicament or that his way of life should be given any special support.

Kymlicka's most detailed discussion of the step from (ii) to (iii) can be found in Chapter 9 of *Liberalism, Community and Culture*. In that discussion he explicitly anticipates the expensive-tastes objection I have just been outlining: If aboriginal rights were defended as promoting their chosen projects, then they would, on a liberal view, be an unfair use of political power to insulate aboriginal choices from market pressure. We can legitimately ask that aboriginal people form their plans of life with a view to the costs imposed on others, as measured by the market.[27]

If, for example, aboriginal people have chosen an expensive life-style involving a large amount of land, then "it is only fair that they pay for this costly desire in a diminished ability to pursue other desires that have costs for society." [28]

Kymlicka claims, however, that minority rights can be defended "not as a response to shared choices, but to unequal circumstances." There is a way of making the move from (ii) to (iii) which does not run foul of the expensive-tastes problem. I think that this claim is correct, and will explain why in the next section. In the remainder of this section, however, I will show that Kymlicka's defence of the claim is unsuccessful.

One suggestion made by Kymlicka is that an individual's culture should not be considered as the product of her choice but as the "context of choice." On this view, it is a mistake to reduce cultural membership to the status of a preference or life-style, since culture is the context in which different preferences and lifestyles are made available. The problem with this suggestion is that it fails to advance the argument any further. To say that a culture is a context of choice is, for Kymlicka, to say that it (1) provides the meanings and beliefs about value which guide individual choice, and (2) provides the options corresponding to these meanings and beliefs about value. We have already seen in the previous section that serious difficulties arise for Kymlicka's argument if it relies on the meaning-providing function of culture: if a minority culture is in decline because of the attraction of the majority culture, then it is not clear that anybody is going without beliefs about value. We are now considering whether the argument can go through if the option-providing function of culture is appealed to instead. The worry is that this variant of the argument will be stymied by the expensive-tastes objection, an objection which liberal egalitarians, at least, take very seriously. The suggestion that culture is a "context of choice" does not provide an answer to this worry but simply restates the claim.

The same is true of another motif of Kymlicka's discussion as well: the suggestion that what is at stake is not the satisfaction of some preference, or the realization of some belief about value, but the very "survival" or continued 'existence' of the cultural community.[29] The relevant senses in which a cultural community can be said to exist, for Kymlicka, are the meaning-providing and option-providing senses. So, once again, pointing out that a culture's continued existence is at risk does not provide an answer to objections to the meaning-providing and option-providing variations of the argument but simply restates the claim. Kymlicka's most interesting suggestion is that the non-availability of options corresponding to the beliefs about value of minority-culture members should give rise to liberal egalitarian intervention because it arises not from the preferences and choices of the members of that culture themselves but from the choices of other people. As we have seen, he stresses that those in the minority risk being outbid or outvoted by members of the majority culture. But no one chooses to be born into a minority rather than a majority culture and no one chooses the fact that, because of the choices of the majority, it is difficult to maintain meaningful options in some minority cultures.

Unfortunately this argument is inconsistent with the liberal egalitarian position which Kymlicka starts from. The problem is that there is no general requirement that liberal egalitarians intervene on behalf of people who find that the options they value are expensive or unavailable because of the choices and preferences of others. Some people, for example, prefer independent films to Hollywood blockbusters. Unless they live in a big city, however, or go to the considerable expense of travelling to a big city, this option will probably not be available to them because the preferences and choices of most other people are different. This is a case in which some people find their preferences frustrated by the choices and preferences of others, but it is not one in which liberal egalitarians would call for intervention. For liberal egalitarians, it is fair that those with minority film preferences should have to pay a relatively high price to satisfy those preferences because the resources they are asking others (in this case, the majority) to give up--e.g., use of the

local cinema--are relatively precious to those others. Intervention in this kind of situation would mean that some would be paying more and others would be paying less than the full cost of the resources they use measured in terms of social opportunity cost.[30]

7. The Argument From Linguistic Incapability

I am attracted to Kymlicka's claim that there is an important connection between individual freedom and culture, although, as I pointed out in discussing the assimilation case, we need to be careful in formulating what exactly this connection is. The most serious problem in Kymlicka's theory arises in his explanation of why the insecure freedom of minority-culture members is something which should activate liberal egalitarian intervention. Kymlicka's position seems vulnerable to the offensive/expensive-tastes objection and none of his arguments to the contrary are successful at dispelling this impression. There is thus an important gap in Kymlicka's attempt to reconcile liberal egalitarianism with cultural rights. Kymlicka has shown why cultural membership might be an important condition of individual freedom but he has not shown why insecurity of cultural membership should cause liberal egalitarians to abandon *laissez faire*.

My aim in this section will be to try to plug this gap in Kymlicka's approach by outlining a different reason for thinking that liberal egalitarians should intervene in this kind of situation. One way to plug the gap might be for liberal egalitarians to bite the bullet on at least some expensive tastes and abandon their insistence on holding people responsible for all of their ambitions and beliefs about value.[31] For the purposes of this paper, however, I would like to set this possibility to one side and develop a different argument which remains clearly within the boundaries of liberal egalitarian thought. The argument remains true to the basic spirit and structure of Kymlicka's theory but locates the disadvantaging feature of a minority-culture-members's situation in a different place than the ones suggested by Kymlicka.

My argument makes use of two concepts which will need some explanation. The first is the idea of a viable linguistic community. Speakers of some language L are part of a viable linguistic community, I shall say, if and only if the population of L-speakers in the community in which those individuals live is sufficiently numerous and concentrated to allow them to engage in the full range of human activities and pursuits in that language. Thus, for instance, in a viable linguistic community, L-speakers would be able to work, practice their religion, participate in political debate and decision-making, form friendships, have a rich family life, and so on, all in their own language. The linguistic community of L-speakers falls below a threshold level of viability when the population of Lspeakers becomes too small or too dispersed to allow those individuals to engage in such activities and pursuits in their own language.

The second concept we need is the concept of linguistic capability. An individual has a linguistic capability with respect to some language L, I shall say, if and only if she is able to speak L or could learn to do so without excessive cost--where an ability to speak L implies an ability to engage in a range of activities and pursuits such as those mentioned

above in the language L. An individual has a linguistic incapability with respect to some language if she is unable to master that language sufficiently to engage in such activities and pursuits or if she could do so only at great expense.

With these two ideas in hand the argument can now proceed quite straightforwardly. The main point can be made by considering a community with two principal cultures, Minority and Majority, each having its own language. For a variety of reasons, let us say, the population of Minority is gradually declining and the population of Majority is growing: this might be because the birth-rate in Minority is stagnant and immigrants are choosing to integrate into Majority, or it might be for some other reason. At some point the Minority linguistic community will be in danger of falling below the threshold level of viability: the population will become too small or too dispersed to support a full range of activities and pursuits in Minority language. Furthermore, and this is the crucial point, it is conceivable, even likely, that some of the remaining members of Minority will be linguistically incapable with respect to the language of Majority: despite the fact that an increasing proportion of the community belong to Majority, they will be unable to master the language of Majority or will be able to do so only at great personal cost. These people will suffer from a grave disadvantage if their linguistic community becomes unviable. As the community becomes less viable, they become increasingly unable to engage in a range of important human activities and pursuits. To this extent, their freedom in the option-providing sense is clearly diminished and, as I suggested in Section 5, this may have further knock-on implications for their freedom in the meaning-providing sense. This disadvantage is one which should concern liberal egalitarians. It does not arise merely in virtue of the ambitions or preferences of the individuals concerned, or merely in virtue of the fact that the choices of others make those ambitions difficult to realize. Rather, it arises in virtue of a kind of handicap which individuals in that situation suffer from: they are unable to master the Majority language which is increasingly required to get through life.

I should hasten to add that this argument provides a basis for liberal egalitarian intervention on behalf of some struggling minority cultures; it does not fully justify such intervention. A full justification would require an assessment of the costs and burdens that a policy of intervention would place on various people, including both members and non-members of the culture in question.[32] These costs might be so high that intervention would create an even greater inequality than the one it is meant to prevent. For instance, if intervention on behalf of the culture involved significant constraints on free speech, then, from a liberal egalitarian perspective, this would almost certainly be too costly. Even if the costs do not seem that high at a given moment, over the long run the accumulated burden may outweigh even fairly significant disadvantages suffered by those who are unable to master the majority language. It remains possibly, however, that the burdens imposed by a policy of intervention would not be very costly relative to the disadvantage suffered by those who are unable to master the majority language and thus that intervention could be fully justified.

As it stands, this argument is fairly limited in application since it only applies to minority cultures which are defined in terms of language. Having made the point about language,

however, it seems possible to extend the argument to other kinds of minority cultures as well. Cultures can differ not only along linguistic lines but in terms of the basic outlook and conceptual framework of their members. It is not difficult to imagine, for instance, a case in which the member of a minority culture is able to learn the language of the majority but is unable to master the attitudes, conventions and basic outlook that are required for him to get along in the majority culture--for instance, in the workplace, or in forming personal relationships, or in contributing to political debate. Individuals in this situation might be able to master the vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation of the majority language but not the thought processes and conceptual orientation which make up the culture for a native speaker.

As in the linguistic case, these individuals would be greatly disadvantaged if their cultural community were to become unviable, and it might well make sense to say that their freedom is at risk. Once again, it would seem, liberal egalitarians have grounds for intervention on behalf of an endangered culture: individuals face loss of their freedom not because of their own choices or ambitions but because they are unable to master the conceptual framework and basic outlook of the majority culture.

Note that this final turn in the argument is not necessarily invulnerable to a suitably formulated analogue of the offensive/expensive-tastes objection invoked in the previous section. It is conceivable that a subculture of people with champagne tastes could find it difficult to master the outlook and thought processes of those in the mainstream of society. But the argument I have been sketching does help us to see one important difference between cultures and sub-cultures which should minimize the likelihood of this kind of case arising. Members of sub-cultures typically share a common societal culture with others in the community: they share a language and history, participate in many of the same institutions and practices, have access to the same media and entertainment, and so on.[33] It is thus difficult for them to claim that they are unable to get along in the mainstream culture. It will often be nearer to the truth to say that they choose not to participate in the mainstream culture, or that they disvalue, or even despise, aspects of that mainstream culture. With distinct societal cultures, by contrast--cultures which are more or less institutionally complete--the claim that some individuals are likely to be incapable of integrating into the majority culture becomes much more plausible.[34]

8. Final Thoughts

It turns out, then, that Kymlicka's central claim about minority cultures can be defended: liberal egalitarian principles are under certain conditions reconcilable with a policy of supporting minority cultures. In its present form, Kymlicka's discussion of the connections between freedom, equality, and culture does not generate the conclusion he wants. But an argument from linguistic incapability can do the remaining work that is required. In concluding, however, it is worth pointing out two limitations of this approach to culture, limitations which do not necessarily negate its value but suggest that more work needs to be done.

The first limitation has already been alluded to: because it is important to balance the disadvantages borne by those who cannot integrate into the majority culture against the costs and burdens imposed by interventionist policies, the argument is only likely to go through for a restricted range of cases. In many of the cases where some members of a disintegrating minority culture are unable to integrate into the majority culture, it would none the less be unpalatable to introduce measures aimed at protecting the culture, given the costs and burdens that such a policy would entail for both members and non-members of the culture in question. Training and other forms of special support and assistance might be owed to people in this situation but there is no requirement that the state intervene to prevent cultural decline.

The second limitation arises because of the narrowness of the incapability criterion itself. A feature of the argument I have been sketching is that cultural support is only due to people who have attempted as far as they can to master the language and outlook of the majority culture. People who refuse to make this effort should be held responsible for their predicament, in which case their incapability is no longer grounds for liberal egalitarian intervention. Now, on its own, this does not represent a serious difficulty for the argument, since the people who are incapable in the relevant sense depend on others (including those who are capable) to make up a viable community. But it does, I think, point to a slightly different intuition that many people are likely to have about minority rights. This is the intuition that, even if everyone in a minority culture could effortlessly assimilate into the majority, there is something legitimate about their desire not to, their desire to preserve their own distinct identity. As Kymlicka puts it, "even where the obstacles to integration are smallest, the desire of national minorities to retain their cultural membership remains very strong." [35] Kymlicka's point, I think, is that, even if members of a costly minority culture are able to assimilate easily into the majority, they should not be faced with the choice of doing so or paying the high cost of remaining within their own culture: they have a legitimate interest in the survival of their own culture which justifies some kind of support or compensation from the rest of the community.

I share Kymlicka's intuition about this point but I do not think that his approach, even on my own version of it, can possibly explain it. So long as the argument hinges on what is chosen and what is unchosen in a person's situation it cannot condone intervention on behalf of a people who could assimilate into the majority culture but would prefer not to. In light of these limitations, I believe that further work needs to be done on the relationship between liberal egalitarian principles and support for culture: it is worth investigating whether there are any other reasons, besides the ones explored in this paper, why liberal egalitarians should abandon their preference for *laissez faire* and opt for intervention instead.

NOTES

* Many thanks to Will Kymlicka for comments on an early draft of this paper and to Jerry Cohen for his comments and for showing me his unpublished paper "Multiculturalism and Expensive Taste." Thanks also to Dario Castiglione, Iain

Hampsher-Monk, David Miller, Stuart White, Andrew Williams, and participants in the Nuffield College and University of Exeter Political Theory Workshops for comments and discussion. This paper was completed with the assistance of research grants from FCAR and SSHRC.

1. For good discussions of the Canadian debate see C. Taylor, *Reconciling the Solitudes: Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism* (Kingston, Ontario: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), ch. 8, and J. Tully, "The Crisis of Identification: The Case of Canada," *Political Studies*, vol. 24, Special Issue (1994), 77-96.
2. See, for instance, David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) p. 88; Joseph Raz and Avishai Margalit, "National Self-Determination" in J. Raz *Ethics in the Public Domain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
3. See, for instance, the discussion in Allen Buchanan, *Secession: The Morality of Political Divorce from Fort Sumter to Lithuania and Quebec* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), pp. 52-64.
4. In this paper, I shall focus on Kymlicka's two most important works on this subject: W. Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), and W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). Note that I will sometimes use the terms 'minority' and 'national' culture interchangeably even though they are not always synonymous. Whether or not some national culture is a 'minority' depends on the context but the moral issues are often the same, whichever term is used.
5. See C. Kukathas, "Are There Any Cultural Rights?," *Political Theory*, vol. 20 (1992), sec. III.
6. Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*, pp. 153-54.
7. See Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, pp. 108-15.
8. See, for instance, Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*, pp. 138, 150.
9. For the claim that liberal equality requires an extensive set of rights and liberties, see R. Dworkin, "What is Equality? Part III: The Place of Liberty," *Iowa Law Review*, vol. 72 (1987), 1-54. For the claim that it requires "equality of resources" and for an exposition of this ideal, see R. Dworkin, "What is Equality? Part II: Equality of Resources," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 10 (1981), 283-345. For an overview of Dworkin's position, see his "Foundations of Liberal Equality," in Grethe Petersen (ed.), *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, 11 (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1990), pp. 36-42. 10. See Dworkin, "What Is Equality? Part II" (cited in n. 9, above).
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 284-90.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 289.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 311.
13. Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*, p. 162. Note that Kymlicka combines (ii) and (iii) into a single proposition.
14. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, p. 83.
15. Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*, p. 166.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 165. Emphasis in the original.

17. a. This paragraph and the three that follow are adapted from my article, "The autonomy argument for liberal nationalism," *Nations and Nationalism* 5 (1), 1999, 1-17, at pp. 8-9.
18. Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*, p. 167.
19. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, p. 105.
20. A similar argument is made by John Tomasi in "Kymlicka, Liberalism, and Respect for Cultural Minorities," *Ethics* 105 (April 1995). A weakness in Tomasi's paper is that it fails to consider other possible construals of Kymlicka's position on the relationship between freedom and culture. In particular, he does not consider what I am calling the option-providing reason or the anomie case of the meaning-providing reason.
21. Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*, p. 166.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 146-48.
25. Dworkin, "What is Equality? Part I: Equality of Welfare," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 10/3 (1981), 185-246. For an excellent critical discussion of these objections, see G. A. Cohen, "On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice," *Ethics*, 99/4 (1989), 906-44.
26. Dworkin, "What Is Equality? Part I," pp. 189-90.
27. Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*, pp. 186-87.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
30. For discussion of this sort of case, see Dworkin, "What Is Equality? Part II," pp. 288-89, and "What Is Equality? Part III," p. 31.
31. This strategy is urged by G. A. Cohen in "Multiculturalism and Expensive Taste" (unpublished).
32. For a good discussion of some of these costs and burdens, see Denise G. Reaume, "The Group Right to Linguistic Security: Whose Right, What Duties?" in J. Baker (ed.), *Group Rights*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 127-34.
33. For the concept of a "societal culture," see Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, p. 76.
34. Where members of a sub-culture really are unable to integrate into the mainstream culture, and are disadvantaged by this fact, then it seems to me that liberal egalitarians may have no choice but to recognize that they are eligible for compensation and support.
35. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, pp. 85-86.

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Source: Monist, Jul99, Vol. 82 Issue 3, p387, 24p

Item: 2653692