

CHAPTER 4

TAYLOR'S CULTURAL COMMUNITARIANISM

"Many [communitarians]...believe
that mere appeal to a postulated consensus is
sufficient to justify core political
commitments." -- Ian Shapiro (1990, 224-25)

It will not be surprising that, like Sandel, Taylor puts forward metaphysical claims whose primary justification is strategic, not alethic. For it was Taylor who pointed out to us that his student, Sandel, should be interpreted as doing just that. Taylor's republican communitarianism is not identical to Sandel's, however. Taylor differs from Sandel in urging the strategic importance of consciously embracing the particularity of republican commitments. This emphasis on self-conscious particularity only aggravates the contradiction that gives rise to the communitarian dynamic, producing, in reaction, a denser skein of particularist truth claims and universalist constraints upon them than the ad hoc structure of constraints on which Sandel relies.

Taylor's argument against Nozick, described in Chapter 2, leaves no doubt that for Taylor, republican government is instrumental to individual freedom--"freedom to choose life plans, to dispose of possessions, to form one's own convictions and within reason act on

them, and so on" (1985d, 202). Why, then, does he insist that atomist liberals, who favor just these freedoms, cannot recognize, on instrumental grounds, an obligation to support institutions that preserve freedom? Taylor's answer is that atomism "has no place for functioning republics, societies bonded by patriotism." For patriotism is "grounded on a common good of a stronger kind than atomism allows" (Taylor 1995a, 188, emphasis added). The political value of patriotism in legitimating republics is Taylor's strategic rationale for communitarianism. It commits him to a more nationalistic variant of communitarianism than Sandel's, since for Taylor what is politically necessary is not just an intersubjective identity aimed at liberal ends, but a liberal intersubjective identity that is, at the same time, self-consciously loyal to the values, institutions, and members of a particular polity.

Patriotism, according to Taylor, is very different from "attachment to universal principle" (1995a, 187)--the type of allegiance that might be motivated by a state's usefulness in securing a universally valid end. "Patriotism is based on an identification with others in a particular common enterprise. I'm not dedicated to defending the liberty of just anyone, but I feel the bond of solidarity with my compatriots in our common enterprise" (ibid., 187-88). Patriotism is therefore to be distinguished from "altruistic dedication," which "has no concern for the particular" (ibid., 188). This is where Taylor departs from Sandel (or vice versa). For Sandel, one's "community" is simply the validating authority that stands behind one's normative commitments. For Taylor too, as we shall see, one's

community serves this function. But for him, it is an object of veneration as well. Atomistic individualism is politically undesirable, according to Taylor, because it presents not only an individualistic view of the subject of moral commitments, but a universalistic view of the object of those commitments. For atomism precludes patriotic attachment to the institutions as well as the members of one's particular community.

Despite this difference from Sandel, Taylor's argument against atomism, indeed his entire philosophy, is just as strategic as that of his student. For this reason, it is just as prone to dissolve when we look for the underpinning of its truth claims. Taylor's contention is that a liberal society, "a political culture sustained by institutions of political participation and guarantees of personal independence" (1985d, 198), depends on the widespread belief that atomism is false. This dependence is expressly political: only those who believe that liberal institutions and guarantees are intrinsically valuable, in Taylor's view, will be sufficiently motivated to support them.

For republics to be intrinsically valuable, atomism would have to be false. However, for republics to seem intrinsically valuable, such that they inspire adequate political support, they need not be intrinsically valuable in reality--nor, therefore, need atomism be false. Taylor never faces up to the question of why the intrinsic value of a republic could not, in principle, be propagated as a noble lie even if atomism were valid; or why, if atomism were valid, the instrumental end of a republic, equal freedom, could not still be achieved in the conventional liberal fashion: through equitably

distributed obligations extracted from citizens who are motivated to pay their taxes and obey the laws either by legal sanction or by their recognition that these obligations must be fulfilled if equal freedom is to be secured (as Taylor believes to be the case).

Instead, Taylor vacillates between assertions of the truth value of patriotism, and thus the falseness of atomism; and arguments for these assertions that show in fact merely the usefulness of believing patriotism to be valid if liberal norms are to be politically sustainable--in which case atomism might well be true, even if politically inconvenient. Were Taylor's endorsement of patriotism (~1) entirely strategic (~2')--solely validated, that is to say, by its ability to secure political support for the institutional prerequisites of individual freedom (~3)--Taylor would be, at best, a politically astute liberal. What makes him a communitarian is that he attaches validity to patriotism, trying to make communitarianism not only useful but objectively true (~2). This is the pure communitarian moment in Taylor's thought. It invites relativism by suggesting that attachment to one's fellow participants in any and all "common enterprises"--not just those that secure individual freedom--is good.

The Republican Proviso

The pure communitarian moment passes quickly. To avoid a relativistic embrace of all "particular historical communities" (1985d, 198), including illiberal ones, Taylor immediately (and without

argument) repudiates "patriotisms in unfree societies, for example, founded on race or blood ties and finding expression in despotic forms, as in fascism; or the patriotism of Russians, under tsars and Bolsheviks, which is/was linked to authoritarian forms of rule." This move narrows the range of acceptable patriotisms down to one type, "republican patriotism": loyalty only to particular polities that contain such liberal institutions and values as "the rule of law, individual rights," "principles of fairness and equal treatment," and "the central good of the civic-humanist tradition, participatory self-rule" (1995a, 199). I will call this constraint on Taylor's particularism the republican proviso. My main concern will be whether it is consistent with the particularist precepts of Taylor's critique of atomism.

Taylor justifies patriotism by presenting it as a politically effective antidote to the atomism he blames on naturalist universalism. But a blanket endorsement of patriotism in any and all societies courts relativism among the particular polities to which people might be loyal. Checking this relativism by endorsing only republican patriotism, however, appears to be a form of universalism, reducing republics, and patriotism, to instruments of a transcultural value, equal freedom. How, then, has Taylor escaped the allegedly scientific, naturalistic ambition to achieve a standpoint beyond all social particularity?

Taylor's answer to this question involves reconceptualizing the republican proviso's universalist constraint on patriotism as being, itself, particularistic. This type of reconceptualization occurs

repeatedly in Taylor's communitarianism: it is his response to the contradiction embodied in the strategy of using particularist means in a less-than-overtly strategic bid to achieve universal ends. Before explicating the structure of Taylor's communitarianism, then, we need to explore why he succumbs to this, the communitarian dynamic. Why does he make metaphysical truth claims for particularist patriotism instead of presenting it simply as an effective way to defend liberal institutions of universal validity?

Taylor's reply is based on a distinction between convergent and shared goods. Convergent goods are the public goods recognized by atomist theory, such as flood control and national defense. These are valuable to individuals separately but must, in order to avoid free riding, be pursued jointly. Shared goods, by contrast, are those whose value is necessarily a product of their joint pursuit. If there were a way to provide shared goods individually, they would not be as good. Pursuing them is (at least in part) an end in itself.

Shared goods, according to Taylor, are not recognized by atomists. Patriotism, however, requires that one see the state and participation in it--politics--as shared goods, ends in themselves. "The bond of solidarity with my compatriots in a functioning republic is based on a sense of shared fate, where the sharing itself is of value." Thus, Taylor maintains, "a republican regime as classically understood requires an ontology different from atomism": an ontology of "we-identities as against merely convergent I-identities" (1995a, 192). At this juncture Taylor is making the transition from a strategic argument for the usefulness of "we-identities" in sustaining liberal

freedoms to an assertion of the validity of these identities.

Notice that Taylor does not adhere to my distinction between generic patriotism and republican patriotism: he consistently ignores the genus in favor of the species, presenting patriotism as if it automatically has the republican proviso built in (except when he is explicitly stating the proviso). But nothing in his argument about shared goods justifies his restriction of the intrinsic value of "my ties with these people and to this enterprise" to a republican regime (1995a, 192). If "a sense of shared fate" produces an intrinsically valuable bond of solidarity (ibid.), then all regimes (especially, perhaps, those at war with other regimes, putting the fate of their members in the balance) have intrinsic value; whether a regime is republican or not is beside the point. Taylor's strategic argument needs to contain the republican proviso, because equal freedom is the political end the argument serves: "the essential condition of a free (nondespotic) regime is that the citizens have a deeper patriotic identification" (ibid.). But if patriotic identification is to be considered the expression of a valid metaphysics rather than being merely a convenient phenomenon of social psychology, then Taylor has proved too much, since members of despotic regimes may feel the same identification, only more so.

Taylor also proves too little. His assertion that atomists are necessarily averse to recognizing shared goods is unwarranted. The value of such goods, after all, accrues to the individuals sharing them, just as with convergent goods (cf. Hardin 1995, 67-68). An atomistic society might, however, have difficulty achieving shared

goods, no matter how much they were recognized as desirable, because of collective-action problems peculiar to such goods. Even if atomists believe that equal freedom is valuable to them as individuals, they may be unwilling to do what is necessary to secure it. So--assuming that political participation is, as Taylor claims, an empirical prerequisite of equal freedom--there may not be enough of it in an atomistic culture, not because atomists must be blind to its (instrumental) value, but because no one person's participation will make the difference between securing equal freedom for society as a whole and failing to do so. This collective-action problem could indeed be solved if participation came to be viewed as intrinsically rather than instrumentally valuable. What might be deficient in atomistic societies, then, is not widespread acceptance of the value of shared goods, but widespread acceptance of their (alleged) intrinsic value.

But Taylor provides no reason for us to be concerned about this deficiency that is not itself an instrumentalist concern, for he has not shown that shared goods are, in fact, intrinsically valuable. Rather than demonstrating that political participation is intrinsically valuable, Taylor has argued only that if people do not think it is, they will not support institutions that are, *ex hypothesi*, instrumental to equal freedom. But even if we grant, for the sake of argument, that viable liberal institutions require citizens who accept the intrinsic value of participating in and otherwise supporting them, this does not mean that political participation and support are intrinsically valuable.

As was true of Sandel, therefore, Taylor's claim that republics

"require" a collectivist ontology is true only strategically, not alethically. Even at the strategic level, moreover, there is no reason why atomist philosophers could not endorse hoodwinking the public into accepting a collectivist ontology in order to help it achieve its members' (individual) interest in equal freedom; or why a state could not simply compel the populace to do whatever is necessary to overcome collective-action problems, while leaving intact the popular belief in atomism. This is just what conventional liberals propose: a state strong enough to force people to pitch in for the common good, but one that is prohibited from enforcing or encouraging "controversial" metaphysical beliefs. Perhaps such liberals are politically naive; perhaps a neutral liberal state is unfeasible. If so--if more devious means than simple compulsion are strategically necessary--then perhaps it would be desirable to manipulate people into believing that to participate in and support liberal institutions is intrinsically valuable. But this would not make such a belief true.¹

By never even considering the possibility of compulsory or manipulative solutions to collective action problems, Taylor discloses that, in effect, he is more liberal than the liberals. He is, like the other communitarians, willing to put metaphysics to the service of liberal ends, but only so as to secure voluntary support for those ends. For Taylor, only

a strong identification with the society could move citizens to assume willingly the heavier burdens of a free regime....This identification can perhaps be

described in this way: it exists where the common form of life is seen as a supremely important good, so that its continuance and flourishing matters to the citizens for its own sake and not just instrumentally to their several individual goods. (Taylor 1985a, 213, emphases added.)

Taylor notes that without the patriotism that is fostered by love of the particular and by the perception of political participation as a shared good, "coercion" would be necessary to extract the necessary "sacrifices," "demands," and "disciplines" from the citizens of a republic (1995a, 187). "A free society needs [patriotic] motivation to provide what despotisms get through fear; to engender the disciplines, the sacrifices, the essential contributions it needs to keep going" (ibid., 193). Like Sandel, Taylor not only wants a society that protects individual freedom; he wants such a society to be produced freely. This seems to be why it is so important to him that he convince rather than force or deceive people to do what he thinks is necessary for the preservation of liberal "institutions and guarantees." Hence his attempt to overcome republican collective-action problems by asserting that political participation is good in itself, paralleling Sandel's attempt to overcome political resistance to income redistribution and affirmative action by claiming that we are actually members of a collective "self"--not just by claiming that it would be useful for us to think so.

A defender of Taylor and Sandel might portray these moves as

cunning tactics in the effort to secure universal ends, turning to good purpose existing, parochial loyalties rather than relying on relatively ineffective theories of abstract rights. But if Taylor and Sandel could accept this Mchiavellian portrait of their particularism,² they would be able to leave it at that--a shrewd strategy, nothing more. Instead, they insist that the metaphysics they are trying to persuade people to accept is really true, and that deontology and atomism are not only inconvenient, but false. And this is what produces the dynamic of communitarianism, its relativism and its sanctioning of immoral communal practices, and therefore the need to constrain it by adding to it caveats that contradict it, making it but a convoluted form of liberalism. All of this is a high philosophical price to pay, suggesting that more is at work than a strategic gambit. By insisting that shared goods are intrinsically valuable and "we-identities" valid, Taylor not only goes beyond what would be justified by a strategic rationale for communitarianism; he actually jeopardizes the strategic aim of his patriotism by according intrinsic value even to illiberal polities, leading to pure communitarianism and thus the need for constraints such as the republican proviso.

Liberal norms enter Taylor's communitarianism (like Sandel's) in three ways. First, they are the political target toward which his strategic rationale is aimed. Second, they make it impossible to think of communitarianism as a mere strategy, since that would entail manipulation. Third, once it is viewed as a proposition about the true nature of the subject, communitarianism must be constrained to sanction only liberal communities if it is to achieve its political object.

Plainly it is untrue that, as Taylor would have it, atomism must be false if patriotism is to be widely enough accepted to inspire uncoerced participation and support for a regime (of whatever variety). All that is necessary to bring forth such participation and support is, at most, a widespread belief in the intrinsic value of participating in and supporting the regime, not the actual intrinsic value of these activities. The point here is elementary, although it is one that Taylor and Sandel frequently overlook: the instrumental value of a belief is not equivalent to its truth value. Even if he had demonstrated the usefulness of the belief that republics are intrinsically valuable, Taylor would not have proved that they are intrinsically valuable. This raises a puzzle to be addressed in Chapter 5: how (as opposed to why) can the optimistic communitarians make such a basic error?

The Structure of Taylor's Communitarianism

Far from confirming the usual claim that republicanism is an anachronistic doctrine far removed from modern realities, Taylor's republicanism is built--like the views of the other optimistic communitarians--on a crucial political reality that necessarily eludes conventional liberals. This hard fact is the irreplaceable role nationalism plays in sustaining "liberal" states. Nationalist sentiments produce sympathy for one's fellow nationals, and this sympathy is the foundation of modern redistributive politics. As Yael

Tamir (1993, 121) notes, the "community-like nature of the nation-state is particularly well suited, and perhaps even necessary, to the notion of the liberal welfare state." The nation-state is, in David Miller's words, "the setting in which ideas of social justice can be pursued" (Miller 1995, 185).

As universalists, however, liberals cannot readily countenance the restriction of egalitarianism to the confines of a nation-state, excluding human beings who happen to live outside these borders from the rights and entitlements granted to those who live within. Liberals have always been reluctant to recognize the role of nationalism in legitimating liberal policies, let alone endorsing it (although, with the appearance of works such as Tamir's and Miller's, which draw on communitarian philosophy, this reluctance may be ending).

As Taylor pointed out in his 1982 essay, "The Diversity of Goods,"

there is a standing divergence between the demands of international equality and those of democratic self-rule in advanced Western societies. Democratic electorates in these societies will probably never agree to the amount of redistribution consistent with redressing the past wrongs of imperialism, or meeting in full the present requirements of universal human solidarity

--for the citizens of Western societies are far more concerned with

taking care of their fellow nationals than with giving aid to "foreigners" (in 1985d, 245). The collective selfishness of Western electorates is a graphic illustration of the side of nationalism that repels universalistic liberals. But Taylor is not repelled: he celebrates this parochialism. "Only despotic regimes, like Cuba and the DDR," he wrote before the Berlin Wall came down, "bleed themselves for the Third World" (ibid.). As indicated by the term "despotic," Taylor was criticizing the likes of East Germany for their alleged propensity to self-sacrifice. By contrast, Taylor implies that the modern liberal state should be congratulated for pursuing its collective self-interest rather than international distributive justice, for it thereby demonstrates "a common allegiance to a particular historical community" (ibid., 198). Its sense of obligation ends--properly, in Taylor's view--wherever exclusionary borders have been drawn by history.

Since liberal theorists are loath to justify the circumscription of interpersonal obligations by national boundaries, Taylor's endorsement of nationalism might be seen as remedying an important lacuna in contemporary political philosophy. But his argument for nationalism, being as strategic as his argument for patriotic support for and participation in a regime, does not fill this gap. What justifies the geographical limitation of interpersonal obligations? Taylor's only answer is, again, that nationalism is needed if the sacrifices required by liberal institutions are to be made voluntarily: if a republic is to survive freely, in his view, its citizens need to believe that their compatriots are more deserving of sympathy than

foreigners. But Taylor does not show that, in fact, they are more deserving.

Indeed, the particularism of modern nation-states appears to be an instance of exactly that indiscriminate negative freedom against which Taylor contrasts "strong evaluation." "Some discrimination among motivations seems essential to our [positive] concept of freedom" (1985d, 219), Taylor contends; yet what separates democratic republics from Cuba and East Germany seems to be that the former refuse to discriminate among the motivations of their electorates. This is what enables them to indulge their electorates' selfish inclination to look after themselves rather than helping the Third World.³ It is the communist despotisms that practiced strong evaluation, bleeding their people for the sake of the Third World despite what must have been their inclination to look after themselves. How can Taylor square his endorsement of positive freedom with his defense of Western states, which seem bastions of the "simple weighing" of preferences when compared to communist tyrannies?

This quandary dissipates once we realize that strong evaluation is not, in Taylor's hands, actually a device for discriminating the "good" from the "bad" in any usual sense of these terms. One might easily be led to believe that strong evaluation is intended to discern the good because Harry Frankfurt's (1971) idea of the second-order evaluation of first-order desires, upon which Taylor erects his defense of positive liberty, seems compatible with--indeed, it could be read as demanding--the evaluator's adoption of some transcendent standard, whether deontological or teleological, secular or religious, as the

second-order evaluative criterion. Otherwise--if the standard does not transcend what is being evaluated, namely, existing preferences--how can it serve as a basis for their evaluation?

But if Taylor were to endorse a transcendent form of strong evaluation, he would be a universalist, and even his argument for the truth value of parochial political identities would amount to an attempt to manipulate people into supporting regimes that are actually good not because they express people's particular identities, but because they embody universally valid norms. (This is precisely how the work of nationalist liberals such as Tamir and Miller might be characterized; see Friedman 1996.) Instead, Taylor gives us a particularist version of strong evaluation, in which the goal is not to compare our preferences to a transcendent good, but rather to equate some of our preferences--those that are in tune with our socially determined "identity"--with an immanent good. Thus, Taylor uses strong evaluation not only to indict the indiscriminate liberal acceptance of individual preferences but, contradictorily, to endorse the indiscriminate acceptance of certain (indeterminate) communal preferences. What I will call Taylor's social expressivism is the philosophical perspective that produces this ambiguity about the status of preferences.

Social expressivism welds together two elements: the Romantic tradition Taylor labels "expressivism" plus Taylor's Wittgensteinian philosophy of language. The first of these elements, expressivism simpliciter, consists of three assumptions that Taylor runs together, but that need to be disaggregated: i. the assumption that the only way

to make second-order evaluations of what is good is to ground them in one's "identity"; ii. the assumption that one's identity manifests some unique essence; and iii. the assumption that one's identity is good. To these assumptions, social expressivism conjoins iv. the Wittgenstein-derived assumption that that one's (unique, valuable) identity is socially constituted. Let us consider these elements in turn.

i. The identity assumption equates the second-order evaluation of first-order desires with the expression of one's identity. Truly free decisions, Taylor asserts, reflect "important, long-lasting needs, represent a fulfilment of something central to me, will bring me closer to what I really am, or something of the sort." In short, they reflect "our identity, whereby we recognize that some goals, desires, allegiances are central to what we are, while others are not or are less so" (1985d, 224). Second-order evaluations of first-order desires, then, must (to count as strong evaluations) yield "authentic" decisions, meaning decisions that are "true to [one's] own convictions" (1985d, 194). The autonomous chooser is positively free in the sense of being able to rise above distractions and forces that would keep her from expressing her identity. Her choice to fulfill a certain desire is autonomous only if she really, authentically desires it.

ii. The essentialist (uniqueness) assumption is derived from Taylor's Romanticism. It is reflected in Herder's protonationalist idea that "each people ha[s] its own peculiar guiding theme or manner of expression, unique and irreplaceable" (Taylor 1979, 2). "Each culture, and within it each individual as well, has its own 'form' to

realize," Taylor writes, and "no other can replace it or substitute for it" (ibid., 3). At the individual level, "my humanity is something unique, not equivalent to yours" (Taylor 1975, 16).

The essentialist assumption may seem to suggest, following Herder, that there is a harmony among the multitude of unique individual and collective identities, such that each of them is valuable. But this suggestion is not necessarily consistent with the particularist thrust Taylor derives from the Romantics. The notion that everyone's unique essence can be part of a harmonious whole comes from an Aristotelian view of Romanticism, which, as Taylor notes, conflicts with the essence, as it were, of essentialism.⁴ According to Aristotle, Taylor writes, "the adequate human life" fulfills a form that "is fixed independently of the subject who realizes it." But for the Romantics, an adequate human life "must have the added dimension that the subject can recognize it as his own, as having unfolded from within him. This self-related dimension is entirely missing from the Aristotelian tradition" (Taylor 1975, 15). When Aristotelianism is subtracted from the Romantic view, it becomes subjectivist and discordant--as soon as the third assumption is added. For there is nothing to stop the drive toward uniqueness from giving different people essences that directly contradict each other. This is simply to say that Romanticism cannot be spared the contradictions of pure communitarianism once the alien, harmonizing remnant of Greek universalism is removed.

iii. The particularist assumption implies that the unique aspect of individual identity is necessarily good. (One might instead, for

example, view unique identities that contradict a transcendent normative criterion as so many deviations from the one true good.) When Herder claims that each essence is unique, he also implies that it is good: as Taylor puts it, "Each people ha[s] its own peculiar guiding theme or manner of expression, unique and irreplaceable, which should never be suppressed" (1979, 2).

As far as I can tell, Taylor never defends this crucial assumption. He simply relies on the authority of such writers as Herder and Hegel. But why is it reasonable to believe that even accurate second-order reflection about which of one's desires expresses one's unique identity will produce values that are good, such that they should never be suppressed?

Perhaps Taylor intends to say that second-order expressions of unique identity are more objective than first-order expressions of desire because, being based on reflection about which preferences are essential to one's identity, second-order views are more rational than the desires they assess. But Taylor gives us no reason to think that any given agent will hit on truly good ends if she relies on ratiocination about her identity instead of simply weighing her desires against each other. If anything, he gives us reason to think otherwise, precisely because he equates second-order reflection with the expression of an individual's unique identity (assumptions i plus ii). In this view of second-order reflection, the individual does not search for what is (objectively) good. Instead, she searches for her (subjective) identity. It is a category mistake to equate the one with the other.

Like Sandel, Taylor tries to oppose value subjectivism. For instance, he trenchantly attacks the type of subjectivism encouraged by crude forms of utilitarianism, which assign equal worth to all individual desires. Against this view, which corresponds to "negative freedom, the freedom to do what I like" (1975, 390), Taylor emphasizes that an agent can be wrong about what he truly wants. Taylor's embrace of positive freedom is designed to fight such subjectivism. But by equating second-order reflection with the search for one's authentic identity, Taylor inadvertently subjectivizes strong evaluation. It is true that his form of positive liberty may be more discriminating than forms of subjectivism that take unreflective "de facto desires" (1975, 543; 1985b, 31) to be incorrigibly good. By comparing one's de facto desires against one's unique identity, Taylor allows the subject to choose which of the former are "authentic." But Taylor, like Sandel, overlooks another kind of subjectivism, one that persists even when we agree with Taylor that the individual may be mistaken about which of her desires are good. This form of subjectivism resides in the idea that the content of the good must be contained in some of the preferences of the individual in the first place.

Taylor's particularism (iii) endorses this form of subjectivism. It is what allows him to associate strong evaluation with "the frustration/fulfilment of our purposes" (1985d, 198, emphasis added), and with the "affirmation of...our defining situation...as ours" (1975, 563). This kind of subjectivism--identitarian or, more elegantly, Romantic subjectivism--is traceable at least to Taylor's 1975 study, Hegel. There, for example, in the same paragraph in which Taylor

argues that freedom cannot be "identified with following our strongest, or most persistent, or most all-embracing desire," he asserts that it can be identified with "those of our aspirations which we endorse with our whole soul"--aspirations that are somehow "more authentically ours" than others (1975, 561-62). Compare Frankfurt's view: according to him, the second-order evaluation of desires indicates that people "are capable of wanting to be different, in their preferences and purposes, from what they are" (Frankfurt 1971, 7, emphasis added). Although Frankfurt goes on to assume, for no apparent reason, that second-order evaluation must involve "identify[ing]" oneself with one or some of the desires one already has (ibid., 13, 16), this seems inconsistent with the insight that second-order evaluation concerns "the desirability of" desires (ibid., 11, emphasis added). Surely a premise of reflection upon the desirability of one's desires need not be that some of them must be desirable.

Taylor locates the historical origin of the Romantic approach in the attempt to overcome Kant's diremption of moral autonomy from inclination, the universal from the particular (Taylor 1975, 32ff). The basic approach taken by Kant's successors was to bridge this gap by speculating that particular inclinations actually express something good. Indeed, they claimed not only that natural human desires--for Kant, the source of heteronomy--are moral, but that non-human nature is, too. Hence the Idealist ontologies of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. To identify the Idealist origins of identitarian subjectivism, however, is not to render it legitimate. If anything, cognizance of its intellectual history has the opposite effect, for its genesis

suggests that it may only have been plausible because of the theology that originally went with it. Absent some analogue to the belief that everything is good because it is created by God, it is hard to see much merit in the idea that everyone's unique identity is automatically good.

Taylor's equation of strong evaluation with reflection about one's authentic identity distances him from an endorsement of de facto desires, just as does Sandel's reflexive proviso. We can understand why Taylor might consider a particularism hedged in by the strictures of "authenticity" to be more objective than the atomist's endorsement of de facto desires, since such a limited particularism allows one, upon reflection, to draw a distinction between worthwhile, essential "inclinations" and happenstance, inessential "desires." But the edge that this form of strong evaluation has over atomism comes entirely from the extent to which expressivist particularism is, relative to atomism, constrained. The identity assumption (i), by imposing this constraint, works at cross purposes with the particularist assumption (iii). It transforms what would otherwise be a completely indiscriminate equation of the good with whatever one desires into a relatively sober equation of the good with one's identity. The uniqueness assumption (ii) chips in by giving the identity assumption some content: one determines what one's identity consists in by figuring out which of one's preferences are unique.

But for all of the constraint the first two assumptions produce when Taylor's expressivism is compared to, say, some utilitarians' apotheosis of de facto desires, Taylor's position remains

subjectivistic because of the third assumption. It is important whether what I seek knowledge about is "what is central to me," "what I really am," rather than what should be central to me or what I really should be. By equating the good with some of one's preferences (the unique ones), Taylor's third assumption entrenches a surd element of the subjectively, contingently given in his understanding of what is objectively good. Despite the constraint that only what is subjectively, contingently given as one's unique identity is to count as good, the good remains buried, for some reason, somewhere in every individual's subjective, contingent desires. As Taylor puts it,

The idea is not just that men are different; this was hardly new; it was rather that the differences define the unique form that each of us is called on to realize. The differences take on moral import, so that the question could arise for the first time whether a given form of life was an authentic expression of certain individuals or people. This is the new dimension added by a theory of self-realization. (1975, 17, emphasis original)

In short, the third assumption makes particular individual identities good simply by virtue of their being particular individual identities.

Romantic particularism thus embeds value subjectivism in Taylor's thought. The only significant respect in which Taylor differs from Romanticism is over the locus of particularity. Taylor's fourth assumption, while leaving Romantic particularism intact, shifts its

locus away from the individual. In this way it embodies the basic communitarian mistake: the focus on individualism as the source of subjectivism, leading to proposals for an equally relativistic, but metaphysically collectivist, alternative.

iv. The social assumption is derived from the claim that human beings are essentially rational and linguistic.⁵ Rationality, Taylor believes, is "characteristically human," and a human being is also essentially "a language-using animal" (1985d, 190, 196). These two definitions of the human essence go together, because rationality, or autonomy, calls for strong evaluation; and strong evaluation requires "a language in which to express the superiority of one alternative, the language of higher and lower, noble and base, courageous and cowardly, integrated and fragmented, and so on" (1985b, 24). Positive freedom depends on rational normative reflection, and rational normative reflection depends on language, so the preconditions of language will be the preconditions of autonomy. And Taylor believes the preconditions of language to be social.

Although Taylor buttresses the latter view with many references to Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations (e.g., Taylor 1975, 567; 1985b, 192, 237, and ch. 10; 1989, ch. 2; 1995a, chs. 1, 4, 5), he traces its ultimate origins to writers such as Herder, Humboldt, and Heidegger, who held that

a language, and the related set of distinctions underlying our experience and interpretation, is something that can only grow in and be sustained by a community. In

that sense, what we are as human beings [i.e., rational; ergo, strong evaluators] we are only in a cultural community....The life of a language and culture is one whose locus is larger than that of the individual. It happens in the community. The individual possesses this culture, and hence his identity, by participating in this larger life. (Taylor 1979, 87)

The social view of language thus establishes, according to Taylor, "the priority of society as the locus of the individual's identity" (1995a, 13).

A language only exists and is maintained within a language community....One is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it....Who I am ...finds its original sense in the interchange of speakers. [For] there is no way we could be inducted into personhood except by being initiated into a language. We first learn our languages of moral and spiritual discernment by being brought into an ongoing conversation by those who bring us up. The meanings that the key words first had for me are the meanings they have for us, that is, for me and my conversation partners together. (1989, 35, emphasis original)

If the individual is to achieve rational, positive freedom, then, it will be through strong evaluations rooted in a socially formed language. "The linguistic dimension...makes possible value in the strong sense....Only language beings can identify things as worthy of desire or aversion" (ibid., 106).

The particularist assumption (iii) unbalanced by the social assumption (iv) would produce a Romantic, individualist analogue to pure communitarianism. Once the artificial harmony of identities created by Aristotelianism is ejected from Romantic particularism, any given individual's unique identity becomes a source of a moral authority that is relativistic unless it can somehow be precluded from contradicting the unique identities of other individuals. Taylor's fourth assumption rectifies this problem--but only by making the community's unique identity the source of moral authority. This authority is as relativistic as is the pure individualism captured in the third assumption. Thus, Taylor's social expressivism replaces pure individualism with pure communitarianism--unless, in turn, the social assumption (iv) is weakened by provisos of some kind. But since a communitarianism thus constrained would collapse back into individualist expressivism (i-iii), only an unconstrained interpretation of the social assumption can ground Taylor's endorsement of the intrinsic value of the (republican) state.

Pure Linguistic Communitarianism

Taylor is far from clear about whether unconstrained social expressivism is what he has in mind. When engaged in exegesis of such philosophical heroes as Herder, Hegel, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein, Taylor seems to imply that all second-order desires that conform to the values of one's community count as expressions of one's unique and valuable identity, because the community is the "locus" of the language in which second-order evaluations are made. This seems to be what Taylor means us to conclude from Wittgenstein's private-language argument:

A language, and the related set of distinctions underlying our experience and interpretation, is something that can only grow in and be sustained by a community. In that sense, what we are as human beings, we are only in a cultural community....

When I say that a language and the related distinctions can only be sustained by a community, I am not thinking only of language as a medium of communication; so that our experience could be entirely private, and just need a public medium to be communicated from one to another. Rather the fact is that our experience is what it is, is shaped in part, by the way we interpret it; and this has a lot to do with the terms which are available to us in our culture. (Taylor 1975, 381)

A language only exists and is maintained within a language community. And this indicates another crucial feature of a self. One is only a self among other selves....

I define who I am by defining where I speak from, in the family tree, in social space, in the geography of social statuses and functions, in my intimate relations to the ones I love. (Taylor 1989, 35.)

The unconstrained interpretation of such passages would shift the source of one's identity--the decision-making authority in moral matters--from the individual (under expressivist assumptions i-iii alone) to the community.

Further supporting an unconstrained interpretation of Taylor's social expressivism is his tendency to proceed as if the social assumption (iv) is the only contestible part of social expressivism. (Indeed, he does not even distinguish expressivism from social expressivism, let alone distinguish between the three assumptions that make up the former.) Taylor appears to believe, for example, that, if one agrees with Wittgenstein in rejecting the possibility of a private language, one must automatically accept the normative authority of one's constitutive community. This does not follow, however. Assumption iii is also needed if one's socially constituted identity is to have normative significance. The social assumption without a normatively dispositive particularism has no normative implications at

all. Even if the social assumption is accurate,⁶ all it justifies is the descriptive claim that society is a prerequisite of language. No prescriptions validly follow from this observation. That I was taught the English words "good" and "bad" by other English speakers does not entitle them to determine what is good or bad, or even to determine what is good or bad "for me"; that I participate in a particular English-speaking culture does not impose on me either an obligation to approve of the values widely shared in my culture, or an inability to reject them. Nor does Taylor's more ambitious claim, that one cannot make strong evaluations without a socially derived vocabulary of "higher and lower, noble and base, courageous and cowardly, integrated and fragmented"⁷ (1985b, 24), establish the validity of the content one's linguistic community attaches to these terms.

It is not even clear that this more ambitious claim is true. Is language necessary for strong evaluation? Any given English speaker is capable of performing actions that other English speakers would be able to oppose even if they had no antonym to "good" at their disposal. (Opposition to their conversation partners' objectionable actions would even be consistent with Taylor's assumption of the surd goodness of some given desires as long as the objectionable actions had some appeal to the objectors, albeit an appeal that was overridden by other, stronger considerations.) Discriminating among desires does not require labeling them.

Even to begin considering the issue in these terms, however, conflates description and prescription. The most important question raised by making one's community a normative "locus" is not whether a

given culture's repertory of concepts actually constrains the valuations conceivable for its individual members. It is whether, even if it did so, it would make that repertory morally binding (as opposed to contingently inescapable) for the individual members. If there were a culture so conceptually impoverished that it had many terms for cruelty but none for kindness, even if this did compel the members of the culture to be cruel, it would not make cruelty good or kindness evil.

An unconstrained, pure-communitarian interpretation of expressivism seems to motivate the project Taylor undertakes in Sources of the Self, which is primarily to provide a genealogy of how the subjective turn in Western culture led to "punctual" or individualistic understandings of freedom, and how social expressivism, combining assumptions i-iv, provides the much-needed remedy. There, and in The Ethics of Authenticity, Taylor also urges the social assumption as the answer to contemporary, narcissistic subjectivism, which "travesties and eventually betrays" expressivism (1991, 22). Taylor's intention is to find a middle way between conservative critics of the culture of authenticity who reject the very idea of identity, on one side, and the subjectivist forms of that culture, on the other. Only an unconstrained reading of the social assumption would seem to do the trick, by establishing that the dependence of language on society makes the true (objective) expression of one's normatively dispositive identity depend on its conformity to socially accepted values rather than individual whims. Thus, Taylor claims that individualistic versions of expressivism pervert the desire to be true to our

identities, for they neglect the social "sources" of identity. Individualists hold that "community affiliations, the solidarities of birth, of marriage, of the family, of the polis, all take second place" to "the primacy of self-fulfilment" (1989, 507). They "concentrate on self-fulfilment in opposition to the demands of society, or nature...bracket[ing] out history, nature, society, the demands of solidarity, everything but what I find in myself." Individualism therefore "slides towards an affirmation of choice itself. All options are equally worthy, because they are freely chosen, and it is the choice that confers worth." Affirming the intrinsic value of choice amounts to "soft relativism," and its individualist source--identity sans community--constitutes "the subjectivist principle" (1991, 37-38, emphasis original). In short, individualism is invalid--not just politically unwise. Passages such as these give rise to the impression that Taylor is a value objectivist; but it is hard to see how, if what makes a value objective is its social source, we can somehow constrain this source so that it validates only unique social identities that do not violate liberal sensibilities.

Taylor claims that "the ideal of authenticity doesn't itself license its self-centred modes. Rather, in the light of this ideal, these appear as deviant and trivialized" (1991, 55). Its "transcendence of particularity" (1989, 407) is what is responsible for the degenerate, individualistic form of expressivism. "A self-definition in dialogue," by contrast, "binds us to others" (1991, 66-67) by virtue of its social particularity, furnishing us with "authoritative horizons" (1979, 159)--extra-individual sources of

norms. Indeed, these may have to include not only society but nature and God (e.g., 1989, 495; 1991, 82) if they are to counteract the relativistic implications of individualist expressivism. If society has the authority of nature and God in "situating" us, the implication would seem to be that it is wrong for us to violate social norms. Thus, social expressivism, if unconstrained, contains another moment of pure communitarianism, one that stands behind the (quickly constrained) pure-communitarian affirmation of all patriotisms.

Back to Individualism

As with his pure communitarian version of patriotism, however, Taylor no sooner expounds the strong interpretation of the social assumption than he constrains it. In this case, the constraint is so massive that, if taken seriously, it obliterates the social assumption entirely. For Taylor allows that the positively free individual can dissent--apparently without limit--from her socially given identity. Let us call this close relative of Sandel's reflexive proviso the dissensus proviso. It is necessary if social expressivism is not to sanction all social norms, even those that are repressive and inegalitarian.⁸

While Taylor derides "conceptions of individualism which picture the human person as...declaring independence from the webs of interlocution which have originally formed him/her, or at least neutralizing them" (1989, 36), the dissensus proviso appears to

sanction just such conceptions. For it allows us to "sharply shift the balance in our definition of identity, dethron[ing] the given, historic community as a pole of identity"--somehow without "sever[ing] our dependence on webs of interlocution" (ibid., 39). In "the definition of our identity," Taylor avers, we are "always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the identities our significant others want to recognize in us. And even when we outgrow some of the latter--our parents, for instance--and they disappear from our lives, the conversation with them continues within us for as long as we live" (1991, 33, emphasis original). "I may develop an original way of understanding myself and human life, at least one which is in sharp disagreement with my family and background. But the innovation can only take place from the base in our common language" (1989, 35-36). The net result of these qualifications is a reading of the social assumption that allows the community no real authority over the individual, because everything the individual does counts as an expression of her socially constituted identity. Indeed, Taylor adds a straightforward equivalent to Sandel's reflexive proviso: notice, for example, his previously quoted, and (as far as I know) unjustified, declaration that "our experience...is shaped in part, by the way we interpret it; and this has a lot to do with the terms which are available to us in our culture" (1975, 381, emphases added). We might call this the partial proviso.

These two constraints on the social assumption effectively render it a dead letter, leaving us to wonder about the purpose of Taylor's painstaking contrasts between negative and positive liberty and between

perversely individualistic (simple weighing) forms of expressivism and those that acknowledge the "authoritative horizon" provided by society (strong evaluation). If, as the dissensus and partial provisos suggest, society is merely a handy source of language teachers and conversation partners who serve as points of reference and, when asked, as interlocutors in the individual's unbounded search for her own identity, there would seem to be little reason for Taylor to emphasize so strongly the constitutive nature of language and culture. Nor would he seem capable, with his hands tied by the dissensus proviso, of fending off the subjectivism he so thoroughly deplores.

In the constrained interpretation of social expressivism, then, Taylor adds to individualist expressivism (i-iii) the social assumption (iv), generating pure communitarianism; but then he returns expressivism to its individualistic starting point by undermining the social assumption with the dissensus and partial provisos. This guarantees the individual freedom that was the point of the exercise, but only by completely subverting Taylor's critique of liberalism and traducing his alternative: the pure-communitarian insistence that our social horizons determine the good. The dissensus proviso reduces the good to individually chosen values, all of which automatically express unique, "socially" determined identities because we are "always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the identities our significant others want to recognize in us" (1989, 33, emphasis added). Individual freedom (~3) now dominates Taylor's communitarian moral epistemology (~1), and no departure from liberalism is apparent. Communitarian relativism is constrained so completely that

individualist subjectivism takes its place; and there is nothing left to justify Taylor's claim that atomistic individualism is invalid, such that the (republican) state is intrinsically valuable.

Because a literal interpretation of the dissensus and partial provisos has such drastic consequences, however, we might want to treat the provisos as formalities, leaving social expressivism unconstrained. In this interpretation, the social assumption transforms Romanticism into pure communitarianism, and the resulting social expressivism rescues our "identities" from subjectivism by conferring binding authority on our "webs of interlocution," which are equated with the good. Now, however, communitarian metaphysics as true (~1) dominates liberal norms, defeating Taylor's strategic purpose. This would justify Taylor's endorsement of the nationalistic behavior of liberal republics by using the social assumption to transfer subjective arbitrariness to society at large, but it would block the republican proviso that restricts Taylor's nationalism to societies that respect equal freedom.

Moreover, nationalism itself contradicts Taylor's version of positive freedom. By endorsing nationalism, Taylor appears to suggest that the liberty enjoyed by the citizens of "free states" is the freedom to indulge de facto desires, unmediated by second-order evaluation. Now we see that the appearance is real, and we can discern the reason for it: the expressivism at the foundation of Taylor's version of positive freedom is itself relativistic, licensing either the individual (i-iii) or society (iv) to pursue whatever ends express a unique identity. Without the social assumption, or with the social

assumption overturned by the dissensus and partial provisos, individual expressivism is wholly indeterminate about the good because it must be neutral between competing, unique individual conceptions of the good. In thus tautologizing the good, it produces relativism among individuals (subjectivism). This cuts the ground from under any alethic (as opposed to strategic) rationale for treating either republican participation or the nation-state itself as intrinsically good. If individuals do not find these things to be good, we cannot argue with them, because whatever individuals believe to be good is good ipso facto: any individual's beliefs are legitimate if they express her unique identity.

If, on the other hand, we interpret the social assumption as overpowering the dissensus and partial provisos, we get a communitarianized version of Romantic individualism: i.e., pure communitarianism. The tautological, indeterminate, subjectivist equation of individual identities with the good becomes a tautological, indeterminate, relativist equation of "we-identities" with the good. This suggests an alethic conception of communal identity and, therefore, of patriotism--and of exclusionary nationalism. If patriotism is valid simply because people feel it, Taylor has no way of limiting his endorsement of patriotism so that it extends only to non-despotic regimes other than through the ad hoc, universalistic republican proviso--which turns patriotism into a vehicle for reaching liberal goals, not an expression of ontological truth. The strategy of building liberalism on people's parochial identities collapses whenever Taylor asserts that these "we-identities" are valid, for at those

moments, he can no longer constrain communitarianism so that it serves only liberal ends.

In Sandel's ontology, the hard question is the definition of the boundaries of the "subject"; Sandel's answers suggest the existence of a mysterious social being as soon as he leaves his strategic rationale behind and asserts that communitarianism is not only politic, but true. The boundaries of Taylor's ontology are less mysterious because they coincide with the familiar borders between nation-states. Taylor is convinced that equal freedom will elude us until we recognize that, within these boundaries, nations-cum-linguistic communities are entitled to do as they please. So, too, in liberalism, where the individual is free to do as she pleases within the borders of her realm--the sphere of subjective values that are free from outside interference. Taylor wants to distance his expressivism from what he considers this degenerate, individualistic, negative-libertarian, subjectivist version, but in insisting that his strategic argument justifies treating communitarianism as true, patriotism as valid, nationalism (without the republican qualification) as admirable, he accords the same arbitrariness to the nation-state that he deplors in the "punctual self" that is, in modern philosophy, "naturalistically" abstracted from social "sources" of moral authority.

Indeed, inasmuch as a republic is uniquely defined by its borders, i.e., by what sets it apart from other nations, it is difficult to see how Taylor's uniqueness assumption (ii) does not warrant giving higher marks to regimes that are more exclusivist than their neighbors. What Romanticism demands, after all, even in the form

of Taylor's socialized positive freedom, is the expression of one's differentiation from others. What it means to value positive freedom is that we value our borders, since these, expressing what is essential to our identity, are the only criteria we have for strong evaluation. So there is nothing wrong with nationalism; although it may be thought to involve simple weighing when it licenses international injustice, this is only because simple weighing is indistinguishable from strong evaluation--once the latter is equated with the expression of one's identity.

Republics vs. Hypergoods

In explicating the structure of Taylor's communitarianism, I began with his embrace of patriotism, and with the republican proviso attached to it. This starting point was somewhat arbitrary: it flowed only from the need to compare Taylor with Sandel. I could have started elsewhere, for Taylor's is a complete system; wherever one finds a moment of pure communitarianism, one also finds a proviso.

By the same token, wherever one finds a proviso, one finds an interpretation of it as being particularistic, despite the appearance that it constrains particularism. How can Taylor justify restricting patriotism and nationalism to "free states," and how can he justify checking the all-important social locus of our linguistic, rational identity by allowing that we can dissent from it and that, in any case, its authority over us is only partial?

The answer may be found in Taylor's defense of "hypergoods"-- freedom, equality, and universal benevolence. Freedom is consistent with the dissensus and partial provisos; freedom and equality with the republican proviso. But Taylor does not admit that these are constraints. The suspicion that they are dei ex machinae that save social particularism from what are, according to liberal criteria, its ugly ramifications by subjecting it to a universalistic vetting process is only intensified by the third hypergood, universal benevolence, which would appear to leave standing only republics that, far from being absorbed in their own concerns or their differences with other regimes, are willing, as Taylor wrote in 1982, to "bleed themselves for the third world." In Sources of the Self (1989), indeed, the third hypergood seems to offer a basis for reversing Taylor's earlier, negative assessment of what can be expected from republics in terms of foreign aid. "In our public debates," Taylor writes approvingly in Sources of the Self, "standards which are unprecedentedly stringent are put forward....We are meant to be concerned for the life and well-being of all humans on the face of the earth; we are called on to further global justice between peoples; we subscribe to universal declarations of rights" (1989, 515). The liberal aims that justify Taylor's communitarianism in the first place once again rescue it from its own consequences.

Yet for Taylor, what makes hypergoods legitimate is not their universal validity, hence their ability to constrain communitarianism; rather, it is their congruence with the "constitutive ideals of modern culture"--our culture (1991, 18; cf. 1989, 88; cf. *ibid.*, 12). They

are good because they are ours, not ours because they are good. "We have somehow saddled ourselves with very high demands of universal justice and benevolence," he writes; "we as inheritors of this development feel particularly strongly the demand for universal justice and beneficence, are peculiarly sensitive to the claims of equality, feel the demands of freedom and self-rule as axiomatically justified, and put a very high priority on the avoidance of death and suffering" (1989, 397, 495).

This move exemplifies the tautological possibilities of communitarianism. Taylor seems bent on pushing these possibilities to their limit, so that universalism becomes a form of particularism: "the most important spiritual traditions of our civilization have encouraged, even demanded, a detachment from...particular historic communities" (1989, 36, emphasis added). To be universalistic is, for Western liberals, the only way to be truly particularistic! "We are all universalists now about respect for life and integrity" (ibid., 6); that is to say, universalism expresses our particular identity. So the hypergoods are particularistic; so are the republican, dissensus, and partial provisos they sanction; and so, also, is the even more exacting proviso suggested by universal benevolence, the liberal proviso, which enjoins us to be patriotic only toward polities that are not only democratic and respectful of individual rights, but that are beneficent toward their less-fortunate fellow nations. The hypergoods constrain communitarianism so thoroughly, then, that one is hard pressed to find any sense in which Taylor's position differs from that of the most cosmopolitan liberal. What Taylor calls particularism means, for those

of us who are liberals, a commitment to universalism. The strategic advantage of Taylor's view over conventional liberalism would seem to have vanished.

By claiming that whatever is Western is good, however, Taylor deprives himself of any constraints on the interpretation of what is Western. Schematically, he has produced an argument that moves from the truth value (~1) of whatever is Western (i.e., whatever constitutes Westerners' identities as language beings) to the objectivity (~2) of hypergoods (~3). But Western thought, and practice, contain much more besides hypergoods, so Western thought and practice would have to be constrained if relativism and immorality are to be avoided. Why isn't fascism or feudalism or whatever else anyone who has been taught a Western language advocates valid? What about those in the West who do not "feel particularly strongly the demand for universal justice and beneficence" (1989, 495)?

Taylor's answer comes in the form of an essentialist proviso that, unlike Sandel's--which interprets the defeated American tradition of republicanism as the essence of America--equates the strategically successful with the good:

One can only argue convincingly about goods which already in some way impinge on people, which they already at some level respond to but may be refusing to acknowledge. The order of argument is in a sense ad hominem, and involves showing what Ernst Tugendhat calls a 'way of experience' which leads from one's interlocutor's position to one's

own via some error-reducing moves, such as a clearing up of a confusion, the resolving of a contradiction, or the frank acknowledgement of what really does impinge. (1989, 505, emphasis added)

A persuasive reconstruction of our identity will, therefore, by virtue of its persuasiveness, show that it articulates real goods that "impinge" upon us. We liberals would not find fascism or feudalism persuasive, so they must not be good. The extra-individual source of normative authority that defines our identities is not, in the end, a particular polity, or a particular republic, or the liberal tradition, or even the Western tradition as a whole. It is the philosopher-politician who succeeds in convincing us of the legitimacy of his definition of the essence of our identity. For, if he is successful, he must, ipso facto, have tapped into our "webs of interlocution."

The echoes of Hegel do not seem accidental. Although Taylor's historiography evinces a clear preference for socially (or naturally or divinely) attuned forms of expressivism over individualistic, disengaged forms, and for hypergoods that have the effect of checking any untoward moral consequences of social expressivism, he is like Hegel in avoiding the posture of transcendent critic of those who might disagree. He consistently tries to reinterpret these disagreements as evidence of an underlying consensus; otherwise, he would cut the ground from under his claim to be articulating what "we" believe. What he is against is consistently conceptualized as a "degraded" form of what he is for (e.g., 1989, 23). In attempting to express their identities

subjectivistically, in seeking to achieve "transcendence of particularity" (1989, 407), the narcissistic and punctual selves spawned by the West are actually misunderstanding the first hypergood they have inherited from their tradition.

The effect of this immanentist hermeneutics is to obliterate the line between particular and universal. This allows Taylor to substitute, for Hegel's historical telos, the particular values Taylor judges to be essential in Western thought. Taylor himself becomes the functional embodiment of the owl of Minerva--inevitably, because transcendent criteria must be called in to clear up confusions and resolve contradictions in one's identity: that is, to constrain communitarianism. However, bereft of Hegel's assumption that history has been progressing toward a good end--which was grounded in his theological philosophy of nature--there is no principle to validate Taylor's normative criteria. His identification of our essential identity as liberal is what he calls an "error-reducing" rather than an error-producing move only if we already accept liberal values, as embodied in the hypergoods. But that is precisely why the tactic is supposed to be convincing.⁹

Taylor provides no reason why those who do not accept liberal hypergoods should do so--not only because, like Tugendhat, he thinks this impossible, but because he thinks it unnecessary. For if there really is a Western identity, then Taylor, as a product of it, is capable of identifying its essence. The account he produces need only be persuasive to himself and others like him, in the sense that it articulates the moral demands that he, as a liberal, "feel[s]

particularly strongly." In this odd form of argument--albeit a form that may be familiar from the post-Wittgensteinian practice of appealing to "our" moral intuitions--Taylor encapsulates the communitarian dynamic. In the guise of telling us what we already believe--what is-- Taylor is telling us what ought to be. Convinced that the transcendent avowal of what ought to be--equal freedom--is individualistic and therefore self-subverting, Taylor cannot own up to this "ought." So he portrays as communitarian what would otherwise be known as liberal values. Having made this transition, every move Taylor makes must find some grounding in his language community. But when this threatens to render his community coextensive with whoever agrees with Taylor about anything, making his communitarianism universalistic, Taylor justifies universalism itself by reference to its status as a tradition. This is how Taylor ultimately reconciles his social expressivism with the need to constrain it, if it is to do its job.

NOTES

1. This might pose problems for liberal democrats, since it is conceivable that in their capacity as voters, atomistically inclined individuals would not vote to impose the obligations on themselves that would be required to sustain their equal freedom. However, since Taylor has not, in fact, demonstrated that atomists cannot recognize the need for public goods, it is unclear why atomist voters would not tax themselves to pay for such goods.

2. I use the term "Machiavellian" ironically: Taylor acknowledges that

Machiavelli championed the doctrine that "only people who live in and

cherish a free regime will be motivated to fight for themselves"

(1995a, 193), but he does not seem to notice that in moving from this

empirical political claim drawn from the Discourses to the normative

claim that patriotic republican beliefs are true, he, in effect,

engages in the kind of manipulation of ethical convictions Machiavelli

discusses in The Prince.

3. That the indulgence of national self-interestedness is

indiscriminate, and thus manifests simple weighing rather than strong

evaluation, can be seen by imagining how Taylor would react to a

majority of republican voters who decided to sacrifice themselves

voluntarily for the benefit of people outside their borders. Surely he

would not deny them this right. Therefore, by endorsing the usual,

non-self-sacrificing practices of modern democracies, Taylor cannot be

suggesting that national selfishness is inherently the product of

strong evaluation. He is simply equating what is good with what is

collectively chosen, reducing the good to the simple weight of

collective desires--regardless of their merit.

4. There is nothing wrong with hermeneutical essentialism; if one is investigating the logic of a writer's thought, essentialism is necessary to sort out what propels the arguments and what is irrelevant or contradictory. My objection is to treating essences as if they have normative rather than merely analytical significance. For an example of this distinction, see n9 below.

5. What I am calling the "social assumption" helps justify, but is not

the same as, Taylor's "social thesis"; see Taylor 1985d, 197. I should

also note that the writers from whom Taylor derives the social

assumption are the ones he calls "expressivists"; he often seems to run

together the social and expressivist assumptions, and to apply the

"expressivist" label to the combination. But the idea that morality is

the expression of one's identity is clearly separable from the social

assumption: the idea that one needs interlocutors to locate one's

essential identity.

6. Both Chomskian linguistics and evolutionary psychology cast serious

doubt on the "social origins of language" thesis. (See, e.g., Baker

2001 and Pinker 1994.) Taylor does not seem to realize that the social

assumption is an empirical claim, not one susceptible to philosophers'

a priori assertions (despite all the a priori assertions about it that

he draws upon).

7. In discussing the claim that moral evaluations depend on socially

particular vocabularies, I leave aside the possibility of making strong

evaluations in a binary fashion--"good" versus "bad"--that could

dispense with all but two evaluative terms, terms whose conceptual

content, as I suggest in Chapter 7, is universal.

8. It is worth repeating that I am exploring the logical structure of the communitarians' thought, not their deliberate intentions. It seems to me that exploring the logic of a thinker's arguments, even to the point of supplying dialectical links that are not explicit or that a thinker might deny, is an important part of writing intellectual history--not only on the Popperian ground that one should reconstruct deficient arguments with which one disagrees so they are as strong as possible, but because one purpose of non-antiquarian intellectual history is to determine how logically deficient arguments could seem

plausible to the figure being investigated. This will sometimes mean imputing logical "motivations" that a thinker is unaware of, because it is my conviction that we are not fully in control of the complex logic that compels us to find certain ideas plausible. In this respect, the present essay, while concerned with living writers, is an intellectual history.

9. This is not to say that Taylor is wrong about the "essence" of Western culture. Speaking empirically, it is hard to dispute the power that the drive toward equal individual freedom, captured in Taylor's perception of "hypergoods," has exerted on Western culture. But Taylor is not speaking empirically; he is speaking normatively, and is thereby suggesting, in his pure communitarian moment, that "we" cannot possibly question this drive (although, in his constrained moment, he suggests that even questioning it indicates participation in it).