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Can hybrid cultures be normative?: the challenge of indeterminacy for multiculturalism

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Can Hybrid Cultures Be Normative? The Challenge of Indeterminacy for Multiculturalism

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Executive Summary

Over the past decades debate surrounding the normative status of culture has occupied a great deal of the attention of political theorists. One salient manifestation of this debate is the scholarly dispute over whether culture is an entity *determinate* enough to warrant the presumption that persons, governments, or judges owe it (and its members) respect and recognition. Whereas advocates of the multiculturalist position understand culture as a consistent bearer of value, committing liberal democracies to accommodate distinctive cultural concerns and to protect culture-specific rights, critics have expressed strong skepticism towards the assumption that culture possesses as determinate a normative quality as, say, human beings, constitutions, or banknotes. If culture were to perform the normative work multiculturalists believe, these critics argue, we would have to suppress its inherent *indeterminacy* – the fact that culture is not a monolithic concept with clear boundaries and an ineluctable essence, but a notoriously *hybrid*, continuously evolving product of the rough-and-tumble of political struggles for the control of symbolic meaning. Multiculturalists, then, seem to be faced with a major challenge. To make their normative case, they must either reject the indeterminacy of culture and accept the heavy moral costs this entails for a politically liberal society, or they must demonstrate how social entities whose symbolic properties are contingent upon strategic agency can, despite their morally arbitrariness, be considered valuable in the sense required by multiculturalism.

This dissertation takes up the challenge of indeterminacy and offers a theoretical framework for thinking about cultural normativity that not merely countenances, but explicitly builds on a hybrid and political conception of culture. The central aim is to show that the liberal emphasis on the historically and politically contingent character of culture does not imply, as some strands in political theory and anthropology have prominently suggested, that the concept becomes unreal, fictitious, and thus unserviceable for moral inquiry. It will be argued that such pessimistic conclusions are precipitates of a dominant philosophical tradition which, following the Kantian privilege of practical reason over lived experience, views ascriptions of normativity as cognitive derivations of abstract, pre-constituted moral principles. In this tradition, to which most liberal justifications of multiculturalism subscribe, to know what we owe to culture presupposes that we can reliably determine the (intrinsic or instrumental) relation between a given cultural group and some overarching moral good (e.g. autonomy). It is the prevalence of this static, 'top-down' understanding of norm-ascription that explains the confusion when culture – the

supposed norm-bearer – is being portrayed as a hybrid and discordant social construct.

On the view defended in this dissertation, rejecting the normative quality of culture on grounds of its indeterminacy is mistaken. If cultural hybridity indeed were to subvert cultural normativity, regretting, for example, the demise of the highly fragmented and internally contested Romansh culture in Eastern Switzerland would appear philosophically questionable at best. The key to overcoming the challenge of indeterminacy, and thus to safeguarding the capacity of political theory to make sense of our moral intuitions regarding disunited cultures, lies in the rehabilitation of human experience as a valid starting point for thinking about the normativity of culture. This, in turn, necessitates a rupture with the predominant Kantian-styled 'top-down' view of normativity. The pragmatist tradition, in particular John Dewey's (1859-1952) naturalist conception of ethics, turns out to be congenial to such an endeavor. Dewey, it will be argued, provides us with the philosophical tools to view culture *itself*, in all of its unavoidable contingency, as a source of normativity. All normativity is for Dewey an outcome of people's continuous efforts to keep their experience of the surrounding social world in a state of equilibrium. In this perspective, tensions and conflicts as they occur in a symbolic universe like culture no longer appear as some unnatural deviations from the ideal moral life, but as reasons to engage in cooperative processes of inquiry aiming at the re-equilibration of troubled experience. Thus, the normative significance of discordant groups – of cultures in particular – consists in their being a continuously growing reservoir of problem-solving habits learnt and institutionalized in the course of iterated instances of settling irritated experience.

Dewey is largely unknown in multiculturalist thought, which, as this study hopes to make clear, is a missed opportunity. This matter of fact contrasts heavily with the remarkable reception of Dewey's pragmatism in democracy theory in recent years. The argument that will unfold seeks to demonstrate that the relevance of Dewey's naturalist ethics for political theory reaches beyond the literature on substantive conceptions of democracy. Furthermore, insofar as the present argument encourages a critical stance towards some well-known liberal objections against multiculturalism, it contributes to the debate over how cultural diversity should be dealt with in liberal societies. Finally, this dissertation aspires to encourage a rapprochement among scholars in the fields of anthropology and political theory who, while interested in the normative implications of culture, are anxious about the reductionist or conservative impulses this interest has often implied.

Résumé

La controverse autour du statut normatif de la culture a considérablement préoccupé les théoriciens politiques au cours des dernières décennies. Une manifestation saillante en est la querelle entre les partisans et les détracteurs de la thèse que la culture est douée d'une unité matérielle et formelle suffisamment *déterminée* afin de justifier la présomption que celle-ci (tout comme ses membres) mérite le respect des citoyens et la reconnaissance des gouvernements et des tribunaux. Pour les adhérents de la position multiculturaliste, il est évident que la culture est susceptible d'être porteuse de valeur et donc d'engager les démocraties libérales à accommoder les intérêts spécifiques des cultures minoritaires et à leur accorder des droits spéciaux. Pourtant, certains critiques ont contesté la prémisse que la culture possède une qualité normative déterminée au même titre qu'un être humain, une constitution ou un billet de banque. Selon cette position critique, si la culture devait posséder une signification normative telle que les multiculturalistes la revendiquent, cela nécessiterait la négation de son *indétermination* inhérente, autrement dit, du fait que la culture n'est pas un concept monolithique bien délimité, pourvu d'une incontournable essence, mais une construction notoirement *hybride* et en constante évolution, issue d'une continuelle lutte politique pour le contrôle de signification symbolique. Les multiculturalistes semblent alors faire face à un important défi. Afin de faire valoir leur argument normatif, ils/elles doivent ou bien rejeter la thèse de l'indétermination de la culture et assumer le coût moral que cela entraîne pour une société libérale, ou bien démontrer comment des entités sociales dont les propriétés symboliques sont le produit de comportements stratégiques peuvent être regardées, malgré leur caractère moralement arbitraire, comme porteuses de valeur conformément aux exigences de la pensée multiculturaliste.

La présente thèse tient à relever le défi de l'indétermination en proposant un cadre théorique pour penser la normativité culturelle qui est non seulement compatible avec une conception politique de la culture, mais qui l'embrasse explicitement comme point de départ. L'objectif central est de démontrer que, contrairement à une objection qui a récemment ressurgi en théorie politique et en anthropologie, l'insistance libérale sur le caractère historiquement et politiquement contingent de la culture ne rend pas le concept irréel, imaginaire et donc inapte à servir de catégorie en enquête morale. Il sera soutenu que ces conclusions pessimistes sont des reflets d'une tradition philosophique dominante qui, obéissant au privilège Kantien de la raison pratique au préjudice de l'expérience vécue, considère les attributions de valeur comme des dérivations cognitives d'un canon de

principes moraux abstraits et prédéterminés. Dans cette tradition, à laquelle a souscrit la plupart des approches libérales du multiculturalisme, la connaissance de nos obligations à l'égard de la culture présuppose une connaissance antérieure du rapport (intrinsèque ou instrumental) entre un groupe culturel donné et un bien moral surplombant comme, par exemple, celui de l'autonomie. C'est la prédominance de cette méthode d'assigner la normativité statiquement, du haut vers le bas, qui explique la confusion lorsque la culture – le prétendu objet de cet assignement – est présentée come une construction hybride et discordante.

Selon l'argument proposé dans cette thèse, il serait erroné de rejeter la qualité normative de la culture sous le prétexte de son indétermination. Si ce conflit était effectivement insurmontable, il serait philosophiquement douteux de regretter, par exemple, le déclin d'une culture hautement fragmentée et intrinsèquement contestée comme celle du Romanche dans les Grisons. La clé pour la solution du défi de l'indétermination, et donc pour une théorie politique qui reste capable de tenir compte des intuitions morales que nous avons à l'égard des cultures indépendamment de leur unité interne, demeure dans la réhabilitation de l'expérience vécue comme une base valide pour penser la normativité culturelle. Cette réhabilitation, pourtant, nécessite une rupture avec l'approche conventionnelle de la normativité. La tradition pragmatiste, notamment l'éthique naturaliste de John Dewey (1859-1952), se révèle particulièrement fructueuse pour une telle entreprise. Dewey nous fournit les outils philosophiques pour voir la culture *en soi*, dans toute sa contingence inévitable, comme une source de normativité. Pour Dewey, la normativité est une conséquence de nos efforts visant à maintenir notre expérience du monde social dans un état d'équilibre. Dans cette optique, les tensions et les conflits tels qu'ils se produisent dans un univers symbolique comme la culture n'apparaissent plus comme une déviation d'une quelconque vie morale idéale, mais comme des incitations à s'engager dans des processus coopératifs d'enquête visant à la rééquilibration d'une expérience irritée. Il s'ensuit que la signification normative de groupes discordants – de cultures en particulier – découle du fait qu'ils constituent un réservoir continuellement croissant d'habitudes et de modes de répondre à des situations problématiques, appris et institutionnalisés par le biais d'une itération des tentatives de consolider l'expérience troublée.

Dewey est largement inconnu en pensée multiculturaliste. La présente étude aspire à expliquer pourquoi ceci est une opportunité ratée. Cet état de faits se démarque fortement de la remarquable réception dont a récemment joui le pragmatisme de Dewey en théorie de la démocratie. Il s'agira de montrer que la portée de l'éthique naturaliste de Dewey s'étend au-delà de la littérature défendant les conceptions communautaristes de la démocratie. En outre, dans la mesure

où l'argument développé prend une distance critique des objections libérales classiques contre le multiculturalisme, il contribue directement au débat sur les modes souhaitables de conduite face la diversité culturelle en société libérale. Enfin, cette dissertation souhaite encourager un rapprochement entre les théoricien-ne-s dans les domaines de l'anthropologie et la théorie politique qui partagent un intérêt pour les implications normatives de la culture tout en étant soucieux des penchants réductionnistes ou conservateurs que cet intérêt a fréquemment entraînés.

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Introduction

In 1990, the Swiss Federal Supreme Court was asked to weigh in on a public-law appeal by *Bar Amici*, a gastronomy operator in the Canton of Grisons, which was denied the permission to attach a red neon sign reproducing the handwritten words *Bar Amici* to the building where it ran a restaurant.[1] The building regulations of Disentis/Mustér, the location of the business in question, require the wording of advertising signs to be in Rhaeto-Romansh, the majority language in this Alpine valley. Because *Bar Amici* is not Romansh, but Italian, the local authority refused permission. This refusal was upheld by the Federal Supreme Court, which argued that the "preservation and extension of the homogeneity of existing language regions," constitutes a "public interest" to the extent that infringements of the constitutional guarantees of individual freedoms, *in casu* the freedom of commerce, are justifiable in principle.[2] In the final decision the court lamented the "catastrophic decline" of the Romansh language, which, being spoken by less than one percent of the Swiss population,[3] has lost significance in most important spheres of life and is further threatened by an increasing exposure to more dominant national languages (German and Italian) through mass media, tourism, and higher education. Elaborating on the notion of "public interest," the court then emphasized the value of linguistic diversity and warned against "letting the constitutional faith in plurilingualism become dead letter." In conclusion, in the Court's opinion, the "public interest" in the preservation of Romansh justifies, at least in principle, limitations on individual freedoms, which in the present case would be the freedom of commerce.

By considering the preservation of Rhaeto-Romansh a matter of "public interest," the Swiss court falls into line with a series of legal and political endeavors, which flourished in the 1980ies and 1990ies in places as diverse as Australia, Canada, South Africa, South Tyrol, or Wales, to grant national minorities, immigrant communities or indig-

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1   Swiss Federal Supreme Court, decision BGE 116 Ia 345.

2   The language of commercial signs has repeatedly been the subject of legal dispute in Canada, too. See *Ford v. Québec (Attorney General)* [1988] for a related argument on the issue (although this court eventually deemed the unqualified ban of signs other than French, as stipulated in Québec *Charter of the French Language*, unconstitutional).

3   In 2014, 42'410 persons with a permanent residence in Switzerland – corresponding to a relative share of a little more than 0.5% - indicate Romansh as their main language (several main languages could be chosen) (Swiss Federal Statistical Office (2016a)). According to the 2000 census (Swiss Federal Statistical Office (2016b)), where respondents were required to indicate both their main language (only one answer possible) and the "languages regularly spoken" (several answers possible), there are 60'561 Romansh-speakers in Switzerland (0.6%), of which 40'168 (66%) are residents in the Canton of Grisons (27'038 if only "main language" is taken into account).

enous peoples a right to their *own* culture,[4] typically including rights to formal recognition and rights to be shielded from at least some of the assimilative pressures of the larger society. Behind these endeavors is the understanding of culture as something *normative*, as the sort of entity whose misrecognition, erosion or disappearance is considered to cause harm to its members – and possibly, as the judges in the *Bar Amici* case insinuate, also to non-members – and therefore raise issues of justice. The normativity of culture and the correlative "public interest" to safeguard cultural ways of life are the fundamental premises of prescriptive arguments political theorists commonly subsumed under the umbrella term *multiculturalism*. To be sure, multiculturalists disagree on the exact object of cultural normativity. They are divided, for example, on whether culture is valuable for groups or only for individuals, or on the question whether culture is valuable *per se*, or only in a derivative sense, say, as a necessary condition for an external good like individual autonomy or social trust. However important these differentiations may be when it comes to the justification of particular culture-specific rights and policies, multiculturalists remain equally reliant upon the understanding of culture as a concept that makes claims on us, that furnishes us reasons to act in a certain way. Multiculturalists, in other words, require a plausible account of cultural normativity – call this the *cultural normativity thesis*; they have to explain, first and foremost, why complex, internally differentiated collectivities like cultures happen to possess action-guiding force.[5]

For quite some time now, skepticism on whether culture qualifies as a source of normativity has been a familiar theme of the widespread and politically salient critique of multiculturalism (particularly so in Continental Europe and the United Kingdom). In this study, I address a distinct version of this criticism, which holds that multiculturalism founders on the logical impossibility to accommodate both the cultural normativity thesis *and* a normatively and empirically sound conception of culture. Simply put, the critical position I am interested in suggests that the normative stance as it undergirds decisions like the one taken in *Bar Amici* is inextricably bound up with an essentialist culture concept that is empirically questionable and, if seen from a liberal point of view, morally objectionable. Moreover, according to this critical position, multiculturalists cannot simply solve the issue by embracing a non-essentialist, hybrid culture concept. If they did so,

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4 This specification is important, for what is affirmed in the cases referred to here is not the general-abstract right to *any* form of cultural experience, as suggested by some brands of cosmopolitanism, but the comprehensive way of life as a person finds it to be embodied in her culture. For the relevance of this distinction see Margalit and Halbertal (1994, 498–499) and Kymlicka (1995, 84–85).

5 Throughout, unless otherwise specified, it is this normative conception which I am addressing when I use the term 'multiculturalism'. Sometimes, to avoid confusion with its colloquial or descriptive meanings, I also use the compound word 'normative multiculturalism'.

then they would surrender the prospect of having a concept *determinate* enough to do the normative work they envision, namely that of justifying a politics of cultural recognition. Call this latter hypothesis the *challenge of indeterminacy for multiculturalism*.

This leaves us with a paradox. Let's assume with the critical position I have just circumscribed that cultural essentialism is false. Cultures are never monoliths, but always hybrid to the extent that their boundaries are porous and their symbolic content is neither stable nor uncontested. How, then, is it explainable that many people still have strong attachments to what they consider to be their culture(s)?[6] How much sense, then, does it make when the Swiss Federal Court bemoans the "catastrophic decline" of the Romansh language, knowing that this linguistic minority can hardly be characterized as essentialist?[7] Isn't the ascription of value to such a culture merely based on a category mistake?

This paradox incited me to pursue two interrelated objectives. In a first step, which spans the first three chapters, I want to better understand what exactly is at stake when scholars are pointing out the challenge of indeterminacy for multiculturalism. Why is it that many political theorists working on culture are at pains to rid their conceptual premises of essentialist connotations, but remain peculiarly circumspect on the question as to how their inherently contested, negotiated, 'modernist' culture conceptions can continue to offer normative guidance? Here, my analysis will follow a dialectical pattern. I shall begin with a discussion of a radical form of cultural non-essentialism which originates in anthropology, but which has found acolytes in 'postmodern' political theory. According to this position, the quest of an empirically and normatively unproblematic concept of cultural distinctiveness is futile and it would be best if we quitted writing and thinking about culture. I then present an opposing view of cultural hybridity which – hoping that the challenge of indeterminacy can thus be surmounted – tries to reconcile the non-essentialist impulse with a robust notion of cultural distinctiveness. This endeavor, I will explain,

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6   An extreme example is the case of the Mashpee tribe on Cape Cod which, in 1976, sued the Town of Mashpee in Federal Court for the return of ancestral homelands (*Mashpee* Tribe v. New *Seabury* et al.). On James Clifford's account, the Mashpee, MA "institutions of tribal governance have long since been elusive" and moreover "since about 1800 the Massachusett language had ceased to be commonly spoken in Mashpee" (Clifford 1988, 278). To settle the question of land ownership, the court jurors had to determine whether the Mashpee "constitute an Indian tribe as of August 26, 1976." The court decided it did not, and created a precedent in stating that cultural identity requires a minimal threshold of cultural determinacy.

7   In fact, what today is known as the Rhaeto-Romansh language is, on the one hand, a generic term comprising five distinct idioms that are barely mutually intelligible. On the other hand, it may refer to the standardized, artificial linguistic variation – the *Rumantsch Grischun* – intended for pan-regional use and for the purpose of easing linguistic preservation. Since its proposition in 1982 by a (non-Romansh) linguist, Rumantsch Grischun, and the argumentative topoi linked with it, have never ceased to be the subject of fierce contestation.

fails. Even if we can establish a satisfactory approach to cultural distinctiveness, cultures that are conceptualized as intrinsically political do not fit nicely into the framework of normative multiculturalism. To clarify why this is so will be the task of the third chapter.

In a second step, which essentially covers the fourth chapter, I want to break out of the latent tension between cultural hybridity and cultural normativity. Drawing on the ethical writings of John Dewey (1859-1952), I trace the contours of a path that leads multiculturalists away from the challenge of indeterminacy. I hope to be able to show why it is not absurd to hold hybrid cultures to be valuable and, therefore, to accept them as having deliberative weight in politics.

The Cultural Normativity Thesis

Multiculturalists premise their political agenda on the claim that cultures possess value and therefore exert a normative force on persons and political agents – decision makers, court judges, administrations. I have already mentioned that this claim embodies what I will refer to as *the cultural normativity thesis* throughout this study. The cultural normativity thesis can take a variety of different theoretical shapes, depending on the philosophical premises of morality one adopts. According to multiculturalists like Will Kymlicka or Joseph Raz, for whom culture is *instrumentally* valuable for its members' autonomy, we "should be concerned with the fate of cultural structures (…) because it is only through having a rich and secure cultural structure that people can become aware, in a vivid way, of the options available to them" (Kymlicka 1989, 165; cf. 1995, 82–84, 89; 2001, 209–210; Raz 1994a; Raz 1994b). For Charles Taylor, who adopts a *non-instrumentalist* theory of cultural value, intact cultures are "intrinsically good" because they are sites of "irreducibly social goods," such as the practice of one's native language, which cannot logically be valued independently from the culture that makes them possible (Taylor 1995, 135–137). Taylor derives from such goods the "presumption," "something like an act of faith," that we owe "equal respect to all cultures" (Taylor 1994, 64–69).[8] Both positions deem their specification of the cultural normativity thesis fit to guide the justification of a political and legal agenda which typically includes self-government rights, language rights, guaranteed representation in institutions, and exemptions from a set of legislative

8   More accurately, Taylor's argument takes the form of a syllogism: if it is true that the experience drawn from symbolic constructs like works of art or languages are a good, and if it is true that this good can only be enjoyed against a shared cultural "background of practices, institutions, and understandings," then we must value, "other things being equal," the cultural background that "makes these things possible" (Taylor 1995, 136–138).

requirements of the larger society. These, in a nutshell, are two of the most influential multiculturalist arguments as to why an appeal to culture might generate practical arguments for or against some practice or policy. Both explanations seek to clarify the idea that culture, and the symbolic resources it sustains, are in valuable ways related to the practical identity of its members.

However it is important to note that this is not an exhaustive enumeration of the varieties the cultural normativity thesis can take. It is often suggested that philosophical accounts of the normativity of culture – indeed of human collectivities more generally – should be classified not only along an instrumentalist/non-instrumentalist dimension, but also along an individualist/collectivist dimension (Mason 2000, 42–45; Johnson 2000, 407–408; Festenstein 2005, 40–41). The first dimension distinguishes whether a culture is valuable for its own sake or whether it has value as a means to some other good. The second dimension differentiates between accounts holding that the value of a culture is reducible, without a remainder, to the value it brings about to its individual members, and accounts holding that cultures have independent moral standing *qua* cultures. Following this taxonomy, Kymlicka's liberal theory of cultural value falls into the instrumentalist/individualist category, while Taylor's theory falls into the non-instrumentalist/collectivist category. Note that other constellations are conceivable too.[9] Liberal nationalists like, for example, David Miller (1995, 90; 2000, 31–33) have insisted that culture is instrumentally valuable by virtue of the goods of trust and solidarity it contributes to political communities. And Denise Réaume gestures towards what appears to be a non-instrumentalist/individualist valuation of culture when she argues that "most people value their language not only instrumentally as a tool, but also intrinsically, as a cultural inheritance and as a marker of identity as a participant in the way of life it represents" (Réaume 2000, 251). Allen Buchanan makes a similar argument in his discussion of the right to secession (Buchanan 1991, 53–54).

The Challenge of Indeterminacy

Over the last few decades, the cultural normativity thesis – the thesis of culture as a source of action-guiding norms – has become a focal point of a wider scholarly backlash against normative multiculturalism.[10] An increasing number of critics share the concern that multi-

9   I am indebted to James Johnson (2000) for this point.

10   Another arm of theoretical criticism against multiculturalism questions the claim that political liberalism countenances, or even requires, group-differentiated rights (Barry 2001; Waldron 1992). A further cluster of criticism centers around the suspicion that multiculturalism weakens social bonds and therefore has disuniting effects on national identity and citizenship (Miller

culturalists have underestimated, if not wittingly repressed, the theoretical and conceptual difficulties that are implicit in the process of ascribing normativity to culture (Barry 2001; Benhabib 2002; Appiah 1994; 2005; Kompridis 2005; 2006; Kukathas 1992; 1997; 2003; Johnson 1999; 2000).

Multiculturalists, so the challenge goes, are faced with a tragic trade-off between, on the one hand, embracing a non-naïve, empirically and normatively attractive conception of culture, and, on the other hand, sustaining the claim that cultures are capable of grounding reasons for action. Underlying this challenge is the worry that when culture – in the aim of avoiding the pitfalls of cultural essentialism – is conceptualized as 'hybrid,' 'constructed,' 'fluid,' 'negotiated,' or 'internally contested,' the concept becomes unacceptably indeterminate so that it is no longer serviceable for the justification of group-differentiated politics.

Alan Patten has recently referred to this seemingly tragic choice of multiculturalism as the "dilemma of essentialism:"

> "*Either* culture is understood in an essentialist way, in which case multiculturalism is empirically and morally flawed; *or* culture is understood in a nonessentialist way, but then the concept no longer supplies multiculturalism with the means of making the empirical judgments and normative claims that are central to it" (Patten 2011, 735 original emphasis).[11]

Both horns are inimical to the kind of philosophical endeavor that underpins the justification of multiculturalist rights and policies. Cultural essentialism provides exactly the sort of conceptual coherence and determinacy that makes it easy for multiculturalists to treat them as "contexts of choice" (Kymlicka 1995, 82) or as "horizons of meaning for large numbers of human beings" (Taylor 1994, 72); however it can only fulfill this function at the price of repressing the often hybrid character of culture and cultural attachments, and of running into conflict with the liberal priority of individual self-determination.[12] Cultural

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2000, chap. 5; Schlesinger 1992). Finally, much recent literature has highlighted the unequal distribution of the moral costs of multiculturalism. A familiar version of this worry holds that some group-differentiated policies inflict a disproportionate burden on intra-cultural at-risk groups like, as in many cases, girls and women (Okin 1999; Shachar 2001). I turn to Okin's argument in Chapter 3.

11   For a more general statement of the problem, see also Festenstein (2005, 26–32; 2010b, 78–81).

12   There is a near-perfect consensus about the invalidity of cultural essentialism in social theory. It has become a standard for multiculturalist political theorists to distance themselves from it. See, for instance, Kymlicka (1989, 165; 1995, 103), Raz (1994a, 176–177), Tully (1995, 10–14), Parekh (Parekh 2000, 77–79). The interesting question, however, is whether this reflexive rejection is credible, in other terms, whether these theorists can present an alternative to cultural

non-essentialism, in turn, precludes the recourse to a less problematic conception of culture, but by extolling contingency and insecurity it is unlikely to be easily subsumed under any moral theory.

I will have little to say about the problems laid down in the dilemma's first horn. That the consequences of essentialism are at odds with the normative claims of equal liberties is undeniable, most particularly so if we accept Rawls's "fact of pluralism" (Rawls 1993, 36). But my agreement with the dilemma of essentialism ends with the claim laid down in its second horn, which states what I have termed the *challenge of indeterminacy*: that a non-essentialist account of culture *simpliciter* ceases to be serviceable for the normative claims of multiculturalism. I take up the challenge to show that the anxieties sustaining the second horn, while in large part legitimate *per se*, do not undermine the normative leverage of culture if culture is conceived in naturalist terms, that is, as a symbolic web that evolves through an indefinite sequence of *problems*, or rather, of the intra-cultural efforts to solve them. Patten too seeks to defuse the dilemma by seizing the second horn. However, his argument is different from the one I offer in an important aspect. On the view he defends, the trouble non-essentialism poses to normativity vanishes if culture, or rather, cultural continuity, is defined in the terms coined by Harvard anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn, as a "precipitate of a common social lineage" (Patten 2011, 736). Cultural continuity, he argues, does not require invariable essences, but merely an uninterrupted lineage of the controllers of intergenerational cultural transmission (2011, 738–739). As long as a culture controls the succession of the "set of formative conditions" (2011, 736) that "shape the beliefs and values of the persons who are subject to them" (2011, 740), it constitutes the sort of concept that dodges the dilemma of essentialism. The social lineage view of culture, Patten concludes, is "compatible with, and indeed helps to explain patterns of heterogeneity, contestation, and hybridity" which anti-essentialists are emphasizing (2011, 736); and it satisfies what he takes to be the two main requirements "for multiculturalism to be a plausible normative demand" insofar as it allows us to "identify distinct minority cultures and to make judgments about how they are being treated and whether they are surviving and flourishing" and "to think of cultures as mattering to their members" (2011, 747).

While I agree with Patten's statement of the problem, I find his solution to the dilemma unconvincing. It seems unclear to me how the criterion of a subjection to a shared formative context can avoid the sort of foundationalism which, as scholars from Iris Marion Young and Judith Butler to James Tully and Joseph Carens worried, allows cultural properties to appear as beyond contestation. If Pat-

essentialism that does not undermine the cultural normativity thesis.

ten's attempt to make non-essentialism compatible with the normative claims of multiculturalism is grounded in the idea of a controlled cultural continuity, there must be 'something out there', something like a formative script of socialization, whose inter-generational succession can be effectively controlled and evaluated as either successful or unsuccessful, good or bad. The very notion of controlled transmission already implies the prior existence or knowledge of the metrics underlying the social lineage of a culture.[13] Yet, after all we know from the works of critical theorists, we are unlikely to ever live in a world of unchallenged formative contexts and of politically disinterested controllers of cultural transmission processes. Therefore, my attempt to solve the dilemma of essentialism is not premised on the discovery of "precipitates" of cultural a priori conditions which can satisfy both the requirements of non-essentialism and of normative multiculturalism. My approach is more radical in that it unashamedly assumes the challenge of indeterminacy as a source of normative leverage.

Let's now turn back to the second horn of the dilemma of essentialism and to the problem conceptual indeterminacy allegedly poses for multiculturalism. Patten himself does not elaborate much on what it exactly is that makes the relationship between non-essentialism and multiculturalism problematic. Here is a short demonstration of a typical way in which the challenge of indeterminacy is framed in political theory.

The challenge of indeterminacy for multiculturalism has given rise to claims that the thesis of cultural normativity as multiculturalists are assuming it stands on shaky philosophical ground and needs to be dismissed. For Samuel Scheffler,

> "cultures are not perceived sources of normative authority in the same sense that moral, religious, and philosophical doctrines are. Those who think of them as being on a par commit something like a category mistake, for 'culture' is a descriptive, ethnographic category, not a normative one" (Scheffler 2007, 120).

And further,

> "Of course, one might propose that the need to protect individual identity should be treated as an independent basis for a regime of cultural rights. However, as I argued earlier, 'identity' is too protean and variable a notion to warrant this sort of protection" (Scheffler 2007, 122).

No matter how culture or cultural identity are conceptualized, skeptics

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13   James Booth makes a similar point (Booth 2013, 867). For Patten's rejoinder to Booth's objection, see Patten (2013).

like Scheffler argue, it is simply the wrong kind of entity to possess any normative authority. Isn't the idea of culture as something valuable as nonsensical as insisting that paintings or musical compositions warrant respect and fair treatment (Jones 1998, 36)? Brian Barry gestures towards precisely this conclusion when he argues against the tendency to consider the invocation of cultural facts – traditions, customs, languages, and so on – as a free-standing justification for a multiculturalist policy agenda; a tendency which, as Barry claims without much differentiation, is endemic in multiculturalist theory, and which "comes close to tautology" (Barry 2001, 253).

If there is indeed no way to hold, without committing a category mistake, that culture may give a reason for acting, then the very idea of cultural normativity is obviously a non-starter for any theory of justification. The total rejection of cultural normativity, however, cannot be what Barry and Scheffler mean. While both insist that culture, merely *qua* culture, should not be accorded any moral weight, they grant that, at some deeper level, some features of culture may nevertheless be authoritative in an unproblematic way (although not authoritative enough to qualify as a justificatory argument for multiculturalism). For Barry, for example, this is the case with what he terms "unselfconscious traditionalism," the view that some degree of cultural continuity "keeps the costs of coordination to a minimum, (…) especially in relation to informal norms (as against laws and public policies)" (Barry 2001, 259). Similarly, Scheffler qualifies his rejection of cultural normativity by arguing that the political claims advanced under the heading of cultural rights or cultural preservation should not be automatically dismissed, but rather "be redescribed in such a way as to make clear the values, ideals, and principles that are at stake." Scheffler suspects that in most political and legal appeals to culture, these "will turn out to be moral, religious, or philosophical values or ideals" (Scheffler 2007, 124).

These qualifications nourish the conclusion that what liberal scholars are worrying about is not so much the possibility or impossibility of cultural normativity *per se*, but rather the casual, and often under-theorized treatment of the relationship between 'is' and 'ought' in multiculturalist literature. The tendency of multiculturalists to consider this relationship as self-evident might, as Matthew Festenstein suggests, reflect their effort to tether the principle of human dignity – a moral theory "with apparently impeccable liberal credentials" – to a Herderian thesis of the cultural embeddedness of the self (Festenstein 2005, 32).[14] This combination of liberalism and cultural ontology enables the claim that the respect that is owed to *me* as a person is

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14   See the first two chapters of Charles Taylor's *Sources and the Self* (1989), where he contests the liberal (in his words: "welfarist" or "atomist") thesis of free human agency as disengagement from a substantive social context.

equally owed to *my* culture. And it leads to the impression that cultural ontology – the account of how culture *works* – acquires its normativity 'naturally' in a way that does not require further justification.

I assume that this extension of the principle of individual integrity to the level of cultural groups is in important ways responsible for the confusion that discourses of hybridity have caused in multiculturalist theory. Indeterminacy at the ontological or group level is something that profoundly disturbs the endeavor of presenting culture as a reliable supplier of autonomy, security, or harmony. If this assessment is fair, then this shows us the direction which we have to work in to overcome Patten's dilemma. What we need is a more organicist approach to the relation of 'is' and 'ought' – a moral theory that is not scared of indeterminacy, but that unhesitatingly embraces it, demonstrating that cultural indeterminacy can by itself be a source of normativity. With this thesis I hope to give force to the idea that John Dewey is a reliable philosophical ally for such an enterprise.

In examining the problem *of* and the method *for* a reconciliation between cultural hybridity and cultural normativity, the task I pursue in the following four chapters can be understood as a conversation between three completely different bodies of literature, of which the common feature is the intuition that cultural indeterminacy is more than a description of chaos, messiness, disorientation, or decay, but indeed harbors potentialities for a melioristic future. In order to illustrate this, I would like to provide three quotations. The first quotation is by Salmon Rushdie, the author of *The Satanic Verses* (1989), the second is by the Yale political theorist Seyla Benhabib, and the third is by John Dewey.

> "To migrate is certainly to lose language and home, to be defined by others, to become invisible or, even worse, a target; it is to express deep changes and wrenches in the soul. But the migrant is not simply transformed by his act; he also transforms his new world. Migrants may well become mutants, but *it is out of such hybridization that newness can emerge*" (Rushdie 1987, 210 emphasis added)

> "We are born into webs of interlocution or narrative, from familial and gender narratives to linguistic ones and to the macronarratives of collective identity. We become aware of who we are by learning to become conversation partners in these narratives. Although we do not choose the webs in whose nets we are initially caught, or select those with whom we wish to converse, our agency consists in our capacity to weave out of those narratives our individual life stories, which make sense for us as unique selves" (Benhabib 2002, 15).

"The more complex a culture is, the more certain it is to include habits formed on differing, even conflicting patterns. Each custom may be rigid, unintelligent in itself, and yet this rigidity may cause it to wear upon others. The resulting attrition may release impulse for new adventures" (Dewey 1922, MW 14: 90).[15]

In the next section, I give a short practical overview of how this conversation is structured.

The Structure of the Argument

As the title of this thesis states, I chose to focus my study on a concept of culture that comes in conjunction with the qualifying adjective 'hybrid'. Admittedly, the terminology of 'cultural hybridity' may evoke mixed feelings among social theorists. Over the past two decades, the concept of hybridity – a semantic field comprising terms like 'syncretism', 'creolization', 'métissage', 'mestizaje', 'mongrelization' – has earned notoriety as a chronically under-theorized trope for a wide variety of sometimes contradictory agendas, which, moreover, is frequently subject to unjustified slippages between empirical and normative usages. The reasons for my decision to stick with the term 'hybrid' in the present analysis are of an entirely methodological kind. As I would like to show in this chapter, the way this term is being used in the wake of the anti-essentialist[16] turn in Western social theory harbors an interesting and oftentimes disregarded tension between two distinct types of anti-essentialism that pursue very different aims. I will henceforth refer to these two types as the *skeptical* account and the *political* account of hybridity.[17]

In the first chapter, I begin with the presentation of the skeptical account of hybridity, which I portray as an excessively radical strand of anti-essentialism that undermines the very idea of individuated cultures. My discussion focuses on the question of how social theorists who have lost their faith in the culture concept and prefer to drop it from the realm of social analysis are now approaching the sort of phenomena that is no longer called 'culture'. The empirical and nor-

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15   Throughout this thesis, John Dewey's works are cited with the original publication date, followed by the volume and page numbers in the official edition of his collected works – early, middle, and late (EW, MW, LW) – published by Southern Illinois University Press.

16   Following Mallon (2007), I use 'anti-essentialist' to identify theorists and their positions that oppose essentialism. I use 'non-essentialist' to describe the (non-propositional) situation when a category lacks an essence. Note that 'anti-/non-essentialism' is sometimes used interchangeably with 'anti-/non-realism'. For present purposes, I can safely disregard the nuances of this distinction.

17   Except for the difference in terminology, this distinction is largely congruent with Mallon's (2007) distinction between "skeptical" and "constructionist" anti-essentialism.

mative reasons behind this skeptical reaction are well-known, and I will only briefly mention them for the sake of completeness in section two. Instead, I shall pay particular attention to the strategies and, from the multiculturalist viewpoint, the analytical costs of the endeavor of "writing against culture" (Abu-Lughod 1991). As it appears, the elimination of the culture concept from the vocabulary of the social theorist creates an array of new problems. Perhaps the most obvious one, at least for the multiculturalist, is that she loses her main analytical category. From the moment cultural phenomena can only be studied as 'fictions' or 'imaginations', people cannot reasonably be expected anymore to be bound in any normatively significant way to such a construction. The skeptical account of hybridity, insofar as it rejects cultural individuation, leaves room only for a highly ironic kind of social science, one that *de facto* excludes the possibility that indeterminacy may ever be rendered determinate.

The pressing question is this: can advocates of the skeptical approach to hybridity make meaningful normative statements about phenomena of culture? In the third section, I turn to the "cosmopolitan alternative" (Waldron 1992) coined by thinkers like Jeremy Waldron, Salman Rushdie, and Homi Bhabha, which I take to offer an affirmative answer to this question. What these authors suggest, I believe, is a normative way of life within the framework of a strongly deflationary account of culture. However, even though their emphasis of the potential for "newness," creativity, and self-fulfillment a hybrid way of life brings about seems, at first sight, appealing from a liberal standpoint, I am not persuaded by their argument. My worry is that such an alternative, which values cultural unsettledness more than cultural embeddedness, comes at the cost of becoming dangerously uncritical regarding the political realities and the sources of conflict in human life. Moreover, it is unclear to me how the absolutization of experiences of 'border-crossing' and 'liminality' can leave enough room for a meaningful critique of modernity. I presume, as I argue in the last section, that similar problems occur in Anne Phillips's proposal of a "multiculturalism without culture" (Phillips 2007).

In the second chapter, I turn towards what I have termed the *political* account of hybridity. This account, in a nutshell, holds that an anti-essentialist commitment need not be accompanied by skepticism regarding the possibility of cultural individuation. Anti-essentialism does not entail anti-realism. My aim here is to show that this is a more promising realization of anti-essentialism. When multiculturalists reflect upon the normativity of culture, they are not falling prey to some pervasive epistemological mistake, as the skeptical account presumes. Political theories of hybridity rightly assume that culture is no less real than other symbolic constructs like paper money, constitutions, or languages. Drawing on anthropological theory (section one) and literary theory (section two), I sketch the contours of a distinct culture

concept that strongly emphasizes the political character of culture. The metaphor that best characterizes the politically-hybrid account of culture is that of an unstable equilibrium; encultured persons are permanently confronted with alternating experiences of (symbolic) determinacy and indeterminacy, security and insecurity, freedom and constraint, etc. The passage from one experience to another is, according to the equilibrium view of culture, both hermeneutical and contested. There is no hope that culture has ever reached or will ever reach an ultimate equilibrium, a harmonious state of symbolic purity and stability. In section three, I turn to the case of the Rhaeto-Romansh standardization movement in the Swiss Canton of Grisons in order to offer a practical illustration of how the 'political' operates in the equilibrium conception of culture. In the final section, I make a preliminary assessment of the argument and wonder whether the political reading of hybridity is capable of discounting the dilemma of essentialism.

I shall continue examining this point in the third chapter. I begin the discussion by addressing what I believe is the main anxiety underlying the second horn of Patten's dilemma, which is the presumption that the cultural normativity thesis requires a culture concept that is not intrinsically contested. In the first two sections, I want to clarify this suspicion. I invoke the legal literature on collective rights to examine the question whether groups are, generally speaking, the right kind of entity to bear value (section one) and to furnish reasons for acting (section two). I show that the concern of determinacy and unified agency indeed plays a non-negligible role for the definition of legitimate value- and right-holders.

In section three, I examine the weight of these two considerations for the normative premises of multiculturalism. To this purpose, I go back to Kymlicka's and Taylor's theories of cultural normativity. Both theorists proceed from the assumption that participation in culture is either an instrument (Kymlicka) or a constitutive condition (Taylor) for the realization of some *pre-defined* good: autonomous choice in Kymlicka's case, and a secure horizon of meaning in Taylor's case. Regardless of the philosophical differences that exist between their theories, both authors share a commitment to a goodness criterion which they derive from a transcendental moral standpoint. In their justifications of multiculturalism, both authors then subsume cultural groups under their respective goodness criterion. I shall argue that this pattern is particularly vulnerable to the challenge posed by indeterminacy. Kymlicka's and Taylor's subsumption, as it appears to be, becomes unavoidably problematic in the context of politicized culture concepts. Their accounts are indeed caught up in the dilemma of essentialism.

In the final chapter, I turn to the argument that John Dewey's naturalist conception of ethics furnishes an unorthodox way out of the dilemma. Dewey is largely unknown in multiculturalist thought, which, as I intend to explain, is a missed opportunity. In stark contrast

to the stunning resurgence of Dewey's pragmatism in democracy theory during the last years, his writings have never systematically been brought into contact with multiculturalism. I am hoping that the present study might constitute a modest contribution to changing this state of affairs.

Drawing on Dewey's ethics, I defend a theory of cultural normativity that regards situations of symbolic indeterminacy not as an impediment to, but the starting point of norm-yielding processes. The philosophical terrain for the rehabilitation of cultural hybridity in normative multiculturalism, I shall argue, is prepared by Dewey's anthropocentric metaphysics, that is, by the fact that Dewey sees normativity not as derivative of fixated, disengaged moral theory, but as an outcome of human efforts to transform "indeterminate situations" into "determinate" ones (Dewey 1938, LW 12: 108). Seen from a Deweyan viewpoint, the circumstances of symbolic and hermeneutical instability that characterize hybrid cultures no longer seem unnatural or otherwise obstructing normative quality. In democratic contexts, the condition of indeterminacy described by thinkers as diverse as Rushdie, Benhabib, and Dewey carries in itself the potential for the transformation of presently disrupted experience into a more balanced one. Each culture is, in the context of its ever-evolving webs of significance, a site of problem-solving inquiry and therefore a potential source of normativity.

Chapter 1:
The Skeptical Account of Cultural Hybridity

Suppose that the "challenge of multiculturalism" for liberal democracies consists in the task to accommodate cultural difference in a morally defensible way (Gutmann 1993). If the term 'cultural difference' is to be meaningful at all, those who inquire into morally attractive ways of its accommodation have to be able to specify what counts as a culture and what does not. Multiculturalists, in other words, must furnish criteria of *individuation* that make a given culture C identifiable as an empirically intelligible concept, allowing inferences of the kind: 'C is shared by X, but not by Y', 'Z identifies with both C_1 and C_2', or yet 'C_1 demands to be recognized by C_2'. Put more abstractly, the requirement of individuation can be seen as a sub-condition for context-transcending intelligibility, namely to ensure that an instance is reidentifiable as the same entity in different contexts (Spinosa and Dreyfus 1996, 742).[18] Much could be said here about other approaches of individuation. Alternative cues for the criterion of individuation could for example be derived from Wittgenstein's "family resemblance" [19] or from Zadeh's "fuzzy-sets."[20] While these cues are certainly important, they cannot

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18   Spinosa and Dreyfus put the criterion of individuation on a level with Derrida's concept of *citationnalité*, which, in their view, is a characteristic of *entities*, saying something about an entity's identifiability in an infinitely large number of contexts. As these authors further remark, individuation contrasts with another, less specific criterion for conceptual intelligibility, namely what Derrida has called *itérabilité*, which is a characteristic of *types*, saying something about the context-transcending identifiability of an instance as being a part of the same type (1996, 742). Following Merleau-Ponty, Spinosa and Dreyfus believe that that "if organisms could not recognize *instances of the same type* in many different contexts, they would not have any intelligence at all. If they could not recognize the same entity in various contexts, they would not have *human or higher mammal* intelligence" (1996, n. 26 original emphasis).

19   Several authors find the remarks of the later Wittgenstein (esp. 1953) – after his renunciation of the essentialist assumptions underlying the *Tractatus* (1922) – on the unity and continuity of language congenial to the problem of individuation in cultural theory. Richard Amesbury (2005, chap. 6), Kwame A. Appiah (1998), Tariq Modood (1998) Linda Nicholson (1999), and Natalie Stoljar (1995), explicitly invoke the authority of Wittgenstein's language philosophy in the context of culture-related conceptual inquiry. For a skeptical view of the pertinence of Wittgenstein's "family resemblance" concepts in the context of culture, see Mason (2007, 222–223).

20   In his seminal 1965 article, Lotfi Zadeh defines fuzzy-sets as a "class of objects with a continuum of grades of membership" (Zadeh 1965, 338). The degree of unity required for a class of entities to be identified as individuated is, on this account, thought to be quantifiable. The conception of culture as a fuzzy-set would imply that we could name for all constitutive traits a

be fully discussed here. What makes the problem of individuation so pressing for social theory is its practical significance for the possibility of empirical and normative analysis. If cultural phenomena are to have an application in social analysis, it is vital to safeguard the possibility that a given culture can be identified *as* itself, which, in turn, presupposes that this culture remains at least minimally *identical with itself* across different spatio-temporal contexts (Kompridis 2005, 324). The criterion of cultural 'individuatability' is the most fundamental analytical constraint the multiculturalist faces. The decisive question now is of course whether the individuation criterion commits us to some objectionable form of essentialism. Philosophers and political theorists are notoriously divided on this question. While pessimists answer in the affirmative, suggesting that individuation unavoidably implies oppressive types of essentialism, others tend to be more optimistic, seeking realizations of cultural individuation that do not require cultural essences, at least not problematic ones.[21] I will discuss a pessimistic and an optimistic position in the second and, respectively, in the third section of this chapter. A critical assessment of the skeptical account of hybridity in the light of multiculturalism follows in the fourth section. However before this, it might prove useful to have some more clarity on the apparent congeniality of cultural essentialism with the desideratum of cultural individuation.

Cultural Individuation

Until the final quarter of the 20th century, the dominant understanding of individuation in social thought was to think of cultures as monoliths, that is, as separate, bounded and internally uniform entities. James Tully calls this understanding the "billiard-ball conception of cultures" (Tully 1995, 10) and locates its origins in 17th and 18th century contractarianism. Tully sees the predominance of this conception in modern constitutional theory as a reason for liberalism's "failure" to properly account for cultural "multiplicity." He therefore rejects the billiard-ball conception and pleads for a culture conception that is "overlapping," "interactive" and "internally negotiated" (Tully

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degree of membership. A membership degree of 100% would imply that a given trait is essential for the culture to be the culture it is. A degree of 0% would imply that the trait, at least in a given context, is never part of the culture. To the extent that Zadeh's approach allows measurable differentiations between 'degrees of essentialism', but does not take into account time-variant considerations of *citationnalité* and *itérabilité*, it is, as far as I can see, at least in one crucial way different from the Derridean criterion of individuation I adopt (following its reconstructed version in Spinosa and Dreyfus (1996)).

21   I count scholars like Stuart Hall (1987; 1992), Paul Gilroy (1993), Homi Bhabha (1994; 1996), Ayse Caglar (1997), and, to some extent, Jeremy Waldron (1992), Seyla Benhabib (2002), Anne Phillips (2007; 1995), and Samuel Scheffler (2007) among representatives of the former position.

1995, 7–14). Three assumptions meet in the billiard-ball conception of culture which, conjointly or taken in isolation, are now commonly referred to as *essentialist*.[22] The first (E1) is the assumption that sharing a culture C means sharing a set of distinct properties – symbolic traits, narratives, formative conditions – that do not overlap in a significant way with other cultures and that irreducibly make C the culture it is. The properties of C, in other words, are seen as *individually necessary* and *jointly sufficient* for C's existence as a discrete empirical concept (Mallon 2007, 148). The second assumption (E2) implicit in the billiard-ball conception takes C's distinctive properties to be relatively ahistorical, non-relational features of C's individual members (Mallon 2007, 148). Not only are C's properties individually necessary and jointly sufficient for making C the culture it is, they are also innate, 'natural' characteristics that hold independently of social continuity and human agency. Finally, the billiard-ball conception assumes that C's properties are internally uniform (E3). On this view, there is a stable intra-cultural agreement over the significance of C's distinctive symbolic properties – traits, narratives and formative conditions. The interests of the members of C are thought to be homogeneous with respect to the authoritative interpretation of cultural properties.

This, in short, is what during the last centuries used to be the dominant approach to the individuation of cultures. Now, one might object that 'culture' is a misleading term in the analysis of essentialism's history, for what scholars from John Locke to Max Weber were seeking to individuate were not 'cultures' in the modern, anthropological understanding as intersubjective "webs of significance" (Geertz 1973, 5), but relatively narrow, territorially concentrated and institutionally embodied groups that are better described as 'nations' or 'peoples' or *Völker*. The endorsement of essentialism, one might continue arguing, enabled enlightenment scholars and advocates of colonialism to establish the kind of classificatory taxonomies – say, distinctions between 'civilized' and 'uncivilized' peoples – that allowed them to justify differential legal standings of groups. Essentialism, as Tully explains, made it possible for Locke to argue in *Two Treatises of Government* that

"being in the state of nature, all encounters, such as 'between a *Swiss* and an Indian, in the Woods of *America*', are dealt with under the law of nature. Since the Amerindians have no govern-

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22   However, the billiard-ball conception of culture does not exhaust the full spectrum of meanings the concept of essentialism has acquired in social theory. There is also no full agreement on whether all the three assumptions it embraces are logically independent. Insofar, however, as the three assumptions all played a primordial role in triggering the anti-essentialist backlash (which I will turn to in the following section), I shall, for the sake of terminological convenience, henceforth refer to the billiard-ball metaphor as 'essentialist'. My reading of the billiard-ball conception is based on the works of Mason (2007), Mallon (2007), and Phillips (2007; 2010, chap. 5).

ments to deal with and no rights in their hunting and gathering territories, they violate the law of nature when they try to stop Europeans from settling and planting in America and Europeans, or their governments, may punish them as 'wild Savage Beasts' who 'may be destroyed as a *Lyon*'" (Tully 1995, 73, quoting Locke 1991 [1689], first treatise, sec. 130, second treatise, sec. 11, 14, 37, 38 original emphasis).

To be sure, the example of Locke's doctrine shows us one concrete application of the method of essentialism, namely the elevation of two specific properties – institutional sophistication and property rights – into distinctive features of the category of "Europeans" and (in their absence) of the category of "Indians." Conceptions of social groups which reify territorial boundedness and institutional completeness – 'nations', 'culture-nations' (*Kulturnationen*),[23] 'peoples', 'tribes', 'folk ideas' (*Völkergedanken*)[24] – are perhaps the most apparent, but by far not the only possible manifestations of Tully's billiard-ball account. Essentialism as a method for conceptual individuation is not limited to the sort of institutionally structured, territorial entities enlightenment thinkers like Locke had in mind; it is logically compatible with relational conceptions of culture too. Conceptions as contemporary political theorists employ them to single out groups and traits which, presumptively, play a constitutive role in the development of those "habits (...), frames of interpretation and categorization, primary practices, interests, and motivational preoccupations" that make up a persons *practical identity* (Rorty 1994, 154; quoted in Festenstein 2005, 11). My understanding of *practical identity* is indebted to Christine Korsgaard's claim that persons possess socially conditioned features that "ground at least some of their reasons to act" (Festenstein 2005, 10; cf. Korsgaard 1996a, 101).[25] To be clear, culture is not the only social setting that makes a difference in our personal life as agents. A broad variety of socio-economic, gender-based, or race-based traits can be central for our practical identity. Indeed, the relative centrality of each trait varies across individual and cultural contexts and is often a source of conflict (Rorty and Wong 1990, 27). The premise underlying terminologies of 'cultural identity' is merely that no account of a person's practical identity can be complete without taking his or her culture into consideration.

It follows from the above-said statement that essentialism can be

23   This term is Friedrich Meinecke's (1908).

24   According to Adolf Bastian, "elementary ideas" differentiate into "folk ideas" as a function of "geographical" and "organic" factors (Bastian 1881).

25   Unless otherwise specified, this understanding also applies to situations when I refer to 'identity' without an adjective.

a powerful method not just for the individuation of culture *simpliciter*, but also for the individuation of culture as a distinctive, non-substitutable ingredient of a person's practical identity, and therefore, as multiculturalists emphasize, as a proper beneficiary of group-differentiated rights and policies. Matthew Festenstein (2005, chap. 1) has identified three conceptions of culture – "societal," "normative," and "semiotic" cultures – that have been employed in political theory to explain the significance of culture for a person's practical identity. I shall not rehearse them at length here. Nor do I mean to suggest that any of these conceptions somehow require or entail essentialism. Rather, I want to lend weight to the *analytical* appeal of essentialism for the purpose of individuating conceptions of culture so that they become suitable for the claims made by multiculturalists.[26] First, consider the case of "societal cultures," a conception coined by Will Kymlicka (see 1995, n. 76; 2001, 25, 53), which has been criticized for being a direct heir to the "old logic of the nation-state" (Carens 2000, 66; cf. Choudhry 2002, 58–60; Gilbert 2000, 179–180). A societal culture, Kymlicka explains, is a "territorially-concentrated culture, centered on a shared language which is used in a wide range of societal institutions in both public and private life (schools, media, law, economy, government, etc.)" (Kymlicka 2001, 25). Kymlicka uses the term "societal" to mark his conception off from conceptions that involve less institutionally structured properties like "common religious beliefs, family customs, or personal lifestyles" (2001, 25). That Kymlicka (and other multiculturalists that subscribe to Rawlsian liberalism) tend to privilege the societal conception should come as no surprise. For Kymlicka, it is first of all through social institutions that "options" enabling autonomous agency are made available. Membership in a societal culture, then, is a necessary condition for one's autonomy to explore and revise one's notions of the good life. (Kymlicka 1995, 93; 1997, 75; 2001, 23–27). Non-societal cultures – less institutionally developed entities like immigrant groups and cultures in the "thick," "ethnographic" sense (Kymlicka 2001, n. 18) –, according to Kymlicka, do not constitute stable "choice contexts" and thus are unlikely to be instrumental to the flourishing of individual autonomy. Moreover, lacking a sufficient level of institutionalization, non-societal cultures often prove unfit to withstand the homogenizing pressures of modernity, and face the threat of being "reduced to ever-decreasing marginalization" (Kymlicka 1995, 80, 95–101; 2001, 53–54).

There is at the center of Kymlicka's normative justification of

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26   Note that I am not talking here about any possible *political* appeal of essentialism. It has been noted that recourses to reifying discourses about culture may be a strategic instrument to highlight – say, in a contest for group-differentiated policies – the significance of culture for one's practical identity: "if we think of what is fixed and unchangeable about a person as being particularly important to her identity, then an essentialist view of culture gives us a reason to think of it as important" (Festenstein 2005, 27; compare Baumann 1999, 95; Modood 1998, 381).

group-differentiated rights an ideal of a world neatly divided into societal cultures, each offering to its identity-seeking members a sufficient degree of institutional and territorial stability and security. It is in many ways tempting to think that Kymlicka's normative argument gains in analytical clarity if societal cultures were regarded through the lens of the billiard-ball account. If it is true that my cultural membership stands in a positive relationship with my freedom and autonomy, a clearly bounded, ahistorical and apolitical definition of my culture's constituent features offers a compelling parsimonious operationalization of the 'explanatory' variable of the Rawlsian-Kymlickan thesis. If essentialists suppose that the traits 'native French speaker' and 'went to school in Québec' are individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for a person's membership in the societal culture of Québec, there would be little room for conceptual ambiguity if it comes to the normative question of what the Canadian government *ought* to do in order to foster this person's autonomy (namely accommodating the 'essential' societal constituents of Québécois culture).

Essentialism is also straightforwardly applicable to what Festenstein has called the "normative" conception of culture. According to the normative conception, which Festenstein associates with Ayelet Shachar's characterization of cultural groups as *nomoi* groups (Shachar 2001; cf. Parekh 2000), cultures are differentiated by a set of shared beliefs and values (*nomoi*). The significance of culture for practical identity, on this account, lies in the normative authority culture holds over its members. The members of *nomoi* groups "share a comprehensive and distinguishable worldview that extends to creating a law for the community" (Shachar 2001, 2). *Nomoi* groups often achieve their normative coherence through religious scripture. For example, Muslims can be viewed as a *nomoi* group insofar as they feel committed to the authority of the Five Pillars of Islam. But secular *nomoi* groups are conceivable too. A good example is the centrality of one's native language in the nation-building processes in the Baltic countries during the recovery of independence in the early 1990s. For Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians, language became an expression of a complex set of shared values, including the collective memory of the decades-long struggle for cultural survival under foreign occupation.

What can essentialism contribute to the normative conception of culture? Two points bear mention. First, as with the societal conception, essentialism recommends itself to the claim that i) there are such things as individuated *nomoi* cultures and that ii) these entities matter for their constituents' practical identity. It seems tempting from an analytical standpoint to operationalize the criterion of individuation by singling out a finite number of individually necessary and jointly sufficient values and beliefs, and to assume that they are unchangeably inherent in the culture. Knowing the 'essence' of a culture's axiological content would convey consistency to the causal explanation of what

it *is* that causes persons to develop such deep allegiances with their culture. However, essentialism not only helps specifying *nomoi* groups as clear-cut epistemic entities agreeable to the needs of the analyst; it also lends weight to an idea that is of particular importance in communitarian thought, namely the idea that there are core values and beliefs that exert a perennial authority over us and that thus make us "encumbered" with allegiances without which we could not be the particular persons we are (Sandel 1982, 179–180).[27] Second, essentialism has the advantage of allowing a straightforward demarcation of culturally grounded values from values that are derivative of non- or sub-cultural forms of identification, say, from gender-, family-, party- or social class-related allegiances. Such a demarcation is a notoriously difficult enterprise, mainly because the degrees of centrality of various identity traits for personal agency is often subject to conflict (see e.g. Rorty and Wong 1990; Rorty 1994). Essentialism, then, is an effective method for identifying the *existence* of such conflicts and, once their existence has been established, for specifying the *terms* of such conflicts. If we were able, for example, to establish that the Book of Mormon constitutes the normative essence of the Mormon *nomoi* group, then we could establish a clear dividing line to determine whether a given non-cultural identity aspects of a random "encumbered" Mormon – say, her rejection of the centrality accorded to the family roles – collides or not with the *nomos* of her culture.

Finally, can the same be said for the semiotic conception of culture? On the semiotic account, culture can be defined as "the pattern of meaning embodied in symbolic forms, including actions, utterances, and meaningful objects of various kinds, by virtue of which individuals communicate with one another and share their experiences, conceptions and beliefs" (Thompson 1990, 132; quoted in Festenstein 2005, 23).[28] In this case, the individuation of culture is no longer determined by shared, territorially bounded institutions (as in the societal conception) or by a set of shared values (as in the normative conception), but by interrelated interpretations of symbols and symbolic constructs – religious and political rituals, language, national symbols, musical and culinary tradition, and historical memories. Having its theoretical roots in the anthropological works of Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz, (see especially V. W. Turner 1967; 1975; Geertz 1973; 1983), the

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27   "We cannot regard ourselves as independent [in the sense that our identity is never tied to our aims and attachments] without great cost to those loyalties and convictions whose moral force consists partly in the fact that living by them is inseparable from understanding ourselves as the particular persons we are – as members of this family or community or nation or people, as bearers of this history, as sons and daughters of that revolution, as citizens of this republic" (Sandel 1982, 179).

28   I will discuss the semiotic conception in more detail in section three of this chapter and in Chapter 2, Section 2.

semiotic conception of culture has quickly begun to attract social theorists which, under the influence of the 'linguistic turn', were uneasy about the "reductionist sociology" (Benhabib 2002, 4) of culture understood as a societal or normative structure. Some theorists adhering to the semiotic view have sought to show that if culture plays a significant role for the practical identity of its members, then this significance must consist in the fact that culture, like a language or a text, satisfies a need of self-interpretation and self-evaluation that inheres deeply in the human psyche. For, as Charles Taylor claims, "doing without frameworks is utterly impossible for us;" that personhood is inextricably bound up with our capacity to make "strong evaluations" is not, according to Taylor, just "a contingently true psychological fact about human beings" (Taylor 1989, 27; cf. Taylor 1994, 26).[29] Culture, Taylor then argues, "provides the frame" for such evaluations, "within which [people] can determine where they stand on questions of what is good, or worthwhile, or admirable, or of value" (Taylor 1989, 27).

According to one reading of the relationship between cultural symbols and a person's interpretational self-understanding, we might think of essentialism as an epistemic tool allowing us to extract and specify the background conditions, and in particular, the "shared meanings" that are ultimately responsible for the development of personhood.[30] According to this reading, the possibility to decompose a culture's "webs of interlocution" (Taylor 1989, 36) into their atomistic, time-invariant constituents would not be unattractive analytically. It undoubtedly would give the analyst a clear idea about what 'cultural diversity', 'cultural integration' or 'cultural change' means in the light of culture's symbolic contribution to the self. Moreover, it would be a convenient heuristic for a hypothetical cultural entrepreneur or a Supreme Court judge seeking to demarcate symbolic forms like 'pure' and 'impure' or 'important' and 'unimportant'. However, there is a second, more generous reading of the semiotic conception, a reading which I believe does more justice to the reasons behind the renewed interest in the semiotics of culture among contemporary political theorists, and which I will therefore further pursue. On this second reading of the semiotic conception, essentialism no longer appears to be an unconditionally appropriate technique of cultural individuation. Insofar as the symbolic materials that shape personal self-understanding are a product of the hermeneutic capacity of a multitude of persons, this adds an element of fallibility to the question about the composition and structure of a symbolic construct like culture at a giv-

29   This claim of Taylor has been attacked for lying on faulty empirical premises. See, for instance, Flanagan (1990).

30   The tendency to demarcate cultural groups by overemphasizing their "shared meanings" has been associated with Michael Walzer's *Spheres of Justice* (1983). For an example of such criticism, see, e.g, Kymlicka (1989).

en moment in time. Culture, because it is a hermeneutic construction, cannot be a clearly bounded entity denuded of history that "sprang into being spontaneously" (Carrithers 1992, 9). Rather, human beings, being self-interpreting animals, perceive their symbolic allegiances – and their possible conflicts with the interpretations of their interlocutors – as a *narrative*, "as part of an unfolding story" (Carrithers 1992, 82). In a similar vein, Seyla Benhabib argues that "participants in the culture (...) experience their traditions, stories, rituals and symbols, tools, and material living conditions through shared, albeit contested and contestable, narrative accounts" (Benhabib 2002, 5; cf. Young 1990, 42–48; Carens 2000, 15). Festenstein aptly explains the neutralizing consequences the understanding of culture as a hermeneutic continuity has for the billiard-ball account of culture:

> "To answer the question 'Who am I' by saying, for example, 'I am Quebecois' is to offer a (challengeable) interpretation of a conception of identity built up from the (challengeable) intersubjective interpretations of one's interlocutors: what it means to be Quebecois, including the criteria for belonging, is a subject susceptible to reinterpretation (is it religion, a language, a shared heritage, a political identity some combination of these?). From the hermeneutic standpoint, this difficulty is not a deficiency since this delicate process of intersubjective negotiation is precisely its approved route to understanding meaning. Given the tendency of the normative and societal accounts to loss over intra-cultural disagreement the fact that this account offers a model for understanding constitutes a particular strength" (Festenstein 2005, 25).

My sketch of the three different ways in which the problem of cultural individuation has been approached in social analysis necessarily misses a great deal of nuance and empirical overlap among the various distinguishing features. The important point to retain is that it would be misleading to think that an endorsement of the essentialist assumptions E1-3 implies a convergence towards a particular conception of culture. The method of essentialism is very versatile; it reveals its appeal whenever configurations of cultural properties are to be presented – whether by encultured individuals, by cultural leaders, by judges and politicians, or by the distant analyst – as discrete, individuated entities. The analysis of cultural difference and of questions of cultural identification is by default an analysis that has to cope with the vicissitudes of social life, replete with tensions between causation and indeterminacy, between moments of conceptual stability and moments of conceptual continuity. Essentialism has a long historical record of conveying an impression of conceptual foreseeability and security to the analysis of cultural phenomena. In the next section, I shall have a look at a radical line of anti-essentialism and discuss the consequenc-

es the rejection of essentialism entails for the multiculturalist's desideratum of having at her disposal a tangible, individuated concept of culture capable of grounding normative claims.

"Writing Against Culture"

Consider the following two passages. In the first, Friedrich Nietzsche, writing in 1878, describes the impact of modernity on culture, an impact which he views both disruptive and reconstructive, able to fundamentally alter "folk cultures" and ultimately clear the way for novel life forms that dispense with a compartmentalizing "culture of comparison." In the second, Alain Locke, writing in 1925, reflects on the transformation of "the Old Negro" in the wake of the *Harlem Renaissance* in the 1920s.

"The Age of Comparison. The less that people are tied by custom, the greater grows the inner movement of their motivations, the greater, accordingly, the outward unrest, the intermingling of people, the polyphony of intentions. Who, nowadays, is still subject to any strict compulsion to tie himself or his offspring to one particular place? Who, indeed, is subject to any strict compulsions at all? Just as all the styles of art are used side by side, so with all levels and kinds of moralities, customs, and cultures. Such an era receives its importance from the fact that all different worldviews, customs, cultures can be compared and lived out side by side… This is the age of comparison!… Let us understand the task of our age in as positive a way as we can: then future generations will thank us – future generations who will have gone both beyond the mutually separate original folk cultures and beyond the culture of comparison" (Nietzsche 1968 [1878], 45; quoted in and translated by Baumann 1999, 81).

"In the last decade something beyond the watch and guard of statistics has happened in the life of the American Negro and the three norns [sic] who have traditionally presided over the Negro problem have a changeling in their laps. The Sociologist, The Philanthropist, the Race-leader are not unaware of the New Negro but they are at a loss to account for him. He simply cannot be swathed in their formulae. For the younger generation is vibrant with a new psychology; the new spirit is awake in the masses, and under the very eyes of the professional observers is transforming what has been a perennial problem into the progressive phases of contemporary Negro life. Could such a metamorphosis have taken place as suddenly as it has appeared to? The answer is no; not because the New Negro is not here, but because the Old Negro had long become more of a myth than a man. (…) With the Negro

rapidly in process of class differentiation, if it ever was warrantable to regard and treat the Negro en masse it is becoming with every day less possible, more unjust and more ridiculous" (A. L. Locke 1925, 3, 5–6)

Both quotations are reflections on the effects of phenomena of urbanization on the distinctiveness of cultural groups. They read like prolegomena to what many decades later shall have materialized as an influential epistemological and methodological shift in anthropology and later also in political theory, namely the skeptical rejection of thinking about social entities – not just culture in the anthropological sense, but *any* group that is able to ground allegiances and identifications – in essentialist terms. What for Nietzsche was the end of the "Age of Comparison" and what for Locke was the end of the "Negro en masse" is for contemporary cultural anti-essentialists the herald of a post-Cartesian age of *hybridity*, whose epistemic and normative implications are seen as absolutely fatal to the idea of culture as an externally bounded and internally homogeneous social fact. The disruptive implications of this shift – dubbed variously 'hybrid', 'constructivist', or 'deconstructionist' – for the status and usefulness of culture as an individuated analytical concept constitute an obvious complication for the normative premises of multiculturalism which, to recall, consist of the thesis that culture is either instrumentally or non-instrumentally valuable. Some clarification is in order.

Discourses of 'cultural hybridity' and its semantic kin terms – 'syncretism', 'between-ness', 'creolization', 'liminality', *'métissage'*, *'mestizaje'*, 'mongrelization' – first emerged in the anthropological research of the late 1960s in the wake of a methodological paradigm change that sought to supersede the lost "ethnographic authority" of Western researchers over a specific 'other' portrayed in terms of ahistorical dichotomies and essences (Clifford 1988, chap. 1).[31] Anthropologists became increasingly aware of the necessity of research methods that accommodated images of culture that are not fixed, but relational, interconnected, and imbued with power. Against this background, hybridity became a trope for an immanent philosophical critique of the Cartesian compartmentalization of the cultural world into well-ordered classes and dichotomous criteria of class membership. At a higher level of abstraction, this critique turns out to have both an epistemological and a normative tenet.

Epistemologically, it became widely accepted that the defense of an account of culture on the premises of essentialist assumptions à

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31   Seminal arguments against cultural essentialism are found in the anthropological writings of Barth (1969; 1993), Geertz (1973; 2000), Clifford (1988), and T. Turner (1993). On the new "anti-essentialist consensus" surrounding the definition of culture, see Baumann (1999) and the essays by Keesing, Sahlin, and Vayda in Borofsky (ed.) (1994).

la E1-3 amounts to a self-deception. Hardly any collection of human beings that think of themselves as sharing a cultural identity would apply to the empirical specifications of the billiard-ball conception of culture. Therefore, any invocation of essentialism is "objectionable insofar as they seek to impose a model that does not fit social reality" (Mason 2007, 227). Rather, the modern condition exemplified by post-war decolonization, expanded communication, urbanization, global labor migration, or forced displacement is thought to sustain a multiplication of overlapping and contending voices, a cultural "heteroglossia" which, as Michail Bakhtin argued in the context of language, ultimately deprives the category 'culture' of its meaning (Bakhtin 1981 [1935], 291). For what residual reasons do we have for maintaining the idea of analytically individuated cultures and therefore of 'cultural diversity' if a random selection of N human beings involves N different ways of interpreting otherness?

While the epistemological objection to cultural essentialism was a product of empirical research by post-Parsonian anthropologists (see especially V. W. Turner 1967; 1975; Barth 1969; Geertz 1973), the *normative* objection was expressed the most forcefully about a decade later in political theory, in particular in the works of Rawlsian liberals, feminists, and postcolonial scholars. In a time when the "politics of difference" (Young 1990) emerged as one of the testing grounds for the erupting debate between liberals and communitarians, political theorists on both sides of the liberal-communitarian divide became anxious to recant the billiard-ball conception of culture. Cultural essentialism was increasingly seen to be conducive to morally pernicious generalizations involving the 'naturalization' of stereotypes, the concealment of intra-cultural patterns of power, and the patronizing denial of agency to encultured subjects. For liberals, any public policy grounded in a presumption of intra-cultural homogeneity of interests and life plans would be oppressive to members whose interests and life plans diverge from the 'official', authoritative position (Young 1989; Waldron 1992; Rorty 1994; Appiah 1994; 2005; Kukathas 1992; 1997; Benhabib 2002; Phillips 1995; 2007). Feminists have shown how over-generalizations – the masquerading of intra-cultural symbolic dissent for the sake of conceptual unity – may be imbued with hegemonic power relations that are damaging to the rights of girls and women (Shachar 2001; Okin 1999; Narayan 1998). And for many postcolonial scholars, the framing of human activity in terms of ahistorical conceptions of culture – 'Western vs. non-Western discourse', 'Muslim community', 'Third-World conflicts' – is reminiscent of the history of colonization insofar as it subtly, in the garb of innocuous "culture talk" (Mamdani 2004, 61), reiterates old codes of "authorizing discourse" (Asad 1993, 37–39) and racialized difference (Gilroy 1993, 7–8; Bhabha 1994, 2; 1996).

The conjunction of these two critical tenets prepared the histori-

cal terrain for what I suggested to call the *skeptical* account of hybridity. It may not be quite clear yet what is so skeptical in this account other than its reluctance to embrace cultural essentialism as implied by the assumptions E1-3. One might well agree, with theorists like Veit Bader (2001) or Alan Patten (2011), that cultures need not be conceived of as essential, integrated wholes in order to be 'real' and therefore serviceable for the needs of the positivist researcher or the normative multiculturalist. I shall examine such a non-skeptical, *political* account of hybridity in the following chapter. However, the skeptical account is much more radical in its ambitions. Rather than merely aiming at reconciliation between the desiderata of cultural non-essentialism and cultural individuation, its resistance against reified notions of culture takes a distinctly deconstructivist, ironic thrust. "Hybridity," according to the skeptical account, "is Heresy" (Bhabha 1994, 226). Anti-essentialist commitments echoed in discourses of hybridity have at times ushered in what would be better called a brand of *anti-realism* about culture, in the negation of the very possibility and desirability of cultural individuation. This skepticism regarding the suitability of culture as a sound object of analysis has prompted one anthropologist to wonder whether the representatives of his discipline can "be defined as otherwise intelligent human beings who nevertheless believe in the concept of culture" (Fox 1985, xi). Increasing doubts that a meaningful individuation of cultures requires an unrealistic and morally objectionable degree of external boundedness and internal homogeneity gave new impetus to demands that the notion of culture be eliminated from the vocabulary of social scientists. It is along this line of critique that skeptical anthropologists like Lila Abu-Lughod have urged their fellow colleagues to "pursue, without exaggerated hopes for the power of their texts to change the world, a variety of strategies for writing *against* culture" (Abu-Lughod 1991, 137 original emphasis). Abu-Lughod then suggests three such strategies, which she labels i) "discourse and practice," ii) "connections," and iii) "ethnographies of the particular" (1991, 147–149). Taken together, they anticipated the contours the skeptical account of hybridity has adopted in political theory literature, perhaps the most notably in Anne Phillips's *Multiculturalism Without Culture* (2007).

i) Abu-Lughod's suggestion to think and write about culture in terms of "discourses and practices" rather than structures is reminiscent of a broader epistemological agenda which, going back to Hegel, Fichte, and the American Pragmatists, rejects the opposition between *phenomena* and *noumena* that extended from Descartes to Kant. Culture is not a self-evident "clear and distinct perception" in the Cartesian sense, apprehensible through logical deduction. Culture does not exist *a priori* (see also Caglar 1997, 174; Parkin 1993, 96); we cannot make cultural phenomena intelligible without putting at the center of

our concept the cultural agent and the practical uses he or she makes of symbols in a given spatio-temporal context. All we have is culture in the *making*. The agent does not *think* culture through a noumenal contemplation of essences, of some sort of a Hegelian *Geist*, but by means of her capacity to *act*, more particularly, her capacity to create and engage in *discourses* of culture. Abu-Lughod's approaches this argument in two steps. First, drawing on Bourdieu's notion of "practice" (1977), Abu-Lughod pleads for an approach to "social life" which is "built around problems of contradiction, misunderstanding, and misrecognition, and favors strategies, interests, and improvisations over the more static and homogenizing cultural tropes of rules, models, and texts" (Abu-Lughod 1991, 147). Second, invoking Foucault's discourse model (1972 [1969]),[32] Abu-Lughod argues that discourse "is meant to refuse the distinction between ideas and practices or text and world that the culture concept too readily encourages" (1991, 147). These two argumentative steps were reiterated and empirically corroborated in Gerd Baumann's study on the communities of Southall, the "most densely populated multiethnic ghetto of London" (Baumann 1996, i). One of Baumann's key findings was the complex notion of how Southallians related culture to community. Southallians engage in various, often contradictory discourses when asked about their cultural allegiances. While at one time Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, Afro-Caribbeans, and whites seek to disengage from the idea of community, creating cultural discourses on the basis of religious or social class cleavages instead – for example, on caste differences in the case of the Sikhs (Baumann 1996, 152) – they engage in highly communitarian, reifying discourses at another time, asserting what they see as their 'essential' or 'original' cultural traits. Such evidence about the simultaneity of multiple cultural discourses depending on a specific context is what leads skeptics to pursue an anti-realist stance towards 'groupisms'. As Baumann himself notes, "[culture] exists only insofar as it is *performed*, and even then its ontological status is that of a pointedly analytical abstraction." In its ethnic understanding, culture is "analytically impotent" (Baumann 1996, 11, 19 emphasis added). What resonates in the discourse-based strategy for writing against culture is a claim that we shall encounter again in the discussion of Dewey's concept of inquiry in the fourth chapter, namely the necessity to consider mental (theoretical or moral) and practical (factual or political) representations of culture not as mutually exclusive, but as standing in a dialectical, and, ultimately, *normative* relationship.

32   In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault argues that the task before him is "to show (...) that in analyzing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice. (...) A task that consists of not – of no longer – treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault 1972, 49).

ii) The second strategy which Abu-Lughod deems useful for thinking and writing against the culture concept consists in the critical inquiry of those processes that bring experiences of cultural otherness and difference into being. What should be asked about culture, Abu-Lughod argues, is "what this 'will to knowledge' about the Other is connected to in the world" (1991, 148). Reflectivity about the patterns behind such connections, according to the assumption at play here, would quickly reveal the mediating role of political power in the construction of cultural otherness and, eventually, expose the epistemic falsehood of the idea that cultural otherness takes the shape of clear-cut communities. The long history of the billiard-ball version of culture, on this view, is inextricably linked with the absence – most particularly in Western social thought – of a sufficient degree of reflectivity about the connections between the analyst and her subject, between the instance that *observes* and the instance that *participates* in culture. What is at stake here is a problem of selective emphasis, the tendency to overemphasize the 'exotic' otherness of cultural traits that are believed to be different from one's own, and, consequently, to view the identity-constitutive function of such traits as important mainly for members of 'traditional' cultures, which, as a rule, tended to be non-Western or minoritarian.[33]

Political theorists too are anxious about unreconstructed, binary visions of cultural otherness. Closely paralleling the skeptical conclusions of anthropologists regarding the analytical usefulness of cultures as distinct, coherent wholes, political theorists have attacked multiculturalists (but also liberal nationalists like David Miller and Yael Tamir) for relying on uncritical spectator points of view with respect to cultural otherness. As Anne Phillips summarizes the point, "characterizing a culture is itself a political act, and the notion of cultures as preexisting things, waiting to be explained, has become increasingly implausible" (Phillips 2007, 45). Phillips points out that binary imaginations of difference between observers *of* and participants *in* culture, between 'us' and 'them', have often been used as a heuristic strategy to explain 'other' behavior that otherwise could not be made sense of, say, behavior that is deemed 'irrational' or 'self-destructive' (Phillips 2007, 46; cf. Kuper 1999, 10).[34] Again, the "implausibility" of such dichotomies and the unavoidability of hybridity are thought to

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33   Such selective patterns of seeing the non-Western other as encultured, history-less, while the Westerner's way of life is thought to be guided by personal choice, is the subject of Eric Wolf's study *Europe and the People Without History* (1982). For similar conclusions in the feminist literature, see also Volpp (2001).

34   Rogers Brubaker (2004, 17) makes a related point in his discussion of "coding biases" in the context of conflicts. He observes a tendency among analysts and ethnic actors to normalize violence and conflict by overemphasizing their ethnic character. This leads to instances of conflict or violence that are "coded" as ethnic while in reality they should have been coded in other, non-ethnic terms.

become apparent once we realize that *we* too are historically situated when constructing cultural otherness. I believe that it is the awareness about the bidirectional and context-dependant character of connections between 'us' and 'them' that resonates in Benhabib's "complex cultural dialogue." "The method of complex cultural dialogue," Benhabib writes, "suggests that we focus on the interpenetration of traditions and discourses and disclose the interdependence of images of the self and the other" (Benhabib 2002, 41). If Abu-Lughod's, Phillips's and Benhabib's insistence on the dialogical constitution of cultural difference is fair, then continuing to see cultural groups as fundamental units of analysis is more than to commit an epistemic mistake; it is to reiterate the chauvinistic logic of establishing cultural taxonomies for the sake of a compartmentalization of the social world into minorities and majorities, victims and perpetrators, groups *in need of* accommodation and groups *obliged* to accommodate.

iii) The third strategy for writing and thinking against culture – named "Ethnographies of the Particular" – is for Abu-Lughod "an especially useful way to disturb the culture concept" (Abu-Lughod 1991, 157). Whereas the first two strategies emphasize individual capabilities of discursive construction (first strategy) and of self-reflection and self-situation (second strategy), the third strategy seeks to undermine culture by emphasizing the difference-erasing implications of the analyst's moving away from abstract group generalizations towards particular *experience*. Undertaking "Ethnographies of the Particular," Abu-Lughod predicts, will demonstrate that *my* particular experience of the surrounding world is not so fundamentally different from *yours* as the billiard-ball conception of culture might make us believe.

> "The very gap between the professional and authoritative discourses of generalization and the languages of everyday life (our own and others') establishes a fundamental separation between the anthropologist and the people being written about that facilitates the construction of anthropological objects as simultaneously different and inferior" (Abu-Lughod 1991, 151).

Abu-Lughod here seems to reiterate (and wrap into anthropological garb) a claim that – as we shall see – is fundamental in John Dewey's naturalism, namely that knowledge-oriented inquiry starts not from theoretical or conceptual abstraction, but from the every-day experience of the inquiry's participants. Once observers start embracing the experience-based view, perceiving others no longer as "robots programmed with 'cultural' rules, but as people going through life agonizing over decisions, making mistakes, trying to make themselves look good, enduring tragedies and personal losses, enjoying others, and finding moments of happiness," they will have, so Abu-Lughod's

hope, an interest to jettison reified notions of culture.

This epistemic faith in the experience of the particular, or more accurately, in its capacity to free social science from its hyperbole of difference, otherness, and the ensuing conservatism, is nicely captured in the opening of Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*, when he stresses the

> "need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (Bhabha 1994, 1–2).

What the postcolonial age has left us with are "in-between" or "third spaces" inhabited by individuals whose identities and understanding of the other's are subject to ongoing negotiation and transformation. Such "spaces" or "interstices" are sites where experiences of "migrancy," "border-crossing," or "unhomeliness," turn into existential aspects of identity-formation (Bhabha 1990, 54–55; see also Chambers 1994; Moore-Gilbert 1997). Hence, if culture is thought to matter for the development of a person's identity, then the right question to ask is not about the pre-given traits and boundaries that determine patterns of identification, but about the processes sustaining the "uneven, incomplete production of meaning" persons are engaging in in their daily "act of social survival" (Bhabha 1994, 172).

We do not need to insist on the perplexities raised by the three strategies for writing against culture to see that each of them is fatal to the claims of normative multiculturalism. This for the obvious reason that the anti-realist attack against the culture concept deprives multiculturalism of both its conceptual and its normative foundation. If all that is left from culture is an imaginary or fictional creation that is radically dissociated from time and space, ought we not to reject any deployment of culture as an individuatable, finite class of traits as a category mistake, or worse – recall Locke's comments on the *Harlem Renaissance* quoted at the outset of this section – as a ridiculously patronizing act? Nikolas Kompridis seems to endorse such a view. In criticizing Benhabib's (cf. 2002) anti-essentialist "narrative view of culture" – which he regards as coming "uncomfortably close to a [Nietzschean] position which fictionalizes culture and identity" (Kompridis 2005, 324) [35] – argues that "once we have exposed cultures as imagi-

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35   While I agree with much Kompridis has to say about the pathologies of radically-skeptical accounts of hybridity, I am not persuaded that Benhabib's "narrative view of actions and culture" (2002, 5) can fairly be presented as being a version of it. See, on this point, Benhabib's reply to

nary constructs and the boundaries that maintain them as inherently exclusionary and repressive, we no longer have any (good) reason to preserve our cultural identifications and attachments" (2005, 326). A theory of cultural hybridity that regards culture's relationship with a person's practical identity as merely fictional and protean on the one hand, and as unavoidable on the other hand, leaves us with a conception of culture which is so indeterminate that people cannot reasonably be expected to be bound to it in a normatively significant way. "Ironic detachment and self-alienation," Kompridis wonders, "would then become the permanent ontological conditions under which we form and transform our identities, and appropriate and pass on 'our' culture/s" (2005, 326).

Suppose, for the sake of argument, that the sacrifice of all positive notions of cultural individuation and cultural existence on the altar of non-essentialism is indeed a necessary measure for the revitalization of the Enlightenment project of individual and collective empowerment and global justice (Bader 2001, 268). Let us suppose also, with John Rawls, that "a plurality of reasonable yet incompatible comprehensive doctrines is the normal result of the exercise of human reason within the framework of the free institutions of a constitutional democratic regime" (Rawls 1993, xvi); these comprehensive doctrines like religions or national myths are most likely to involve a desire for different, sometimes incompatible group allegiances. By what means, in a culture-less universe, should a given state identify and make sense of the group that is referred to, say, in political claims for the recognition of a specific language? By what standards should this hybridity-abiding state make judgments about whether a given minority is treated well or not by the surrounding society? Would my claim that culture C constitutes a non-substitutable dimension of my practical identity – and the evidence of a hypothetical anthropologist that this is indeed the case – be reprimanded as a blatant epistemic mistake? Or would courts turn down claims for cultural rights by invoking the well-known dictum in legal theory that *fictitious entities have no rights* (Graff 1994, 194)?

The anxiety resonating in such questions is about the loss of any possibility to safeguard normative connotations of cultural life in a world governed by the skeptical account of hybridity. If jettisoning the culture concept is indeed the only viable alternative to rid social thought of its centuries-old heritage of essentialism, it seems that we must either relinquish all hope for the normative justification of multiculturalist rights and policies, or start seeking, with Anne Phillips, to think of ways to conceive a *Multiculturalism without Culture* (2007). In the next two sections, I take up the latter suggestion and discuss

Kompridis (2006, 384–385).

the "cosmopolitan alternative" (Waldron 1992), which I read as an attempt to reconcile the skeptical account of hybridity with the possibility of cultural normativity. I shall then argue that the "cosmopolitan alternative" founders, despite the *prima facie* appeal it might have for liberals, on its latent, but pervasive depoliticization of cultural life.

"It Is Out of Such Hybridization that Newness Can Emerge"

So far, my discussion has largely focused on two functions the trope of hybridity has frequently been associated with. 'Hybridity' can be used as a reference to either a descriptive diagnosis – cultural hybridity *is* an ineluctable characteristic of modern societies – or as an epistemological or methodological theory directed against 'groupist' thinking in the study of culture, thinking which is suspected to require false essentializing and dichotomizing inferences. However, these two functions do not fully exhaust the appeal of the hybridity concept in social theory. It is crucial to notice a third – normative – function the term 'hybridity' fulfills in accounts of cultural non-essentialism (Nederveen Pieterse 2001, 238). In political theory, assertions about the hybridity of culture were to an important extent undergirded by intellectual currents with a pronouncedly normative agenda, portraying the deconstruction of old conceptual categories of 'groupness' as a necessary step in the struggle against structural and historical injustices. It is therefore no accident that the struggle against reified categories in the analysis of culture has been accompanied by a tendency which forms the reverse of the coin; the – often vague and undertheorized – gesturing towards a normativization of experiences of cultural 'impurity', 'border-crossing', 'diasporic identity', or 'migrancy' as a desirable and inalienable aspect of modernity. One unmistakable sign that a great deal of normative reasoning is at work in the scholarship accompanying the skeptical account of hybridity is the abundance of adjectives like 'disruptive', 'interruptive', 'transformative', or 'translational' in vindications of cultural dissociation and deconstruction. The philosophical baseline of such normative innuendo appears to be some kind of melioristic account of cultural evolution – a combination of Hegelian idealism and a Darwinian understanding of organic continuity. No one has put this presumptive relationship between cultural hybridity and social betterment and creative "newness" more eloquently than Salman Rushdie. Commenting on John Berger's portrait of the *Gastarbeiter* in *A Seventh Man* (Berger and Mohr 1975), Rushdie says:

> "To migrate is certainly to lose language and home, to be defined by others, to become invisible or, even worse, a target; it is to express deep changes and wrenches in the soul. But the migrant

is not simply transformed by his act; he also transforms his new world. Migrants may well become mutants, but *it is out of such hybridization that newness can emerge*" (Rushdie 1991 [1987], 210 emphasis added).

Such statements form the prolegomena of the sort of cosmopolitanism Rushdie famously advocated in *The Satanic Verses* (1989) and later characterized as "rejoic[ing] mongrelization, fear[ing] the absolutism of the pure, and celebrating '*mélange*, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that'" (1991, 394). It is a cosmopolitanism carried by the faith in the privilege of the mongrel and the migrant – those bereft of their traditional culture – to identify and overcome old and seemingly ahistorical impediments to social change and innovation. If culture has a value, then the value-subject is not culture understood as an individuated group, but as the ironic process of transcending old notions of 'groupness'. Whereas for Rushdie cultural hybridity is *non-instrumentally* valuable, his portraying culture as radically non-identical with itself renders him unable to ascribe *moral standing* to culture. His account of cultural normativity prevents him from viewing culture or encultured persons – where 'encultured' is understood in the conceptually contingent, cosmopolitan sense he endorses – as capable of bearing cultural interests and the related claims to cultural rights.

By an irony of fate, the normative connotations Rushdie has ascribed to processes of transgressing boundaries have acquired their full magnitude only in the context of the "Rushdie Affair" and its repercussions among scholars who regarded the overcoming of communitarian group notions not just as a remedy against political or religious fanaticism, but as a fundamental liberal duty. In political theory, Rushdie's emphasis on the normative consequences of hybridity and processes of hybridization became a driving force behind what today is sometimes referred to as "post-multiculturalism" (see e.g. Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010; Alibhai-Brown 2000; cf. Kymlicka 2010). Narratives of cultural hybridity have repeatedly been invoked in endeavors to downplay or depoliticize claims made on behalf of culture and therefore to undermine the philosophical appeal of group-differentiated rights and policies (Joppke and Lukes 1999, 11; Kompridis 2005, 326). While post-multiculturalists might still perceive a normative function of culture in an abstract sense, say, to the extent that also an unbounded and centrifugal 'hotchpotch' culture may provide autonomy-enabling options to persons, they cannot – for a lack of meaningful methods for individuating cultures – embrace the claims of minority or immigrant cultures as they are evaluated in the works by Kymlicka or Taylor. Writing in the early 1990s under the influence of the escalating Rushdie Affair, Jeremy Waldron was among the first to convert Rushdie's valorization of hybridity into a cosmopolitan critique of normative multiculturalism. Much of Waldron's argument against Kym-

licka's account of group-differentiated minority rights – as sketched in his *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (1989) – was premised on the assumption that the modern condition of *mélange* and hotchpotch can easily supplant the normative resources lost with the death of billiard-ball cultures. "Meaningful options," Waldron argues, "may come to us as items or fragments from a variety of cultural sources" (Waldron 1992, 783). But this empirical claim is not the end point of Waldron's argument; it is only a premise for a wider-ranging normative conclusion, centering around the claim that a "hybrid lifestyle" is "the only appropriate response to the modern world" (Waldron 1992, 763). Waldron's Rushdinian extolment of hybridity comes together with its programmatic reciprocal – an undisguised condescendence towards communitarian visions of group identification and the association of the latter with inauthenticity and anti-modernism. "From a cosmopolitan point of view," Waldron argues,

> "immersion in the traditions of a particular community in the modern world is like living in Disneyland and thinking that one's surroundings epitomize what it is for a culture really to exist. Worse still, it is like demanding the funds to live in Disneyland, while still managing to convince oneself that what happens inside Disneyland is all there is to an adequate and fulfilling life" (Waldron 1992, 763).

Failure to recognize the ineluctability of cultural hybridization, as one of Waldron's commentators says, is tantamount with being "anti-modern and guilty of primitivism, exoticism, backwardness, and childlike naïveté" (Kompridis 2005, 322).

A related, although less boldly formulated argument is found in the postcolonial thought of Homi Bhabha. Like Waldron, Bhabha extols the presumptive melioristic potentialities of the migrant's endeavor to transcend and dissolve cultural distinctiveness. "The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (Bhabha 1990, 211). The meaning of Rushdie's notion of "newness" is for Bhabha not exhausted in the mere rectification of old, essentialist ways of thinking about cultural entities. Rather, Bhabha understands newness in the Hegelian sense of an *Aufhebung*, of the parallel endeavors of cancelling past meaning and elevating the remaining elements to a different level. Cultural transformation thus understood implies, as Bhabha argues in the following fragment, a radical detachment of culture towards temporality:

> "The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural trans-

lation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present" (Bhabha 1994, 7).

The circumstances under which people shape their identities and their lived experience, on this account, are not determined by the intactness of culture, but by the insecurities and the contingency of the "in-between space" generated by the disruption of the routines of past experience.

What resonates in such statements by advocates of a normatively connoted, skeptical account of cultural hybridity is an old Millian commitment against the conservatism of the *ancien* régime. John Tomasi rightly remarks that the doctrine of "liberalism (...) has a deep motivational connection with another important notion: a belief in the possibility of *social progress*, especially as a result of personal *experimentation*" (Tomasi 1995, 591 emphasis added). Many liberals agree that personal experimentation, say, the creative shaping and re-shaping of substantive life plans, presupposes access to a sufficient range of options. However, liberals differ widely about the question whether the richness of options is more effectively promoted in contexts characterized by cultural stability or under circumstances of cultural instability. While liberal multiculturalists like Kymlicka or Raz defend the former position – "freedom involves making choices amongst various options, and our societal culture (...) provides these options" (Kymlicka 1995, 83) – liberals of the Millian sort retort that what ultimately enhances the exercise of individual autonomy and personal experimentation is more likely to be cultural *instability*. On this view, what is required to stimulate the mutually reinforcing relation between personal experimentation and social progress is not an environment of familiarity, but "a certain degree of cultural instability – including an instability that affects the deep sources of people's beliefs about value" (Tomasi 1995, 591). There is a remarkable affinity between Millian presuppositions of social progress and Waldron's and Bhabha's normative emphasis of the experience of disorientation, impurity, and precariousness, exemplified by the migrant in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. In both cases, the dissolution of cultural fixity and the hybridization of symbolic life forms are portrayed as both instrumentally and non-instrumentally valuable processes. These processes are instrumentally valuable insofar as they presumptively encourage personal self-reflection and – recall Waldron's "cosmopolitan alternative" – multiply the options among which people can choose. And they are non-instrumentally valuable insofar as they are thought to enable potentialities for social renewal and – as in Bhabha's case – to direct subversive, transformative

impulses against dominant discourses and power structures.[36] Taken together, these two normative outcomes offer one explanation for the liberal appeal of discourses of cultural unsettledness. Apologists of the skeptical account of hybridity – whether they are 'post-multicultur-alist' critics, or theorists who are sympathetic to the normative claims of liberal cosmopolitanism, or both – tend to take this explanation as sufficient for the 'emancipation' of intuitions of cultural normativity from the billiard-ball vision of cultural groups. In the next and final section of this chapter, I shall try to make clear why we should not fall into an uncritical 'end of history' mode and simply take the *Auflösung* of cultural distinctness for granted.[37]

Multiculturalism Without Culture?

Several scholarly endorsements of cultural hybridity display a peculiar tendency to slip between a Rushdian-styled extolment of cultural de-construction (and its presumptive normative advantages) and bewil-dering circumspection about what exactly the conceptual alternative to 'culture' is supposed to be. Oftentimes, initially emphatic state-ments about the hybrid condition of modernity gradually peter out in the course of the argument and end up unmasking the author's unpre-paredness to relinquish the ideas of cultural distinctiveness and indi-viduation. Rogers Brubaker, for example, felt compelled to defuse the title of his book *Ethnicity without Culture* from the very outset, remind-ing that "[t]he title should not be taken too literally. The book does not seek to banish 'groups' from the study of ethnicity; it seeks, rather, to open up that study to other ways in which ethnicity 'works'" (Brubaker 2004, 3). In a similar vein, Seyla Benhabib quickly relativizes her ini-tial declaration that she does "(…) not believe in the purity of cultures,

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36   The following paragraph is quite representative for the way Bhabha uses to describe the subversive power of hybridity: "hybridity is not a *problem* of genealogy or identity between two *different* cultures which can then be resolved as an issue of cultural relativism. Hybridity is a prob-lematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority (Bhabha 1994, 114 original emphasis). Bhabha's slippage between colo-nial hybridity and "post-colonial" cultural hybridity has been criticized as neglecting the differ-ent historical and political patterns underlying the genesis of these forms of hybridity. See, for instance, Fludernik (1998, 262).

37   David Scott's suspects that the reason why "culture in political theory remains oddly un-dertheorized [and] underhistoricized, (…) like a non-ideological background, or a natural horizon" lies in what he calls the "Geertz-effect," the uncritical reception by multiculturalists of "culture-as-constructed-meaning" as a logical correspondence of what seem to be the "new end-of-ideology conditions of liberal democratic discourse and practice" (Scott 2003, 97, 111). It is the aim of this dissertation to present a reading of "culture-as-constructed-meaning" that escapes the criticism of superficiality and a-historicity.

or even in the possibility of identifying them as meaningfully discrete wholes" (Benhabib 2002, ix). Further on, Benhabib remarks that the "sociological constructivism" she endorses "does not suggest that cultural differences are shallow or somehow unreal or 'fictional'" (Benhabib 2002, 7; see also 2006, 384). Finally, consider how Anne Phillips qualifies her original proposal to think of "multiculturalism without culture."

> "When I say I want a multiculturalism without culture, I mean I want a multiculturalism without particular notions of culture I have found unhelpful. But while I think that cultures have been reified and cultural conflict exaggerated, it is no part of my argument to deny that people are cultural beings. (...) Saying that people are cultural beings, however, carries a different resonance from saying they are from a particular culture. Talk of "a culture" summons up a unity of beliefs, practices, and ways of understanding the world that in most cases do not go together, while talk of people as cultural beings simply draws attention to the mediation of everyone's relationship to their social world" (Phillips 2007, 52).

The puzzle Phillips raises is twofold. First, her talking of "cultural beings" logically implies the existence of a real, non-imaginary, and non-fictitious class of properties that in some way "mediates" people's behavior in their relationship with the social world. There must be something positively 'cultural' out there that entitles Phillips to talk of it as an ontological property of persons. Second, although Phillips copiously criticizes contemporary theories of multiculturalism for their reliance on essentialist visions of culture, she is unwilling to drop the notion from the vocabulary of the political theorist worrying about group-related issues of justice and equality. "Multiculturalism *is* an egalitarian doctrine," Phillips argues, a doctrine "committed to the view that (...) cultural groups (...) who currently constitute the numerical majority do not automatically gain the right to impose their own cultural preferences on the others" (Phillips 2007, 71 original emphasis).[38] The latter point deserves particular attention, as it reveals an aspiration that is similar to the one I am pursuing in the present study, that is, to think about a way to bridge the gap between cultural non-essentialism and the preservation of normative notions of culture.

I admit (with, for example, Alan Patten (cf. 2011, 738) and Veit

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38   Besides its egalitarian sensitivity, Phillips also presents a "political" reason for not abandoning the discourse of multiculturalism, a reason which she sees as flowing from the politically motivated backlash against multiculturalism in Europe and the ensuing resurgence of nationalist and assimilationist citizenship models (Phillips 2007, 72). For a discussion on the status of normative multiculturalism in the light of assimilationist arguments, see Gianni (1998; 2002).

Bader (cf. 2001, 259–260)) that I do not fully understand what lies at the bottom of the slippage between Phillips's simultaneous aversion *of* and reliance *on* culture. But it seems to me that *Multiculturalism without Culture* provides us with a helpful hint. I suspect that such ambiguities have to be seen in the context of her uneasiness with some normative implications of cosmopolitanism. As Phillips herself makes clear, her suggestion not to jettison the discourse of multiculturalism is motivated by her anxiety that cosmopolitanism "adopts no special stance as regards the relationship between majority and minority cultural groups" (Phillips 2007, 72). The problem Phillips locates in cosmopolitanism's disinterest in cultural distinctiveness and in its faith in the redeeming effects of cultural hybridization is that of a premature depoliticization of the social world, resulting in a perspective from which it becomes analytically impossible to identify the existence of conflict and inequalities between and within social groups. The anxiety at play, then, appears to be a version of the older critique against universalism, according to which conflict-blindness and the depoliticization of the public/private distinction are at the origin of its tendency to unjustifiedly neutralize individual or communal inequalities (see e.g. Young 1989; 1990; Benhabib 1992). This kind of worry become manifest in passages as the following, where she invokes Daniele Archibugi's comparison of multiculturalist and cosmopolitan approaches to linguistic diversity:

> "Multiculturalists are keen to stress that the nation-building process leads to winners and losers and that the majority language group retains all gains. Cosmopolitans are less inclined to consider the advantages and disadvantages of the various groups because they implicitly assume that establishing a common language provides advantages to all communities, and they tend to put aside the fact that some communities get a larger share of them" (Archibugi 2005, 543, quoted in Phillips 2007, 72)

Such textual evidence indicates that what underpins Phillips's suggestion to frame questions of cultural justice – the problematic nature of the culture concept notwithstanding – in terms of multiculturalism rather than cosmopolitanism is the worry that the latter is incapable of regarding communities as moral entities, as entities that warrant some (negotiable) degree of respect. Phillips, against here initial aspirations, eventually does not seem to believe that the abandonment of culture and the ensuing hybridity yields sufficient normative power to transcend away the moral consequences of conflict and hegemony as they characterize the social world.

If such implicit skepticism regarding the political and moral naïveté of cosmopolitanism offers a fair account of Phillips's reluctance to fully embrace the cultural anti-realism that transpires from

the title of her book, then her anxieties are in agreement with those of a number of scholars that outspokenly protest against premature valorizations of cultural hybridity as inherently melioristic and transformative.[39] According to this position, which I will focus on in the remainder of this chapter, and which I shall myself endorse, cosmopolitan endeavors to supplant classical, group-based notions of cultural normativity with the celebration of hybridity are painfully oblivious to the ways in which political power operates in the constitution of hybridity (Papastergiadis 2012, 61). For example, it makes a difference, normatively spoken, whether the dissolution of culture is the result of the exercise of personal autonomy in the Rawlsian sense or a way of life celebrated and promoted by a cosmopolitan elite. Overly enthusiastic extolments of the hybrid as *the* post-modern condition have evoked allegations that such proposals too often are void of historical self-reflectivity and therefore susceptible to underestimate or simply overlook the normative salience of such differences.

Hybridity, for its critics, does not imply parity; the unthinking of culture as an analytical category does not automatically entail protection against the "possibility that the hegemonic and economic forces can exploit the ambiguities of a muted version of hybridity to produce what García Canclini calls a 'tranquilizing hybridity'" (Papastergiadis 2012, 61; quoting Canclini 1995, 48). Here is a short summary of three normative problems that have been associated with the difference-erasing, anti-political consequences of hybridity discourses in anthropology and political theory.

First, it has been repeatedly noted that statements of cultural hybridity retain a degree of dependence on some concept of culture and, therefore, in principle, to the moral fallacies of essentialism. Writing and thinking against culture is not combating essentialism, but merely hybridizing it (Friedman 1999, 236; cf. Kompridis 2005, 333; Bader 2001, 259; Modood 1998, 381–382; Appiah 2005, 151–152). For, one might ask, how could we establish the meaning of terms like 'translation', 'fluidity', or 'border-crossing' without any prior understanding of conceptual stability and individuation? This objection does not undermine Waldron's and Bhabha's claim that processes of hybridization may be valuable. But it suggests that the melioristic potential of cultural blending, if we grant that it exists, is not grounded in a conceptual or metaphysical void, some "interstice" or "third space," but in the metamorphosis, re-enactment, or combination of some *real*, antecedently existing source of personal or communal identity. A hybrid cultural community is still, as Jacob Levy has it, a cultural community, and therefore "as much a basis for bounded and exclusionary loyalties

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39   Moreover, if this reading is fair, my disagreement with Phillips is limited to her somewhat caricatural presentation of non-essentialism in the first two chapters of her book.

as any more pristine cultural group" (Levy 2000, 7).[40] As the apologists of hybridity themselves so emphatically insist (recall their rejection of the essentialist assumption E2 above), culture is history. What we identify with today is – despite its radical, perhaps incommensurable newness – to some determinable extent contingent upon the past. Thus, to value cultural hybridity as an enrichment, to claim that hybridization reinvigorates and renews the symbolic world in which we live presupposes a positive understanding not just of the epistemic, but, most crucially, also of the normative status of the entities undergoing hybridization, for example of the way these entities were dealing with sexual minorities or internal dissent. If such knowledge were unavailable to the present-day analyst, or philosophically impossible, normatively meaningful notions of 'newness' or 'subversion' would hardly be imaginable.

The second reservation regarding the normativization of cultural hybridity is an extension of the first. If discourses of hybridity cannot operate independently from the heritage of old, 'groupist' understandings of culture, they are also unlikely to fully transcend the preexisting asymmetries in the distribution of power both on the individual level and on the communal level (Friedman 1999; Friedman 1997; Van der Veer 1997; Ahmad 1995). One approach to this problem is to ask the *cui bono* question – who is the beneficiary of the loss of cultural distinctiveness? The normatively charged language of 'border-crossing' or 'hotchpotch' used by authors like Waldron or Bhabha has prompted critics to argue that discourses of hybridity might tell us more about the life experience of its usually socio-economically privileged proponents than about actual processes of cultural discontinuity. The charge, in other words, is one of elitism. As the anthropologist Jonathan Friedman provocatively has it, "while intellectuals may celebrate border-crossing, the *Lumpenproletariat* real border-crossers live in constant fear of the border" (Friedman 1999, 254; cf. 1997, 79). Friedman suspects that the instrumental value of the liberating and innovating potential of hybridity is conditional upon socio-economic characteristics and often limited to the polyglot professor, the poet, and the frequent flyer. If a hybridized social environment can still offer grounds for allegiances and identifications – as neither Bhabha nor Waldron denies – then this is more likely to be the case for elites than for less privileged and less mobile individuals. The difference-blind valorization of hybridity is for Friedman the symptom of a "new,"

40 With regards to the futile attempt to dissolve criteria of individuation and distinctiveness, some commentators speak, not without irony, of an "essentialist non-essentialism" or "essentialist hybridity." See, for instance, Kompridis (2005, 320), Anderson, (1997, 12), and Friedman (1997, 79). For Pnina Werbner, "hybridity is meaningless as a description of 'culture,' because this 'museumizes' culture as a 'thing'" (Werbner 1997, 15).

post-modern cosmopolitanism that he considers to be a misguided derivation of what he terms the "old," modern cosmopolitanism:

> "The cosmopolitan of old was a modernist who identified above and beyond ethnicity and particular cultures. He was a progressive intellectual, a believer in rationality who understood cultural specificities as expressions of universal attributes. The new cosmopolitans are ecumenical collectors of culture. They represent nothing more than a gathering of differences, often in their own self-identifications" (Friedman 1997, 83; cf. 1999, 236).

The charge that the value of hybridity (as embodied in Friedman's "new cosmopolitanism") is reducible to its enabling the creative self-fulfillment of a privileged elite has also been uttered, albeit in a slightly modified form, in the context of the Marxist-inspired critique of globalization. Proposals to rid social analysis of the culture concept have come under suspicion of setting the stage for a 'marketization' of culture and thus of subjugating culture to the control and domination of "transnational capital itself" (Ahmad 1995, 12). Hybridity is thought to sustain the picture of a cultural space "consisting of a range of commodities from which the consumer makes his selection: food, furnishings, films and funky music from all over the world" (Gilbert 2000, 52). Extolling the hybrid as disruptive and revolutionary, then, is to misrecognize this vulnerability. Hybridity discourse, in other terms, "is part of the very discourse of bourgeois capitalism and modernity which it claims to displace" (Van der Veer 1997, 104; cf. Chow 1993, 34–35).

Finally, the third reservation against the normativization of skeptical hybridity originates in the anxiety that its corollary – the portraying of suggestions to maintain criteria of individuation as reactionary and naïve – excludes the claims of culture and deliberations about the moral costs of cultural loss from the realm of legitimate inquiry.[41] Worse, according to this view, Rushdinian self-indulgence in hotchpotch hybridity renders the critique of modernity if not impossible, then surely morally dubious and to some extent "unnatural" (Kompridis 2005, 338). The exhortation of hybridity talk, it is worried, leaves scant room for intuitions – described not just by multiculturalist like Taylor and Kymlicka, but powerfully elaborated also in the works of Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt,[42] and, as we shall see, in John Dewey

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41   It should be noted here that Waldron, who I have presented as a proponent of skeptical hybridity, later repudiated the somewhat condescending tone in which *The Cosmopolitan Alternative* (1992) qualified the significance of traditional group allegiances and the claims made on their behalf. See Waldron (2000).

42   Writing in the 1950s, Arendt draws positive conclusions from cultural indeterminacy. Arendt famously argues that the "ruins" of the romanticist view of culture – the last desperate at-

– that *some* symbolic meaning of the past might be worth to be passed on to future generations. In particular, the loss of all notions of cultural significance in society and politics would, so it is feared, cancel out without substitution one effective way to confer some degree of epistemic and moral stability to human association in the course of modernity. What sense, one might for example wonder, could we make of Human Rights "without the thick value terms that are the work and result of cultural practices and cultural traditions?" (Kompridis 2005, 336). What point can we give to religious identification other than regarding it as a strangely exotic, backward form of "'false consciousness' simply masking objectives and interests that are actually 'secular'?" (Modood and Meer 2009, 486, quoting Statham 2005, 164–165).[43] The suspicion that such questions attribute to skeptical discourses of hybridity is that of naturalizing the loss of symbolic meaning as an intrinsic and unstoppable feature of human progress. Hybridity talk, then, carries the burden of being wedded to a ruthlessly Darwinian brand of modernity that escapes from political critique, that is, from the possibility that old meaning might be contested, renegotiated, or reinvented (Kompridis 2005, 335; cf. Modood 1998, 381–382; Bader 2001, 268–269) and thus operate as an active *agent* rather than a mere victim of history.

To my mind, the difficulty of squaring the Rushdinian celebration of border-crossing with a reflective perspective on the symbolic and political antecedents of modernity and progress constitutes the most serious limitation of endeavors of writing against culture. As finite human beings we will never be in a position – or rather, with Gadamer and Dewey, in a *situation* – from which we can understand the surrounding world independently from history; "*to be historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete*" (Gadamer 1975, 301 original emphasis). Discourses of cultural hybridity often come dangerously close to the thesis that modernity is tantamount to the end of history, and that henceforth our knowledge, our identifications, our dealing with newness, our struggle against both communal and indi-

tempt to save the authority of "categorical framework of the great tradition" – offer a chance to rediscover the "lost treasures" of our past with "eyes undistracted by any tradition" (Arendt 1961, 5, 28–29).

43   According to Modood and Meer (2009, 485–486), the retreat from a "communitarian multiculturalism" in Britain during the early 2000s and a successive policy-driven turn towards a group-skeptical "multiculture perspective" which "stresses the possibilities of consumption-based, lifestyle identities that are adopted in an atmosphere of 'conviviality'" has encouraged the marginalization and "exclusion of thicker ethno-religious identities," mainly Muslim identities, from the political and scholarly debate on cultural accommodation. Such "built-in interpretative biases" (Statham 2005, 164) in discourses of hybridity, multiculture, and, more generally, in the context of recent transformations in national citizenship models have recently aroused the interest of social scientists. See, for example, Gianni (2015), Gianni and Clavien (2012), Grillo (2010), Vertovec and Wessendorf (2010).

vidual injustices, is no longer contingent upon the past, not even upon the 'past' understood in its radically contested and negotiated sense of a more or less structured web of symbolic meaning. To hold such a view, as I shall argue in the next chapter, profoundly misrecognizes the hermeneutic situatedness of mortal humans. It is my contention that we should not, for this reason, eliminate culture – and therefore criteria of cultural individuation – from the conceptual repertory of the social scientist. Instead, we should keep on thinking about ways to reconcile the anti-essentialist and melioristic impulses of the skeptical account of hybridity with a concept of culture that is realist enough to be valued as a respect-warranting social fact.

Conclusion

The skeptical account of hybridity has the merit of having named the ills of the billiard-ball conception of culture, but it comes close to throwing the baby out with the bathwater. By making culture radically non-identical with itself, it rules out all meaningful ways to think of culture as an individuated concept that can be subject to empirical and normative inquiry. Most problematically, the endorsement of skeptical hybridity renders us incapable of grasping culture as a site of (in)equality and (in)justice which might ground reasons for the attribution of rights and recognition. In the next chapter, I turn to a different reading of cultural hybridity, a genuinely realist one that aspires to make the immanent anti-essentialism of the 'hybrid turn' – its emphasis on the unavoidably indeterminate character of culture – compatible with a positive approach to cultural individuation that is serviceable for the normative multiculturalist.

Chapter 2: Cultural Hybridity Reconsidered: The Rehabilitation of the Political

If the animating objective of proposals for 'writing against culture' was to critique false fixities and dichotomies in classical conceptualizations of culture and cultural identity, not all non-essentialists are willing to take this slogan in its literal sense. A second set of scholars aspires towards a different operationalization of cultural non-essentialism, one that reconciles the desideratum of cultural individuation – the demonstration of the epistemic existence of culture as an instance that is reidentifiable as the same entity in different contexts – with the non-essentialist assumption that cultural properties are outcomes of human agency and, therefore, inherently *historical* and *politically negotiated*. On this account – call it the *political* account of hybridity – there is no philosophical contradiction between the conceptualization of culture as "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols" (Geertz 1973, 89) or as a "multilayered, decentered, and fractured systems of action and signification" (Benhabib 2002, 26) and the study of such entities as individuated, positively intelligible entities, say, that make moral claims on others, that can flourish or decay, that can contribute to personal identity, or that can stand in conflict with one another. Phenomena of cultural identification, dissociation, change, and disappearance are not mental representations of some kind of pervasive epistemological misunderstanding; they are *real* and are best studied through the lens of a conception of culture that stresses not only the self's cultural embeddedness, but also the self's emancipated capacity to interact with and shape the surrounding symbolic world through practices of symbolic (re)-appropriation, negotiation, and contestation.

The political account of cultural hybridity, in other terms, is unwilling to draw defeatist conclusions from the fact that cultures are complex and contested constructs. Most importantly, it refuses to accept the ironic stance of the skeptical account towards any notion of difference and otherness, and it aims at avoiding the implicit condescension of the skeptical account towards intuitions and desires that some aspects of our cultural identity or specific symbolic prac-

tices might be worth to be preserved, cherished, and passed on to future generations. The political account of hybridity is confident that even fundamental intra-cultural discordance on the 'appropriate' or 'authentic' meaning of institutions, values, or symbols need not undermine the individuatability of culture. It has a positive faith in the philosophical soundness of empirical and normative claims made on behalf of culture *even* if culture is not conceived of as a clear-cut societal, normative, or semiotic social entity. In a nutshell, it refuses to see a trade-off between cultural realism and the accommodation of questions of power and inequality in empirical and normative cultural analysis. It, unashamedly and without falling prey to charges of naïveté, wants to embrace the fact that cultural hybridity is as much an inevitable and unfinalizable fact of modernity as it is power-laden and asymmetrical (Shohat and Stam 1994, 42–43; Friedman 1999, 241). From the perspective of the normative multiculturalist, the political approach to hybridity, as it seems, stirs up new hope for the possibility of a conception of culture that solves Patten's (2011) "dilemma of essentialism" – a conception that countenances both non-essentialism and indeterminacy and yet remains serviceable for the multiculturalist as a potential bearer of respect-warranting value.

In the remainder of this chapter, I want to prepare the conceptual terrain for an examination of this hope (which I will then pursue in Chapter 3). In particular, I am interested in two nuances that indicate different paths in which culture can be conceptualized as a site of symbolic politics. The next section draws heavily on anthropological literature. Its aim is to discuss the political implications of the semiotic conception of culture, which, to recall has been celebrated by anti-essentialists as a promising alternative to the "reductionist sociology" (Benhabib 2002, 4) of traditional – normative and societal – conceptions. Against the background of the unavoidable exposure of existing symbolic forms to the surrounding symbolic social contexts, I shall present culture as an uneasy equilibrium between symbolic preservation and innovation. The second section then presents a different, although related reading of the equilibrium view of culture, utilizing an illustration borrowed from hermeneutic literary theory. My aim in section three is to give a short empirical example illustrating the 'political' in the equilibrium conception of culture. Drawing on a recent study of argumentative topoi and language myths in the Rhaeto-Romansh meta-discourse since the late 19th century (Coray 2008), I show how the continual tension between determinate and indeterminate – challenged, contested, reinterpreted – symbolic meaning finds expression in contemporary efforts to demarcate the Romansh culture and to define what counts as worthwhile – practical and institutional – strategies of linguistic preservation and cultivation. I take stock in the forth section by assessing whether the political conception of cultural hybridity solves Patten's dilemma of essentialism, that is, whether it

defuses the apparent conflict between conceptual indeterminacy and normativity-ascription.

The Politics of Symbolic Interpretation

The view that I have named the political account of cultural hybridity is intellectually indebted to the 'hermeneutic turn' of the early 1970s, the awareness that culture, being a symbolic construct, appeals to the researcher's capacity of *Verstehen* rather than *Erklären*.[44] This new affirmation of meaning and interpretation as the focal points of anthropological inquiry – in contrast to the positivist observation of the influence of Durkheimian "social facts" or Marxian "superstructures" on individual behavior – is inextricably linked with the work of Princeton anthropologist Clifford Geertz (see especially Geertz 1973; 1983; see also Kuper 1999, 71–72, 81–83). A central thread running through Geertz's work was the rupture with Talcott Parsons' positivist anthropology, which aspired to infer law-like patterns from symbolic constellations seen as largely static states of affairs that can be inquired into from, as pragmatists would say, a disengaged 'spectator point of view' (Putnam 1990b, 267; 1995, 70). For Geertz, the main problem with this methodology is twofold: first, it elevates the epistemological position of the researcher over the one of his or her subjects. Ethnographic research, according to Geertz, involves "conversation" rather than causal attributions of "social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes" to culture (Geertz 1973, 14). Second, it misrecognizes the semiotic character of culture. If culture is a construct of symbols that people invest with meaning, then a proper understanding of culture requires a hermeneutic perspective and, therefore, a disposition that sees the individual not merely as a *receptor* of symbolic force, but as a pivotal *agent* in the constitution, interpretation, and recreation of symbolic meaning. Culture, Geertz argues invoking Paul Ricoeur (1971), is in itself a hermeneutic phenomenon; its constitutive symbols do not emanate from some other-worldly, purified a priori; symbols are 'real' parts of our every-day experience, ever-exposed to the interpretative power of our minds, unsheltered from redefinition and contestation. These two sources of discontent with classical anthropology are nicely reflected in the following phrase:

> "The concept of culture I espouse, (…) is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspend-

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44   Note that the 'hermeneutic turn' in the sense used here is now often thought to be part of a broader 'cultural turn', which involves both a turn *to* culture (by disciplines other than anthropology) and a turn *in* the concept itself (e.g. regarding its epistemological foundations). See, for example, Scott (2003, 106–107) and Chaney (1994).

ed in *webs of significance* he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an *interpretive* one in search of meaning" (Geertz 1973, 5 emphasis added).

Symbols are not merely determining human behavior; their propositional meaning is itself contingent on human acts of interpretation. Being self-interpretive animals, all we have is culture in the making, accessible only through the hermeneutic study of the interplay between symbolic power and symbolic construction. The upshot of the hermeneutic turn in anthropology, then, is the view of culture as a site of an unstable *equilibrium* between being "suspended" in and "spinning" webs of significance. This metaphor of culture as a hermeneutic equilibrium, I believe, stands at the very center of the rehabilitation of personal agency for the individuation and structuration of culture. Because it has immediate political implications, it is a vital force behind the developments that have made culture such an intensely debated problem in political theory (see also Scott 2003).

Let me now elaborate what exactly the political implications of the culture-cum-hermeneutic-equilibrium metaphor consist of. If some symbolic structures – religious rituals, founding myths, or ideologies – may prove to be extremely stable over time, to the extent that their practical significance for social interaction remains unchallenged over generations, the fact that symbols are, by their very nature, functions of interpretation always leaves "scope for interpretive manoeuvre by those who use them" (A. P. Cohen 1985, 18). The possibility that people may attach diverging or conflicting meanings to a given symbol involves a latent degree of uncertainty, imprecision, and ambiguity when it comes to the question of the authority of this symbol in social action (A. P. Cohen 1985, 17; Barth 1993, 4–5; Mach 1993, 40–42; Firth 1973, 77; cf. Geertz 1973, 112–113). Post-Parsonian anthropologists were at pains to show that the attribution of meaning to symbols is neither reducible to a mere problem of semantics, nor to a politically naïve manifestation of human caprice. Rather, the uncertainty and ambiguity surrounding symbolic meaning constitutes strong incentives for agents to deploy strategic power in the aim to make symbols "fit their circumstances" (A. P. Cohen 1985, 18; cf. Sahlins 1981) and, indeed, to "affect the behavior of others" (Firth 1973, 84; cf. Johnson 2000, 412; Ortner 1978, 7; 1984, 129, 152–157).[45] Symbols, as Victor Turner states, are "triggers of social action – and of personal action in the public arena" (V. W. Turner 1975, 155; cf. Firth 1973, 84; Geertz 1973, 250). Their rule-defining power is their most obvious function in social life.

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45   The strategic dimensions of culture have been presented as an unbridgeable obstacle to normative multiculturalism (Johnson 2000; Jung 2008). I will get back to this topic in the third chapter of this thesis.

Symbolic constructs such as religious scripture, language metaphors, memory of ancestors, diplomatic usage, or aesthetic norms can be invoked to legitimize a specific social order, say, to discriminate between 'good' and 'bad' practice, or to draw the boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. Symbolic constructs are outcome of declarative speech acts made by rational agents; they seek to *coordinate* social interaction and to reduce the indeterminacy of our experience by "foreclosing or disclosing" possibilities for agency (Johnson 2000, 412). This makes the assignment (or invention, or recasting) of symbolic meaning and the struggle for prerogatives of interpretation a matter of seeking control over others or, in other terms, an immediate act of mobilizing political power. For Pierre Bourdieu, this power of symbolic control is echoed in practices of "naming:" "By structuring the perception which social agents have of the social world, the act of naming helps to establish the structure of this world, and does so all the more significantly the more widely it is recognized, i.e. authorized" (Bourdieu 1991, 105). In a similar vein, Ian Hacking, drawing on Foucault, has connected the exercise of symbolic power with the effect of "making up people," the "creation of kinds among the masses" (Hacking 1986, 223). It seems to me that a further noteworthy account of the relationship between symbolic meaning, power, and available options is reflected in Sally Haslanger's "discursive constructions:"

> "*Discursive construction*: something is discursively constructed just in case it is the way it is, to some substantial extent, because of what is attributed (and/or self-attributed) to it" (Haslanger 1995, 99).

Given that our every-day classifications and attributions are made in a world of symbols, their social consequences are contingent upon what is the dominant, 'discursive' meaning of these symbols at a given time. Classificatory schemes, because of their being an outgrowth of symbolic force, may in immediate ways foreclose or disclose options that affect our possibilities for action. This is in particular the case when attributions convey social roles or normative expectations. As Haslanger illustrates it, "being classified as an able-bodied female from birth has profoundly affected the paths available to me in life and the sort of person I have become" (Haslanger 2003, 310). The ascription "able-bodied female" determines a person's options – socio-economic perspectives, social status, self-understandings – not because of its intrinsic features; it can only have this effect against the backdrop of a symbolic script which determines the dominant (linguistic and pragmatic) meaning of the category 'able-bodied female'.[46]

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46   Moreover, symbolically instructed classificatory schemes may bring new social categories into existence. "Our attributions," Haslanger argues, "have the power to both establish and re-

The account of culture thus portrayed, it is fair to say, has no ontology in the strong, pre-political sense. There is no cultural *Stoff* that hides behind its acts. In this respect, the status of the semiotic culture concept is congruent with the status Judith Butler has ascribed to gender. "Ontology," Butler argues, "is not a foundation, but a normative injunction that operates insidiously by installing itself into political discourse as its necessary ground" (Butler 1990, 189). To fixate the ontology of culture in the strong sense would be to hold a particular set of symbols as beyond criticism. Now, can the same be said for the 'political' in what has been termed the political account of hybridity? In the following, my discussion will try to carve out the idea, clearly present in Geertz's anthropology, that power relations necessarily emerge whenever people are dealing with symbols. The political, seen from the naturalist standpoint I adopt, is something that in some way describes the kind of practical behavior we display when we are facing symbolic tension and indetermination. I cannot give a conclusive answer here whether or not the notion of the political as a function of irritating tension corresponds to the type of strong ontology Butler rejects. The crucial point to keep in mind, it seems to me, is the 'banality' of the political, the tight and absolutely natural entanglement between our dealings with symbolic forms and power.

The imbrication of symbolic under-determinateness, 'polysemy' or 'multivocality' with a strategic contest for the 'determination' of symbolic meaning has consequences for the conceptual individuation and structuration of culture. If cultural agents are, ontologically speaking, not just self-interpreting, but also political animals, ready to coalesce and mobilize resources in order to define and redefine the framework that coordinates their interactions, then the prospect of having at our disposal coherently integrated and stable culture-entities seem fairly dim. Culture, in the view of semiotic anthropology, is neither a structure nor a "'super-organic' reality with forces and purposes of its own" (Geertz 1973, 11); rather, it resembles a tragic continuity, an evolving hermeneutic process riven by periodic disruptions in the form of new indeterminacies and the political contests for authoritative meaning that ensue from them. It is in this interplay between situations of symbolic indeterminacy (polysemy, multivocality, ambiguity, etc.) and the struggle for symbolic control that the complexity, the precariousness, and most of all, the political brisance of the equilibrium view of culture consist in. And it is, as I hope to make clear in the fourth chapter of this study, a view of culture that is congenial to the pragmatist naturalism of John Dewey.

One additional remark is in order to clarify the relationship between the equilibrium notion as I derive it from Geertz's semiotic an-

inforce groupings which may eventually come to "fit" the classifications (Haslanger 1995, 99).

thropology and the equilibrium notion as it is frequently deployed in social system theory, which I reject. David Bidney, the author of *Theorethical Anthropology*, *prima facie* seems to concur with Geertz when he argues that "an integrated culture is a moving equilibrium, an ever-changing harmony regulated in accordance with the requirements of individual and social life" (Bidney 1967, 375). However, Bidney parts company with Geertz in that his understanding of 'equilibrium' refers not to the intra-cultural hermeneutical balance of symbolic meaning, but to culture as a "homeostatic system analogous to a living organism" (1967, 376). This difference is crucial, because only the Geertzean equilibrium is truly 'political'. As we have seen the Geertzean equilibrium is a *hermeneutic* one – it is the fragile state of a symbol or a set of symbols in which meaning is not currently being challenged. Bidney's equilibrium, in contrast, is a homeostatic one – one that is maintained not on the level of symbols, but on the level of culture understood as an organic whole. On the latter account, it is the culture *qua* organism that faces the vicissitudes of a hostile environment and it is primarily the *aggregate* of this organism that tries to maintain or re-establish a healthy state, not its individual agents. To hold such a view of culture, as Geertz himself rightly notes (Geertz 1973, 11), is to illicitly reify a pre-existing vision of cultural flourishing that moreover neglects the strategic and preference-driven agency of encultured individuals.

Now, it would be wrongheaded to believe that this fragile equilibrium between hermeneutic indeterminacy and hermeneutic control could be stabilized over time through repeated iterations of conflict-resolving mechanisms or through the establishment of an enduring intra-cultural balance of power. That would mean to deprive the struggle for the control of symbolic meaning of its history. As Turner emphasizes, the causes of interpretative conflict are not merely reducible to the inherent ambiguity of symbolic meaning, but they are also a function of contextual factors that are only contingently related to cultural phenomena. The "multivocality" of symbols, Turner argues,

> "enables a wide range of groups and individuals to relate to the same signifier-vehicle in a variety of ways. Otherwise hostile groups may form coalitions in political fields by emphasizing different *signata* of the same *signans*. The greater the number of people, the more complex the division of labor; the higher the 'plurality' of a society, the greater the likelihood that its dominant symbols will be simple at the level of *signans*, complex at the level of *signata*, and various in modes of *signification*" (V. W. Turner 1975, 155 original emphasis; see also 1967, 50).

Symbolic meaning, and in particular the processes that engender *dominant* meaning, may ramify into contexts that lie beyond the immediate experience of persons inhabiting a culture. Most notably, the

interpretative scope of a given *signans* (the number of *signata* a symbol may obtain) – and therefore the incentives for symbolic politics – may increase as a function of the exogenous changes brought by modernity. Under the effect of global economic integration, a shrinking 'digital divide', and increasing mobility, the boundaries separating 'us' from 'them', symbolic familiarity from symbolic foreignness, have become less tangible and are moving away from the fringes of our society, but much closer to the everyday experience of the individual. Nowadays, "foreignness," as Geertz puts it in a later essay, "does not start at the water's edge, but at the skin's" (Geertz 2000, 76). The fact that the boundaries of our societies have ceased to prevent us from exposure to the symbolic world of distant people and groups, groups whom our ancestors – if they were at all aware of their existence – could easily ignore, has broadened the array of meanings which a specific symbol may potentially adopt (Mach 1993, 19; cf. A. P. Cohen 1985, 44).

Much has been written about the ways in which the multiplication and diversification of symbolic meaning may fuel intra-cultural conflict and cause massive disruptions to the intra-cultural balance of power. Some cultures may (and indeed do) attempt to safeguard their symbolic continuity by reasserting – at the cost of individual autonomy – habitual and ostensibly 'traditional' or 'authentic' meaning, or by ostracizing undesired, 'impure' *signata* from the scene of interpretational negotiation (Appiah 1994; Rorty 1994; Bissoondath 1994; Kernohan 1998).[47] Yet the possibility of a reflexive escape into conservatism and cultural reification is opposed by evidence from empirical anthropology that this is by no means a necessary outcome of interpretative uncertainty and the ensuing opportunities for symbolic conflict. Victor Turner, analyzing the "polysemic" character of Ndembu symbols in their ritual context, established that cultures differentiate and hierarchize symbolic meaning depending on the context (V. W. Turner 1967). Michael Carrithers, in his study about the reciting of the Buddhist *Aggañña* text over the last 2'400 years, has observed that persons dispose of sophisticated, deep-rooted capacities to "permute" old meaning into new symbolic realities using means of hermeneutic creativity, social intelligence, and narrative thought. The "metamorphic character of human experience," Carrithers concludes, "[allows] people to act with an awareness of the flow of action in which they are immersed" (Carrithers 1992, 9, 146). John Bowen, concluding on the question "Can Islam be French?" highlights the disposition of French Islamic public actors – Imams, Islamic school teachers, theological

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47   As I argue in the next chapter, the pursuit of symbolic control is not the only reason for the recourse to reifying discourses. Another reason lies in the anxiety that a high degree of symbolic indeterminacy may limit the prospects of groups to be regarded as bearers of action-guiding value, for instance, in the struggle for public recognition or group-differentiated rights. I will argue that given the way the normativity of culture has been philosophically constructed, this anxiety is not entirely unjustified.

consultants, etc. – to engage in creative, "socially pragmatic forms of reasoning within the Islamic tradition" in the aim of legitimizing

> "practices that may be innovative in their specific form (French-language sermons, home loans at interest, civil marriage taken as already Islamic) but that extend to French Muslims the guarantees and the benefits already enjoyed by fellow Muslims living in societies with a broader range of Islamic institutions" (Bowen 2010, 197).

Such "pragmatic" modes of reasoning are not symptoms of 'thinking against culture', or steps towards the dissolution of cultural meaning, but innovations achieved through ongoing negotiations between traditional and present realms of justification, between – to use Geertz's terms again – acts of being *suspended* in and acts of *spinning* particular webs of significance. The fact that we are cultural beings, "thrown" (Young 1989, 260) and raised in linguistic, ritual, or aesthetic webs of significance, as it seems, is perfectly in line with the fact that these webs are political in nature, and therefore always, to put it in the words of the skeptical account of hybridity, in flux.

The Politics of 'Fusing Horizons'

At the end of the previous chapter, I have gestured towards the Gadamerian thesis that past meaning has bearing on the way persons deal with present indeterminacy and its related insecurities. I have criticized the inability of anti-realist, skeptical accounts of hybridity to allow for the possibility that some aspects of the past – in the sense of past symbolic meaning – might be worth preserving and passing on to future generations. This not for the aim of cementing or reifying the past, but for the aim of making a reflective use of past meaning in our efforts to better control the vicissitudes of modernity.[48] I should now become more articulate about the contention that the past has bearing on our present. For, as it turns out, the Benjaminian-Arendtian dialectic between past and present horizons, while established as an effort to channel the complexities of modernity, is not devoid of politics either. This interplay between past and present horizons of symbolic meaning is no less a cause for the hybridization and indeterminacy of cultural meaning than exogenous pressures from "foreign" symbols;

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48   The point is not to understand the past as a refuge from the awareness that our traditions are a product of history: "We should not be misled by a curious, but understandable, paradox: modern nations and all their impedimenta generally claim to be the opposite of novel, namely rooted in the remotest antiquity, and the opposite of constructed, namely human communities so 'natural' as to require no definition other than self-assertion" (Hobsbawm 1983, 14).

the extent to which past meaning matters in the present is no less depending on the discretion of agents, be they group leaders, politicians, or tourism boards. On the view I hold, culture in the semiotic sense, understood as a web of symbols, is the locus of a never-ending chain of what Gadamer in *Truth and Method* (1975) called "fusions of horizons" (*Horizontverschmelzungen*). To put what I have just stated in Gadamer's words,

> "it is a grave misunderstanding to assume that emphasis on the essential factor of tradition which enters into all understanding implies an uncritical acceptance of tradition and sociopolitical conservatism (…). In truth the confrontation of our historical tradition is always a critical challenge of this tradition (…). Every experience is such a confrontation" (Gadamer 1979 [1975], 108).

Such passages might sound familiar to the ears of those familiar with Geertz. The image of a present horizon which – perhaps against great resistances – 'updates' traditional horizons of meaning as a function of contextually conditioned expectations or interests furnishes another demonstration of the uneasy hermeneutic equilibrium between moments of symbolic indeterminacy and moments of symbolic control. To carve out the political brisance of the relationship between past and present horizons of meaning, and in particular the pivotal role of the present actor – the *recipient* – in the reinvention of cultural meaning, let me make a short detour into literary theory.

During the second half of the 20th century, the debate on the methodology of literary interpretation brought forth two competing clusters of methods, which can be distinguished by their philosophical starting point into recipient- (or reader)-centered and text-centered methods. In political thought, the reception as a hermeneutic method has for a long time been neglected, if not explicitly rejected (see e.g. Kramm 1981; Nonnenmacher 1981). Since its first appearance in the context of scholastic theology, the concept of reception has been known in legal sciences from the 13th century onwards (first in connection with the reception of Roman Law in Western and Central Europe). It is likewise used in the history of art (Jauss 1987, 10–18). In philosophy, the interest devoted to reception analysis is recent and is commonly associated with the works of Gadamer on philosophical hermeneutics (Jauss 1987, 16). As a hermeneutic method, the study of reception patterns has prospered the most pervasively in literary sciences, where it ushered in an influential set of theories commonly referred to as the *Constance School* in the 1960s.[49]

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49   The key figures of this methodological current are the University of Constance scholars Hans-Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser. See Jauss (1975a) and Iser (Iser 1970). Other common names for this tradition are *reception aesthetics* (*Rezeptionsästhetik*) and, in the Anglo-Saxon liter-

The *Constance School* repudiates all attempts to reduce the reader to a passive 'consumerist' of textual content and holds that the act of reading has a primarily dialogical and pragmatic dimension. It is important to note that its emphasis of the *acting* reader does not correspond to the conception of the *actor* in the Marxist school of literary theory. To be sure, the Marxist conception of reception also attributes to the recipient an analytical role. According to the Marxist view, the main function of the recipient is to reconstruct and assess the "superstructure" that underlies a text, that is, the material basis (or production structure) it is reflecting.[50] However – and here the theoretical *prima face* similarity ends – the Marxist recipient has no hermeneutic autonomy, and her horizon is not seen to be varying over time or according to changing contextual experiences and expectations. The *Constance School* takes issue with the presumably static character of the reader's horizon of experience and holds that her "code of interpretation" cannot be taken simply as a function of, as in the case of the Marxist reception analysis, a certain social class allegiance (Jauss 1975b, 348).

For similar reasons, the Constance reception theory also rejects the formalist approaches within literary science, such as the *New Criticism* movement that emerged in the 1920s around Ivor A. Richards (see especially Richards 2001 [1924]). Whilst the Marxist approach conceives the reader essentially as a sociologist who is a priori interested in the text's materialist background, formalists expect the reader to detect and categorize distinctive formal patterns, according to the instructions the text provides. Both theories are seen by the Constance approach to neglect the agential autonomy of the reader, especially her capacity to critically assess what she receives. If Marxists and formalists emphasize the reader's active role, they refer to her ability to discern and contemplate certain properties of the text (social class, formal structure) rather than to her "genuine (…) role as addressee to whom the literary work has primarily been destined" (Jauss 1975a, 126, my translation). Recipients, as Jauss argues, are more than just "perceiving subjects" (1975a, 126). The actual task of meaning-production rests on them, not on the author of the text.

From this view of the literary recipient as a reflective, meaning-producing agent follow three conclusions which resonate in interesting ways in the Geertzean portrait of culture as a negotiated, and therefore ever-evolving, symbolic equilibrium.

The first conclusion we can glean from hermeneutic literary theory is that inferences about symbolic meaning, be it textual or cultural meaning, cannot be detached from a careful study of the prevailing

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ature, *reader-response criticism*.

50   Georg Lukács is a central representative for the Marxist literary theory. See Lukács (1972).

expectation structure at the time of the reception. Whether and how a symbol is seen as meaningful depends on its salience in the light of the recipient's expectation structure, that is, on whether it is perceived to be capable of furnishing an answer to the prevailing questions of the recipient. Hence, if the meaning of a symbol is at least in part a function of the recipient's practical expectations, it follows that the constitution, or rather, the updating of symbolic meaning is essentially a *dialogical* enterprise. The act of reception, on this account, involves an encounter of two horizons, a *horizon of expectation*[51] on the part of the recipient, and a *horizon of response* on the part of the symbol or symbolic construction. The recipient's horizon of expectation is determined both by previous symbolic knowledge (or acculturation) and the historical context at the time of the reception. It can thus be highly diversified in character, sometimes targeting aesthetical enjoyment or self-identification, or at other times reflecting a quest for certainty and guidance, say, in periods of economical or political turmoil. At the moment of the reception, the recipient's reflective effort consists first and foremost in establishing a connection between his dominant expectations and intensions – the *intentio lectoris* – and the perceived response potential of his symbolic environment. Each time the recipient is facing an antecedent symbolic response horizon – the *intentio auctoris* – she engages in a process during which these two horizons are reflectively negotiated. To the extent that this reflective endeavor – Gadamer's *fusion of horizons* – modifies or updates the prevalent horizon of expectation, new meaning comes into the world. Cultural meaning, then, is an outcome of the human capacity to draw on past symbolic horizons with the aim of modifying the present horizon of expectation.

A second conclusion from the literary theory of the Constance School that has bearing on the dialogical constitution of cultural meaning highlights the historicity of symbolic constructions. Constance literary theory rejects the idea of perennial literary canons whose authority is seemingly shielded from the reflective agency of the recipient. Following a closely parallel rationale, cultural non-essentialists are at pains to denounce the falsity of views which treat culture as an ahistorical, deterministic one-way street (recall assumption E2 of the billiard-ball conception discussed in the first chapter). Changes in the historical context and in the recipient's literary experience continuously affect the expectation structures at work during acts of reception. With every new reception step, the meaning of the same text is reconstructed anew and thus undergoes a successive actualiza-

51   For a detailed explanation of the horizon of expectation and its role for textual understanding, see Jauss (1975a, 136–141).

tion.[52] Consequently, the verdict on the meaning of a given (textual or cultural) symbol always evolves across cohorts of recipients. Insofar as symbolic meaning is not just pragmatically, but also historically constituted, it is safe to regard symbolic constructions – literary texts, myths, constitutions, cultural customs – as having a "destiny" (Gerber and Ossipow 2010).

The third conclusion that can be drawn from the view of symbolic meaning as hermeneutically negotiated is a methodological one and is logically related to the two precious ones. If the premises that symbolic meaning is i) the outcome of hermeneutic agency and ii) iterated (as a function of changes in the actor's horizon of expectation) at different moments on a time axis are correct, then a proper understanding of the meaning of a symbol at t_n presupposes a systematic historical analysis of the recipient's horizons in $t_{n-1...-n}$. In other words, in order to be able to make inferences about the meaning of a given symbol *today*, we require some degree of knowledge about the hermeneutic transformations this symbol underwent in the past. [53] We must, to use Gadamer's terms again, be able to look behind us and reconstruct the questions which the symbol, in the time preceding our experience, gave an answer to.

If the hermeneutic conception of culture thus portrayed contrasts with the Rushdinian, skeptical conception in that it admits the possibility of cultural individuation and distinctiveness – the possibility that a given set of symbols *can* remain minimally identical with itself across different spatio-temporal contexts – it shares with the latter a feeling of repulsion for the billiard-ball conception of culture. The Geertzean-inspired anthropological literature seems at times reluctant to uphold criteria of cultural distinctiveness. Sometimes the tone of the rhetoric surrounding the symbolic-political constitution of culture suggests an affinity with the notions of hybridity and fluidity used by cultural anti-realists à la Waldron and Bhabha. Nonetheless, the Geertzean approach did not yield to the temptation of deconstruction, but, as we have seen, tried to keep pace with modernity by showing that cultural boundaries and cultural symbols are neither cast in stone nor super-organic wholes, but complex sets of meaning fabricated by reflective human agents. As we have been aware of since Aristotle, we

52   It is in this sense Jauss uses Gadamer's metaphor of the *fusion of horizons*. Gadamer argued that the "understanding [of a text] is always the fusion of these [previous] horizons supposedly existing by themselves" (Gadamer 1975, 305). Hence, because the contemporary verdict on a textual work is always considered to be grounded on the study about the chain of receptions that were made between t1 and tn, reception analysis is thought to lead to the "hermeneutic accomplishment" of the act of reading.

53   For a powerful illustration, consider for instance the semantic trajectory – and the correlative political struggles for the prerogative of interpretation – the concept of 'neutrality' has gone through in Swiss political discourse since the Second World War. See, for example, Kreis (2004), Ricklin (2014).

humans are political beings. We possess interests, disinterests, expectations, and sometimes emotions that we are not always able to withhold when our experience is at odds with a given (set of) symbols. The struggle for symbolic control, according to the position I have sketched, is not something we have to be ashamed of. It is an unavoidable feature of our life as encultured creatures that we should, as Dewey would say, take as a source of "disturbances" that call for "recovery" (Dewey 1938, LW 12: 34).

It remains to be seen, however, how the political account of hybridity performs in the light of the cultural normativity hypothesis, that is, whether the latter can be upheld in combination with an inherently contested conception of culture.

Political Hybridity at Work: The Political Underpinnings of the Rhaeto-Romansh Struggle for Survival

Recall the *Bar Amici* case from the introduction of this dissertation, in which the Swiss Federal Supreme Court upheld the building regulations of Disentis/Mustér, according to which commercial signs must be in Romansh.[54] In its verdict, the court recognizes that marginalized national cultures may be exempted from constitutional norms of commercial freedom if the latter endanger the existence and the "homogeneity" of the respecting communities. Adopting an entirely linguistic criterion of cultural demarcation ("the Rhaeto-Romansh language region"), the court, apparently following Charles Taylor's non-instrumentalist theory of cultural value,[55] ascribes to the group thus defined a normative character grounding a "public interest" in the preservation of the Romansh cultural identity.

What makes the *Bar Amici* case rewarding for the reflection on the relationship between cultural hybridity and cultural normativity is the fact that what the court refers to as "the Rhaeto-Romansh" (*das Rätoromanische / le rhéto-romanche*) is itself a contested symbol. Even if regarded from a strictly linguistic perspective, the meaning of this category involves manifest ambiguity and, indeed, conflict.[56] Histori-

54   Swiss Federal Supreme Court, decision BGE 116 Ia 345 (1990).

55   This reading is consistent with the scholarly comments on cultural minority rights in Switzerland. For the *Bar Amici* case in particular, see Kälin (1999, 17, 50–54).

56   Of course, that would be all the more true if broader, ethno-territorial criteria were used to demarcate the Romansh culture. Not only has there never been in the Romansh meta-discourse a consensus on the symbolic content of a Romansh ethnicity; the very existence of cultural markers beyond merely linguistic criteria has been repeatedly denied by Romansh elites themselves (see, e.g., Solèr (1998)). Some commentators have argued that representations of the Romansh

cally, Romansh has never existed as a unitary, monoglossic language. It comprises five idioms – *Puter, Vallader, Sursilvan, Sutsilvan, and Surmiran* – which, under the impact of topographic and confessional constraints, have largely evolved along separate trajectories.[57] The Romansh language region is not congruent with a contiguous territory, but compartmentalized into small, often geographically secluded, mountain communities that have never shared a common cultural and economic center. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the Romansh idioms and their respective symbolic universes have only been weakly interconnected over many centuries – a circumstance which not only hampered Romansh nation-building efforts, but also, as contemporary linguists emphasize, the improvement of mutual intelligibility (see e.g. Grünert et al. 2008, 38–56; 2015, 55). Starting from the 19th century, under the influence of the accelerating Germanization of the Canton of Grisons and the continual retrogression of Romansh language practice in the public space, initiatives for a successive harmonization of the Romansh idioms started to gain momentum. The promotion of a higher degree of integration between the idioms, it was hoped, would decrease incentives for the use of German or Italian – especially written – in the public sphere and lay the foundation for a flourishing pan-regional Romansh identity. Endeavors of linguistic standardization oscillated between, on the one hand, initiatives that merely aimed at the tentative approximation (*avischinaziun*) of orthographic rules and the accommodation of neologisms, and, on the other hand, initiatives for the creation of a novel, unitary Romansh standard language.

Not at least as a consequence of the emergence of the *Lia Rumantscha* ('Romansh League')[58] as an influential political actor and its alignment with a strategy of linguistic convergence in the early 1980s, the latter kind of initiative has prevailed and has materialized in the shape of the *Rumantsch Grischun* (RG), a *koiné* variety of Romansh constructed on the basis of scientifically inferred commonalities between the three largest idioms – Sursilvan, Vallader, and Surmiran (Coray

culture as a *Volk* or an ethnic group tend to be employed predominantly by non-Romansh scholars (as e.g. in Burri (2015)). For a detailed discussion of the question whether the character of the Romansh culture is ethnic or linguistic, see Coray, (2008, 345–349).

57 In the Swiss 2000 census (the most recent data allowing the itemization of Romansh idiom use), a total of 27'038 residents of the Canton of Grison indicate Romansh as their main language. The relative proportions of the idioms are as follows: Sursilvan 13'879 (57.8%), Vallader 5'138 (21.4%), Puter 2'343 (9.8%), Surmiran 2'085 (8.7%), Sutsilvan 571 (2.4%) (Gross (2004, 31; quoted in Coray 2008, 89)).

58 Founded in 1919, the Lia Rumantscha is an umbrella organization with the statutory aim to promote the Romansh language, to aggregate the interests of its member organizations and to represent the latter in the cultural and political arenas of Switzerland. It currently maintains a secretariat with 20 permanent employees (equivalent to 1200% full time posts) and has a budget of 3.5 million Swiss Francs (3.7 million USD), out of which 2.5 million are public funds (D. Bezzola 2015, 95–96).

2008, 138).[59] In the two decades following its invention, RG has enjoyed a remarkable consolidation on the social, legal and institutional level (Coray 2008, 139–144). RG first aroused the attraction of private advertising companies, who started to experiment with RG newspaper advertisements as early as 1982. The first RG translation of an Asterix comic was published in 1984 (*Asterix ed ils Helvets*). In 1986, a textbook for economy classes in vocational schools was published in RG (*Economia*). In the same year, the Swiss federal administration, on the government's initiative, started using RG for translations into Rhaeto-Romansh.[60] In 2001, the citizens of the Canton of Grisons accepted a bill that requires the publication of all official proceedings in RG. And in 2004, the cantonal parliament voted for the introduction of RG as a school language. In 2014, forty dominantly Romansh-speaking municipalities have implemented RG as the alphabetization language in primary schools (Coray 2014, 84).

If the establishment and institutionalization of a standardized Romansh variety undoubtedly is the most conspicuous (and internationally much-noticed) feature of a two-centuries-long efforts to preserve a language of 60'000 speakers, it would be mistaken to consider RG as something like the late, but logical *discovery* or *revelation* of a long-time unacknowledged Romansh essence or, as some of its promoters have suggested in an biological-organicist fashion, as a natural act of "creation," a "natural medicine" (e.g. against the "German virus"), or yet a "heart's desire" (for bibliographical evidence, see Coray 2008, 390–391, 398, 407). Such topoi misrecognize the negotiated character of cultural forms. RG – as much as all previous initiatives aiming at linguistic standardization and cultural preservation – cannot be studied without taking into account the political implications of the intra-Romansh struggle for symbolic control. The history of the Romansh struggle for survival is the history of symbols which, in a dynamic continuum, have passed through periods of stability, periods of contestation, and periods of hermeneutic indeterminacy. The institution and consolidation of RG, then, is not more nor less 'natural' than the institution of paper money or constitutions; as the Romansh case teaches us in an exemplary fashion, the function of cultural forms at a given time is always a reflection of dominant strategies to determine the meaning of specific cultural symbols and, normatively, to determine what symbols ought to be passed on to future generations.

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59   The birth of RG is marked by the publication in 1982 of an essay by Heinrich Schmid (Schmid 1982), a Romance philologist from Zurich. Commissioned by the then secretary-general of the Lia Rumantscha, Bernard Cathomas, Schmid's *Richtlinien* ('Guidelines') provided the scientific impetus for a comprehensive, nine-year-long research project under the auspices of the Swiss National Science Foundation, whose aim was to elaborate the basis of RG. For a detailed account of RG's inception, see Coray (2008, 139).

60   On the federal level, Romansh has been a constitutionally recognized national language since 1938.

For an illustration of the kind of symbolic politics that underpins the Romansh efforts of linguistic convergence, consider the symbol of a key. The association of the Romansh language with a key is among the oldest and most well-known language metaphors within Romansh meta-discourse (Coray 2008, 323).[61] However, it is at the same time a metaphor that has repeatedly been invested with different, often contradictory meanings in the pursuit of particular political visions of cultural flourishing and cultural unification. Very early in the Romansh renaissance movement, in the early 19th century, poets and clergymen presented Romansh as a valuable key that provides access to foreign languages, and thus to a body of scientific and philosophical knowledge which, so the pessimistic assumption goes, can never reasonably be expected to become available in Romansh (Coray 2008, 324). The representation of Romansh as a door opener for the acquisition of both Romance and Germanic languages was a dominant metaphor also in the 20th century – frequently used as an idealization of the self-ascribed polyglotism of Romansh-speakers or, as in an essay by Alexi Decurtins (1966; quoted in Coray 2008, 325), of the particular geostrategic location of the Grisons. The long period of hermeneutical stability – during which the meaning of the key symbol (e.g. its pragmatic function in political discourse) had remained unchallenged – ended in the 1970s. Critical intellectuals increasingly worried about the fading power of the key – and other functionalist metaphors ('bridge', 'tool', 'vehicle') alike – as an argumentative metaphor fostering Romansh unity. In a poem by Clo Duri Bezzola, for instance, the key is presented as a well-worn, empirically flawed *topos* that is soon likely to become too bulky to 'fit' and thus to lose its imaginative capacity as a door opener (C. D. Bezzola 1978, 35; quoted in Coray 2008, 327).

This worry, which marks the beginning of a period of symbolic contestation, is nicely expressed in a caricature published in 1978 in the magazine *Il Chardun* (reproduced in Coray 2008, 327):

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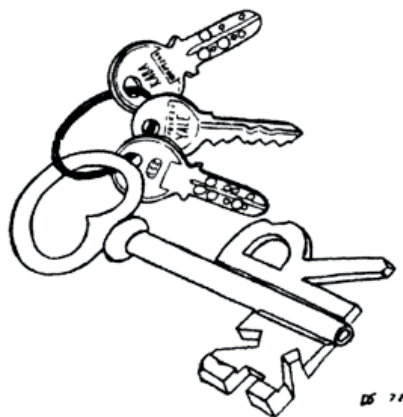
61   The fact that the emblem of the Lia Rumantscha features a stylized key has further contributed to the prominence of this symbol.

With the intensification of the promotion of RG in the 1980s, the key definitely lost its meaning as a pan-Romansh, idiom-transcending asset or privilege. Instead, it successively turned into a beacon for the widening and increasingly conflictual divide between adherents of linguistic standardization and its opponents. In the pro-RG discourse – which included the larger part of the Romansh-speaking political and cultural elite – the key continued to be deployed as a constitutive symbol for the value of Romansh. However, as Coray demonstrates in her discourse analysis, the promoters of RG were now at pains to establish a new dominant meaning, one which associates the key now longer with Romansh in general, but exclusively with the new, standardized variety. In the pro-RG discourse, the key is no longer presented as capable of opening the (modern) door to foreign languages and the larger world, but as an outdated, dispensable adornment useful enough (if at all) to access the five Romansh idioms (Coray 2008, 455–456). These efforts to recast the meaning of the key in terms of a symbol of closed-minded, idiom-focused provincialism sought to foreclose the possibility of a Romansh integration based of the promotion and protection of the five idioms. Therefore, unsurprisingly, many opponents of RG fiercely rejected the key symbol and, more broadly its instrumental-functionalist character, which they saw as a threat to the emotional and affective value of language culture (Coray 2008, 404–407, 444).

The hermeneutic stability of the key symbol until the beginning of the RG movement in the 1980s, the contestation of its old meaning by both adherents and proponents of RG, and the subsequent consolidation of a recast meaning mirroring the preferences of a dominant set of actors is, to be sure, merely an arbitrarily chosen episode within the history of Romansh culture. It is however an episode that is germane for the demonstration of three aspects that I subsume under the politically-hybrid view of culture, namely the futility of 'ontologizing' cultural phenomena, the pertinence of the Geertzean equilibrium metaphor in the study of cultural change, and, consequently, the pivotal role of *problems* of symbolic control in the evolution of culture. As I wish to elaborate in the forth chapter, there are good reasons to assume that the latter point has ethical consequences that are relevant for my attempt to solve Patten's dilemma of essentialism.

Is the Political Account of Cultural Hybridity Compatible with the Cultural Normativity Thesis?

Multiculturalists, to repeat, premise their political demands on the thesis that culture possesses value and that it therefore exerts a normative force on persons and political institutions. I have called this the cultural normativity thesis. Recall also the dilemma of essential-

ism, according to which this thesis, if it is to operate as multiculturalists hope, must reject cultural non-essentialism. I have argued in the previous chapter that abandoning the very notion of culture is not a commendable way to deal with the dilemma and that we should continue to frame culture-related claims in terms of normative multiculturalism. I then presented an alternative account of anti-essentialism, one which grants the possibility of conceiving cultures as individuated, yet politically contested entities. Now, the question that obviously begs an answer is whether the solution of the dilemma of essentialism lies in the political account of cultural hybridity. Can the systematical politicization of cultural boundaries and cultural substance countenance the cultural normativity thesis?

I begin this inquiry by looking at a skeptical argument. The ubiquity of discourses of constructivism, hybridization, and non-essentialism in social thought has recently begun to attract critical attention.[62] Calls for more circumspection in dealing with such discourses are increasingly motivated by doubts about whether socially constructed entities can be normative subjects to the extent that they can ground claims of justice. Such doubts have sometimes led to the anxiety that conceptual indeterminacy (as it results from the application of non-essentialism to social categories) and attributions of normativity stand in insoluble conflict with each other. This anxiety, of course, forms the basis of Patten's "dilemma of essentialism" and, in the context of the backlash against multiculturalism, has fueled skepticism regarding the normative significance of culture. Evidence of the purchase of such anxieties is the wide-spread perception of a latent tension in multiculturalism between, on the one hand, the commitment to an unbounded and symbolically contested conception of culture and, on the other hand, the assumption that culture is capable of bearing value and, possibly, group rights. According to the skeptics, what follows from this tension is a fatal indictment for the justifiability of multiculturalism; the discourse of hybridity with its reluctance to embrace standards of conceptual integrity renders cultural attachments normatively and politically indefensible (Kompridis 2005; 2006; Jung 2008; Scheffler 2007; Bader 2001; Johnson 2000; 1999; cf. Graff 1994). Perhaps surprisingly, among the first to address the possible obstacles conceptual indeterminacy could entail for the multiculturalist agenda were scholars with otherwise undisguised sympathies for non-essentialism, hybridity discourses, and the philosophical claims of constructivism. Gerd Baumann has observed that the subjects of his famous anthropological study, the inhabitants of the West London suburb of Southall, often engage in two distinct discourses of culture, an essentialist or "reifying" discourse on the one hand, and a non-es-

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62   Among the seminal philosophical critiques of constructivism which spilled over into social sciences is Ian Hacking's *The Social Construction of What?* (1999).

sentialist or "processual" discourse on the other hand:

> "Most people practice a double discursive competence when it comes to their discourses about culture, and they develop this dual discursive competence more strongly the more they expose themselves to multicultural practices. In some situations, they can speak of, or treat, their own culture or somebody else's as if it were the tied and tagged baggage of a national, ethnic, or religious group. They can thus *essentialize* their discourse of culture to the point of creating totally static stereotypes, and they can do this to the culture they regard as their own just as easily as they do it to cultures they regard as alien. In other situations, however, they can speak of, and treat, their own culture or somebody else's as if it were plastic and pliable, something that is to be shaped rather than has been shaped, something you make rather than have" (Baumann 1999, 93–94, emphasis added).

Cultures, for Baumann, are the scene of a peculiar dialectic; incentives to quit the otherwise preferred processual discourse of hybridity in favor of a reifying discourse might be created if claims on behalf of a minority cultural group are sought to be pressed in compliance with a reified dominant discourse. Reification becomes a *strategic* instrument deployed by grass-root movements or cultural leaders in anticipation of specific opportunity structures of dominant institutional politics and mass media (see also: Jung 2008, 14–18; Eisenberg 2009, 28–32; Offe 1998, 125–131; Kukathas 1992, 110–115; T. Flanagan 1985), or, on a smaller scale, say, by families that seek to pass on to children a sense of cultural belonging and identity (Baumann 1999, 95). Therefore, as Baumann concludes in another of his works,

> "a reification of culture must appear necessary (...) if [culture] is to serve in the contestation of a new kind of rights: a category of rights more collective in conception than the traditionally individualist Civil Rights, but far more exclusive in character than generally Human Rights. They are claimed, or indeed denied, on the basis of people's membership in a collective defined by 'its culture'" (Baumann 1996, 13).

In a strikingly similar vein, feminists like Gayatri C. Spivak (1987) or Avtar Brah (1992) have stressed the necessity of "strategic essentialism," "in which one knows that essentialism is false but in some politically favored contexts may act as if it was true" (Modood 1998, 381). Two lessons follow from such strategic double-discourses about culture, both of which cause major difficulties for the cultural normativity thesis.

First, cultural attachments, no matter whether they occur on the

basis of nationality, ethnicity, or religion, materialize through what seems to be a delicate balance between non-strategic (processual) movements and strategic movements. Strategic movements frequently obtain when a specific cultural attachment and the related taxonomic criteria are sought to be publically presented as a normatively or politically salient. If seen from an epistemological standpoint, a culture's recourse to reifying discourses stays problematic for the known empirical and normative reasons. *Epistemologically*, we may well take reifying discourses and the underlying philosophical essentialism to be false. However, as Baumann is rightly reminding the reader, this rejection only tells us one side of the story. As social scientists, we cannot simply discard cultural reification, for then we would, against our better judgment, discard the fact that many people *do* – sometimes unconsciously – present their cultural attachments in essentialist terms, namely if this is deemed a politically advantageous strategy (Baumann 1996, 11, 14; 1999, 94).

The second lesson that can be drawn from the rationalization of reifying discourses in the public advancement of demands for collective rights is the existence of a hard political dilemma. If Baumann has it right, then political agents are caught up in a tragic choice between the protection of either intra-group dissent or the protection of group autonomy. The liberal endeavor of supporting the struggle of minority groups against externally imposed categorizations, as it seems, may come at the price of sacrificing internal dissent for the sake of making the processual "demotic" discourse compliant with the reifying "dominant" discourse (Baumann 1997; cf. Bader 2001, 266–267; Kukathas 1992, 113).

One might now object that my reasoning is going in a circle. Pointing out the existence of double-discourses on culture, it might be argued, offers no answer to the question of the compatibility between the politically-hybrid conception of culture and cultural normativity. Isn't Baumann's evidence from Southall merely a different way of describing the political account of hybridity at work – the fact that cultural meaning and the criteria of cultural distinctiveness are products of human agency, of changing horizons of expectations and interests, and of the ensuing struggles for symbolic control? That objection is misplaced because it overlooks the deeper philosophical dimension at work when agents are engaging in reifying discourses about culture. What transpires from such discourses beyond the apparent striving for symbolic power is an attempt to *suppress* intra-cultural politics for the specific purpose of projecting an ideal of unity and integrity, which is expected to facilitate the perception of the culture as an entity of *worth*. Suppressing the contested, political character of a culture, as Baumann indicates himself (Baumann 1996, 13), is a well-rehearsed routine, grounded in the expectation that the image of unity and conflict-absence increases the suitability of a group as a potential bearer

of moral or political rights. In what follows, I will focus on elaborating in some more detail the apparent conflict between cultural disunity – the direct consequence of conceptualizing culture in the framework of the political account of hybridity – and cultural normativity.

Conclusion

If the view of hybrid, politically and hermeneutically negotiated conceptions of culture brings the advantage of supporting cultural distinctiveness and therefore does not require us to reject the notion of multiculturalism, evidence suggests that such a view nevertheless might deprive the claims of culture of a sufficiently determinate and unified conceptual basis, thus making it difficult to grasp the normative significance of culture (or a given cultural trait) for a person's practical identity. The possibility of cultural individuation, as it seems, is a necessary but insufficient condition for cultural normativity. The second horn of the dilemma of essentialism, in other words, cannot be dissolved with a satisfactory theory of cultural individuation alone.

Chapter 3: Whither Cultural Normativity?

In this chapter, I want to further explore the anxiety the contours of which I have just sketched. The following question stands in the foreground: if politically-hybrid conceptions of culture indeed stand in tension with the cultural normativity thesis as it underlies the normative multiculturalism of the sort Taylor and Kymlicka defend, then why is this so? Is the evidence that cultures *do* deploy discourses of reification when asserting group-specific rights also evidence that attributions of normativity require culture to be sanitized from the 'impurities' of symbolic politics?

To begin, let me restate the problem in the words of political theorists with a critical sensibility for intra-cultural politics. The uneasy relationship between politicized notions of culture and cultural normativity has been studied from different perspectives (Scheffler 2007; Wall 2016; Rorty 1994; Rorty and Wong 1990), but perhaps the most explicitly from the standpoint of rational choice theory (Johnson 2000; 1999; Hardin 1995; Ensminger and Knight 1997; Brubaker 1996). One common thread running through these discussions is the anxiety that conceptions of culture which emphasize the historical and negotiated character of symbols inescapably entail distributional consequences and therefore, potentially, problems of collective action. Culture, on this view, is regarded as a site of political struggle for the "right of authoritative description" (Rorty 1994, 158; Jones 1999, 376), in which actors "contest and recast the meanings invested in existing symbolic forms" and thus "foreclose or disclose" cultural options (Johnson 2000, 412). Therefore, the symbolic content of a culture turns out to be not so much a shared inheritance or a social lineage, but rather a "strategic artifact" (Johnson 2000, 414; 1999, 85; see also Clifford 1988, chap. 12; Carrithers 1992, chap. 1–2; Gilbert 2000, 51–54). If cultures are sites of a continual contest for the control of symbolic meaning, a contest that unavoidably entails discriminatory and not necessarily fair distributions of power,[63] it appears at the very least questionable

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63   Attempts of cultural elites to re-appropriate, emphasize or suppress cultural symbols for overarching strategic purposes, e.g. in processes of 'nation-building' or in the aim of aggregating agency in legal and political deliberation, are susceptible to escalating into extraordinary tragedy. Consider, for example, the murderous endeavor of Serbian, Croatian and Bosniak nationalists to

whether culture *simpliciter*, or cultural identities, can retain any reason-giving force and thus perform the normative work multiculturalists are claiming it could. Thus, the ironical implication of non-essentialism, exemplified in discourses of cultural hybridity, appears to be that the acknowledgement of the strategic-political nature of symbolic construction renders the very concept of culture morally arbitrary and thus inimical to the thesis that it possesses significant normative weight in political decision-making and institutional design (Johnson 2000, 414; for similar conclusions, see Barry 2001, chap. 253, 262–264; Abizadeh 2004, 293; Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 26–27).

This is one of the most explicit arguments in support of the prediction of the second horn of Patten's dilemma of essentialism. As conflict as it occurs in the negotiation of symbolic meaning is an unavoidable source of potentially discriminatory and unjust outcomes, there is little plausibility in the thesis that such an indeterminate symbolic messiness warrants any presumptive respect or recognition. It goes without saying that, if this explanation is fair, normative multiculturalism is mistaken at its very foundations and we are back to square one in our quest for a non-essentialist, yet normatively salient conception of culture.

Like in the example of strategic essentialism discussed above, I believe that the implicit anxiety underlying this pessimistic line of argument is that political, agency-based conceptions of culture fail to supply the sort of conceptual unity or determinacy that is required if culture is to count as a normative category to which rights can be attributed. The question now is if this anxiety is justified, or in other terms, if group-level political determinacy is indeed a conceptual presupposition for the cultural normativity thesis.

The following two sections are dedicated to the clarification of this question. My objective is to give some precision to the role of determinacy for assertions of cultural normativity. Each section sheds light on a distinct way for establishing the significance of determinacy; the first section deals with the question whether groups are, generally spoken, the right kind of entity to bear value. This is not so much a question about group ontology – about the relationship between the group and the self's practical identity – but about the capability of groups to offer a sufficiently determinate ground for value ascriptions. Drawing on the literature concerning group rights, I show that the concern of sufficient determinacy plays a pivotal role for defining legitimate value- and right-holders.

The second section analyzes the question whether culture, once we have established its capacity to ground *value*, also furnishes *reasons*

destroy the symbols of Bosnian identity, exemplified by the historically inclusive, multi-ethnical urban centers of Sarajevo and Mostar, during the war in Bosnia-Hercegovina between 1992 and 1995 (Woodward 1995, 234–236; cited in Johnson 1999, 83).

for acting.[64] Multiculturalists owe a justification of why the ascription of value to a culture inflicts duties upon other agents – non-members, the surrounding society, governments, courts – to act in a specific way towards this culture. A routine argument in multiculturalist scholarship suggests that failure to respect and promote the value of a culture is to cause harm to this culture itself and to persons that identify with it. The definition of the harm-incurring agents, however, has important conceptual implications. For 'doing harm to a culture' presumes the existence of a certain degree of uniformity in the intra-cultural distribution of personal interests. Where these interests are indeterminate or unclear, say, as a result of their being subject to continuous symbolic contestation as the political account of hybridity suggests, the very identification of harm is likely to involve a degree of contingency too high for grounding meaningful prescriptions about what (set of) actions ought to be undertaken in a given situation.

In the final section, I examine the weight of these considerations for the normative justification of multiculturalism. Focusing on two well-known approaches to the cultural normativity thesis, i.e. those of Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka, I argue that the uneasy relationship between indeterminacy and normativity sheds light on the inherent bias of multiculturalism towards idealized, apolitical conceptions of culture. My contention is that this bias has to do with Taylor's and Kymlicka's shared endeavor to derive the value of culture from culture-transcending positions of pre-political harmony (Taylor) and personal autonomy (Kymlicka). As I hope to make clear, what pulls multiculturalists away from hybrid conceptions of culture – in spite of their non-essentialist commitments – is not a contingent quirk or an epistemic mistake, but the result of an unresolved tension that is built into the very premises of the cultural normativity thesis.

Group Normativity and Unity of Agency

It is useful to begin this discussion of the relationship between unity and normativity with a short detour into the philosophical premises of claims like 'culture C is instrumentally valuable for A'. What, philosophically speaking, is at stake when people say that some X 'possesses' value?

When faced with this question, moral anti-realists like Richard Hare or John Mackie might immediately raise a red flag. They might protest that the very idea of cultural normativity as scholars like Taylor and Kymlicka establish it in their justification of group-differentiated rights is based on an unfortunate meta-ethical misunderstanding.

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64   In distinguishing the faculties of value *possession* and value *enactment*, I follow Geuss (1996) and O'Neill (1992). A short justification of this distinction follows in Section 2 of this chapter.

Following the tradition of Hume's dictum that objective facts cannot imply values, anti-realists might contend that the source of all value lies not in objects, but in the valuers themselves, that is, in their desires, attitudes, and preferences. For Mackie, if values were objective, they could only be "queer" entities "of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe" (1990 [1977], 38). On this view, thinking of culture (or any other empirical fact) as possessing independent action-guiding authority is simply beside the point. Quite obviously, this has implications for the meta-ethical standing of normative multiculturalism: if the point of a value-based justification of group-differentiated politics is to transcend the diversity of individual interests and desires – if the value of culture is to constitute reasons for action that exist 'objectively' and that do not depend on the agent's will to act upon them – then multiculturalists do have a strong reason to endorse moral realism.[65] The case for moral realism, moreover, seems to be supported by widely held intuitions that 'culture', as much as 'crime' or 'cruelty', are more than just words describing some "natural fact" (Mackie 1990, 41). The fact that many people find it hard to make sense of such concepts without referring to their prescriptive meaning component is one indication that 'is' and 'ought' might in reality be more "entangled" than it has been presupposed by traditional philosophy.[66] However, it would be a grave mistake to think that the rejection of the fact/value dichotomy – thus, the endorsement of moral realism – would somehow ease the burden of justification in the construction of normative arguments. To accept, as the moral realist does, that value properties are no less objective than cats and molecules does in no way suspend the responsibility of the philosopher to furnish an explanation why and in what way a given thing or *concept* happens to perform *normative* work. The moral realist's concession that value properties may inhere *in* or be ascribed *to* objective facts – that the fact of X makes claims on us – is a meta-ethical statement. It is not to be understood as a license for the idea that *anything* can be valuable, or that the conceptualization of facts is somehow irrelevant for their being valid sources of normativity. Moral objectivists are in no way exempted from the duty to explain carefully what it is *conceptually* that makes a fact the kind of fact that is capable of being normative.

It is widely accepted that the construction of value- or rights-based arguments necessitates some criterion of conceptual integrity and unity of the value-/rights-holder. Values and other moral properties require a possessor that can be positively identified as such at a given moment and over time. In many situations, this point seems

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65   For a similar conclusion, see Musschenga (1998, 218–219).

66   For a defense of the "entanglement" of fact and value (*contra* Mackie's "argument from queerness"), see Hilary Putnam's pragmatist theory of realism (especially 1990b; 2002).

trivial, for not all ascriptions of value raise immediate concerns of conceptual unification. In our everyday moral lives, we constantly assign values to facts whose conceptual suitability as a bearer of value is not question-begging. For example, few would question whether *this* red banknote is the right kind of entity to possess a value of twenty Swiss francs. The continued collective acceptance that a specific set of brute physical features – the bill's red color, its denomination, its issuer, its security features – is both necessary and sufficient to fulfill the function of being worth twenty Swiss francs is sufficiently strong to eliminate doubts as to the capacity of this particular bit of paper to possess monetary value. Wherever the constitutive rule that 'such and such bits of paper' count as 'twenty Swiss francs' has been collectively endorsed, it would be unreasonable (and arguably prosecutable) to protest, say, that *these* bits of toilet paper also count as 'twenty Swiss francs'.[67] In contexts of collective intentionality, the conceptual character of a twenty-franc banknote is, under most imaginable circumstances, considered unified and determinate enough to make it capable of bearing ascriptions of value.

The concern of conceptual unity becomes more pressing if the subject of our value ascription is not an inanimate thing, but a collection of *acting* human beings. Can the class of concepts capable of grounding value be extended, without further ado, to corporations, criminal gangs, football clubs, the FIFA, aboriginal populations, random people waiting at a bus stop, or linguistic minorities? Quite obviously, the answer cannot be an unqualified 'yes'. This already for the reason that a meaningful moral deliberation involving groups presupposes some degree of epistemic knowledge about the composition of such groups, about the relationships that are prevalent between the several agents, or about the group's collective objectives.

The new awareness for the conceptual presuppositions of group normativity is a result of the resurgence of philosophical and political positions that explicitly invoke the normativity of groups and that, in a multitude of ways, derive from such 'collective goods' claims for 'collective rights' or 'group rights'.[68] The increased interest in group normativity and group rights has been in important ways prefigured by the "resigned acceptance" that some values and rights "cannot be convincingly disaggregated" – at least not without a remainder – into the

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67   Paper money is the standard example used in John Searle's theory of collective intentionality (Searle 1995, 39–43).

68   The term 'collective rights' is problematic, because it is variably used to describe either, in a generic sense, the class of rights that are not entirely reducible to individual rights, or, in a more specific sense, rights that are held not by the group *qua* group, but jointly by the group's members. See Jones (1999) for an elaboration of this problem. In order to avoid terminological confusion, I use the term 'group rights' when I refer to the latter, generic, meaning, of rights – say, rights for ethno-cultural self-government (Kymlicka 1995, 27–30) – which cannot be meaningfully disaggregated to the individual level.

values and rights of persons, but are held by the group at large (Jones 1999, 353, 362). Whereas early debates about group rights mainly focused on the renewed demands for national and ethno-cultural self-determination in Europe and in North America, the discussion has now considerably broadened and extends to corporations, religions, sexual minorities, and gender-related groups, just to name a few examples.

Over the last three decades, the justification of group-based notions of normativity and rights has ramified into a vast variety of positions that are often overlapping in some respects and contradictory in others. Repeating all the different approaches would clearly be beyond the scope of this study. For the present purpose, it is sufficient to highlight a concern that, although it finds different expressions, is shared by all defenses of the group normativity, namely the concern that the relationships group agents maintain must exhibit a certain degree of concurring interests, solidarity, and formal organization if the group is to be treated as a moral entity. The anxiety at work here is that the justification of group-specific moral or rights claims requires a controllable, sufficiently unified and integrated framework of intra-group agency. Group agents must "have constituted themselves into a single agent" sufficiently determinate to ground value and the corresponding rights (Korsgaard 1989, 114). This anxiety is derivative of what contemporary Kantians like Christine Korsgaard have called the "unity of agency" of individuals (Korsgaard 1989, 110–114; 1996b, 229–230; cf. Parfit 1984, 209–211). If individuals are to be Kantian self-legislators, they must be able to act, and we "have only one body with which to act" (Korsgaard 1989, 111). Free agency, on this view, is unified agency. Freedom requires the unity and the continuity of the "faculties originating motion" (1989, 110). It follows from this reasoning that agents, if they are to be sources of normativity, are facing the "raw necessity of eliminating conflict among [their] various motive[s]" (1989, 110) and act as the same person at a given time and over time.[69] The normative quality of a person, so it seems, stands in tension with a disunited, conflictual, political conception of agency.

Let me now clarify the extent to which this Kantian motive resonates in the endeavor of assigning normativity to groups. In what sense does determinacy-as-agential-unification – the absence of conflict between the group's "faculties originating motion" – matter as a presupposition for group normativity? Some answers to this question are found in the legal scholarship on group rights, to which I shall now turn.

It is an established principle that to ascribe rights to a group requires that we ascribe value to this group (see e.g. Raz 1986, 176–180;

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69   It is in this context that Korsgaard (1989, 112) emphasizes that the need for a unity of agency is not imposed on us by some metaphysical fact, but by the practical necessity of making deliberative choices.

Hartney 1991, 294). In the light of methodological individualism, the idea of 'group value' as such seems counter-intuitive and calls for either a fixated social ontology – explicating, for example, why my value as a person depends on the value of my group – or some theory showing that group value is derivative of personal value. One can distinguish two major paths by which legal theorists have tried to make sense of the idea of group value (Hartney 1991, 297; cf. Jones 1999). The first approach – call it *value-individualism* – is preferred by theorists who hold the view that only the lives of individual human beings have moral standing. If groups can possess value, then they only possess value in a derivative sense to the extent that they contribute to the well-being or the interests of individuals – members or non-members. Correlatively, when it comes to the question of the appropriate rights-holder, value-individualists may grant that some rights are held jointly by group members, but typically deny that rights can be possessed by the group *simpliciter*. The second approach to group-value – call it *value-collectivism* – is preferred by theorists who think that a group can have independent moral standing *qua* group. This latter approach reflects, so to say, the colloquial meaning of 'group value'; it takes groups to be moral entities in their own right that can possess value in and of themselves. Value-collectivists, therefore, are typically forwarding the claim that rights can reasonably be possessed by the group at large and need not be disaggregated to the individual level.

As far as these approaches might be apart from each other regarding the locus of ultimate value;[70] if they hold on to the view that groups may have (independent or derivative) normative significance, they share a common conceptual task. They are equally compelled to define a criterion of *unity* or *integrity* group members must fulfill if the group is to be the sort of group that is capable of bearing normative force. Consider, first, the value-collectivist position, according to which groups can possess, just like human beings, full-fledged and irreducible moral standing. Legal and political theorists have put forward varying conceptual thresholds of unity that must be overcome if groups are to count as moral persons. Suggestions range from "collective interests" (Raz 1986, 208), "sentience" (Kymlicka 1989, 241–242; for a contrary view, see Graham 2002, 90), "noneliminable intentionality" (French 1984, 35–38), and "shared normative understandings"

70   Note that the distinction between value-individualism and value-collectivism is congruent with the distinction I have described in the introduction between individualist and collectivist theories of cultural normativity. Whereas the proponents of the former value culture only for the contribution it makes to its members severally, proponents of the latter assign a value to culture that unfolds its action-guiding force independently of the contribution it makes to the lives of human beings. Recall, however, that the individualist/collectivist dimension is *not* congruent with the distinction between instrumentalist and non-instrumentalist accounts of group value. The former says something about the moral standing of groups, the latter about the presence or absence of causal connection between different sources of value.

(MacDonald 1991, 218; Galenkamp 1993, 112) to strong notions of "solidarity" (Galenkamp 1993, 101–112). Peter French's account of "corporations" is among the most explicit defenses of the extension of moral personality to groups. Corporations, which for French are groups that – unlike "crowds" – retain their identity over time despite changes in their membership and that are capable of intentional action (French 1984, 38), are fully capable of bearing rights and responsibilities:

> "Corporations are not just organized crowds of people, (...) they have a metaphysical-logical *identity* that does not reduce to a mere sum of human members. (...) I hope to provide the foundations of a theory that allows treatment of corporations as full-fledged members of the moral community, of equal standing with the traditionally acknowledged residents: human beings" (French 1984, 32, emphasis added).

French's position assigns to corporations – his model example is the Gulf Oil Corporation – a holistic moral personality whose agency is unified to the extent that it does not alter with changes in the corporation's membership structure. The central element in French's argument that fleshes out the moral significance of corporate "identity" thus understood is the claim that corporations, by virtue of their having an "internal decision structure" (1984, 44) are capable of non-reducible intentionality.

> "To be the subject of an ascription of moral responsibility, to be a party in responsibility relationships, hence to be a moral person, the subject must be at a minimum an intentional actor. If corporations are moral persons they will evidence a noneliminable intentionality with regard to the things they do" (French 1984, 38).

It is the aggregation of individual intentionality through formalized procedures of coordination which establishes unified group intentionality, and therefore, ultimately, group-based moral personality. French's insistence on the formal, proceduralist transformation of individual-level intentionality into group-level intentionality is premised on the faith in the human capacity to create – by means of successful coordination – institutional equilibria that are stable enough to ground rights and duties. Granted that successful coordination is the *raison d'être* of the Gulf Oil Corporation's capacity to act intentionally *qua* corporation, the question remains whether similar equilibria can reasonably be expected to occur in this determinate form in a non-corporate communal context like, say, culture or ethnicity. If it is true that group-level intentionality is a sufficient condition for making a group a moral 'patient', what entitles us to assume that the so-

cial construction of collective intentionality happens so smoothly as French suggests, so devoid of the indeterminacies of power-imbued agency? Where does the optimism come from that processes of coordination will eventually converge in determinate outcomes?

Rational choice theorists raise a red flag: they object that such functionalist ideals overlook the political agency that is unavoidably involved when individuals act together under circumstances of incomplete information (Hardin 1995, 34–37, 56; cf. Myerson 1991, 74–83). For Russell Hardin, there is no determinacy to be had in the constitution of group entities as value-collectivists presuppose it.[71] The "achievement of community," Hardin argues, is all too often "subject to great distortion from the corrosions of self-interest mechanisms, such as those that feed norms of exclusion" (Hardin 1995, 216–217). Any normativization of community, Hardin continues, is premature as long as it cannot be shown that community-establishing processes of coordination do not entail "malign correlates of exclusion" (1995, 217), which are "enforced when there is asymmetric demand for the benefits of membership in a group" (1995, 106).[72] The important point to make against positions that hold aggregated agency or collective intentionality – or whatever term may be employed – to be sufficient conditions for the establishment of free-standing normative groups is their lack of consideration for the potential problems of indeterminacy. If we accept the game-theoretical caveat that collective action may not lead to stable communal outcomes, but, to the contrary, may create incentives for strategic manipulation and, as history has too often taught us, for violence and the utmost of atrocities, then the degree of conceptual determinacy value-collectivists are assuming when assigning moral standing to groups appears dubious already for the reason that it is unlikely to be found in the social world. If this caveat is fair, then the Kantian emphasis on unified agency as a universal presupposition for value-holding stands in tension with the political realities of collective action.

Now, consider the value-individualist approach of group normativity, according to which, to repeat, a group's value is reducible to the value of individuals. Can value-individualists furnish an account of group normativity that is less demanding in terms of thresholds of unity and determinacy?

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71   Knight and Johnson (2011) make the same point regarding the indeterminacy of institutional arrangements, which are "indeterminate in the sense that they represent arbitrary outcomes of strategic interactions (...) [and] insofar as the individuals and groups for whom they are relevant will differ over time about what the rules mean, whether and when they are being followed or breached, who is to decide such matters" (2011, 2, 43).

72   For Hardin, what binds people to community is often, rather than idealism, personal benefits of membership that may come in the shape of cost-reducing familiarity – which he refers to as the "epistemological comfort of home" – or economic advantages like access to jobs and positions (1995, 217).

Value-individualists agree with value-collectivists that capacity for agency or intentionality is an important criterion if entities are to have moral standing. The crucial difference is that the former deny that groups have a moral being or existence independently of their individual members. All agency or intentionality that is related to the group's existence is believed to be resolvable to the private agency of individuals. Hence, on the value-individualist account, to ascribe agency to groups *simpliciter* is to commit something like a category mistake. "To do so," as one commentator puts it, "is to misrepresent the nature and undermine the value of moral rights by eliminating the activities essential to them. (...) One should call a spade a spade and say that a corporation is a *nonagent* and, therefore, incapable of being a moral right-holder" (Wellman 1995, 164, my emphasis).[73] The suspicion that the lack of a proper group-level agency subverts the case for rights-warranting group personality also transpires from the following statement:

> "Only individuals can make decisions, can literally have values, literally engage in reasoning and deliberation. Facts about group decisions and actions are logically contingent on the occurring of acts of communication and responsive behavior among individuals, who establish chains of command and other patterns of behavior responsive to the behavior of others" (Narveson 1991, 334).

It does not follow from the value-individualist denial of group-level agency that groups have no value whatsoever or are irrelevant for moral inquiry.[74] The important distinction value-individualists draw is between the possession of moral standing and the possession of value. For the value-individualist, to say that some group phenomenon is of value does not require us to endorse the view that this value is grounded in the standing of the group at large. The 'Good' in collective goods like culture or nation may be grounded in the moral standing of the individuals who acquire them, and the rights that promote such goods need not be the rights held by the group, but rights held *jointly* by the several group members. In the context of cultural normativity, the difference between possessing value and possessing moral standing is captured in this helpful passage by Peter Jones:

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73   Carl Wellman uses the term "corporations" here, which he considers, alongside "teams," to be a subcategory of "organized groups." He further distinguishes between "organized groups" and "unorganized groups," among which he counts "collections" and "classes." According to Wellman, none of these groups possess irreducible agency that would qualify them to be proper right-holders (Wellman 1995, 157–177).

74   However, orthodox value-individualists like Jan Narveson (1991) at times seem to gesture towards such a conclusion.

"Insisting that we should be fair to cultures merely as cultures is like insisting that we should be fair to paintings or to languages or to musical compositions. These things may have value, but they do not have moral standing. We might speak of 'wronging a culture' or of 'treating a culture unfairly' but that is only because we sometimes use 'culture' as a shorthand expression for a group of people distinguished by a culture. So, if we seek to deal fairly with cultural diversity, it is not cultures that will be the ultimate objects of our concern, but the people who bear them" (Jones 1998, 36).

Traditionally, the impulse to regard the moral status of cultural and other groups as derivative of the moral status of individual human beings arises out of the liberal skepticism about collectivism and its association with intolerance and fanaticism (Mason 2000, 48).[75] Let's assume, for the sake of argument, that this skepticism constitutes a sufficient reason for adopting value-individualism and, therefore, for granting groups the capacity to bear value, but not moral standing. How far does this take us towards a better understanding of the question that animates this chapter: does the multiculturalist presupposition of cultural normativity require a degree of determinacy that can only be achieved by suppressing the political character of the processes by which cultures emerge and evolve? I have argued, invoking rational choice theory, that this is likely to be the case if we adopt a value-collectivist approach to cultural normativity. With respect to value-individualism, I suspect that this criticism remains valid. Irrespective of whether we are endowing groups with moral standing or merely with derivative value, we still beg the determinacy question, for to assign value to a culture is to make a performative speech act; it is an assignment that involves the expectation of practical consequences, namely, that people or institutions be provided with reasons to act in a specific way. Moral and conceptual indeterminacy as it results from the intra-cultural negotiation and contestation of symbolic meaning jeopardizes the stringency of this assignment. It subverts the idea of culture as a stabilizing ingredient for a person's practical identity or selfhood; and it therefore subverts the aptness of culture to operate as an unequivocal, law-like source of reasons for acting. In the next section, I further elaborate on the connection between value-assignment and reasons for acting. It will turn out that the move from value to practical action unveils a further aspect of the problem that prevents advocates of the cultural normativity thesis from wholeheartedly embracing political accounts of cultural hybridity.

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75   Liberal multiculturalists, unsurprisingly, tend to embrace value-individualism in their justification of group-differentiated rights and policies. See, for example, Kymlicka (1989, 241–242; 2001, 20) and Raz (1994a, 178).

From Values to Reasons for Acting

The argument that culture possesses value, I have argued, presents the multiculturalist with a heavy burden of justification. If there are such things as delineate cultural groups, then the assignment of value to such groups implies making substantive assumptions about the unified and integrated character of intra-group agency, assumptions which clearly stand in tension with the non-essentialist canon underlying discourses of hybridity and intra-cultural symbolic politics as I have discussed them in the second chapter of this study.

The significance of this burden of justification goes beyond the question whether or not groups are proper value-holders. For multiculturalists like Taylor or Kymlicka, the consideration we owe to culture is not exhausted in the acknowledgement of its normative character. That would be a very minimalistic and hardly a politically effective way to deal with cultural diversity and the claims of culture. For multiculturalists (and, indeed, for every proponent of a normative political agenda), the establishment of a satisfactory account of group normativity can only be the first step in a wider philosophical endeavor, which consists in demonstrating that culture is not just a bearer of value, but also a source of *reasons for acting*. This is an aspect of the multiculturalist burden of justification I have not fully dealt with in the previous section. It merits some attention because it too faces severe difficulties in the light of political indeterminacy.

A well-known argument in moral philosophy suggests that the fact that *you* value the good X needs not automatically entail that X ought to be realized, or that *your* X ought to matter also to *me* (O'Neill 1992, 131–133; Geuss 1996, 198–199; Heuer 2004, 135–141; cf. Korsgaard 1996b, 101). The action-guiding force of a given value, according to this line of argument, is conditioned by some prior contextual considerations, in particular by considerations about the sort of goods that would be promoted if this value were to be recognized or otherwise be given weight in moral deliberation. As John O'Neill argues in opposition to subjectivist skeptics like Simon Blackburn (1984), the objective possession of value *simpliciter* does not entail moral considerability:

> "One can discover what is good both for rain forests and the AIDS virus. One can recognize that something has its own goods, and quite consistently be morally indifferent to these goods or believe one has a moral duty to inhibit their development. That Y is a good of X does not entail that Y should be realized unless we have a prior reason for believing that X is the sort of thing whose good ought to be promoted" (O'Neill 1992, 131–132).

The relationship between values and reasons is a recurrent theme in the debate on normativity, which I cannot belabor any further

here.[76] The point here is that the responsibility to justify the reason-giving force of culture-based value rests on advocates of normative multiculturalism. In other words, the question that requires clarification is the following: Does the value of a culture – provided that we have successfully established that culture is part of the class of entities that is capable of bearing value – entail specific reasons for acting towards this culture? Matthew Festenstein cautions against prematurely collapsing claims about the moral status of culture (or of some form of cultural identification) and claims about what is to follow practically from this evaluative stance.

 "[T]he requirement of respect for persons, in conjunction with a claim about cultural embeddedness of the self, does not establish that we should respect a person's culture. For it requires an explanation of why someone's having the practical identity that she has imposes reasons or obligations on others" (Festenstein 2005, 32–33).

A common way to respond to this requirement of explanation is to connect a claim about the (instrumental or non-instrumental, individualist or collectivist) value of cultural embeddedness with an auxiliary claim about the *harm* that would be caused were this value to be denied. To this purpose, demands for group-differentiated policies have been standardly proposed in conjunction with a harm theory which highlights the wrongs the failure to realize the value of culture would cause to persons or – in the case of value-collectivism – to their cultures.[77] Thus, the reasons for group-differentiated rights and multiculturalist policies, while still grounded in the presumptive value of culture, acquire their action-guiding power by virtue of their being reasons for the avoidance of some concrete harm; a harm which is expressed in relation to moral properties (e.g. the culture's vulnerability in a politically hostile surrounding context) that are logically independent of the primary value of a person's cultural embeddedness.[78]

76   For the sake of completeness, note that the prioritization of values over reasons, which I am assuming throughout (thus following the position which most multiculturalists seem to at least implicitly endorse), is subject to debate. As Joseph Raz has it, "the value of what is of value determines what action, if any, it is a reason to perform" (Raz 2001, 164–165). Raz suggests this prioritization in opposition to T.M. Scanlon's argument that values depend on reasons for their existence. According to Scanlon, "being valuable is not a property that provides us with reasons" (Scanlon 1998, 96; cf. Heuer 2004).

77   For a general discussion of minority rights as instruments for the avoidance of harm, see Simon (1997).

78   For Andrew Mason, citing Korsgaard (1996a, chap. 9), the question whether i) X possesses action-guiding value only by virtue of properties that "depend, at least in part, on the existence or nature of something else," or whether ii) X possesses action-guiding value by virtue of properties which "do not depend, even in part, on the existence or nature of anything else," establishes a new distinction in the taxonomy of values – a distinction which does not overlap with the one

The ubiquity of the notion of *recognition* in multiculturalist political theory, and the focus on the harm that is caused by the *misrecognition* of a person's cultural identity sheds light on one possible strategy to bridge the gap between cultural value and reasons for acting towards culture. Here are some examples. Charles Taylor argues that

> "if withholding the presumption [of equal cultural worth] is tantamount to a denial of equality, and if important consequences flow for people's identity from the absence of recognition,[79] then a case can be made for insisting on the universalization of the presumption as a logical extension of the politics of dignity" (Taylor 1994, 68; cf. 1995, 140).

According to Axel Honneth, reasons to recognize individual and collective ways of live – and conversely, reasons to avoid experiences of social devaluation that cause to individuals "a loss of personal self-esteem, of the opportunity to regard themselves as beings whose traits and abilities are esteemed" – stand in direct relationship with the "social value of individuals or groups" (Honneth 1995, 134). Or, as Will Kymlicka writes, "an equality-based argument for [group-specific] special rights (…) must show that some groups are unfairly disadvantaged in [the] cultural marketplace, and that political recognition and support rectifies this disadvantage" (Kymlicka 2001, 146; cf. 1995, 108–115). As these examples show, the reasons for group-specific rights are presented not as an immediate result of an abstract account of cultural value, but as a consequence of the aspiration to avoid or "rectify" harm systemic pressures of the larger society are suspected to inflict on minority groups and their members.[80]

While arguments about the moral costs of misrecognition are a crucial element in bridging the gap between cultural value and value-guided agency, and therefore a necessary feature of a successful multiculturalist argument, they don't alleviate the worry of indeterminacy which, to repeat, is a consequence of the role of power in the intra-cultural contestation surrounding the meaning of symbols. In fact, power-imbued hybridity is as much a challenge to the claim that

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between non-instrumental and instrumental value – where values of type i) are called "extrinsic" values, and values of type ii) "intrinsic" values (Mason 2000, 43). Thus, the strategy (which I am ascribing to multiculturalism here) to catalyze the value-reason relationship by referring to a harm theory can be understood as implying an affirmation of a culture's *extrinsic* value (besides the instrumental or non-instrumental value it possesses by virtue of its ontological properties).

79   For "misrecognition (…) can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred. Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need" (Taylor 1994, 26).

80   Arguments for group-differentiated rights that highlight the role of 'systemic' harm are found in Tamir (1993, 85–86), Tully (1995, 190–191; 2000, 470), Nickel (1995), and Hoover (2001, 205).

culture grounds reasons for a politics of recognition, preservation, admiration, or respect as it is a challenge to the more general claim that culture can bear value. What practical action-reasons can flow from an entity that is not just in constant flux, but also driven by the logic of strategic interaction?

A well-known objection has it that even if we successfully complement a claim about the value of culture with an auxiliary claim about the moral costs of a non-realization of this value, there might be moral considerations that override this auxiliary claim and that therefore annul the reason-giving authority of culture. For instance, we might agree with Kymlicka on principle about the instrumental value of culture for the enhancement of personal autonomy, while holding that the existence of oppressive patterns within that culture *qualifies* its reason-giving force. A useful example is Susan Okin's argument that a culture ceases to offer reasons for its preservation if it endorses practices that subordinate girls and women to men. It seems highly unreasonable to Okin not to reassess the political and legal entitlements of a given culture in the light of evidence that this culture endorses clitoridectomy or the coerced marriage of children. According to Okin, in some circumstances, namely if a patriarchal minority culture is surrounded by a "less patriarchal majority culture," it would be "in the best interests of the girls and women" if such a culture were "to become altered" or even "to become extinct," so that "its members would become integrated into the less sexist surrounding culture" (1999, 22–23; see also Shachar 1998; Nussbaum 1999). If such obnoxious cultures really exist, then the reason not to promote the flourishing of such a culture may outweigh the residual reasons for respect and recognition that are grounded in the overarching value of cultural embeddedness or identification. As Okin concludes, "it would take significant factors weighing in the other direction to counterbalance evidence that a culture severely constrains women's choices or otherwise undermines their well-being" (Okin 1999, 23). The moral evils Okin locates within patriarchal cultures is a drastic example of the consequences intra-cultural struggles for symbolic control might entail. Seen from Okin's standpoint, if the negotiation of cultural webs of interlocution is susceptible to power asymmetries of the magnitude described in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?*, and if cultural boundaries and cultural options are to an important extent contingent on political transactions, then it is no longer clear what consistent action-norms such a culture concept could reasonably ground.

To recognize the challenge indeterminacy poses to the cultural normativity thesis, we need not endorse Okin's radical conclusion that a culture's moral claim for unharmed existence simply evaporates in the event that it displays oppressive power asymmetries. On a more generous reading, a culture that rationalizes forms of oppression still may ground reasons and duties of a *pro tanto* sort, whose deliberative

weight keeps a residual force even in the light of overriding moral considerations (Hurley 1989, 130–135, cited in Festenstein 2005, 34; cf. Graham 2002, sec. 4.3).[81] Several of Okin's commentators have taken such a stance, criticizing the move to single out one distinct morally problematic feature of a culture and treat it as a sufficient condition for the annulment of action-norms grounded in its morally unproblematic features. As Bonnie Honig remarks in her reply to Okin, "even those who are least empowered in a certain [cultural] setting may have some measure of agency in that setting," agency that "is bound up (though not determined by) the cultures, institutions, and practices that gave rise to it" (Honig 1999, 39–40). Along similar lines, Kymlicka argues that the fact that a culture is illiberal does not license its assimilation into the (more liberal) majority society. "Liberals should not prevent illiberal nations from maintaining their societal culture, but should promote the liberalization of these cultures" (Kymlicka 1995, 94–95, chap. 8; 2001, 55). And for Festenstein,

> "the empirical fact of disagreement about the content of a cultural identity, even in its most persistent and political forms, does not demonstrate that a cultural identity has no determinate character. First, disagreement does not imply that there is nothing for competing views on an identity to be views *of*, or that no view is *better* than any other" (Festenstein 2005, 28 original emphasis; cf. 2010c, 81).

Perhaps, then, the lesson to draw from Okin's concern about the intra-cultural power asymmetries is merely a reminder for sufficient circumspection in the allocation of culture-specific rights and, in particular, sufficient guarantees of exit-rights (Benhabib 2002; Kukathas 2003; 1997; Spinner-Halev 2004) and a differentiation of such rights not only at the level of cultural groups, but also at the level of sub-groups and 'minorities within minorities' (Weinstock 2004). By way of a general response to Okin's challenge against cultural normativity, one might argue that given the potential that group allegiances and identities may carry "built-in escape-interests," as Keith Graham puts it – interests in "some predicate's ceasing to be true of me," for instance the predicate of "being a registered unemployed person" (Graham 2002, 114–115; cf. 1986, 26; Mason 2000, 56–61) – we cannot infer practical judgments from social roles *simpliciter*, but are obliged to justify the reason-giving force of a group on a case-by-case basis.[82]

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81   Susan Hurley distinguishes between *pro tanto* and *prima facie* reasons. The latter are of an even more provisional sort, "like a rule of thumb" that "may turn out not to apply when we learn more about the situation at hand, in which case they have no residual reason giving force" (Hurley 1989, 133).

82   The insistence that the reason-conferring power of group identities must not be taken as an

It might be argued now that it is precisely by means of a better understanding of power asymmetries suffered by 'minorities within minorities' and of a more fine-grained differentiation and application of group-specific politics that the tension between symbolic indeterminacy and cultural normativity can be defused. For what in the world gives theorists the right to deny the people may have respect-warranting allegiances to groups *in spite of* the fact that these groups are in constant flux and riven by internal dissent? If liberalism were to mean that everything indeterminate and contingent is morally void, would that be a doctrine anyone would want to endorse? Although I have a great deal of sympathy with objections of this kind – a sympathy which is grounded in the belief that indeterminacy needs not be a specter haunting the value theorist, but may encourage normatively sensitive attitudes of problem-solving – I have strong doubts that multiculturalists can readily incorporate such a generous reading of the problems which game-theorists have located in the politics of cultural hybridity and which Okin describes in the context of culturally-sanctioned sex discrimination. In legal and political practice, we might well allow that the cultural normativity thesis and its reason-conferring power are subject to deliberative judgment and might, if only in a qualified *pro tanto* form, survive the challenge of political and symbolic indeterminacy. However, as I shall argue in the next section, the standard justification of multiculturalism founders on such indeterminacy. Despite the fact that multiculturalists are at pains to emphasize their commitment to non-essentialism and hybridity, they ultimately seem to require a non-hybrid conception of culture whose agents are not politico-hermeneutic animals, but are acting in concert and in full compliance with the valued ideal-type of cultural life – be that culture as a "context of choice" (Kymlicka 1995, 82), as a "horizon of meaning for large numbers of human beings" (Taylor 1994, 72), or yet as a "source of trust and solidarity" (Barry 1991, 156–186; Miller 1995, 92). In the absence of a recognizably consistent pattern in the way culture influences a person's practical identity at a given moment and over time, it appears unclear why culture is to be the kind of entity that could ground substantive reasons for acting.[83] To elaborate why this is so, it will help to go back to the basic structure of the cultural normativity thesis, multiculturalism's philosophical backbone. It will turn out that the tension between liberal multiculturalism and the contingen-

a priori brings us back to a remark I have made at the outset of the first section of this chapter. To assume, with the moral realist, that cultural facts can, metaphysically spoken, be an 'objective' source of normativity does not dispense the multiculturalist from assuming the burden of justification when it comes to the question of what practical reasons flow from cultural normativity so understood.

83   Note that the same can be said for other forms of collective agency. In the absence of a longitudinally unified understanding of agency as implied by social roles like 'parenthood' or 'medical doctor', no claim could be made about the sort of moral obligations these roles entail.

cy of cultural hybridity – and, correlatively, the oft-cited awkwardness in the encounter of multiculturalism with cultural non-essentialism – is a direct consequence of the Herderian heritage in the standard account of cultural normativity. A heritage which reflects the reluctance of traditional philosophy to take human experience as a starting point of our moral life and, in particular, its understanding of normativity as something rooted beyond the realm of human experience, which has to be intellectually inferred before it can be tethered to the facts of the lived world. In short, as it seems, the normative premises of multiculturalism suffer from the same sort of metaphysical orthodoxy Dewey has, throughout his long philosophical life, criticized as philosophy's futile "quest for certainty" (see especially Dewey 1929b, LW 4). Let me explain.

Multiculturalism's Quest for Certainty

The cultural normativity thesis, to recall, is composed of two distinct steps; the first consists in the elaboration of an account of the self's cultural embeddedness. Some have called this the 'ontological' or 'anthropological' premise of multiculturalism. This step is successful if it can plausibly demonstrate that culture (in its normative, societal or semiotic conceptualization) is a significant ingredient in a person's practical identity – her capacity to create and recreate her substantive life plans. The second step consists in the ascription of a value and a corresponding action theory to the fact of cultural embeddedness. My culture's contribution to my practical identity is more than a simple matter of empirical causation. It is, according to the cultural normativity thesis, a causation that makes human life worthwhile, be that instrumentally through its enhancement of personal autonomy or as an end in itself, say, through its capacity to confer meaning to our lives.

During the last three decades, the efforts to accommodate phenomena and claims of cultural identification within political theory have yielded a variety of suggestions as to how normative prescriptions and the ensuing rights and duties are to be tethered to cultural ontology. Unsurprisingly, the theoretical choices made are often a function of overarching philosophical or ideological considerations. I have addressed some aspects of this variability above in the discussion of individual-level and of group-level normative standing and shall now leave aside the nuances in the operationalization of the cultural normativity thesis. Instead, I want to have a critical look at the basic structure of the latter and argue that it explains in important ways the tension between multiculturalism and politically-hybrid culture concepts. In a nutshell, I suspect that the rigid conceptual constraints associated with multiculturalism are an implication of an overly unreflective ascription of value to cultural embeddedness. Multiculturalists from

Charles Taylor and Bhikhu Parekh to Joseph Raz and Will Kymlicka share a peculiar tendency to consider the value of embeddedness as *a-priori* or *pre-cultural*, as something that is grounded not in the human transactions and experiences that *lead to* or *grow out of* culture, but in a metaphysical state of nature that supposedly transcends human experience. In the following, I will attempt to give some precision to the nature of this charge by looking at a convergence point in the multiculturalist theory of Taylor and Kymlicka: the indebtedness to Johann G. Herder's faith in the recovery of a natural, equilibrate state of recognition and harmony – disrupted or threatened in the course modernity – through one's recognition as a member of a distinct *Volk*.

In his discussion of Charles Taylor's *The Politics of Recognition*, Patchen Markell notes that "perhaps the most striking parallel" between Taylor and Herder is that they "plot the history of recognition in the same triadic form (…), tracing a decline from an original condition of *unproblematic* transparency among persons, and imagining a redemptive future in which a similar (though not identical) transparency might be recovered" (Markell 2003, 54, emphasis added). The person in Herder's pre-modern "Eden" disposes of a God-given "sovereignty over nature," and lives in a state of "linguistic rightness" but faces "no problem or question of rightness" (Markell 2003, 55).[84] According to Herder, it is by virtue of a person's identification with her purposive, option-providing community, with her *Volk*, that she redeems her imperiled capacity for sovereign agency foreseen in the state of nature. Explicitly invoking this Herderian motive, Taylor portrays the "politics of recognition" – which throughout carries the marks of the experience of Québec's struggle for self-determination – as a route towards the recovery of unconstrained agency and unproblematic social identity as it has, on the (quite daring) historical approach he takes, characterized the societies in medieval Europe.

> "What has come about with the modern age is not the need for recognition but the conditions in which the attempt to be recognized can fail. That is why the need is now acknowledged for the first time. In pre-modern times, people didn't speak of "identity" and "recognition"—not because people didn't have (what we call) identities, or because these didn't depend on recognition, but rather because these were then too unproblematic to be thematized as such" (Taylor 1994, 35).

In his secularized reading of Herder's divine, problem-free order, Taylor locates in cultural embeddedness the premises for "the prospect

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84   Markell draws here on Herder's *Abhandlung* über *den Ursprung der Sprache*, an essay on the subject and origin of language written in 1770 and published in Herder's *Sämtliche Werke* (Herder 1877, vol. 5).

of a future state of successful recognition" (Markell 2003, 56) by virtue of which the decentering effects of modernity can be absorbed and re-equilibrated.[85] From this redeeming function of cultural embeddedness follows, as is known, Taylor's "presumption" that "cultures that have provided the horizon of meaning for large numbers of human beings (…) are almost certain to have something that deserves our admiration and respect" and that "it would take a supreme arrogance to discount this possibility *a priori*" (Taylor 1994, 72–73).

We might rightly wonder about the discrepancy between Taylor's emphasis of human finitude, as it transpires from his critique of political liberalism, and the certainties that seem to underlie his "presumption" of equal cultural worth.[86] As Taylor argues in the last paragraph of *The Politics of Recognition*, all that is needed to generate sufficient reasons for the acceptance of the presumption is

> "a sense of our own limited part in the whole human story, (…) a willingness to be open to comparative cultural study of the kind that must displace our horizons in the resulting fusions (…) [and] an admission that we are very far away from that ultimate horizon from which the relative worth of different cultures might be evident" (Taylor 1994, 73).

Even if Taylor admits that, given our partial experience of the surrounding world, we still have a long way to go in order to fully grasp the "ultimate horizon" which the value of a given culture could be measured against, his valuation of cultural embeddedness as enabling the restoration of a natural state of recognition nevertheless affirms such a substantive position. Taylor leaves no doubt that there *exists* a metaphysical basis for the "presumption" of equal cultural worth; his only reservation is that the latter might not be fully intelligible to us finite mortals.

But this is a highly demanding and metaphysically immodest claim. Given all that we know from contemporary anthropology about the contestedness of cultural symbols and the precarious equilibria that govern the intra-cultural balance of power, how realistic is it that Taylor's "ultimate horizon" can do the justificatory work behind the presumption for the value of cultural embeddedness? What happens with the presumption of cultural worth once our experience as encultured beings runs counter to the redemptive and harmonious promises of leading a cultural life? Can arbitrations about the moral

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85   For similar invocations of Herderian accounts, see, for example, Sandel (1982, 146–161, 179) and Shachar (2001, 2). Alternative accounts of Herder's influence on contemporary political theory are given, for instance, by Parekh (2000, 67–79), and Gilbert (2000, 35–38).

86   I am drawing here on a line of critique levied against Taylor's foundationalist residuals by Markell (2003, 58), Habermas (1994, 129–130), Hanssen (2000, 204), and Hardin (1995, 66–67).

status of culture – say, whether a culture is a legitimate candidate for groups-specific rights – be pursued independently of procedurally defined accounts of equal respect (Hanssen 2000, 204)?

Taylor's account of cultural normativity, as it appears, presents the non-essentialist, hybridity-endorsing multiculturalist with a double challenge. First, the absolutization of the connection between cultural embeddedness and the metaphysically anchored good of "unproblematic" agency makes the occurrence of conflict appear like an 'unnatural' obstacle to sovereign agency. Because the recovery of lost sovereignty is elevated to an absolute finality, indeterminacy in the ontological tenet of the cultural normativity thesis – the fact of 'being in the dark' regarding the contribution of one's culture to one's practical identity – unavoidably disrupts the endeavor of providing a theory of cultural normativity that could stably guide the deliberation of courts and governments. Second, the application of Taylor's substantive account to hybrid conceptions of culture exacerbates a well-known issue of vicious circularity: if there is a fixated "ultimate horizon," a stable axiological consensus from which the moral significance of cultural belonging can be rationally derived, then such a position is unlikely to be had under Rawlsian circumstances where persons are acting freely and are building their comprehensive world views in the absence of constraints of oppression and misrecognition (Rawls 1993, 36). Yet, unconstrained agency *is* a desired consequence of the cultural redemption which this position envisions to ground. Hence, Taylor's substantive foundations of cultural normativity are ultimately self-defeating; it is precisely *because* culture enhances sovereign agency and encourages fusions of horizons that the quest for pure and certain God's eye points of view must ultimately appear futile.

This is obviously bad news for the prospect of incorporating hybrid concepts of culture into Taylor's "presumption" of cultural normativity. The concept of culture that is serviceable for Taylor's account of embeddedness is not of a Geertzean kind, but of a Herderian one. If leading a cultural life is the path towards a harmonious, pre-political state of nature, then the symbolic content of such a life must be certain, unified, and determinate. It cannot be conceptualized as being constantly 'in the making', as a site where individuals are simultaneously "spinning" and "suspended" in webs of significance (Geertz 1973, 5).

It would be unfair to affirm this pessimistic outlook without addressing the liberal rejoinder to Taylor's substantive definition of the cultural normativity thesis. Mindful of the challenge communitarian invocations of German Romanticism pose to liberal individualism, a number of scholars following the seminal work of Will Kymlicka and Joseph Raz have started to look for a defense of minority rights that does not require a prior endorsement of the substantive faith in the communal redemption of a lost recognition, but that derives its nor-

mative force from the Kantian foundation of personal autonomy. One basic intuition behind the liberal critique of Taylor's Herderian defense of multiculturalism was, as Kymlicka puts it, the evidence that "most ethnocultural groups within Western democracies do not want to be protected from the forces of modernity in liberal societies," but instead "want to be full and equal participants in modern liberal societies" (Kymlicka 2001, 20). In Kymlicka's and Raz's defense of cultural rights, the discourse of autonomous choice has supplanted the discourse of redemption and recognition. Their justificatory program draws on what they take to be a more metaphysically parsimonious good of individual autonomy to which culture stands in a merely instrumental relationship. What is crucial in the move to make cultural accommodation an object of legitimate state action, as Raz puts it, is the condition that a culture's "moral claim to respect and to prosperity rests entirely on [its] vital importance to the prosperity of individual human beings" (Raz 1994a, 178; cf. 1986, 307–313). The value of culture, then, rests solely in its being a repository of options that facilitate the promotion of individual autonomy, or to put it in a more Kantian way, of the capacity for self-legislation under the categorical imperative (Korsgaard 1996b, 98; see also Raz 1994a, 70; 1986, 369). [87] My cultural embeddedness – including not just its present expressions such as my interaction with fellow members of my cultural group in the language I am most familiar with, but also its features of the past, including ancestory, customs, or historical memories – warrants respect and political consideration, because it provides me options that enable me to make "meaningful choices" and "intelligent judgments about how to lead [my] life" (Kymlicka 1995, 83).

Part of Kymlicka's strategy to make the "differential treatment" of "societal cultures" palatable to a liberal readership is his emphasis on the "inevitably pluralistic" character of culture (Kymlicka and Opalski 2001, 18).[88] The presentation of culture as a field of reflective choice rather than constraint is one of the core themes of *Multicultural Citizenship* (1995), where Kymlicka is at great pains to steer away from the Herderian view of the self as being authoritatively "constituted" and "determined" by its "authentic" cultural background (Kymlicka 1995, 91–92; cf. 2001, 20–23). *Individuals*, not cultures, are viewed as the primary moral agents; cultures, merely as cultures, lack "moral status of their own" (Kymlicka 1989, 165; cf. Raz 1994b, 72). For Kymlicka, it is perfectly "natural, and desirable, for cultures to change as a result of the choices of their members" (Kymlicka 1995, 104).

87   The concept of autonomy as used by liberal multiculturalists also parallels Isaiah Berlin's notion of "sovereignty," that is, the "wish on the part of the individual to be his own master, (…) a doer – deciding, not being decided for" (Berlin 2002, 178).

88   Compare Rawls's insistence that "reasonable pluralism is a permanent condition of public culture under free institutions" (Rawls 1993, 129).

There is in Kymlicka's theory a latent double-narrative between culture as a source of determination and constraint, often implying considerable exit costs (Kymlicka 1995, 85), and culture as a locus of choice and self-development, contributing to its pluralistic and dynamic character. Intra-cultural pluralism is not all-encompassing, but "balanced and constrained by linguistic and institutional cohesion" (Kymlicka 2001, 25). This double-narrative is exemplified in Kymlicka's distinction between cultural "character," the transitory manifestation of the exercise of autonomous choice, and cultural "existence," the stable set of traits and properties by which a culture is individuated and which determine its option-providing, identity-constituting power (Kymlicka 1995, 104–105). According to Kymlicka, what is of normative significance and warrants state intervention is only the "existence" of culture, "the very survival of the culture as a distinct society (...) in jeopardy as a result of decisions made by people outside the culture" (1995, 105). The "character" of culture, in contrast, being a function of processes of modernization and self-chosen symbolic reinterpretation, does not warrant state interference other than the protection from illiberal "internal restrictions" (1995, 105).[89] This distinction is meant to fulfill at least three purposes. First, it sends a signal to liberal skeptics of multiculturalism that the ascription of value to cultural groups is compatible with the liberal principles of fallibility and choice-based agency. Second, it introduces a way to identify criteria of necessity and sufficiency for cultural "existence." It distinguishes the set of traits that is supposedly *essential* for the generation of strong cultural attachments from the set of traits whose alteration does not threaten the identity-constituting power of culture (Kymlicka 1989, 167).[90] Finally, and most importantly, the distinction allows Kymlicka to bracket out the problem of indeterminacy when establishing his instrumentalist account of cultural normativity. By excluding intra-cultural agency and symbolic politics – with its harmonious and less harmonious consequences – from the realm of normative inquiry, Kymlicka can quite easily "present 'culture' as a thoroughly sanitized locus of normative value" (Johnson 2000, 416).

But what brings Kymlicka to the conclusion that the disruptive force of the exercise of personal autonomy – which he readily ad-

89   Responding to Jeremy Waldron's (1992) concern that the preservation of minority cultures requires their insulation from the outside world, Kymlicka acknowledges that "preserving the 'purity' and 'authenticity' of their cultures (...) *is* the motivation of some minority leaders," that such "internal restrictions" are "illegitimate from a liberal point of view" and justify government intervention (Kymlicka 1995, 103 emphasis added; cf. 2001, 60).

90   In this sense, the properties of cultural "existence" mirror the definition of cultural essentialism I have given in Chapter 1, Section 1. The terminology of cultural "structure" in Kymlicka's earlier work (see esp. 1989, 166–170) – as opposed to cultural "character" – further indicates that the hierarchy between essential and non-essential cultural properties is a key motivation behind this distinction.

mits and repeatedly illustrates by pointing out the transformation of Québec from a religious and rural society to a secular and urban one – mystically spare the individuating, option-providing and identity-constitutive "existence" of culture? Whence the assumption that the occurrence of symbolic oppression is merely a matter of cultural "character" with no bearing for the capacity of a culture to furnish choice-enabling options? Once again, it is sufficient to refer to the anthropological evidence about the political constitution and evolution of cultural phenomena to see how implausible and artificial such a distinction is (Johnson 2000, 416; see also Markell 2003, 160–161). But there is nevertheless a lesson to be drawn from the latter, a lesson that is surprisingly familiar to what has been said above on Taylor's theory of cultural normativity. What Kymlicka's distinction brings to light is the lingering awareness that the mobilization of absolute moral goods – here personal autonomy – as an ultimate scale against which the value of culture can be measured has undesirable conceptual implications. Kymlicka's insistence on the instrumental connection between cultural "existence" and the pre-cultural good of autonomy forbids him to fully embrace culture as a site of symbolic politics and strategic interaction. Whereas Taylor's culture requires determinacy and certainty in order to function as a medium of re-equilibrating redemption, Kymlicka's culture – or rather, cultural "existence" – requires determinacy and certainty to be the sort of good that enhances individual autonomy. Analogous to Taylor's case, Kymlicka's justificatory argument for multiculturalism is forced into disarray as soon as culture fails to afford determinate choice options to individuals. What makes Kymlicka's case so interesting in the debate on cultural normativity, in my view, is the discrepancy between, on the one hand, his liberal sensitivity for the hybridizing and potentially disruptive effects of individual agency and, on the other hand, his reflexive deployment of *ad-hoc* strategies to dodge the challenge of indeterminacy to cultural normativity. His Rawlsian-inspired principle to ground the value of culture in a 'thin' metaphysics of personal freedom does not, as he hopes, allow him to work with a culture conception that fully countenances the liberal model of agency and the ensuing indeterminacy of outcomes.

This unintended, but inevitable pull towards a strongly idealized, depoliticized understanding of culture furnishes an important element to the explanation of Kymlicka's much-noted disinterest in culture concepts with a weaker degree of institutionalization than the "societal" concept. Kymlicka, to repeat, unmistakably postulates that "liberal values of freedom and equality must be defined and understood in relation to such societal cultures" (Kymlicka 2001, 53). Non-societal, hybrid conceptions do not constitute stable "choice contexts" and are unlikely to resist the homogenizing pressures of modernity (Kymlicka 1995, 80, 95–101; 2001, 53–54). To identify legitimate bearers of group-differentiated rights,

"we need to show that ethnocultural groups do not form a fluid continuum, in which each group has infinitely flexible needs and aspirations, but rather that there are deep and relatively stable differences between various kinds of ethnocultural groups" (Kymlicka 2001, 59; quoted in Markell 2003, 167–168).

To liberal ears, this sounds like a surprising relapse into a Herderian discourse of cultural embeddedness and agency-as-self-fulfillment (see also Markell 2003, 168). But against the background of Kymlicka's exclusive reliance on extra-cultural sources of normativity, the renewed insistence on institutional certainty and stability is not so much a political sacrifice than a philosophical one for the sake of safeguarding a non-ambiguous justification of multiculturalism.

It seems that also the liberal approach to multiculturalism does not bring us further in our search for a theory of cultural normativity which countenances the desideratum of cultural hybridity, which, in other words, can be grounded in a condition of latent indeterminacy. I agree with Patchen Markell in thinking that the decisive problem in both Taylor's and Kymlicka's theories of multiculturalism is that they both

"fail to come to terms with one of the most fundamental conditions of human action, which Arendt, Sophocles, Hegel, and others have all, in different ways, brought into the foreground: the fact [that] our choices and our identities are constitutively open to an *unpredictable future*, whose unpredictability arises in substantial part from the fact that we do not act in isolation but as agents among others" (Markell 2003, 175, emphasis added).

The issue at stake is the continual quest for conceptual and moral certainty in much of contemporary political thought (and, indeed, political science), and the correlative angst of the unpredictable future. As long as multiculturalists are unable to make their accounts of cultural normativity fit for the indeterminacy (and therefore unpredictability) as it inevitably arises out of the context of conjoint interpretational agency, they must remain committed to a counterfactual and – as non-essentialists from Kwame Appiah to Brian Barry to Jeremy Waldron tirelessly remind us – problematic conception of culture.

Conclusion

I have framed my discussion of the relation between cultural normativity and cultural hybridity by focusing on the status of conceptual determinacy in theories that ascribe value to groups. Drawing on the

literature dealing with rational choice, group rights, and multicultur-alism, I have tried to bring out the resilience of a 'quest for certainty' and a suppression of political agency in the specification of culture concepts when the latter are portrayed as exerting normative power on people or institutions. Kymlicka's liberal justification of multicultur-alism is a particularly instructive example as to how the presentation of a culture as a legitimate bearer of action-guiding value may entail – sometimes against the philosophical convictions of the theorist – a relapse into sanitized, de-politicized notions of culture. The tension between hybridity and norm-assignment is a powerful reminder that the cultural normativity thesis is not a self-evident metaphysical fact, but, to the contrary, poses a heavy burden of justification for anyone who embraces it.

I have further argued that one important reason behind the pecu-liar attraction non-hybrid or reifying culture concepts exert on theories of cultural normativity lies in the fact that the latter locate their meta-physical sources beyond human experience. If the answer to the ques-tion *Can culture be normative?* can only be found in the lofty heights of metaphysical ultimacy, like in Herder's case in a hypothetical state of nature where there is recognition and harmony, but no *problem* of recognition and harmony, it is not at all clear how any culture concept that fails to live up to these standards of harmony can be integrated in a plausible justification of multiculturalist policies.

The awkwardness raised by cultural hybridity, then, is not the re-sult of a mere incoherence and even less of a latent reactionary atti-tude in multiculturalist thought; it is, I suspect, an immanent symp-tom of the attempt to measure the value of groups against an ultimate, pre-political, and experience-transcending moral standard. Our social world is *never* problem-free, and it is implausible to regard culture, under whatever conceptual specification, as an exception. Unless the contrary can be shown, it remains implausible to think of our moral obligations towards culture – and, not to forget, our moral and aes-thetical intuitions – as originating in a theory that unreflectively ele-vates culture into a medium through which our aspirations of uncon-strained agency are realized.

As regards our initial objective to solve Patten's dilemma of essen-tialism, it is safe to reiterate that we have still failed to make substan-tial headway. We are still lacking a compelling way to make the cultur-al normativity thesis compatible with the political indeterminacy as it inevitably characterizes our social life. Multiculturalists are in need of a radically different cultural normativity thesis, one that is not reliant upon other-worldly metaphysical fixity, but which is grounded in hu-man experience as it is lived.

Chapter 4:
The Normativity of Indeterminacy

So far I have tried to elucidate the tension between multiculturalism's feeble for context-transcending, abstract moral foundations and the fact of cultural hybridity. The reliance on the authority of overarching, extra-cultural doctrines prevents theories of cultural normativity from wholeheartedly countenancing cultural hybridity as it is recommended by non-essentialism. In this chapter, I argue that this is not the end of the story. The problem I have expounded upon over the past three chapters does not force us to capitulate to the challenge of group-level indeterminacy and to exclude from the realm of moral inquiry our intuition that there is at least *something* valuable in culture. Rather, it is my contention that the challenge of indeterminacy, and the difficulties to accommodate it within the standard account of normative multiculturalism, directs us towards a different foundation of the cultural normativity thesis.

My suggestion is that the most promising way out of the dilemma of essentialism consists in the demonstration that symbolic indeterminacy as it characterizes our cultural life is not an *obstacle to*, but a *starting point of* the process that establishes the normative character of culture. Such a demonstration calls for an account of cultural normativity that – given the lack of unproblematic moral spectator points of view – is grounded in the concrete experience of reflective agents, in all its harmonious and discordant facets, as it is lived within culturally informed contexts. This may sound very adventurous to Kantian ears. Indeed, it is clear that any attempt to put experience at the center of moral inquiry requires a radical rupture with traditional, non-naturalist philosophy. In the following, I articulate the philosophical contours of such an alternative account of cultural normativity by drawing on John Dewey's naturalist ethics. Dewey is a safe guide in the pursuit of such an alternative because he has anticipated and addressed, perhaps more systematically and profoundly than anyone else, the pitfalls of abstract moral theorizing in a contingent and uncertain world. I think that Dewey's potential contribution to the problem of indeterminacy in contemporary multiculturalism is his explicit affirmation of indeterminacy in his ethical theory. For Dewey, normativity is a direct result of the human capacity to solve problems, that is, to transform situations that are experienced as irritating and 'problematic' into at

least provisionally stabilized outcomes. The generation of normative principles and the possibility of moral progress are for Dewey contingent on the intelligent conduct of inquiry.

My argument proceeds in four steps. In the first section, I set out the way in which I intend to read Dewey. Given the massive corpus of his work, and given the fact that the notion of culture is, while immensely important for his philosophy, not treated systematically and even less uniformly, I find it important to belabor this point in some detail. I explain why I am less interested in what Dewey says on cultural pluralism in his political and educational writings than in the status of culture in his metaphysics of ethics. In the second section, I establish the aspects in Dewey's metaphysics which I deem relevant for the reconstruction of the cultural normativity thesis. My focus shall be on the emancipated status of the individual in the construction of normativity. It will be shown that the centrality Dewey allocates to human experience in morality has attractive implications for political theorists who believe in the normative connotations of politics but are anxious about utilizing fixed ethical foundations for the justification of political institutions. I shall also elaborate the extent to which Dewey's view is different from most traditional visions of normativity and the moral life. The third section addresses the implications of Dewey's experience-based ethical starting point for cultural normativity. I shall argue that Dewey's problem-solving inquiry – the cooperative procedure by which indeterminacy is sought to be rendered determinate – is not only historically situated, but also culturally situated. I establish a parallel between culture in the Deweyan sense, understood as a form of human association in continual pursuit of balanced experience, and the anthropological description of culture as an unstable hermeneutic (and therefore political) equilibrium. In the fourth section, I counter the objection that Dewey's culturally situated inquiry is politically naïve. I show that despite the absence in Dewey's ethics of fixed criteria or rules that could guide inquiry in cases of deep conflict, his account of culture provides routines that can stabilize problem-solving inquiry over time. Finally, in the fifth section, I briefly discuss an alternative, Peircean-inspired way to utilize pragmatist philosophy for the reconstruction of the cultural normativity thesis. At the core of this alternative is the Millian claim that culture is epistemically valuable in that it multiplies epistemic perspectives in a society. While the Peircean and the Deweyan position both share a commitment to non-foundationalism, I argue that the former – because of its reducing value to one specific predicate (epistemic diversity) – is unlikely to be a good candidate for a hybridity-friendly theory of cultural normativity.

Was Dewey a Multiculturalist?

But before I turn to Dewey's metaphysics, an important caveat is in order. If it is my intention to present Dewey's philosophy as a reformative impulse aiming at attenuating multiculturalism's anxiety of hybridity and indeterminacy, it is crucial to underline that my defense of normative multiculturalism is theoretically indebted to Dewey's naturalist conception of ethics; it is, however, only contingently related to Dewey's *political* endorsement of cultural pluralism, on what the Dewey had to say about culture and citizenship in his theory of education and in his democratic thought. In this sense, my normative approach to culture is certainly 'Deweyan', but not necessarily 'Dewey's'. By saying this, I am taking sides in what seems to be a fundamental cleavage running through the contemporary reception of Dewey in political theory. According to one side of this cleavage, the one in which I situate myself, the "ultimate glue" of Dewey's political positions, most particularly his emphatic defense of democracy and his lifelong quest for an alternative to moral and political absolutism, is his naturalist faith in experience and, more accurately, in the possibility of "ameliorating the quality of present experience by its own resources" (Pappas 2008, 12–13).[91] Scholars on this side of the cleavage typically embrace the view that Dewey's most original contribution to social theory is his demonstration that moral judgment and the creation of normativity are not a matter of 'private', intellectual introspection, but the outcome of successful problem-solving. On the other side of the cleavage are Dewey scholars that are to a lesser extent persuaded by the constitutive character of Dewey's experience-based starting point. According to the latter position, Dewey's own political thought is sufficiently authoritative and philosophically freestanding to be deployed in the elaboration of arguments of normative justification.[92]

For our present purpose, this precision is important given the fact that Dewey, together with other pragmatists of his generation, has been occasionally portrayed as furnishing an immediate justification of multiculturalism (see especially Putnam and Putnam 1994; for a Peircean account of multiculturalism, see Clanton and Forcehimes 2011). I disagree with this view. In spite of the primordial significance

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91   Gregory Fernando Pappas's *John Dewey's Ethics: Democracy as Experience* (2008) gives the most complete argument why Deweyan political theorists should study Dewey's political standpoints against the background of his experience-based naturalism and his naturalist ethics. Among the Dewey scholars on this side of the cleavage, I also count Robert Westbrook (1991; cf. 1998), Melvin Rogers (2009), Douglas Browning (1998), and Dirk Jörke (2003).

92   For example, Hilary Putnam, in his reconstruction of a Deweyan epistemic justification of democracy, considers Dewey's social theory to be more satisfactory than his moral theory because of the latter's incapacity to instruct "individual existential choices" (1990a, 1688–1689). See, for similar assessments in the context of democratic theory, Kloppenberg (1998) and Honneth (1998).

Dewey attributes to cultural pluralism not just in his ethics, but also in his political, educational and aesthetic theory, Dewey was neither a clear-cut multiculturalist in the sense that he would have provided an unambiguous account of cultural normativity, nor was he, unlike his pragmatist companion and close friend Horace Standish Kallen, a particularly consistent advocate of a politics that is cognizant of cultural difference.[93] Some prima facie textual evidence that might lead some to think of Dewey as a multiculturalist are passages like the following, in which he emphatically rejects the 'melting-pot' metaphor of citizenship, arguing instead for the promotion of a cultural "give and take:"

> "The concept of uniformity and unanimity in culture is rather repellent (…). Variety *is* the spice of life, and the richness and the attractiveness of social institutions depend upon cultural diversity among separate units. In so far as people are all alike, there is no give and take among them. And it is better to give and take. The theory of the Melting Pot always gave me rather a pang. To maintain that all the constituent elements, geographical, racial and cultural, in the United States should be put in the same pot and turned into a uniform and unchanging product is distasteful. The same feeling that leads us to recognize each other's individuality, to respect individuality between person and person, also leads us to respect those elements of diversification in cultural traits which differentiate our national life" (Dewey 1917, MW 10: 288–289; quoted in Kronish 1982, 139).

Dewey's support of cultural pluralism clearly takes the form of a Millian-inspired valuation of variety in the human condition. In this respect, Dewey might be thought to set out the first step for a more fine-grained normative account of culture as a contributing factor to some substantive common good, similar to the account of contemporary liberal nationalists like Yael Tamir or David Miller. But this is not something Dewey ever intended to undertake in a systematic way. Although passages where Dewey expresses his sympathy with cultural rights and duties of recognition can be found scattered throughout his work, Dewey is always quick in subjecting his belief in the stimulating and enriching power of cultural pluralism to important qualifications.

> "[I]f there is to be lasting peace there must be a recognition of the cultural rights and privileges of each nationality, its right to its own language, its own literature, its own ideals, its moral and

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93   For a critical discussion of Kallen's influence on Dewey's view of cultural pluralism, see Kronish (1982) and Westbrook (1991, 212–215). For Louis Menand however, the author of *The Metaphysical Club*, it was Kallen's missionary zeal that has instilled in pragmatist circles a sensitivity for the virtues of cultural difference and cultural identity (Menand 2001, 388–399).

spiritual outlook on the world, its complete religious freedom, and such political autonomy as may be consistent with the maintenance of general *social unity*" (Dewey 1917, MW 10: 288, emphasis added).

And further:

> "I believe that in any state of enduring organization for the future we must secure for each nationality an opportunity to cultivate its own distinctive individuality to the point where it does not become dangerous to the welfare of other peoples or groups" (Dewey 1917, MW 10: 289).

In contrast with Kallen, Dewey is anxious about the threats of cultural segregation and seems never to lose sight of the ideal of a "socially unified" nation, an ideal which shall later, in *The Public and Its Problems*, become the linchpin of the "Great Community" – "the society in which the ever-expanding and intricately ramifying consequences of associated activities shall be known in the full sense of that word, so that an organized articulate Public comes into being" (Dewey 1927, LW 2: 350).

As Robert Westbrook puts it, there was "no point" for Dewey "in cultivating ethnicity if the various groups involved did not communicate with one another and enrich the common life" (Westbrook 1991, 214). But this is not the only ambiguity diminishing Dewey's authority as a forefather of contemporary multiculturalism. Throughout his writings, Dewey remains peculiarly nebulous when it comes to the question of the value of specific cultures, and he seems to be almost entirely disinterested in the normative assessment of phenomena of cultural identification. The ambiguity of Dewey's stance on the value of culture in the anthropological sense comes to light especially clearly in his theory of education. On the one hand, Dewey presents the classroom as a training ground for democratic citizens that can only benefit from the large breadth of available cultural options. Dewey strongly advocates a racially mixed school system that is "cognizant of the variety of homes from which the children come," thus "preparing the next generations to live and function in a pluralistic society" and conveying them the necessary virtues to discern the common good of a democratic society (Putnam and Putnam 1994, 235–236). Moreover, Dewey welcomes multicultural curricula:

> "we need a curriculum in history, literature and geography which will make the different racial elements in this country aware of what each has contributed and will create a mental attitude towards other people which will make it more difficult for the flames of hatred and suspicion to sweep over this country in the future"

(Dewey 1923, MW 15: 155).

On the other hand, Dewey's commitment for the promotion of differentiated ways of human flourishing stands in tension with his aspiration for a "concordant," "harmonious," American culture. Dewey does not hesitate to advocate in the same breath a culture-sensitive curriculum and the need "for an educational institution which shall provide something like a homogeneous and balanced environment for the young (…), accustom all to a unity of outlook upon a broader horizon" and furthermore exert an "assimilative force" (Dewey 1916a, MW 9: 25–26). Dewey sees no contradiction in condemning, on the one hand, Woodrow Wilson's "Americanization programs" and his hostile rhetoric against "hyphenated Americans" and, on the other hand, welcoming the end of bilingual instruction (as it was practiced until World War I in places with important Germanophone immigrant communities like Minnesota or Wisconsin) and the introduction of English as the only official language (Dewey 1916b, MW 10: 186). Dewey does not consider culture to be valuable instrumentally or non-instrumentally. He explicitly accepts the possibility that immigrant cultures may deteriorate or merge in an Anglo-Saxon dominant culture. He also demands, without much reflective sensitivity regarding the moral and political dimensions of cultural convergence, that "each individual gets an opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social group in which he was born" (Dewey 1916a, MW 9: 24). If public education is to fulfill its aim of fostering individual development, it "must promote some forms of association and community life and must work against others," namely community life that is oppressive and undemocratic (Dewey and Childs 1933, LW 8: 80; quoted in Detlefsen 1998, 320).

In Dewey scholarship, Dewey's zeal for unity in diversity is sometimes thought to mirror modern notions of cosmopolitanism like the one advocated by Jeremy Waldron (Detlefsen 1998, 325–326; Ryan 1995, 172–173; Hansen 2009). This to the extent that Dewey gestures towards an understanding of human flourishing that does not so much require cultural membership, but instead depends on the individual's capacity and openness to draw on a large perspectival diversity. Dewey's integrated classroom, according to the cosmopolitan interpretation, is the site where the capacity to instill newness and creativity in one's present experimental horizons is learnt. Like in Waldron's case, communal agency is not limited to a specific conception of culture for Dewey, but seen as potentially infinite and, in any case, *transformative*. "Community is not marked by 'collective action', nor is it marked by a common link to a static past. Rather, it is marked by 'the give and take of communication', and by people who are transforming their associations according to this communication" (Detlefsen 1998, 327, quoting Dewey 1927, LW 2: 332). On a cosmopolitan reading, Dewey's preparedness to weigh the particular interest of cultures and their in-

dividual members against the interest of national integration can be understood as an implication of his prioritization of a universal communicative openness. Dewey's "Great Community" can be brought to fruition only if citizens are willing and able to subordinate their substantive conceptions to the requirements of cooperative interaction. In other words, what appears to animate the cosmopolitan aspect of Dewey's cultural pluralism is the worry that our efforts to solve social problems for the benefit of everyone cannot work effectively under circumstances where inquiry is impeded by communicative limitations, be they induced through culturally-sanctioned orthodoxy or any other form of unreflective dogmatism.

Karen Detlefsen rightly remarks that the cosmopolitan interpretation of Dewey's cultural pluralism stands in conflict with a narrower notion of community Dewey also sometimes works with. In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey repeatedly insists that the fertile soil for the democratic, communicatively open, and liberating "Great Community" he envisages is the intactness of communal life at the local level.

> "To learn to be human is to develop through the give-and-take of communication an effective sense of being an individually distinctive member of a community; one who understands and appreciates its beliefs, desires and methods, and who contributes to a further conversion of organic powers into human resources and values" (Dewey 1927, LW 2: 332).

And further: "Vital and thorough attachments are bred only in the intimacy of an intercourse which is of necessity restricted in range" (Dewey 1927, LW 2: 367). Reminiscing Hegel, and in an odd contrast with the cosmopolitan flirtations in his theory of education, Dewey now sees in the restoration of small-scale communal life – the "family and neighborhood" (1927, LW 2: 367) – a constitutive condition for a democratic society. "[T]he local is the ultimate universal, and as near an absolute as exists" (1927, LW 2: 369).

In a later text, Dewey goes one step further and asserts a communal ontology that strongly resembles the 'nomos' conception of culture advocated by contemporary social theorists like Ayelet Shachar, which we have already encountered above in Chapter 1:

> "[F]or a number of persons to form anything that can be called a community in its pregnant sense there must be values prized in common. Without them, any so-called social group, class, people, nation, tends to fall apart into molecules having but mechanically enforced connections with one another" (Dewey 1939, LW 13: 71).

Communal life, for Dewey, is not just secured by the possibility of effective "give-and-take" communication, but also by the availability of

shared values that give individuals a sense of security and stability.[94] It is in such normatively integrated local communities where democratic character is formed, the character skilled in intelligently inquiring into the consequences of social interaction. The striking parallels such passages exhibit in comparison with the post-Rawlsian critique of liberalism by Sandel and MacIntyre has led some to label Dewey a proto-communitarian.[95] There clearly is common ground. Like the communitarians, Dewey presents the local and the familiar as vulnerable and deeply challenged by technological progress and economic integration. "The machine (...), distant markets (...), mobility and migration have invaded and often broken up local community bonds (...) that once held men together and made them aware of their reciprocal obligations" (Dewey 1932, LW 7: 234). Although in his later work Dewey moved gradually away from the distinctly Hegelian understanding of an organic connection between the individual and the community towards a less harmonious, more conflict-laden understanding of communal life, he never softened in his political thought the idealization of communicative quality as it emerges out of local, voluntary, and direct forms of association. Such communitarian strands in Dewey's work have lead many to wonder whether Dewey's political ideal of the "Great Community" can effectively countenance the sort of Millian cultural pluralism he vindicates elsewhere, as we have seen for example in his educational theory. In particular, from a liberal standpoint, it seems questionable how shared public ends can become conceivable in a society where a multitude of local communities are to operate as incubators for cultivating a democratic character skilled in problem-solving inquiry. According to an objection that has been around for a while, but that has been forcefully restated recently in political theory, Dewey's faith in the extension of a local to a public 'we-mode' is but another substantive conception of the good among many, which therefore cannot be utilized for justificatory purposes without incurring threats of oppression and 'coercive freedom' (see Damico 1978, 96–99; MacGilvray 2004, 144–149; Talisse 2007, 27–53; 2010a; for a meta-critique, see Festenstein 2010c). And even if one could successfully rebut this Rawlsian objection, there is little hope in Dewey's political thought that his conceptions of culture and community are much different from Tully's billiard-ball conception in terms of structure and character.

To sum up, there can be found in Dewey's political works two seemingly contradictory positions on the status of community: a cos-

94   "Habit is the mainspring of human action, and habits are formed for the most part under the influence of the customs of a group" (Dewey 1927, LW 2: 334–335).

95   For an argument that brings Dewey in line with communitarianism, see Bernstein (1991, 254) and Fott (1998, 45–47).

mopolitan position in Dewey's educational theory, which explicitly welcomes cultural pluralism while approving the eventuality of cultural assimilation, and a communitarian position in Dewey's democratic theory, which values small-scale community as an ingredient for a truly democratic society, but which begs the question of illiberal essentialism. Both strands fail to address the problem of intra-group heterogeneity. Neither, therefore, takes us much further in our quest for a novel approach to cultural normativity as it is required by contemporary multiculturalists.

Nonetheless, it would be a grave mistake to stop here. I agree with Pappas when he warns against trying to pigeonhole Dewey's political positions in terms of the contemporary communitarian-liberal debate. A dialogue between Dewey's political views and those of contemporary theorists, Pappas argues, is "impoverished," if not "impossible" if it does not take into account Dewey's metaphysical assumptions about moral life. Worse, by unreflectively classifying his position, say, on cultural pluralism and communal life as 'communitarian' or 'cosmopolitan', "one runs the risk of making him complicit in assumptions he sought to override" (Pappas 2008, 259). In the remainder of this chapter, I try to argue that a different vision of normativity can be reconstructed from Dewey's basic assumptions about morality, one that prepares the way for a theory of multiculturalism that no longer founders on indeterminacy as it characterizes cultural life.

Indeterminacy as a Starting Point of Normativity

Over the past chapters, I have tried to provide a more solid theoretical basis for my astonishment concerning the lacking willingness in political theory to think about accommodating cultural indeterminacy within an account of cultural respect. I have also vaguely expressed the hope that a promising approach towards a solution lies in demonstrating that indeterminate situations are not morally void, but can themselves carry the seeds for normatively significant outcomes. It is now time to give this hope some theoretical support. If this endeavor succeeds, then we could give an original rejoinder to the skeptic who argues that valuing culture necessarily presupposes problematic notions of unified agency and political uniformity.

On many philosophical accounts, such an endeavor is to commit a sacrilege. The idea that normativity can be constructed 'bottom-up' from the human experience as it is lived in cultures runs counter to the starting point the Western tradition of moral thought has historically privileged.[96] Whatever category, be it the goodness of outcomes, the

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96   In particular, Dewey breaks with the Kantian precept that morality is by default a category apart from our experience of the surrounding world. See Kant (1785, chap. II, section 5).

rightness of actions, or the virtue of character, moral theories take as primary, their responses to the primordial question "why be moral?" have historically been elaborated from standpoints that are explicitly *not* experiential. Rather, it has been presumed since Plato and Aristotle that moral inquiry, if it is to furnish singular and certain adjudications to morally indeterminate situations, and if it is to guide the way towards moral progress, must be shielded from the vicissitudes of the 'practical' world as it is experienced. In other terms, according to the tradition, principles of moral conduct originate in a spectatorial reality purified from the indeterminacies of the real world and are therefore uncontrollable by ordinary mortals.

Dewey has criticized moral philosophy's "exaltation of pure intellect" and its persistent attempt to escape from the precariousness and uncertainty of our every-day lives as an understandable, but inevitably futile "quest for certainty" (Dewey 1929b, LW 4: 5; cf. Westbrook 1991, 347–348). At the center of Dewey's criticism was the belief that the enduring postulate of a disengaged and sanitized starting point in moral thought has given rise to costly oversimplifications of the richness and the complexity of moral life. The zeal of philosophers to offer a rationalized, necessary, and certain guidance for *all* imaginable circumstances of moral doubt, Dewey complained, has made moral philosophy "inefficient" (Dewey 1966, LW 5: 288); it has sustained the empirically faulty confidence that the only choice we are facing when we experience moral indeterminacy is between prefabricated monocausal explanations, each of which offers a recipe to discriminate between "good and evil, appetite and a categorical imperative, the disposition to virtue and the penchant for vice" (1966, LW 5: 280). For Dewey, this is an unacceptably caricatured view of moral life; things are more complicated than that. In morally problematic situations, when we are looking for guidance about what to do, the conflicting choices we are faced with are, apart from extreme 'laboratory' circumstances, not reducible to a mere formal conflict between pre-defined theories. Dewey thinks that more metaphysical modesty is in order. Rather than envisioning "ready-made solution[s] to large moral perplexities" (Dewey 1932, LW 7: 316), moral theory should start by acknowledging the irreducible complexity of our moral life, by realizing that "the need for moral theories *grows out of conflict* between ends, responsibilities, rights, and duties" (1932, LW 7: 165 emphasis added). When we experience moral (or hermeneutic) uncertainty – say when we are torn between the duty of always telling the truth and the good brought about by lying in some specific contexts – singular monocausal prescriptions often provide little serviceable guidance simply because our perplexity involves a multitude of intertwined moral factors. To take the tragic interrelatedness of our moral life seriously means, first of all, to avow our human finitude and to take responsibility as intelligent moral inquirers. Our quest for moral guidance – what we ought to value, what ends

and actions we ought to pursue – does not grow out from abstract theorizing, but from the concrete problematic *situation* as it prompts our need for clarification. Philosophical theories and principles may help us in organizing the maelstrom of conflictual experience, but they cannot be antecedent to it. The belief that moral philosophy can provide authoritative guidance to situations before they actually occur, Dewey lamented, deeply misrecognizes the procedural and hypothetical character of moral problem-solving. It "releases the larger part of the acts of life from serious, that is moral, survey," thus putting a "moratorium" on every-day factors that are considered 'non-moral' but may nevertheless inform our moral judgment (Dewey 1922, MW 14: 194).

The urge for a rehabilitation of the experienceable present – in all its tragic, conflictual, inchoate, messy manifestations – as a valid starting point in philosophy is the centerpiece of Dewey's reconstruction of ethics and, in fact, of his faith in democracy. Individuals trying to emerge from indeterminate situations are no longer seen as passive recipients of pre-defined theoretical elucidations, but as intelligent agents that bear the responsibility of inquiring into ways to settle the situation experienced as problematic. For Dewey, moral problem-solving is the "confidence in the directive powers that inhere in experience, if men have but the wit and courage to follow them" (Dewey 1929a, LW 1: 5). The overcoming of moral uncertainty, the emergence of normative principles – and in effect, the achievement of moral progress – are contingent on the intelligent conduct of inquiry, that is, on the human capacity to *transform* experienced disruptions into stabilized states of affair. "Substituting intelligence for transcendent reason," as one commentator infers, "require[s] vesting authority not in the insights of philosophers (or scientists), but in the deliberations of ordinary men and women skilled in the art of practical judgment." What Dewey suggests, in other words, is a distinctly anti-platonic metaphysics "*of* (…) and *for* the common man" (Westbrook 1991, 360–361). The quest for certainty in philosophy has sustained the view that the sources of normativity lie in or are derivative of fixed laws of introspective reason.

One important manifestation of Dewey's revolt against this 'top-down' notion of normative authority is his understanding of normativity as an *empirical* enterprise. For Dewey, solving moral problems, evaluating conflicting desires and choosing modes of conduct does not require a method of critical intelligence that is functionally distinct from scientific inquiry as it is pursued in laboratories. Empirical inquiry in ethics characterizes the reflective effort of agents to reequilibrate situations which they experience to be, in one way or another, out of balance, or, as Peirce put it, characterized by the "irritation of doubt".[97]

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97   "Doubt is an uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into the state of belief; while the latter is a calm and satisfactory state which we do not wish to avoid, or to change to a belief in anything else. (…) The irritation of doubt causes a struggle to

Inquiry into the disruptions of our every-day experience comes down to the reflective activity of transforming the experience of "confusion, ambiguity and discrepancy" into a unified, consummatory experience characterized by "illumination, definiteness and consistency" (Dewey 1929a, LW 1: 61). This transformative process is itself a precarious enterprise; because it involves moments of deliberation and adjudication, it is ultimately subject to the same challenges as other proceduralist accounts of moral judgment.[98] The crucial lesson of Dewey's anthropocentric metaphysics and the empirical thrust it confers on moral inquiry is the view that each indeterminate situation, whether within a culture or within a community of laboratory researchers, "carries the seed of its own transformation" (Pappas 2008, 112). What is called for to let the seed of transformation grow, Dewey famously argues, is the communicative openness of a democratic society.

At this point, it is useful to emphasize the attraction the experience-based starting point of morality has exerted on recent reappropriations of Dewey's pragmatism in democratic theory. Dewey's basic assumptions about morality have inspired a range of scholars motivated by the anxiety that the will-formation within post-cold war liberal democracies has lost its normative capacity to reproduce cohesive values and sufficiently "strong" notions of the common good.[99] Much of the appeal of Deweyan pragmatism for democratic theory comes from the view that Dewey's ethical approach to democracy dispenses with strongly metaphysical foundations. His experiential starting point of norm-construction has been regarded as congenial to the desideratum – formulated the most prominently by Jürgen Habermas – that a normative account of democracy can only have a *reflective* foundation based on processes by which free individuals cognitively assess their practical interactions.[100] Thus, insofar as Dewey furnishes a metaphysics of ethics that does not privilege theory over praxis and that lies entirely in the responsibility of ordinary mortals, many contemporary democratic theorists invoke Dewey's pragmatism as a "way to move beyond the family quarrels between democratic theories" (Pappas 2008, 259; see also Jörke 2003, chap. 8). "Democracy," Dewey argues,

attain a state of belief. I shall term this struggle inquiry, though it must be admitted that this is sometimes not a very apt designation" (Peirce 1960, 5.374–5.375).

98   For example, Dewey's inquiry cannot duck the challenge of deep conflict, that is, the absence within the community of inquirers of intersubjectively shared principles of adjudication (Bohman 1996, 76–77).

99   This is the underlying philosophical rationale of Benjamin Barber's *Strong Democracy* (1984). Recent reappropriations of Dewey's pragmatism in democratic theory include Festenstein (1997), Honneth (1998), Caspary (2000), Jörke (2003), Knight and Johnson (2011).

100   This interpretation, I believe, comes close Axel Honneth's argument that Dewey's account seizes both the essential claims of (Arendtian) "republicanism" and (Habermasian) "proceduralism" (Honneth 1998, 765).

"has many meanings, but if it has a moral meaning, it is found in re-solving that the supreme test of all political institutions and industrial arrangements shall be the contribution they make to the all-around growth of every member of society" (Dewey 1920, MW 12: 186; see also 1922, MW 14: 194).

Dewey was always aware of the tension between his ethical con-ception of democracy as a "way of life"[101] and the empirical fact that free individuals potentially disagree on the terms by which this dem-ocratic good is to be defined. How Dewey deals with this tension, and how he seeks to defuse it, becomes clear very early in his work, written in a time of rapid socio-economic change, where the scope for individ-uals to create their own lives was limited by a pervasive faith in tech-nological progress and by increasingly democracy-skeptical political elites. In an 1888 essay Dewey warns against "aristocratic" temptations to secure the normative ends of democracy over the top of the heads of free persons, be that through the authority of absolutist leaders, or through some moral theory whose authority is *a priori*. "Democracy," Dewey contends,

> "(…) admits that the chief stimuli and encouragements to the re-alization of personality come from society; but it holds, none the less, to the fact that personality cannot be procured for any one [sic], however degraded and feeble, by any one else, however wise and strong. It holds that the spirit of personality indwells in every individual and that the choice to develop it must proceed from that individual" (Dewey 1888, EW 1: 244).

This passage captures Dewey's view of democracy not as a mere aggre-gation of political interests, but as a way of realizing individual flour-ishing, as an "expression of [the society's] organic nature" (1888, EW 1: 230). But this passage also indicates that normative ends of associ-ated living are neither a pre-political premise nor can they simply be derived from an authoritative theory. This point deserves particular attention: in Dewey's view, the goods that make democracy a norma-tively significant enterprise have their origins not in some fixed, hy-pothesized or hoped-for ends, but in the immediate presence, namely in the initiative of free individuals to realize themselves as parts of a complex and irredeemably pluralistic environment. For Dewey, to say that an institutional pattern is morally valuable does not mean that we have to look for that value in the essence of that pattern or that there is some "ready-made" theory out there from which the goodness of this pattern can be derived. Dewey and the pragmatists reject the idea of

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101   This is a metaphor Dewey uses, in one way or another, throughout his work on democracy. See for example: "A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of asso-ciated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (Dewey 1916a, MW 9: 93).

moral principles, which escape or exist independently from human reflection.

> "Ready-made rules available at a moment's notice for settling any kind of moral difficulty and resolving every species of moral doubt have been the chief object of the ambition of moralists. In the much less complicated and less changing matters of bodily health such pretensions are known as quackery. But in morals a hankering for certainty, born of timidity and nourished by love of authoritative prestige, has led to the idea that absence of immutably fixed and universally applicable ready-made principles is equivalent to moral chaos" (Dewey 1922, MW 14: 164).

Neither – as becomes clear in Dewey's repeated criticism against utilitarianism – does Dewey accept the exclusive reliance on *consequences* as the locus of moral goods. Moral deliberation, according to Dewey, does not mean "to calculate future happenings but to appraise *present* proposed actions first and foremost." For "the future outcome is not certain" (Dewey 1922, MW 14: 143 original emphasis); we simply cannot know *a priori* what goods are worth striving for. To think of morality means to acknowledge the complexity of our world and our own human finitude. It means to start the construction of normativity 'bottom-up', based on what we have, on what we, as participants of a moral deliberation, are able to *experience*.

In the light of this call for more metaphysical modesty in the quest for a foundation of normativity, a pragmatist defense of "strong" democracy against alternative institutional arrangements like markets or expertocracy cannot simply invoke the normative authority of theoretical inferences that posit a causal link between democratic institutions and, say, the beneficial consequences the latter entail for civic integration or the common good. Such an endeavor would be metaphysically *immodest* insofar as the invoked goods lie in the unknowable future and do not originate in reflective human experience. On Dewey's account of morality, democrats must – *faute de mieux*, by virtue of their quality as fallible and finite human beings – focus on the *experienceable present* if they want to show that a democratically organized society is morally superior to a non-democratic society.[102]

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102   For this reason, I presume, Knight and Johnson's Deweyan case for the "priority of democracy" is based on what they call the "second-order effects" of democracy, on "the way in which democratic institutional arrangements facilitate effective institutional choice" in the pluralistic context of modern societies. Democracy's substantive "first-order effects" like its promoting "consensus and commonality" are viewed as a function of second-order effects (Knight and Johnson 2011, 20).

Implications of the Experiential Starting Point for the Cultural Normativity Thesis

What does all this imply for the claim of the multiculturalist that culture is either instrumentally or non-instrumentally valuable? For Dewey, to recall what has been said in the previous section, the only way to think of a way of life as being normative is to see it as a function of co-operative processes in which people try to reequilibrate their irritated experience. A particular community is normative not to the extent that it is intrinsically or instrumentally related to some predefined notion of the good, but insofar as it offers the communicative openness that fosters the ability of citizens to cope with troublesome experiences of indeterminacy and uncertainty. I now want to argue that culture is no exception. In terms of the Deweyan view I hold, valuing culture does not mean ascribing a predefined value predicate to some antecedently identified social entity. Rather, cultural normativity is something that is inherently related to the transformative activity of people which, in the realm of their shared cultural experience, try to hold balance between their "doings" and "undergoings" (Dewey 1929b, LW 4: 66) – between their (practical and interpretative) action and the consequences they entail. Engaging in transformative inquiry is a natural reflex when members of a culture are confronted with indeterminacy and conflict. Thus, if we follow Dewey's naturalist theory of ethics until here, we have sufficient reason to view culture as an instance of a problem-solving, and therefore potentially normative, entity.

To explain why human association is inextricably bound up with experiences of indeterminacy and impulses of cooperative problem-solving, Dewey draws on his naturalist philosophy, which begins with the idea that the person stands in a *reflective* association with her surrounding environment (Dewey 1922, MW 14: 139). Whatever actions this person undertakes, she produces consequences that are experienced either directly by subjects that are themselves involved in the action or *indirectly* by subjects that were not involved in the action but nevertheless perceive its implications (Dewey 1927, LW 2: 243–244). While the first situation is of limited importance for a society, given the fact that the circle of affected subjects remains restricted or, according to Dewey, "private," the latter situation may be considered *problematic* in a way that it calls for inquiry. If indirect consequences of an action are experienced, and if these consequences are deemed to be in need of inquiry, then the action becomes "public."[103] An association of individuals, then, is reflective insofar as it monitors the extent to

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103 Note that the demarcation between indirect consequences that call for inquiry (and are therefore public) or not is fluid and has to be "discovered experimentally" (Dewey 1927, LW 2: 275).

which intersubjective transactions entail consequences and deliberates whether these consequences need to be publically addressed in a problem-solving inquiry.

By insisting on the cooperative and reflective character of the processes by which people try to settle experienced indeterminacy, and by offering a proceduralist criterion for determining when a given course of action is to be subject to inquiry, and how large the scope of inquirers in each case has to be, Dewey situates and historicizes the activity of problem-solving and the production of melioristic outcomes. Problem-solving or indeterminacy-settling is an activity that does not occur in a decontextualized void, but always occurs within the contours of specific modes of association, and always based on a coordinated assessment of the experiential imbalances that require fixing.

This has immediate bearing on our aspiration to connect the affirmation of cultural hybridity with an account of cultural normativity. Consider, once again, Clifford Geertz's presentation of culture as an inherently hermeneutic phenomenon, whose constitutive symbols are distinctive elements of our every-day experience, ever-exposed to the interpretative power of our minds and unsheltered from redefinition and contestation.[104] Encultured subjects, in Geertz's account, are constantly engaged in a struggle to maintain an unstable equilibrium between being "suspended in" and "spinning" webs of significance. The representation of culture as the site of an uneasy hermeneutic equilibrium is strongly reminiscent of what Dewey considers to be the natural course of how we deal with indeterminacy.[105] Like Geertz, Dewey, in his non-communitarian moments, regards culture as something complex, replete with alternating situations of habitual "rigidity" and impulses of discontinuity:

> "The more complex a culture is, the more certain it is to include habits formed on differing, even conflicting patterns. Each custom may be rigid, unintelligent in itself, and yet this rigidity may cause it to wear upon others. The resulting attrition may release impulse for new adventures" (Dewey 1922, MW 14: 90).

The dynamic vision of culture which this passage alludes to lies at the intersection of Dewey's naturalist approach to inquiry and the argument of post-Parsonian (not just Geertzian) anthropologists that symbols, as Victor Turner has it, are "triggers of social action – and of personal action in the public arena" (V. W. Turner 1975, 155). Sym-

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104   See Chapter 2, Section 1 above.

105   Given that Geertz was, as he would say himself (see Geertz 2001), a deeply admiring student of George Geiger – Dewey's last graduate student at Columbia and a fervent advocate of his philosophical heritage – this is hardly a coincidence.

bols and symbolic constructions, as is known, do not maintain their meaning *ad infinitum*. Their meaning at t_x is at the mercy of the human capacity of humans to act reflectively, or, to put it in a Deweyan way, to assess and, if deemed necessary (that is, public), to investigate the consequences of experienced indeterminacy. Seen from the perspective of Dewey's naturalism, the ever-evolving character of culture, which anthropologists like Geertz and advocates of cultural hybridity are stressing, is but the expression of the sum of ongoing intra-cultural inquiries in which individuals investigate destabilized symbolic meaning. Culture, in the naturalist view, is the site where symbolic "doings" and "undergoings" – the interplay between shaping and depending on webs of significance – are continually evaluated and, by means of a procedure of reflective coordination, attempted to be held in balance.

The common ground between Dewey's naturalist metaphysics of ethics and the culture-cum-hermeneutic-equilibrium view is clearly brought out in the unfinished revised introduction to *Experience and Nature* (1929a, LW 1), written by Dewey in 1951, one year before his death. At this moment, Dewey came to reject the word 'experience' in the title of his principle work on naturalism, claiming that it should be replaced with 'culture'. He found that "culture in its anthropological sense" was less prone to misunderstandings and captures more acutely "what is experienced and ways of experiencing it" (Dewey 1929a, LW 1: 362). "In marked contrast with the prevailing use of 'experience'," culture "designates the vast range of things experienced in an indefinite variety of ways" (1929a, LW 1: 362), including "religion, morals, aesthetics, politics, and economics" (1929a, LW 1: 363). Invoking the Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, Dewey then elevates culture to the most basic condition of human life. Neither "Social organization" nor "knowledge" can "be really understood except as a part of culture" (1929a, LW 1: 363). Knowledge, for Dewey, "is essentially connected with mental and moral discipline, of which religion, laws, and ethical rules are the ultimate source" (1929a, LW 1: 363). And as regards the "production of goods" and the "common modes of enjoyment," these too are "based on a definitive type of social organization" (1929a, LW 1: 363).

Dewey's view of culture, then, is deeply entangled with our experience of the surrounding world. This entanglement forbids him to adopt a reductionist conception of culture in the sense of Tully's 'billiard-ball' essentialism.[106] Rather than being stable and homogeneous, culture in the naturalist sense is in constant flux and its symbolic content, but also its boundaries, are determined by the totality of processes of re-equilibration undertaken by its members. Sor-Hoon

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106   In the light of the 'cultural turn' late Dewey's philosophical life, it seems all the more questionable whether Dewey's communitarian narrative of the local community in *The Public and Its Problems* is sufficiently 'naturalized' to function as a culture in the narrow, billiard-ball sense.

Tan is right when she says that Dewey avoids reductionism by "treating culture as context of inquiry, as presenting problems more than solutions" (Tan 2008, 43). If culture is a community, it is an open-ended problem-solving community with "no essence consisting in a set of traits, qualities, or entities spiritual or material that can define the identity of a group" (2008, 43). Cultural identity, on the naturalist conception, is "a matter of creative continuity, always in the making, never quite complete or fixed" (2008, 43).

A culture, in which agents reflectively identify (and classify) "rigid" or otherwise irritating symbolic traits, subject them to inquiry, and successfully transform them into a state of affairs that is less "rigid" than the initial situation, brings about newness and change. This culturally situated process of transforming old, troubled experience into a new, more balanced one, I have tried to expound, is at the heart of Dewey's vision of normativity as growing out of indeterminacy. It is the centrality of this naturalist ethics of transformation which underpins the title of the present chapter. Seen in this way, it is no longer clear why skeptical accounts of cultural hybridity like Waldron's or Bhabha's must entail a commitment of 'writing against culture'.[107] In the light of Dewey's naturalist conception, it no longer appears particularly subversive and disruptive when Bhabha rejoices in "liminality" and "between-ness," asserting that "the process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (Bhabha 1990, 211). From a Deweyan standpoint, the newness which Bhabha celebrates is simply a consequence of the conducting of problem-solving inquiry among associating human beings; it is entirely irrelevant for Dewey whether this association takes the shape of a small indigenous community in Northern Québec or of Bhabha's cosmopolitan *polis*. The melioristic transformation of symbolic content becomes possible not *despite* culture, but *because of* culture. What is crucial for the endeavor of overcoming the challenge of symbolic indeterminacy is not the culture-less cosmopolitan society Bhabha envisages; normativity is constructed *within* culture when people have the possibility to subject contested, destabilized, polysemic, or multivocal symbols to inquiry under circumstances of equality and democracy.

In sum, the demonstration of how a bridge can be forged between the symbolic contingency of cultural hybridity and the qualitative improvement of individual experience is what I take to be the main lesson from Dewey concerning multiculturalism. But this lesson comes at the price of a rupture with traditional 'top-down' theories of morality. The ascription of normativity to human entities that are in constant flux presupposes philosophically modesty regarding the sources of cultur-

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107   I have discussed this position in Chapter 1, Section 2 above.

al normativity. To grasp the value of culture, we should not try to transcend the context of experience, but instead focus on the immediate present, on the processes by which the meaning of cultural symbols is transformed and consolidated.

The 'Naïveté' Objection

One might now object that all this sounds peculiarly naïve and over-idealized. Is Dewey not simply underestimating the incentives of political and strategic action as they characterize symbolic life forms? Can the normative transformation of indeterminacy Dewey envisions really happen given the potentialities of deep conflict and even oppression within culture, as we have seen in Chapter 3? I have argued so far that Dewey's metaphysics of ethics reveals a way to think of normativity as grounded not in abstract theories, but in cultural experience as it is lived. However, I need to become more precise as to whether Dewey's method of inquiry can also accommodate one of the primordial anxieties in discourses of cultural hybridity – that cultures may be too discordant (say, regarding the status and validity of symbolic forms) to be a site of problem-solving inquiry.

The often enthusiastic tone in which Dewey celebrates the status of difference in his philosophy constitutes a favorable environment for charges of naiveté.[108] We have already seen how strongly Dewey insists on the "stimulating" effects of difference for the functioning of society (Dewey 1916a, MW 9: 93). His ethical writings also include passages where he argues that inquiry can be "intelligent" only on condition that diversity of standpoints is not "merely grudgingly tolerated", but explicitly "welcomed" (Dewey 1932, LW 7: 329). "Unanimity of uniform belief is possible only when a dictator has the power to tell others what they must believe" (Dewey 1939, LW 13: 154). The fact that in most associations people are divided on scientific and moral beliefs, Dewey argues, multiplies the "stimuli" for mutual interaction and for new experience with our counterparts. By cooperatively inquiring into indeterminate situations, we learn how to "liberate" our potentialities for "growth" (Dewey 1927, LW 2: 332).[109]

With respect to the "stimulating" role diversity allegedly plays in

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108   Dewey was repeatedly confronted with charges of naïveté already during his lifetime. An instructive example is the debate between Reinhold Niebuhr and Dewey in the 1930s. For an overview of this debate, see Westbrook (1991, 523–532).

109   There are some interesting similarities between Dewey's view of belief divisiveness and Chantal Mouffe's "agonistic pluralism," which also endorses the idea that in some contexts "social division is constitutive" (see especially Mouffe 2000, 139). Mouffe, however, does not premise her claims in a metaphysics of experiential ethics, but in Lacan's psychoanalytic model. For a discussion of the commonalities between Dewey and Mouffe's poststructuralism, see Larry Hickman (2008).

inquiry, Dewey is certainly fairly optimistic, though not naïve. Dewey would not disagree with contemporary political theorists who caution against depoliticized notions of culture. He is aware of the fact that there are enemies to the sort of transformative process he proposes, people who prefer the status quo, dogmatism, or force to problem-solving inquiry. ''Mankind still prefers upon the whole to rely upon force, not now exercised directly and physically as it was once, but upon covert and indirect force, rather than upon intelligence to discover and cling to what is right'' (Dewey 1932, LW 7: 231; quoted in Pappas 2008, 285). He is cognizant of the fact that there are few situations in which all inquirers are willing to set aside their private interests or the moral doctrines they hold to be absolute. And he did not deny that sometimes the obstacle to inquiry is the reactionary adherence to tradition:

> "[T]he influence of tradition is two-fold. On the one hand, it leads to effort to perpetuate and strengthen the conditions which brought it into existence. But, on the other hand, a tradition may result in habits that obstruct observation of what is actually going on" (Dewey 1939, LW 13: 102).

When Dewey reconstructed Peirce's "method of science" into his "logic of inquiry" he was not, as it is sometimes claimed, guided by a romanticized ideal of scientific practice. Dewey was well aware of the "power plays" in the history of science as in any other human institution (Putnam 1994, 173). Yet he refused to draw from this diagnosis any defeatist conclusions, and defended the view that even under highly non-ideal circumstances "it makes sense to have a *normative* notion of science" (1994, 173). In cases where social conflict threatens to disrupt the pursuit of inquiry, all Dewey can say is that there are good reasons to at least keep on trying and to avoid the use of "power plays" – force, violence, and exclusion (Pappas 2008, 285).

It may seem frustrating that Dewey never addresses the issue of incommensurability and never specifies any criteria for determining when individuals have to be excluded from inquiry. There isn't in Dewey's ethics a fixed threshold of rationality or intelligence that a participant in inquiry must surmount. Unsurprisingly, the reason for this vagueness lies in Dewey's anti-foundationalism, which forbids him to impose such thresholds *a priori* on the conduct of inquiry. When Dewey speaks of the normativity of the "logic of inquiry," he is not suggesting a deterministic sort of meliorism that materializes in any case, regardless of whatever contextual obstacles (conflict, deep disagreement, etc.) there may be. To think *a priori* that there is always a solution to our moral dilemmas would amount to what he calls the "intellectual arrogance" of knowing the good endpoints – infallible solutions, notions of ultimate rationality, stable consensus, Aristotelian *Eudaimonia* – in advance. Dewey accepts that there may be problematic situations that,

even in the long, run may not be settled by inquiry.

In this respect, Dewey differs from proceduralists like Jürgen Habermas, with whom he shares the objective to find a politically relevant procedure with normative bite but without strong metaphysical foundations.[110] The pursuit of the ethical enrichment of political liberalism is at the origin of Habermas's project to reconstruct the Kantian notions of "monological" practical reason into "communicative" reason. Unlike Dewey, Habermas asserts that post-metaphysical standards of rationality governing human conduct can be "transcendental," namely if they are reconstructed from what he thinks are the implicit "formal-pragmatic" rules underlying intersubjective speech. Compliance with such rules in our every-day communicative activity, Habermas argues, leads to a speech "oriented to reaching understanding" (*verständigungsorientiert*) (Habermas 1981, 1:288). "[A]nyone who seriously undertakes to participate in argumentation implicitly accepts by that very undertaking general pragmatic presuppositions that have a normative content" (Habermas 1990, 197–198).[111] Dewey's inquiry does not rely on such presuppositions, for there is no room in his naturalism for transcendental certainties about rationality, and about the communicative methods that should be used to act as a rational participant in inquiry.

Dewey, ahead of his time, recognized the problematic connection between fixed notions of practical reason and the subtle patterns of domination that might distort communicative activity. Dewey conceives problem-solving as a process that is not restricted to oral deliberation, but can also involve more contestatory acts of communication, which under Habermas's ideal speech conditions might have to be rejected as "pragmatic self-contradictions." Antonio and Kellner aptly summarize Dewey's open approach to communication and his sensibility for power-imbued discussion:

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110   Although Habermas rarely quotes Dewey, he explicitly credits him in *Between Facts and Norms* for providing the "most energetic" account of the "proceduralist understanding of democracy," that is, the understanding that "the democratic procedure is institutionalized in discourses and bargaining processes by employing forms of communication that promise that all outcome reached in conformity with the procedure are reasonable" (Habermas 1996, 304). Habermas is referring to (Dewey 1927, LW 2: 365): "Majority rule, just as majority rule, is as foolish as its critics charge it with being. But it never is *merely* majority rule (…) [quoting Samuel J. Tiden] 'The means by which a majority comes to be a majority is the more important thing'" (original emphasis). I am not sure whether Habermas's reading of Dewey's inquiry is accurate, for it is not the case that Dewey suggests a criterion of reason that could be used to test the goodness of proceduralist outcomes.

111   During the 1990s, Habermas gradually backtracked from the aspiration that speech-inherent rules can do the full transcendental work. In *Between Facts and Norms*, the transcendental argument reappears in a reconstructed, less categorical form as the "discourse principle:" "Just those action norms are valid to which all possibly affected persons could agree as participants in rational discourses" (Habermas 1996, 107).

"Communication was, for Dewey, a multidimensional process; bodily senses, emotion, empathy, fantasy, ecstasy, and other aesthetic sensibilities and feelings contribute to intelligence. (...) Moreover, while Dewey tended to privilege consensual solutions to problems, he did not consider agreement to be a telos of communication. In fact, he considered conflicting viewpoints to be a matrix of reflective morality. Overall, he suggested a broader and more naturalistic approach to communication and social relationships than is presented in Habermas' theory of communicative action" (Antonio and Kellner 1992, 284).

It is therefore not far-fetched to take Dewey's account of problem-solving as an anticipation of the worry, taken up many decades later by poststructuralists, that "reasonableness is itself a social construction which usually benefits those already in power" (Kohn 2000, 409).[112]

However, despite the lack of context-transcending rules of communication that would help us to determine when intra-cultural conflict is insurmountable or when individuals have to be excluded from inquiry, Dewey's inquirers are not entirely left in the dark when it comes to hard cases. When the members of a given culture inquire about a specific symbol, they do not usually operate from a 'tabula rasa'; rather, inquirers typically operate against the background of a repertory of past problem-solving experience which they have acquired through a lineage of socially transmitted knowledge won in previous inquiries. As inquirers, Dewey argues in this important passage of *How We Think*,

"we do not approach any problem with a wholly naïve or virgin mind; we approach it with certain acquired habitual modes of understanding, with a certain store of previously evolved meanings, or at least of experiences from which meanings may be educed'' (Dewey 1933, LW 8: 214–215).

Inquirers, in their effort to transform an indeterminate status quo, deploy, experiment upon, adjust, or even reject old "habits" funded by previous experience. Habits, as a matter of fact, are themselves cultur-

112   Margret Kohn, in her critique of Habermas's discourse ethics, argues that language itself "is constituted by a fundamental instability and determined by prior relations of power," which entails that "the structure of language itself undermines the possibility of fully determined meaning" (2000, 410). Any difference-friendly and normatively enriched conception of proceduralism, Kohn argues, must commence with "jettisoning the epistemological privilege of [oral] discourse as a way of resolving social conflict" (2000, 424). In a similar vein, Chantal Mouffe advocates an institutional configuration of democracy that gives room to a repertory of communicative agency that neither "eliminates passions nor relegates them to the private sphere in order to make a rational consensus possible, but mobilizes those passions toward the promotion of democratic design" (Mouffe 1999, 755–756). For a general account of the parallels between postmodern thought and Dewey's inquiry, see Bernstein (1992).

al outcomes.[113] They confer stability and predictability to the coordination of human transactions and provide us the experiential resources to anticipate and avoid many problematic situations. To a certain extent, habits convey guidance for the conducting of problem-solving inquiry which the universe cannot provide (in terms of transcendental reference-points, say, of rationality). Note, however, that habits are also not cast in stone. Once they fail to withstand the disruptive challenge of indeterminacy, they become subject to reflective review and reconstruction. Thus, each successfully conducted inquiry has bearing beyond the present. An isolated instance of problem-solving does more than just re-equilibrating the given indeterminate situation; it also gives rise to some kind of an aggregate 'learning effect', namely the disposition to leave behind old moral and epistemic routines of viewing the world in favor of a more effective problem-solving capacity in the *future*.

Seen from this perspective, it is not false to think of culture as a special case of a human association, one that embodies a vast reservoir of problem-solving habits won in a long lineage of instances where individuals brought unstable symbolic meaning back into equilibrium. In the context of the dilemma of essentialism, this point furnishes additional support to the claim that the cultural hybridity of the political sort does not *a priori* foreclose cultural normativity in the sense required by multiculturalism. In particular, it sheds new light on the Benjaminian-Arendtian argument that the past has bearing for the future – an argument we have encountered in Chapter 2 in the discussion of theorists like Nikolas Kompridis who bemoan the past-denying inclination of discourses of hybridity. The fear of Kompridis, to recall, is that "once we have exposed cultures as imaginary constructs and the boundaries that maintain them as inherently exclusionary and repressive, we no longer have any (good) reason to preserve our cultural identifications and attachments" (Kompridis 2005, 326). But if we accept Dewey's connection between culture, inquiry, and norm-production, there is no longer any reason to fear that the past becomes insignificant under circumstances of hybridity, or that drawing on the past must appear like a conservative, anti-modern act. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Cultural hybridity in its political and hermeneutic facets is both the outcome and the condition of processes of inquiry. And as we have just seen, inquiry is never conducted in a sanitized historical vacuum, but is inevitably enmeshed with habits elaborated in the past. The past determines to a significant extent the way encultured beings tackle the experience of indeterminacy. Past habits, although fallible, are the only guidance we have in our present procedural endeavors to reach a more balanced, and therefore more valuable, future.

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113   "Habit is the mainspring of human action, and habits are formed for the most part under the influence of the customs of a group" (Dewey 1927, LW 2: 334).

Can Culture Be Epistemically Valuable?

A noteworthy alternative to my Deweyan approach to cultural norma-tivity has recently been proposed by theorists that deem Dewey's meta-physics of ethics too demanding and therefore unpersuasive (see es-pecially Clanton and Forcehimes 2011). I want to briefly address their argument from the perspective of Dewey's naturalism.

The proposition is to frame the normativity of culture based on a different reading of pragmatism, one that is indebted to the episte-mology of Charles Sanders Peirce. Instead of putting the normative implications of cooperative inquiry at the center of the argument, Clanton and Forcehimes believe that cultural normativity is a function of what they call, following Mills, a culture's instrumental contribu-tion to "perspectival diversity." Drawing essentially on the interpreta-tion of Peirce's epistemology in the thought of Cheryl Misak and Rob-ert Talisse,[114] Clanton and Forcehimes make the case of an epistemic justification of a "modest multiculturalism." Like Misak and Talisse, they assume that individuals who believe *p* endorse, by the very fact of believing that *p* is true, a set of moral virtues which they believe are not "reasonably rejectable" (2011, 167). Among these tacitly endorsed vir-tues is, as the authors emphasize, an attitude of "epistemic humility" (2011, 170), which includes the willingness to expose *p* to dissenting and unfamiliar reasons as well as the willingness to revise or abandon *p* if it fails to stand up to critical inquiry. In a second step, the authors argue that these commitments have political consequences. Laws and institutions that support the realization of these epistemic commit-ments are justified. Hence, insofar as cultural groups are purveyors of perspectival diversity, i.e. as they yield opportunities to subject one's beliefs to alternative, unorthodox epistemic reasons, so the argument concludes, a democratic state may have a reason to preserve and foster cultural life forms. Cultural groups, then, "are rightly seen as instru-mentally valuable, at least insofar as they are epistemically valuable" (2011, 176–177).

According to Clanton and Forcehimes, the epistemic justifica-tion of multiculturalism they offer is not only "distinct from," but also "less problematic than, the usual justificatory stories offered by most contemporary theorists of multiculturalism" (2011, 178). This claim, which has to be understood in the light of the cleavage between the Peircean and Deweyan foundations of normativity, is currently sub-ject to an intense debate and I have no intention here to take a stand

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114   Clanton and Forcehimes are essentially drawing on Misak's (2000) and Talisse's (2007) re-construction of Peirce. The latter, in particular the thesis that Peirce's pragmatism allows for a theory of justification that is less substantive and therefore more compatible with Rawlsian liberalism than Dewey's, has prompted criticism. See, for instance, Lever (2015; see also Talisse's reply in Talisse 2015), MacGilvray (2014), and Bacon (2010).

on this issue.[115] The point I want to take issue with is the reductionist premise that normativity is reducible without a reminder to epistemic considerations of perspectival diversity.

From the perspective of the experiential starting point set out earlier in this chapter, the portraying of culture as an essentially epistemic device misconstrues moral life. *Where* do advocates of this position derive the confidence from that what is valuable about cultures is reducible to the realm of epistemology? What authoritative perspective gives us the right to *a priori* privilege epistemic over non-epistemic categories of moral life? Do people really identify with their culture because of its contribution to sufficient perspectival diversity? For Dewey, that's not how moral life works. Dewey would question the move of starting normative theorizing from the assumption that there is one *single*, homogeneous source of normativity, namely the presumptive good of sufficient perspectival diversity. For Dewey, the moral good cannot be known in advance – it is always a consequence of human association, an *achievement* of individuals engaging in problem-solving inquiry.[116] As a naturalist, Dewey rejects the Humean demarcation between epistemic facts and values. For Dewey, facts and values are always *entangled* in our experience of the surrounding world. Dewey repeatedly argues that the fact-value dichotomy is not just arbitrary, but also a symptom of a false sense of comfort and security when we make evaluative claims about things. What Dewey attacks is the tendency of philosophers to *ascribe* moral characteristics to courses of action from a spectator point of view. Dewey was particularly allergic to Benthamite utilitarians and their appraisal of actions on the basis of anticipated utilities. To value things on the basis of epistemic extrapolation, as he argues in strong terms, reflects the "intellectual arrogance" (Dewey 1919, MW 11: 51) of claiming to transcend the complexity of our moral experience and to know *a priori* what goods are worth to be strived for.

This is not to say that cultures may never be epistemically valuable. For the moral realist, epistemic assessments certainly *do* constitute an important dimension of morality. However, it is not the only one, and not necessarily in the sense thought of by political liberals who invoke Peirce's pragmatism as a post-metaphysical foundation for the purpose of justifying a specific political agenda. There is, as Dewey's naturalism teaches us, room for a conciliation of epistemic and ethical reasons in multiculturalist thought. But that presupposes that we depart radically from the picture of cultural normativity presented by Clanton and Forcehimes (2011).

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115   For a meta-critique of the quarrel between Peircean and Deweyan accounts of normativity (in the context of the Rawlsian "problem of justification"), see Festenstein (2010c; 2010a) as well as Talisse's (2010b) and MacGilvray's (2010) rejoinders.

116   ''Morality is a continuing process not a fixed achievement. Morals means growth of conduct in meaning'' (Dewey 1922, MW 14: 194).

From a Deweyan perspective, the possibility of valuing cultural life forms requires that we start thinking about a more organic relationship between cultural epistemology and cultural ethics. If we want to remain able to speak of culture as a normative entity, if we want to give political weight to the intuition that the loss of a culture is something regrettable, then we must show that cultural facts and cultural values are entangled and highly dependent on contextual circumstances. We must, in other words, think of culture as a community of inquiry that aims at solving problems of human association. Where human beings associate – recall the discussion in the second chapter of this study – there are unavoidably going to be problems; and some disagreements may indeed be incommensurable as Rawls fears. Cultures, to be sure, are no exception to this. What Dewey so emphatically underlines is the hope that those affected by problematic consequences of human interaction are able, as participants in democratic inquiry, to transform problematic situation into more equilibrate states of affair. If inquiry is successfully conducted, it potentially produces a normative, melioristic outcome. For a balanced, unproblematic situation is better than an imbalanced situation.

Conclusion

The first three chapters of this dissertation were rather pessimistic in tone regarding the possibility to surmount Patten's dilemma of essentialism. In this chapter, I have attempted to offset this pessimism somewhat by setting out the theoretical basis for a reconciliation between the thesis of culture as an inherently dynamic phenomenon and the thesis of culture as being a source of normativity. I have invoked Dewey's writings because I believe that Dewey and the critics of cultural hybridity are animated by the same uneasiness. Both wonder how complex, ever-changing, and potentially discordant forms of human association can be thought of as normative. But in contrast to the skeptics of hybridity and to practically all contemporary multiculturalists I am aware of, Dewey has come up with a remedy against this uneasiness. We have seen that to grasp the full appeal of Dewey's remedy, we should focus on Dewey's ethics and not so much on his political and educational thought – even though it is in these writings where we find his most articulate positions on cultural pluralism. I have argued that the key to the solution of the dilemma of essentialism lies in Dewey's unorthodox metaphysics, which conceives of normativity as an achievement, as an outcome of people's efforts to re-equilibrate their troubled experience in conjoint inquiry. Thus, if we accept the view of culture as a locus of problem-solving inquiry, we do have a vague, but nevertheless serious answer to the skeptic who thinks that hybrid agents cannot be moral patients.

Conclusion

Can hybrid cultures be normative? The purpose of this study was to show under what circumstances this question could be answered in the affirmative. I framed my argument using Alan Patten's "dilemma of essentialism" (Patten 2011, 735), according to which there is a trade-off between the liberal desideratum of cultural non-essentialism or hybridity and the normative defense of multiculturalism. The implicit premise of the dilemma is that hybrid cultures *cannot* be normative, at least not in the sense required by multiculturalism. I came to the conclusion that this trade-off loses its validity once we surrender the 'top-down' view of morality that is utilized in the dominant theories – instrumentalist and non-instrumentalist – of multiculturalism. Once multiculturalists quit assessing the value of culture from the vantage point of metaphysically secured reference points like, in the case of Will Kymlicka, the Kantian imperative of individual autonomy, they gain, without incurring losses to their political and legal agenda, the liberty to work with hybrid, politicized culture concepts that are better in line with the empirical recommendations of modern anthropology. Therein lies not only the chance for a long-overdue reconciliation between anthropology and normative political theory, but also, I suspect, the key to a theory of cultural normativity that does not spring from conservative impulses.

I spent a considerable part of this study trying to explicate the anxiety that animates the dilemma of essentialism. What exactly is the reason that non-essentialist, hybrid culture conceptions are so often thought to be unserviceable within a multiculturalist theoretical framework? The answer cannot be that a hybrid culture is less important for its members' practical identity than a non-hybrid culture. We have seen that even in the extreme event of a culture, in which the intra-cultural balance of symbolic power involves illiberal oppression, for example, to the extent that girls are excluded from public education, there may be sincere allegiances and identifications with this culture. Moreover, the political character of the processes in which cultural meaning is negotiated needs not *a priori* to imply that there is nothing to be valued, as highly instable, symbolically fluctuating cultures may very well be considered as constituting an autonomy-enhancing choice context. The trouble with such cultures in a multiculturalist framework, I have argued, is that they cannot easily be made sense of in the light of the kind of moral theories to which multiculturalists subscribe. As long as the moral premises of multiculturalism remain reliant on moral standpoints that transcend not only the context of culture, but *any* context, cultural groups whose webs of significance are continually evolving are unlikely to be the sort of entities to which

fixated value predicates can be attributed. Hybrid cultures fit uneasily with the ideal-types of choice contexts (Kymlicka) or pre-political Herderian states of harmony (Taylor).

I found in Dewey an ally for the reconstruction of an alternative to 'top-down' views of cultural normativity. Dewey's naturalistic conception of ethics is appealing for multiculturalism because it offers an alternative starting point, one which embraces, without restraint, the condition of indeterminacy. Seen from a Deweyan view, every occurrence of intra-cultural conflict raises, first and foremost, an opportunity for inquiry, which, if successfully conducted, increases in a normatively significant way the problem-solving capacity of affected subjects.

To be sure, it is an entirely different question whether this scenario always materializes, and whether it justifies the sort of group-differentiated politics contemporary multiculturalists suggest. Some readers will no doubt be disappointed that I have addressed the method of inquiry only on a fairly high level of abstraction. It might seem odd that a dissertation about the normativity of culture makes no argument about the political, and especially the institutional implications of the suggested argument. I do have my vague views on this matter – for instance that preservationist policies are hardly compatible with the Deweyan emphasis on the value of transformation – and I intend to steer my future research in this direction. Yet, my answer to the disappointed reader is that before we can start thinking about the institutional implications of a Deweyan theory of multiculturalism, we have to address the abstract question of the possibility of cultural normativity under the constraints of non-essentialism. If this step of the multiculturalist argument cannot be established to our satisfaction, there is no point in pondering about questions of legal and institutional design in the politics of cultural accommodation. Yet undoubtedly, in view of future steps of my pragmatist-naturalist research, a more thoroughly institution-focused examination of culture's normative leverage will be in order; an examination which might take productive cues from the works of naturalists like Philip Kitcher, who wonder about the interplay between problems and institutions in the "history of ethical practice" (Kitcher 2011, 5). What is still missing in the debate of cultural normativity is a demonstration that there indeed *is* a consistent ethical evolution in the ways symbolic conflict is handled within cultures, and that this evolution *is* indeed reflected in the quality of institutions and discourses.

One supplementary comment is in order regarding a parallel readers who are familiar with the multiculturalist literature may now be tempted to establish. The view of taking situated indeterminacy (embodied in the concrete experience of agents) as a focal point of normative theorizing is reminiscent of the 'contextualist' position within multiculturalist political theory. According to Joseph Carens, a multicultural contextualist, "there is no master principle that en-

ables us to determine when we should respect claims advanced in the name of culture and identity and when we should deny them" (Carens 2000, 260). Rather than "simply assuming the superiority of liberal arrangements in every context," Carens argues, "we should take an open-minded stance, trying to think in broad terms about the conditions of human flourishing and the likely effects of imposed liberal institutions in particular contexts" (2000, 261). In a similar vein, Seyla Benhabib pleaded that we should substitute "interactivist universalism" for "substitutionalist universalism." Substitutionalist universalism, which Benhabib ascribes to the Kantian and Rawlsian tradition, "views individuals as generalized, not as concrete, others." Because it "privileges observers and philosophers" over the "narratives of self-identification" of cultural subjects, it fails to sufficiently account for their interacting in "webs of interlocution and narrative;" interactions that, if excluded from the realm of moral theory, prevents moral theory from fully grasping the "otherness of others," those aspects of a person's identity "that make them concrete others to me" (Benhabib 2002, 14; cf. Benhabib 1992, 165). Clearly, Carens and Benhabib share the Deweyan skepticism against the top-down imposition of moral doctrines and their use as purportedly stable reference points against which human conduct can be objectively measured. They also gesture towards an understanding of cultural normativity that does not conceal the concrete experience of the other behind a generic-abstract definition of persons, say, as autonomy-seeking rational agents. In some ways, contextualists reiterate what Geertz regarded as the "first condition for cultural theory," namely that cultural theory

> "is not its own master. As it is unseverable from the immediacies thick description presents, its freedom to shape itself in terms of its internal logic is rather limited. What generality it contrives to achieve grows out of the *delicacy of its distinctions*, not the *sweep of its abstractions*" (Geertz 1973, 24–25 my emphasis).

Like Dewey, the contextualists are reminding philosophers to be wary of the varying effects abstract moral doctrines might cause across contexts. This, however, is where the commonalities end; Dewey's appraisal of contexts – or as he would prefer to call, *situations* – is clearly more radical. For Dewey, situations and the symbolic indeterminacies that characterize them are not just qualifying the validity of abstract moral theory; situations are the very starting point of norm-production in that they appeal us to make use of our intelligence, our capacity to reflectively integrate the "memory of the past, the observation of the present, [and] the foresight of the future" to settle experienced indeterminacies. In Dewey's ethics, it is the engagement in transformative agency that assures "present liberation" and "an enriching growth of action" (Dewey 1922, MW 14: 182).

Dewey's anthropocentric metaphysics, as it seems to me, is the key to an understanding of cultural normativity that considers the occurrence of symbolic indeterminacy and conflict not as an impurity or simply a sign of human failure to be transcended away, but as the very stimulus of potentialities for moral progress. The Deweyan lesson for multiculturalism therefore is a lesson in metaphysical modesty: the assumption of cultural normativity does not come down to an "act of faith" or to an inference from some overarching moral theory. Rather it starts with the minimalist acknowledgement that cultural agents, when they are faced with symbolic indeterminacy, have the potentiality of mobilizing habits aimed at transforming problematic situations into unproblematic ones. When faced with internally contested cultures, non-experiential moral standpoints lose much of their capacity to give meaningful guidance on why this or that form of cultural ontology commits others to act in a specific way.

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