

Liberal ethnicity: beyond liberal nationalism and minority rights

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Abstract

This article tries to make the case for a variant of the good life based on a synthesis of liberalism and ethnicity. Liberal communitarianism's treatment of ethnicity tends to fall under the categories of either liberal culturalism or liberal nationalism. Both, it is argued, fail to come to terms with the reality of ethnic community, preferring instead to define ethnicity in an unrealistic, cosmopolitan manner. By contrast, this essay squarely confronts four practices that are central to ethnic communities: symbolic boundary-maintenance; exclusive and inflexible *mythomoteurs*; the use of ancestry and race as boundary markers; and the desire among national groups to maintain their ethnic character. This article argues that none of these practices need contravene the tenets of liberalism as long as they are reconstructed so as to minimize entry criteria and decouple national ethnicity from the state. The notion of liberal ethnicity thereby constitutes an important synthesis of liberal and communitarian ends.

Keywords: Liberalism; ethnicity; liberal ethnicity; liberal nationalism; minority rights; ethnic boundaries.

The first premise of this argument will be that we must carefully distinguish between two normative planes, the procedural and the substantive. The distinction between these two levels of advocacy is particularly germane to discussions about liberalism and cultural community because most political theorists typically advance a two-pronged agenda. On the one hand, they set forth a model for the optimal organization of the polity, a theory of negative liberty which often seeks an amicable way of regulating competing individual and group claims through state policy and constitutional legislation. Terms such as consociationalism, federalism and liberal democracy figure prominently in such debates (Lijphart 1977; O'Leary and McGarry 1993, pp. 1–40). On the other hand, many theorists nest a positive theory of liberty (to use Isaiah Berlin's phrase) or vision of the good life, within their ideas which sketches an ontological-aesthetic model for social behaviour (Berlin 1958, pp. 13–14). The ideal of individual

autonomy and that of the communally-embedded self are examples (Taylor 1989, pp. 36–9, 390; Taylor 1992).

Within liberalism, there is a lively discussion between communitarian-liberals and individualist-liberals over the form of the good life which ought to be normatively *endorsed* by the secular public sphere – even as there is broad agreement over liberal-democratic fundamentals.¹ Furthermore, within communitarian discourse lies a great diversity of theories about the good.

In this article, I shall distinguish between several varieties of communitarian good: culture, cultural groups, national groups and, in particular, ethnic groups. I hope to demonstrate that liberalism must come to terms with all facets of each type of communitarian good, rather than merely achieving a hazy accommodation with ‘culture’ or ‘community’ in the abstract. Moreover, I shall contend that as we move from cultural group to national group to ethnic group, the challenge for liberal communitarians increases in intensity.

Culture, ethnic group and nation

An initial step in the direction of meeting this challenge is to clarify our terminology in such a way as to minimize the space for semantic ‘solutions’ which skirt logical problems by adopting rhetorical sophistry. As problematic as this may sound, it is vital if we are to expose and surmount the axes of conflict between liberalism and ethnicity. This demands an outline of the differences between our key terms of ethnic group, nation and culture. In much academic literature, these concepts are elided, and the relationship between them is difficult to ascertain. Hence too much empirical and theoretical writing tends to equate ‘nation’ with majority and ‘ethnic’ with minority, all the while subsuming both under the umbrella term ‘culture’.

To a great extent, the recent work of Will Kymlicka, who makes clear use of the term ‘minority nation’, has helped to change this thinking. Other contemporary theorists of liberal nationalism like Joseph Raz, Yael Tamir and David Miller have built sturdy structures upon Kymlicka’s foundation. All have recognized that nations can be minorities within a particular state (Raz and Margalit 1990, pp. 439–61; Tamir 1993, p. 76). However, it remains the case that many political theorists, in tandem with their counterparts in the social sciences, continue to equate ‘ethnic group’ with minority. It seems that only minorities are considered ethnic, a perspective which can be traced to Donald Young’s pioneering study of American ethnic groups, *American Minority Peoples* (1932).

The previous discussion has suggested that the link between ethnic groups and minorities must be challenged. Indeed, it seems that if we are to take ethnicity seriously, we must ask how *majority ethnic groups*

enter our moral universe. Yet this begs the question of exactly what an ethnic group is: in too much normative theory, definitions of the term ethnic group appear imprecise or inconsistent. This task of obfuscation is compounded by the reduction of both ethnic groups and nations to 'cultures'. Notice that I am not claiming that terminological ambiguity can be eliminated – a Herculean task in the social sciences. However, if a strong measure of conceptual clarity is not present, interlocutors in this debate will simply be able to resolve logical dilemmas through semantic manoeuvre, all the while talking past each other.

Let us begin with the nation. Indeed, Will Kymlicka accurately defines 'national minorities' as indigenous cultural units which comprise an 'intergenerational community, more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given territory or homeland, sharing a distinct language and history' (Kymlicka 1995a, p. 18). This definition of the nation strongly conforms to those advanced by writers who work on empirical problems of nationalism (Symmons-Symonolowicz 1985, p. 221; Connor 1994b, p. 96).

However, the same cannot be said for ethnicity. Supporters of group rights like Iris Marion Young and Charles Taylor seem content to speak only of the rights of minority 'cultures' which differ in some way from that of the majority secular culture.² This is too general an approach, one that fails to address the critical differences which mark off various types of cultural group. It is these differences which determine whether a cultural group is ethnic, religious or merely 'cultural'. Not surprisingly, certain cultural groups, notably lifestyle subcultures and religious sects, take more easily to the liberal model of voluntary association. It is not sufficient therefore to speak of liberal culturalism, a theory best suited to forms of cultural association which are not located in a space-time (that is, kinship and territory) segment and maintain few barriers to entry. Instead, we must advance *independent* theories that address more communitarian forms of cultural group, like nation or *ethnie* (ethnic group). Such theories would be called liberal nationalism, a term which is now with us, and liberal ethnicity, which is not.

Of course, some normative political thinkers have recognized the need to specify differences between different varieties of cultural community. Vernon Van Dyke's understanding of ethnicity, for example, is incisive; however his discussion suffers because it identifies ethnicity as a more or less exclusively minority phenomenon (Van Dyke 1995, p. 32). Will Kymlicka, by contrast, has distinguished himself by explicitly using and defining terms like ethnic group and nation, and this is to be commended. Yet Kymlicka's definition of ethnicity does not accord with accepted social scientific conventions. For example, he claims that ethnic groups differ from nations because the former involve uprooted, territorially disparate immigrant groups whereas the latter describe indigenous communities in their homeland contexts (Kymlicka 1995a, p. 15; Kymlicka

1997, p. 59). Kymlicka has certainly identified an important distinction;³ however, few would support using his criteria to distinguish ethnic groups from nations.

Instead, the term ethnic group should be reserved for communities which possess *a belief in their shared genealogical descent* and meet a threshold requirement that distinguishes them from smaller-scale phenomena like clans and tribes or larger ones like pan-ethnies (Francis 1976, p. 6; Smith 1991, p. 40; Van Dyke 1995, p. 32; Weber 1996, p. 35). Ethnicity describes social thought and action based on this putative ancestry. Therefore, what Kymlicka describes as an ethnocultural (or immigrant) group may be more clearly described as a *secondary ethnic group*, while the indigenous entities that he labels minority nations are better referred to as *primary ethnic groups* (Francis 1976, p. 6; Eriksen 1993, p. 12).

Some primary ethnies have attained enough territorial, political, cultural and economic integration to qualify as *nations*, and, of these, some have developed into nation-states. Notice that nations need not possess a myth of genealogical descent, though they require some sense of collective memory and a definite territory.⁴ Ethnic groups, by contrast, need not occupy their homeland, though they require a shared myth of ancestry.

Cultural attributes must in turn be distinguished from both ethnic groups and nations. Most important, cultures can exist without possessing a sense of self-consciousness. For example, most speakers of French, English and other European vernacular languages⁵ did not possess collective self-consciousness until the late medieval or modern period.⁶ No doubt the same could be said for most Chinese Confucians and European Christians in the middle ages. The mass of the population participated in these cultures in much the same way as we interact with modern consumer society: unconsciously.⁷

Hence they participated in a culture and had a 'context' for their lives, but had no related communal *identity vis-à-vis* other groups. Therefore, these broad culture zones were usually unable to coalesce into mass-based social actors (Anderson 1983, chs 1–3; Gellner 1983, chs 2–3; Hobsbawm 1993, ch. 3). In short, tradition does not equate with *traditionalism* – the latter requiring a self-consciousness that is largely to be found in modernity. In this sense, cultural revivals, such as the Welsh revival of the late eighteenth century or the Hindu revival of the late nineteenth, are often modern phenomena, even if the cultures they revived often had a much longer pedigree.⁸

Accordingly, we have no grounds for speaking of cultures as 'synonymous with a nation or a people' (Kymlicka 1995a, p. 18). Instead, what we may say is that cultural symbols *may* function as markers for ethnic and national boundaries while cultural myths *might* furnish the material for group narratives. In all cases, however, the ethnic or

national *community* is the active agent, not the culture. It is therefore all the more pressing that we synthesize liberalism with active communities, and not merely passive cultures. Cultures may offer us contexts of choice, and this may further the aims of liberalism. However, what really ought to concern us is the manner in which liberalism can accommodate communities' *use* of cultural contexts for the purposes of boundary demarcation and mytho-symbolic group narration.

Hopefully, the preceding discussion should make it clear that culture, ethnic group and nation are discrete concepts which are, nevertheless, strongly related. The relationship consists in the fact that both nation and ethnic group are cultural communities. The distinction turns on the communitarian activities of these groups. Ethnic communities are more symbolically exclusive than nations, which in turn are more exclusive than many cultural groups. This suggests that reconciling liberalism with ethnic communities will present greater difficulties than reconciling liberalism with national community, which will in turn be an easier task than synthesizing liberalism with non-segmental⁹ cultural communities.

The cosmopolitanism of liberal communitarianism

The problematic of this article is the relationship between liberalism and ethnic community, one of the most communal forms of cultural group. However, any consideration of ethnic groups inevitably entails a discussion of nations as well, since a state's national project is inextricably bound up with its ethnic conflict management regime.¹⁰

Hence, in our consideration of current liberal philosophies of ethnicity, we must consider theories of both liberal nationalism and liberal culturalism, each of which can yield insights into the way ethnicity has been theorized in liberal discourse. In the process, we shall find that liberal culturalists and liberal nationalists share a similar orientation towards ethnicity which may be characterized as *cosmopolitan* in the broadest sense. This theoretical consensus embodies the following elements:

- 1) Unease with practices of ethnic boundary-maintenance
- 2) A preference for inclusive, flexible and thin ethnic *mythomoteurs*¹¹
- 3) The treatment of ancestry and race as morally retrograde group symbols
- 4) Opposition to *national ethnicity*, despite an affirmation of transnational ethnicity

We shall presently be returning to a discussion of these elements. At this stage, I merely wish to register that, in combination, these principles are in direct conflict with several imperatives of ethnic community.

The cosmopolitan ideal

'A . . . genuine cosmopolitanism is first of all an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other,' remarks Ulf Hannerz. 'It is an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness toward divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity.' Jeremy Waldron adds that cosmopolitans refuse to be defined by location, ancestry, citizenship or language: the constituent ingredients of *ethnie* and nation (Hannerz 1990, p. 239; Waldron 1995, p. 95). Hannerz's and Waldron's exposition of the cosmopolitan ideal harmonizes well with the Hellenic conception of the world citizen which gave rise to the term. Cosmopolitanism has always espoused a principled opposition to ethno-cultural confines, a stance which drew criticism from early nationalist theorists like Rousseau and Herder (Smith 1990, pp. 1–25; Newman 1997, chs 1–2).

Notice that liberal cosmopolitanism is inherently opposed to the concept of the boundary, whether this be in space (territory) or time (ancestry and history). No wonder it has difficulty with ethnicity, which

[W]ith its stress on a beginning and flow in time, and a delimitation in space, raises barriers to the flood of meaninglessness and absurdity that might otherwise engulf human beings. It tells them that they belong to ancient associations of "their kind" with definite boundaries in time and space, and this gives their otherwise ambiguous and precarious lives a degree of certainty and purpose. . . . (Regis Debray, in Smith 1986, pp. 175–76)

In other words, the cardinal issue separating ethnics from cosmopolitans is the status of existential space-time boundaries. Ethnics wish these boundaries to be secure, while cosmopolitans desire to transcend them in the name of either an abstract universalism or a decentred, multi-cultural expressivism.¹² Moreover, the practice of cosmopolitanism and ethnicity are distinctly at odds, to wit, individuals who spend time exploring their own ethnic background accrue less cosmopolitan capital than individuals who commit themselves full time to exotic experience.

The position of liberal cosmopolitans is clear, but where does this leave the liberal communitarian approach to the question of positive liberty? What I wish to suggest is that there exists a liberal communitarian 'consensus' which favours a cosmopolitan variant of the good. Liberal nationalist writers similarly embrace this cosmopolitanism, though they restrict its application within the territorial confines of the political nation.

Now this runs very much against the conventional belief that liberal culturalists and liberal nationalists are communitarian in their orientation towards the good. However, if we examine the relationship

between liberal communitarians and the communities they seek to protect, we must draw the conclusion that their multicultural convictions are ultimately cosmopolitan. This stems from our earlier point that liberal communitarians tend to manifest four tendencies that run counter to ethnic practice:

- 1) Unease with practices of ethnic boundary-maintenance
- 2) A preference for inclusive, flexible and thin ethnic *mythomoteurs*
- 3) The treatment of ancestry and race as morally retrograde group symbols
- 4) Opposition to *national ethnicity*, despite an affirmation of trans-national ethnicity

Let us consider each in turn.

1. Ethnic boundaries in liberal culturalist theory

Fredrik Barth famously pointed out that while population can flow across ethnic boundaries over time, these boundaries tend to remain remarkably resilient (Barth 1969, pp. 20–25). Such symbolic boundaries, or cultural markers, typically include one or more of either phenotype, language or religion. Generally speaking, however, the task of boundary-maintenance tends to rest less with individuals on the frontier (which Barth suggested) than with intellectuals and their institutions, like churches and historical societies, which are often affiliated with major cultural centres (Keyes 1981; Roossens 1994, p. 84). For example, the survival of the Greek language and identity under the Ottomans was intimately linked with the Orthodox Church and its patriarchate, based at Constantinople (Kitromilides 1989, pp. 177–85). In analogous fashion, ethnic revivals were often orchestrated by nineteenth-century romantic intellectuals in major centres of learning, Ludovít Štúr, for example, in Slovakia and Elias Lönnrot in Finland (Smith 1986, p. 136; Smith 1991, p. 67).

The task of boundary-maintenance is central to ethnicity. Without the entry barriers and assimilation pressures which boundary-maintenance entails, members of an ethnic group would not possess markers by which to identify one another. Boundary symbols also serve the ontological function of providing meaning and existential security to ethnic individuals. Michael Walzer has therefore correctly identified the importance of boundaries to the ethnic process. For, as he notes, ‘the distinctiveness of cultures and groups depends upon closure and, without it, cannot be conceived as a stable feature of human life. If this distinctiveness is a value, as most people . . . seem to believe, then closure must be permitted somewhere’ (Walzer 1983, p. 39).

Many liberal communitarians do not rule out closure, yet they are

clearly uncomfortable with it, and are thus quick to qualify it. For instance, while Will Kymlicka appears to endorse Walzer's position regarding the importance of boundaries, he insists, nevertheless, that modern ethnic groups are becoming more like cultural associations than ascriptive communities of birth. Kymlicka, however, is clearly divided on the matter, as he stops short of advocating the inclusion of 'quasi-ethnic' New Social Movements [NSMs] within the multiculturalism paradigm. He also notes that NSMs like gays and the deaf 'are not "ethnic", strictly speaking, since they are not defined by a common *ethnic descent*, but they are certainly "cultural"'. To resolve the terminological ambiguity his statement raises, Kymlicka admits that ethnicity has been defined by descent in the past, but that the normative justification for ethnicity has recently shifted from race to culture (Kymlicka 1998, pp. 95–97, emphasis added).

This begs the question of what now distinguishes ethnic groups from other kinds of historical communities (that is, religious denominations or fraternal orders) or cultural groups (such as gays or the deaf). Kymlicka appears not to have a clear answer here. His interesting comparison with NSMs, for example, seems to indicate that he views these entities as essentially ethnic, even as he avers that, for practical reasons, we may not wish to include them under the rubric of multiculturalism (Kymlicka 1998, pp. 102–103).

Of course, we must be careful to contextualize Kymlicka's thesis. It represents the most articulate liberal attempt, within a century-long tradition, to accommodate ethnic community. Yet Kymlicka's ideas are still very much in keeping with the outlines of the 'cosmopolitan' model of ethnic relations first sketched by American Liberal Progressives of the 1900–1917 period as a reaction against Anglo-Protestant ethnic nationalism.¹³ Indeed, one can argue that this form of anti-nationalism continues to play a central role in contemporary multiculturalism discourse (Bonnett 1997, pp. 173–92; Ceaser 1998, pp. 139–55).

Not surprisingly, the new cosmopolitan approach was a hybrid one, featuring both universalist and particularist aims. It thus represented a fusion of melting pot and mosaic, individualism and collectivism. The particularist aims of the Liberal Progressives included:

1. *An opposition to the Anglo-conformist (though not liberal-modern) assimilation of immigrants*, as this was seen to denigrate the immigrants' culture and self-worth, as well as to retard the onset of cosmopolitan civilization;
2. *A celebration of the cultural diversity introduced into the United States through immigration*, both in its own right, and as a 'contribution' to the American whole. This philosophy was incarnated in Jane Addams' immigrant 'labor museum' at the Hull settlement house during 1905–10, which helped to cultivate immigrant arts, crafts and

history. This, she hoped, would reduce alienation between immigrants, their children and their new society (Carson 1990, pp. 105–109). A corollary of this is that the Liberal Progressives, joined after 1910 by American ecumenical Protestant leaders, opposed immigration restriction (embodied in American Acts of 1912, 1917 and 1924) (Davis 1967, p. 93). In fact, it is interesting to note that they were among the only Anglo-Americans to defend immigration on egalitarian grounds (Miller 1958, pp. 291–92).

Added to the Liberal Progressives' pluralism, however, were several universalist prescriptions:

1. *An endorsement of inter-ethnic contact and hybridity.* Immigration, cross-cultural interaction and inter-ethnic marriage were considered advantageous for society and conducive to richer and higher levels of civilization. 'The dangerous thing,' declared John Dewey in 1916, 'is for one factor to isolate itself, to try to live off its past and then to impose itself upon other elements, or at least to keep itself intact and thus refuse to accept what other cultures have to offer' (Lissak 1989, p. 156);
2. *A vision of a cosmopolitan civilization* to which all cultures would make a contribution. 'Symphony', 'quilt', and, surprisingly, 'melting pot', were metaphors that were used, often interchangeably, to characterize this hoped-for state of affairs¹⁴ (Gleason 1992, pp. 13–22). As Randolph Bourne put it, the immigrants were 'threads of living and potent cultures, blindly striving to weave themselves into a novel international nation, the first the world has seen' (Bourne [1916] 1964, p. 120).

Hence the new cosmopolitan philosophy of ethnic relations valued the diversity brought by the ethnic *culture* of the immigrants and sought to protect it, yet viewed the practice of ethnic *community* with distaste. This creed also elaborated a vision of the United States (and the world), which strove to integrate these ethnic cultures into a cosmopolitan whole – without somehow ironing them into uniformity.

Today's multiculturalism is less equivocal about its cosmopolitan goals than its pluralist predecessors. However, the statements of its practitioners bespeak an identical result. For example, Stanley Fish, Will Kymlicka and other liberal multiculturalists all refer to multiculturalism as a form of equitable inclusion, not separation (Glazer 1997, p. 20; Fish 1998, pp. 69, 73). Kymlicka's attempt to harmonize multiculturalist ideals with Jeremy Waldron's cosmopolitanism provides further evidence of this liberal culturalist 'consensus' (Kymlicka 1995b, pp. 8–9). Furthermore, there exists a general endorsement of inter-ethnic marriage as a positive indicator of integration, a posture which orthodox pluralists like

Horace Kallen would abhor (Kallen 1924, p. 122; Kymlicka 1998, p. 20). Add to this the recent vision of the American nation as a 'kaleidoscope' or 'multiply-constituted' entity, and we arrive at a complete restatement of Liberal Progressive cosmopolitanism (Fuchs 1990; Smith 1997).

The upshot of this discussion is that there is a great difference between a *communitarian* multiculturalism of discrete ethnic groups, and a *cosmopolitan* multiculturalism of hybridized individuals. The latter preserves ethnic *cultures* and their national containers, but not ethnic boundaries – or, by extension, ethnic *communities*.

2. The challenge of ethnic myths and symbols

Ethnic boundary symbols, despite their power, constitute a mere subset of a much larger complex of symbols, myths, images and historical narratives that some have called the ethnic *mythomoteur*. The mythomoteur of an ethnic group thus includes not only the group's symbolic boundary criteria, but all the elements of its Weberian 'ideal type'. This is a culture complex which no one member, past or present, male or female, could ever hope to fulfil. For instance, a Caucasian phenotype, Protestantism and the Afrikaans language are boundary symbols of Afrikaner identity. However, living a rural lifestyle, playing rugby, participating in *Nachtsmaal* and consuming *bok* are not boundary markers, though these items form part of the ethnic mythomoteur that differentiates Afrikaners from other ethnic groups.

Similarly, in mythic terms, ethnic groups are wedded to particular ethno-histories (oral or written), which tell stories about the group's origin, travails and golden age, just as its 'ethnic maps' outline the group's homeland in all its poetic contours (Smith 1986, ch. 8). Over time, particular stories and figures come to be welded together into a single *gestalt* (Hutchinson 1987). Think of the Greeks' fusion of classical, Byzantine and independence myths, or the Japanese, with their blend of medieval Samurai mythology, Shintoism and post-Meiji national history. In both the symbolic and mythic cases, there appears a synergy between members' activities and intellectuals' (selective) ethnic interpretation. In this sense, ethnicity manifests a drive towards selection, particularity and differentiation.

The problem for liberalism, at least in its Rawlsian guise, is that the ethnic drive towards differentiation results in symbolic inequality between those who possess many ethnic traits and those who possess (or subscribe to) fewer. A French woman with an Italian surname might feel less French; a Jew who does not believe in the Masada myth less Jewish; a non-Welsh-speaker less Welsh; an Italian who dislikes Italian food less Italian, and so on. The more symbols that ethnicity values as distinctive, the greater the possibility of symbolic inequality, particularly with respect to new entrants.

The liberal pressure, in this case, is for ethnicity to redefine itself in ever more inclusive terms so as to minimize the alienation of those with low ethnic capital and ease the acceptance of new entrants into the group. For instance, secular, converted or intermarried Sikhs would like to redefine their group mythomoteur in a thinner way in order to minimize their estrangement from the group ideal-type. The problem for ethnicity, however, arises when liberal pressure to strip the mythomoteur of offending elements contributes to a thinning or universalization of the ethnic group, thereby diminishing its distinctiveness.

Liberal culturalists have overwhelmingly responded to the challenge of mytho-symbolic differentiation by declaring that mythomoteurs are flexible, evolving entities that can always accommodate change in their content. This argument has been strongly elaborated by Chandran Kukathas, who argues that ethnic groups are ‘mutable historical formations-associations of individuals’. Their symbolic content is thus ‘constantly forming and dissolving’ (Kukathas 1995, pp. 232–34). And, as Alan Patten notes, ‘[Yael] Tamir, [David] Miller, [Joseph] Raz and [Will] Kymlicka all take pains to emphasise that changes in the *character* of a community are consistent with the continuity of a rich and healthy cultural structure . . .’ (Tamir 1993, pp. 48–53; Miller 1995, p. 127; Patten 1999, p. 9).

First of all, it should be noted that these liberal nationalist authors are all subscribing to a highly constructivist interpretation of ethnic behaviour that is extremely contentious in empirical terms.¹⁵ More important, what these liberal communitarians fail to appreciate is that while ethnic symbolism has historically evolved and changed (somewhat), this does not mean that ethnic group members were *open to change*. Typically, where change has occurred, this has been the result of an unforeseen shock brought about by conquest or élite diktat. Changes of religious markers are one example. The Christianization of Europe, the Islamization of North Africa and parts of South Asia – these events were not foreseeable and usually swept across all the ethnic groups in their path. Thus they did not alter neighbours’ ethnic differentiae. In some cases, that is, pagan Chazars into Jews, Zoroastrian Persians into Shi’ites, Bosnian Bogomils into Muslims, key ethnic markers were affected. However, these were exceptions, and occurred in an age when ethnic groups were often only loosely integrated, if at all.

Moreover, at the time, the institutional sinews of collective memory were weak enough to permit a great deal of collective amnesia. When one’s history is orally transmitted and society hierarchical, changes can easily be recast as ancient traditions or eternal truths. Yet in the modern age of institutional reflexivity – an age of videotape, DNA tests, newspapers and computer databases – the capacity for groups to credibly believe that recent cultural changes are time-honoured traditions has been markedly diminished (Giddens 1991, pp. 20–21, 149).

The lengthening of society's time horizons has been accompanied by an attendant expansion of cognitive space. Hence, for the great number of individuals whose horizons have expanded with global communications and capitalism, cultural options from the outside world become easily identifiable as foreign in origin. An English word like 'television', even if borrowed, as in the Japanese 'terebi', remains identifiably English, where once it might have been passed off as an authentic Japanese inheritance going back into the mists of time. In a modern, reflexive age therefore, symbolic changes become much more problematic as the 'scope for invention' narrows (Zimmer 2000).

The point here is that ethnic groups have not been, and do not wish to be, 'cosmopolitan, and embrace ... cultural interchange ...' (Kymlicka 1995b, p. 8). Change has been thrust upon them in times of stress, and that change has often involved symbols that were not key boundary markers, and which rapidly became hallowed by tradition. So the dominant outlook has been communitarian, not cosmopolitan. Today, cultural change cannot be so easily forgotten, and this means that ethnic behaviour will translate into a more (not less) strident protection of the cultural content of the group's mythomoteur. This is especially true for the subset of symbols, often language, religion, territory and sometimes race which are widely viewed as central to group identity.

At this point, many would challenge the contention that ethnicity is in some way incompatible with a modern orientation of freedom, mobility and experimentation. Many would, in fact, claim the reverse: that the flourishing of ethnicity in a modern age is related to its syncretistic adaptability. Unfortunately, this postulate is rarely buttressed with empirical cases. Indeed, a closer examination of historical and contemporary evidence reveals that cosmopolitan borrowing tends to undermine ethnicity. This is not to say that traditional practices have remained static for successful ethnic groups, but traditional symbols – particularly boundary markers – have remained largely immune to change. Where large-scale borrowing has occurred, ethnic groups have tended to dissolve.

'The Phoenician case,' remarks Anthony Smith, 'highlights the importance of religious and cultural syncretism in the ancient world as a major cause of ethnic absorption and dissolution.' In ancient Assyria, an imperial policy of deporting conquered ethnies to the cultural centre and encouraging mass mixture abetted this process (Smith 1986, pp. 100–101). Ethnic dissolution has been extremely common in all periods of history, and has swept away both superordinate groups like the Assyrians, Romans, Normans and Burgundians, and subordinate ethnies like the Cornish, Wends, Polabs and Pruz. In our time, one can make a strong case that European ethnicity in the United States is experiencing a similar trajectory, that of dissolution, under the pressure of cultural mixture and individualism.

For instance, prior to the 1960s, endogamy rates among American Catholics and Jews were roughly 90 per cent. This has fallen to under 50 per cent today. Among Italian-Americans in 1980, 95 per cent of those over the age of 65 were of unmixed background. Among the same population under five years of age, less than 20 per cent could claim a singular Italian heritage. With regard to northern European groups, the degree of blending is further advanced, to the extent that these groups were between 60 and 90 per cent mixed by 1980. Some believe that ethnicity has adapted to the mixing process by taking on a 'symbolic' character, thus allowing for an 'optional' ethnicity based on selecting from one's mix of ancestries. On the other hand, an equally plausible contention is that symbolic ethnicity merely represents a staging post on the road to ethnic dissolution.

Richard Alba's research in upstate New York on individual identity and mixed heritage thereby led him to comment that, 'In the long run, intermarriage *does* diminish ethnic identity' (Lieberson and Waters 1988, pp. 234–35; Alba 1990, pp. 14–15, 68, 205–6, emphasis added; Gans 1994, pp. 579–80). Ethnic mixture has likewise failed to bolster the Anglo-Saxon charter group, for, as one American historian of WASP ancestry writes, the Anglo-Protestants have largely dissolved their identity within the wider, more amorphous 'white' category (Wright 1976, p. 59; 1999).

Now, one cannot deny the utility of some cultural borrowings for ethnic groups, but these have tended to conform to the 'Eastern spirit, Western technology' model. In other words, borrowing tends to be restricted to matters of technique rather than symbol. Typically, the process begins with modernizers who wish to raise their group from its 'backward' position to catch up with the 'advanced' status of the 'superior' group (that is, the West in the modern era). But this initial modernizing thrust is usually followed by a counter-movement of ethnic revivalism (led by the *ressentiment* of romantic intellectuals) which seeks to 'transvalue' the formerly demeaned values of, say, rural backwardness into positive virtues like rural purity and authenticity. In the process, cosmopolitan borrowing is rejected in favour of cultural exchange with the group's native past. We can trace this process from its beginnings in late eighteenth-century England and early nineteenth-century Germany (both oriented against France) to Eastern Europe, Asia and elsewhere (Smith 1981; Greenfeld 1992; Newman 1997).

Thus in Japan, the adoption of Western technology during the Meiji period occurred against the backdrop of protecting the 'Eastern spirit' of agrarian Japan and 'reviving' a tradition of emperor worship (Yoshino 1999, p. 14). In nineteenth-century Hungary, folk music and art were revived – often with a strong measure of invention – and Magyars looked to an Orientalized pagan past in opposition to Western intellectual trends (Höfer 1995, pp. 72–73). In the Ukraine and Slovakia, not to mention in the Jewish diaspora, nineteenth-century revivalism helped to

institutionalize the ethnic vernacular language, reinforcing this symbol of ethnicity (Pipes 1969, p. 436; Smith 1991, pp. 67–8). More recently, in the Balkans, Bosnian Muslims and Montenegrins, as well as Serbs and Croats, have engaged in linguistic and religious particularism, reinforcing difference through the revival of previously discarded colloquialisms (Conversi 1999, p. 571). In many cases, revivals tend to appear in a recurrent pattern, whenever external influence is strong, to counteract assimilationist pressure. Thus in Korea, traditionalist ethnic revivals occurred in the 1920s, 1960s and 1970s, and in the 1990s (Kendall 1999, pp. 55–72).

This is not to say that cultural change is impossible in modernity. However, it typically involves either a change of symbolic emphasis or the addition of new differentiae to the historical stock. The elimination of core symbols (a process upon which the constructivist argument relies) is much more difficult than the creation of new ones. Turkish ethnicity, for example, has come to focus on Anatolia as a homeland. Yet this does not mean that the idea of a mythical, central Asian ‘Turan’ has been *lost* as a group symbol.¹⁶ Likewise, Quebec’s Quiet Revolution did not result in the *ejection* of the rural *habitant* or Catholicism as symbols of Québécois ethnicity – these remain important ethnic symbols, even though they are not central to the nationalist project. In these cases, and in many others, the traditional content of the ethnic mythomoteur remains unchanged, even as the accent is placed on different symbols and some modern differentiae added. This suggests that cultural change is strongly constrained by historical parameters. There thus appears to be little evidence that large-scale, ‘cosmopolitan’ borrowing is occurring at the level of ethnic mythomoteurs.

What *is* occurring is a division between cosmopolitanism (usually in the guise of Westernization) and ethnicity, between those who wish to yield ethnic particularity in order to accommodate a measure of liberalism and Western culture, and those who wish to resist these influences. Ethnic fundamentalists tend to be in the minority, but the hybridized majority are not under any illusions that Michael Jackson or Coca-Cola are ethnic symbols. Such individuals have come to an accommodation *between* foreign and native influences, and their spokespeople wish to do the same.

Now, I do not wish to suggest that synthesis between ethnicity and liberalism cannot occur. This is something to which I shall later return. At this point, I merely wish to underscore the idea that cultural borrowing has become much more problematic because ethnic groups’ capacity for amnesia and isolation has been progressively eroded by modernity.¹⁷ This means that, *pace* current liberal communitarian thinking, cultural content counts. Whether it be the struggle for a historic Estonian *territory*, the defence of the French *language*, the assertion of a dominant Hindu *religion*, or the blood-quantum rule to protect the Canadian aboriginal *phenotype*, today’s ethnic struggles invariably

involve particular cultural markers. Tamir, Miller, Kymlicka and Raz acknowledge as much when they defend the right of ethnic groups who are fighting nationalist struggles to protect particular cultural symbols from decline (Patten 1999, p. 9).

Overall then, in terms of their prescriptive views of the good life, most liberal communitarians embrace a cosmopolitan perspective on cultural change, one distinctly at odds with ethnic practice. Taken at once, it is difficult to see how their liberal approach to both ethnic boundaries and mythomoteurs can defend against the erosion of actual cultural structures. As Seglow remarks with respect to Will Kymlicka's work:

Perhaps national cultures are merely loose assemblages of options . . . But, if so, it is unclear what meaning there is to the cultural structure existing over and above these options. For, unless it is, in some sense, substantive it is unclear how there can be a cultural structure which is vulnerable or viable. It is also unclear how an aggregate of options can provide the orientation which culture is supposed to give (Seglow 1998, p. 969).

3. Ancestry and race as ethnic symbols

The problems that ethnic boundaries and mythomoteurs pose for liberals are also related to ancestry and race. These can act both as ethnic boundary symbols (that is, American blacks, white Rhodesians) or constitute a less integral part of a group's mythomoteur (that is, Jews' descent from Abraham). For liberal culturalists and liberal nationalists alike, ancestry and race clearly have no constructive role to play in modern liberal theory. For, as Kymlicka writes:

Descent-based approaches to national membership have obvious racist overtones, and are manifestly unjust. It is indeed one of the tests of a liberal conception of minority rights that it defines national membership in terms of integration into a cultural community, rather than descent . . . Membership in an ethnic group is not something fixed at birth by one's genes: it is a matter of socialisation into, and identification with, a way of life – a sense of membership and belonging in a historical community (Kymlicka 1989, p. 225; Kymlicka 1995a, pp. 22–4; Kymlicka 1998, p. 95).

Here again, we must return to an earlier point. If ethnicity is not about shared ancestry, why the need to specify that 'ethnocultural' groups and 'polyethnicity' do not involve 'ethnic descent'. The problem is that Kymlicka is trying to square a circle. He knows that the empirical record shows an extremely close relationship between (putative) descent and what we understand as ethnicity, yet his liberal convictions will not

allow him to endorse this definition of the term. In practice, however, he, along with other liberal culturalists, defends actual descent-based ethnic movements against the universalism of societies where descent is a less significant principle of social organization. In this manner he is endorsing the practical advancement of the very principle (descent) that he abhors.

With respect to race, a similar conundrum prevails. There are examples of trans-racial ethnicity (Cape Coloureds, Mauretanian Moors, and, to a lesser extent, Jews, Latin Americans and Arabs), but, generally speaking, where long-distance migration has brought physically identifiable groups together, race has been used as an ethnic marker (Horowitz 1985, pp. 41–5; Van den Berghe 1995, pp. 395–68). In many cases (that is, Afrikaners and Xhosa, Malays and Chinese, Hawaiians and *Haoles*,¹⁸ Caribbean blacks and whites), phenotype serves as a central symbol. To circumscribe its use could pose a threat to the survival of such groups. Yet, once again, to endorse the movements of any of these groups against a more universalist alternative grants legitimacy to the use of race as an ethnic symbol. It follows therefore that to be consistent with liberal principles, Kymlicka's liberal culturalism must sacrifice its defence of contemporary ethnicity in many contexts.

Liberal nationalists like David Miller and Yael Tamir have espoused similar principles to those of Kymlicka with respect to race and descent. Miller, for example, is at pains to stress that a national identity based on 'biological descent, that our fellow-nationals must be our "kith and kin", [is] a view that leads directly to racism' (Miller 1995, p. 25). Tamir is perhaps less clear on this point, but she makes it evident that subjectively-defined, highly voluntaristic nations are distinct from 'peoples', which may be objectively defined in racial or genealogical terms. Tamir also remarks that liberal nationalism is 'mainly characterised by the features [Hans] Kohn had assigned to the western nationalism modeled on the Enlightenment . . . [namely, that it is] . . . pluralistic and open' (Tamir 1993, pp. 65–6, 83).

In principle, there need be nothing inconsistent about liberal nationalists' insistence that nations are not defined by ancestry or race. So long as liberal nationalists do not pretend to defend *ethnicity*, there are few problems. The practical issue, of course, arises because of the link between ethnic groups and nations. Most nations were formed on the basis of ethnic antecedents, and this connection makes it difficult to construct a national project that won't alienate ethnic minorities (Horowitz 1985, ch. 5; Smith 1991, p. 39). This means that liberal nationalist projects will provoke a symbolic conflict unless they thin their symbolic repertoire down to a bare set of ethical and constitutional essentials.¹⁹ Even here, any hint of a connection between particular national tenets and a dominant descent group may set off struggles for recognition rooted in symbolic self-esteem and ethnic status (Horowitz 1985, pp. 216–17;

Taylor 1994a, p. 25). This in turn creates an ethical challenge which liberal nationalism can only answer by either privileging national culture (which betrays liberalism) or abandoning its particularistic elements (thereby neutralizing nationalism).

In a related way, most minority nationalisms draw on the ethnic sentiments of a particular primary ethnic group. The liberal nationalism of Scotland, for instance, leans heavily on the support of Scot Protestants, Catalanian nationalism on ethnic Catalans and Quebec nationalism on *pure laine* Québécois (McFarland 1990, p. 217; McCrone 1992; Kymlicka 1998, p. 96). A corollary of this is that purely state-based nationalisms, whether in imperial Europe in the nineteenth century, or in post-colonial Africa in the twentieth, have generally failed to supplant sub-state ethnic loyalties (Emerson 1963; Smith 1991, pp. 115–16). Even in the post-modern West, ethnic identity and national fervour are correlated, as with the prominence of those of British ancestry in patriotic societies like the Daughters of the American Revolution or the various Legions in Britain, the United States, Canada and Australasia. Hence liberal nationalists must choose between endorsing successful nationalisms (which appeal to ethnic sentiment) or a thoroughgoing liberalism in which nationality remains weak.

Ancestry and race. The ubiquitous presence of these symbols as ethnic markers casts the arguments of both liberal culturalism and liberal nationalism into shadow. Without admitting these symbols into its pantheon, liberal culturalism cannot logically uphold its commitment to ethnic movements and liberal nationalism cannot defend any practical nationalist project. There is no better illustration of this dilemma than the phenomenon of national ethnicity, which occupies the no-man's-land between liberal culturalism and liberal nationalism.

4. National ethnicity

Liberals often align themselves with national demands raised by “underdogs”, be they indigenous peoples, discriminated minorities, or occupied nations, whose plight can easily evoke sympathy. But if national claims rest on theoretically sound and morally justified grounds, one cannot restrict their application. They apply equally to all nations, regardless of their power, their wealth, their history of suffering, or even the injustices they have inflicted on others in the past (Tamir 1993, p. 11).

Tamir's argument is surely sound, and has been ratified by Will Kymlicka, among others, in his criticism of Charles Taylor (Kymlicka 1997, p. 63; Lichtenberg 1997, p. 171). The question that remains, however, is what to do with nations that are also ethnic groups. On this note, several commentators have acerbically remarked that it is far easier

to empathize with 'cuddly minorities' than dominant ethnic groups (Bauman 1995, p. 551; Goodin 1997, p. 357). As a result, liberal communitarians tend to evince discomfort with national ethnicity.

National ethnicity is a concept which has, to my knowledge, never been used. It is not identical to the term dominant ethnicity,²⁰ because dominant groups need not be national in extent (that is, Afrikaners in apartheid South Africa, whites in pre-1980 Rhodesia, Alawis in Syria). National ethnicity, by contrast, refers to primary ethnic groups which have become nations (whether these possess states is irrelevant). In other words, national ethnic groups are indigenous ethnic groups which have established nations (integrated communities of territory, political history, mass culture and mutual obligation) in their ethnic homeland during the modern period. Catalans in Catalonia, Melanesian Fijians in Fiji, the French in France, the Japanese in Japan – all are national ethnic groups.

Examining the map of the world, one finds that while there are essentially no mono-ethnic states, most states have an ethnic majority. Even in 1971, prior to eighteen successful post-1989 secessions, nearly three-quarters of states had an ethnic majority group while in roughly half of the world's states, the majority group made up at least 75 per cent of the population (Connor 1994a, p. 96). This is no statistical coincidence. If we exclude the former USSR, former Yugoslavia, and the special case of the African continent, the homogeneity of the world's nations and the coincidence between ethnicity and nationalism become strikingly evident.

Michael Walzer makes the point that only in imperial cities was 'space measured to an individual fit'. Everyone else in the empire lived in homogeneous territorial units or urban districts (Walzer 1997, pp. 247–8). This situation remains true today. Were we to break the world map down to the level of territorial nations, stateless or otherwise, we would find that very few parts of the world are 'deeply diverse' in the non-territorial, Western sense. Hence, national ethnicity may be considered a remarkably ubiquitous phenomenon, even though the 'purity' of such national ethnic realms is never perfect. Why the link between ethnic group and nation? There are two reasons. First of all, primary ethnic groups (and even secondary ones like the Jews, Greeks and Armenians in the diaspora) often seek to become nations. The result, according to Anthony Smith, is that, 'Though most latter-day nations are, in fact, polyethnic . . . many have been formed in the first place around a dominant *ethnie*, which annexed or attracted other *ethnies* or ethnic fragments into the state to which it gave a name and cultural charter' (Smith 1991, p. 39).

Even in cases where state precedes nation, the state seeks to develop cultural solidarity within its population. Hence, Francis comments that 'national movements have a tendency to reinterpret demotic [political] unity in ethnic terms in order to provide added legitimacy and sentimental

support'. The endpoint of this thinking is national ethnogenesis, as in Mexico with the rise of the *mestizo* myth of genealogical ancestry during 1892–1917 (Francis 1976, p. 348). Notice that the ethnic character of national ethnic groups continues to persist, in the form of ethno-nationalist revival, even after a state has been obtained.

What is surprising about national ethnicity, however, is that despite its ubiquitous presence on the world scene, it has not been adequately treated in either the social science or political theory literature. Liberal culturalist thought, for example, has carved out space for the politico-cultural claims of minority cultures *vis-à-vis* the majority. In a similar vein, liberal nationalism has argued the case for a majority politico-cultural nationalism of the *Gesellschaft* variety.²¹

One is tempted to ask, however, how liberals would view national groups that wish to go beyond politics and culture, that is, *nations which wish to remain ethnic* in terms of their boundaries and the content of their mythomoteur. In other words, once all ethno-nationalist claims have been settled, where is the space in political theory for *ethnicity*? The answer appears to be the same cosmopolitan one suggested by the American Liberal Progressives in the 1910s: ethnic groups shall either transmute into culturally neutral nation-states or integrate into them, losing their attachment (over several generations) to particular ethnic boundaries and specific myths and symbols.

The current state of synthesis

The argument advanced thus far suggests that liberal communitarians have yet to devise a framework for the good life which synthesizes liberalism with ethnic community. Their views are imperfectly liberal, because of liberal nationalists' advocacy of state-sanctioned nationality, and are insufficiently communitarian, owing to their disapproval of the four practices of ethnic community detailed thus far. Even so, one should not take the foregoing to mean that the efforts of these theorists have come to naught, for several important syntheses have been made.

The first such milestone arrived with the advent of the modern nation-state during the French Revolution. By abolishing the hierarchical system of the *Ancien Régime* and replacing the king with the free community as the focus of the polity, the French Revolution produced a larger measure of both community and liberty. The next important development transpired through the work of Herder, who, in contrast to contemporaries like Hegel and Fichte, advocated a world of free, unitary and authentic nations which respect each other's organic particularity. This 'polycentric' scheme of equal respect between peoples represented an advance over 'ethnocentric' models which stressed themes of divine election, superiority and conquest (Herder 1965, pp. 103–10; Smith 1990, p. 1; Hastings 1997; 1999).

In Herder, we find a defence of communal particularity coupled with the liberal advocacy of inter-ethnic respect, a gain for both principles of liberal community. What is missing in Herder's approach, though, is any space for those within the territorial and genealogical community who wish not to identify with the ethnic nation. There is also no room for non-territorial ethnic minorities to exist in the Herderian social atmosphere.

Herderian polycentrism went on to influence Horace Kallen, one of the first prophets of multiculturalism, during World War I. Kallen believed that mutual respect between nations (and federated ethnic groups in the United States) would lead to an international, cosmopolitan worldview – all the while maintaining ethnic boundaries. However, while Kallen's ideas provide more scope for cosmopolitanism than Herder's and allow non-territorial ethnic minorities to flourish in the United States, they fail to carve out much space for the uncommitted individual (Kallen 1924, pp. 67–125).

In the period since Kallen wrote, a liberal-cosmopolitan consensus based upon the contradictions of Liberal Progressive thought has reigned among many.²² Unfortunately, this has frustrated the progress of political theory by offering too many loopholes for theorists to thread their arguments through. Yet there are bright spots in the lining of this grey cloud. One conceptual development is Will Kymlicka's contention that ethnic and national groups can enlarge the array of meaningful choices that a liberal individual can have (Kymlicka 1995a, p. 83). Here the aim of ethno-cultural community and liberty are both advanced, so long as most liberal individuals choose to identify with their group. Charles Taylor's dictum that a recognized ethno-cultural identity can reinforce individuals' self-esteem similarly advances the cause of both liberalism and community. Once again, though, the problem of non-identifiers muddies the waters somewhat.²³

The work of Yael Tamir is of similar importance to that of Taylor and Kymlicka, for it fuses the cultural nationalism of Herder and Kallen with the inclusive liberalism of Hans Kohn, Alfred Cobban and the post-World War II civic nationalist school (Kohn 1946; Cobban [1944] 1969, pp. 188–25; Tamir 1993). Tamir thereby opens up the ethnic boundary to outsiders, without abolishing it. Finally, David Miller's contribution to liberal nationalism, which highlights the role of the nation in reinforcing the structures of trust which sustain liberalism, is also noteworthy in that it renders the aims of liberalism and communitarianism congruent (Miller 1995, chs 5–6).

Unfortunately, what is evident in these recent syntheses of liberalism and community is that the marginal gains to both Goods have been falling. Worse, liberal-communitarians now appear boxed in: communitarian ground can only be taken by yielding liberal territory or withdrawing to the heights of impracticality (that is, content-free ethnicity and nationalism). This suggests that liberal culturalism and liberal

nationalism are now serving as currents of intellectual refinement, but are falling short of a conceptual breakthrough.

Towards liberal ethnicity

Our quest for a significant synthesis of liberalism and ethnicity must begin with a realistic portrait of ethnic community, and it must seek its solutions *within* the complexity of ethnicity, not above it. This can best be achieved by challenging the following four ethnic precepts which lie at liberalism's communitarian frontier:

- 1) Symbolic boundary-maintenance
- 2) Exclusive, inflexible and thick ethnic mythomoteurs
- 3) The use of ancestry and race as group boundary markers
- 4) The desire among national groups to revive or maintain their ethnicity

Taking all four of these ideas at once, we find that they may be reduced to a discussion of two simple concepts: core and boundary. Thus, ethnic communities can be divided into a symbolic core (or mythomoteur), and a symbolic boundary. At the core lies the intersection of the values of those variables (religion, language, myths, phenotype, material culture) which constitute the group's ideal-type. By contrast, at the boundary lie the maximal points of variation from the ideal-type that are permissible before an individual is no longer considered to be a member. A great deal of variation is usually allowed on most ethnic traits, but for boundary traits, there is often little or no variation permitted. Such boundary traits tend always to include genealogy, and often include race.

The question here is: how distinct from the ideal type can individuals be before they are no longer considered to be part of the group? The answer is completely subjective, and depends upon the inclusiveness of the group. Throughout history, ethnic groups have tended to maintain relatively strict boundary criteria, though seldom as strict as those employed in the stereotypes of foreign observers. Germans with Polish surnames, Alsatian-speaking Frenchmen, and Palestinian Christians are all non-ideal-type ethnics who have nevertheless (usually) managed to satisfy boundary criteria. By contrast, Germans of the Jewish faith, Anglo-Americans of mixed race and Armenians of the Muslim faith have typically failed to do so. The constitution of *boundary types*, or barriers to entry, is the weak spot of ethnicity that we have been searching for, and is clearly ripe for liberal reform.

The liberal-ethnic synthesis

The preceding discussion has established that the cultural imperative behind ethnicity seeks to increase the symbolic density of its ideal-type.

However, we also know that symbolic density leads to the alienation of those who do not fit such criteria. In order to surmount this conundrum, what is required is not the reduction of the *ideal-type* down to its most abstract, inclusive symbols, as current liberal theory requires. Instead, it is the *boundary-type*, or entry criteria, which must be thinned to a minimum. To dismantle barriers to ethnic membership while continuing to invest in the symbolic accumulation of the ideal-type is an excellent solution to the liberal-ethnic dilemma. This substantive model thereby represents a synthesis which promises to renew ethnic vitality while upholding the tenets of liberty and equality.

Let us flesh out the idea of liberal ethnicity. Like traditional ethnics, liberal ethnics would seek to expand the symbolic content of their ideal-type, celebrate its distinctiveness through cultural expression and make use of their myths and symbols as an organizing principle for communal life. On the other hand, liberal ethnicity would differ from traditional ethnicity in several important respects:

Ethnic boundaries

Barriers to entry would be minimal, thereby facilitating the entry and assimilation of those who wish to subscribe to the group's culture, ethno-history and identity. There is one caveat, however. Namely, that while entry criteria will be virtually non-existent, ethnic boundaries will be maintained at the symbolic level, and these boundaries will include ancestry and possibly phenotype. Now, it may seem difficult to apprehend the difference between *barriers* to entry and symbolic *boundaries*, but the difference is significant. Barriers to entry rely on absolute ethnic boundary criteria (*no* Muslim can be a Sikh, *no* black can be a Rhodesian). Symbolic boundaries simply privilege particular symbols within the mythomoteur, that is, *a defining symbol* of the Sikh ethnic group is the Sikh faith; *a defining symbol* of Rhodesian identity is the Caucasian phenotype.

In many situations, liberalism and ethnicity will be able to interweave seamlessly among each other. In other words, there will be some demand from Muslims or non-whites for entry into the Sikh or Rhodesian ethnics, which will be granted, yet the symbolic boundaries of religion and race will remain unaffected. Of course, there may come a point when entry barriers will need to be pressed into the service of maintaining credible ethnic boundaries. It is only when this point is reached that hard choices between the 'mutually incompatible and incommensurable' goods of liberty and community will have to be made (Tamir 1993, p. 112).

In the case of a *real* threat to symbolic boundaries (one thinks of the case of the Welsh with regard to language or many Native American tribes with regard to culture and phenotype), barriers to entry could form part of a liberal-ethnic project. The seriousness of any particular

threat could be determined by an internationally-agreed standard which examined the magnitude of such threats based on factors like the rate of symbolic or demographic decline. A firm threshold for boundary loss would need to inform liberals' views on this matter. For example, as the proportion of those who speak the language falls below x per cent of the ethnic group's population, or if the proportion identifying with the ethnic religion falls below x per cent, stronger barriers to entry for newcomers would be tolerated. Such barriers would not be absolute (that is, no non-Welsh speakers), but circumscribed (that is, no more non-Welsh speakers until x condition returns).

This perspective would take some account of the past significance of particular symbols to the group involved, but would generally hold groups to a common standard. In this manner, perceived threats not supported by evidence (such as the apartheid-era Afrikaners with regard to their 'threatened' racial identity or pre-war Sudeten Germans with respect to their 'threatened' culture) would offer no justification for erecting barriers to entry. Furthermore, a liberal ethnic perspective must affirm the primacy of the basic rights of the individual, including a right to culture. Hence, under no circumstances should barriers to entry take the form of threats to basic liberties, for if a community cannot survive without breaching core liberal tenets, no liberal should support its survival.

Ancestry and race

Related to the preceding discussion about barriers to entry is the importance of ancestry and race as ethnic boundary symbols. Contrary to what most liberal communitarians espouse, there need be nothing illiberal about this, so long as barriers to entry are not predicated upon the idea of maintaining a genealogically or racially 'pure' group. Indeed, the danger of racial and genealogical thinking lies not in the maintenance of racial and ethnic particularity, but in the insistence on *purity*, which breeds intolerance, racist inequality, and, at worst, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Once again, this problem can be surmounted by eliminating absolute barriers to entry. With respect to race, for instance, a Chinese individual trying to join the Norwegian ethnic group would be admitted, even as the racial boundary symbol of Norwegian ethnicity remains in place. Only if the magnitude of new entrants became such as to *credibly* threaten this symbol of Norwegian identity would ethnic Norwegians be justified in controlling entry. In addition, this would have to take the form of a qualified, quantitative restriction (that is, no more newcomers until x condition is met), rather than absolute restriction (that is, no non-whites) so as to respect the cultural rights of the prospective entrants.

In terms of genealogy, a related situation would obtain. Thus, we could

imagine an individual of Irish ancestry joining the Jewish ethnic group or a Moroccan Arab joining the French ethnic group. This would come about as the Irishman or Moroccan takes on the history, culture, and, (this is a critical difference between liberal ethnicity and liberal nationalism) the *myth of genealogical descent* of the Jews and French. One might ask: how can someone who is of Irish descent adopt a belief in his descent from Abraham and the tribes of Israel? The answer is that the Irishman will be joining the lineage that (supposedly) emanates from Abraham. This means that he will envisage his genealogical *destiny* as lying, at least in part, with the Jewish ethnic group. The same holds for the Moroccan and his orientation towards Vercingetorix and the Gauls, or Clovis and the Franks. Without the genealogical commitment, the Irishman or Moroccan could never take on a new *ethnic* identity, though they could remain solid members of the Israeli or French civic *nations*.

Naturally, entry criteria must still exist in order that members of an ethnic group can identify each other. However, the liberal ethnic outlook would insist that these criteria be of an easily acquired nature: attitudes, language, lifestyle, dress, or other cues, for example. Once again, no discrimination on the basis of ethnic capital can be tolerated in daily interaction among members. As a consequence of this egalitarianism, the symbolic boundaries of the ethnic community – even if these include race and descent – will continue to be reinforced as the descendants of new entrants readily assimilate to the central values of their new ethnic group.

Mythomoteurs

Another key difference between traditional and liberal ethnicity concerns the status of an ethnic group's mythomoteur, or mytho-symbolic ideal-type. This would serve as a beacon, or resource for identity rather than as a source of exclusive membership. No hierarchy would be erected which discriminates against those who share fewer ideal-typical ethnic traits. To some extent this already operates widely with regard to surnames. Thus Gerry Adams or John Hume are both considered Irish Catholics, despite their English and Scottish surnames. The same holds for Québécois like Pierre-Marc Johnson or Claude Ryan. In terms of religion, there is some room for Christians to be considered Arabs, though it is harder for Jewish Christians to claim ethnic equality.

A truly liberalized ethnicity would seek to actively level such hierarchies based on ethnic capital with the goal of rendering them obsolete. Appearance, religion and surname might remain central to a group's identity, but those who lacked these credentials would be treated as group members of equal standing. Only those who lacked the requisite entry criteria (psychic attachment, verbal cues or some other voluntarily

acquired symbol) would be considered outsiders. Hence, an Iranian who wished to subscribe to Japanese ethnicity need only display a readiness to acquire the Japanese language and myth of ancestry to be considered an equal member.

Here it is crucial to note that this liberal-egalitarian stance must be limited to entry criteria and should not apply to the Japanese mythomoteur (that is, its 'core' of myths and symbols). An Iranian immigrant would be fully justified in demanding that the Japanese *state* declare itself a fluid, multicultural entity in which the Persian culture sits equally alongside that of the ethnic Japanese. However, an Iranian seeking entrance into the Japanese ethnic should have no such expectations. Though he should feel free to express a multiple identity that encompasses both Persian and Japanese ethnic attachments, he cannot expect the ethnic Japanese myth-symbolic core to reduce its particularity to suit him. Cultural borrowing in this realm may emerge as a result of internal Japanese ethnic discourse, but liberal ethnicity does not demand that any changes in the direction of 'thinning' be made to accommodate new entrants.

The liberal ethnic ideal does not demand a universalization of ethnic ideal-types. What it does demand, though, is freedom for members to experiment and create their own individual identities. It thus acknowledges multiple social identities and encourages members to constitute their self-identity by selecting elements from the group's ideal-typical symbolic archive. For some group members, ethnicity will be their most salient identity; for others, this will not be the case – yet all degrees of attachment would be welcomed by liberal ethnics.

Furthermore, the liberal ethnic *Weltanschauung* would wish to see an ethnic group's historical narrative remain faithful to scientific truth, with the proviso that the scientist's default position of doubt would be replaced by a stance of cautious affirmation. However, should science turn up evidence that elements of the group's narrative are, with high probability, based on false beliefs, ethnic intellectuals would discard those beliefs or accept them as creative, but untruthful forms of communal expression.

Naturally, the notion of liberal ethnicity also rejects the ethnocentrism that has traditionally pervaded the outlook of ethnic groups, in favour of the polycentric perspective expounded by pluralistic nationalists like Herder and Mazzini (Tamir 1993, pp. 79–82, 90). Rather than ascribing superiority to the in-group and inferiority to Other, liberal ethnicity would treat all groups as equal, even as it draws qualitative distinctions between them. A reconstructed ethnicity would also seek to mediate between modern and traditional forms, rather than rejecting modern/exotic influences outright. In this manner, liberal ethnic groups would seek to encourage a lively debate between revivalists and modernizers within their ranks (Smith 1981; Hutchinson 1987). Moreover,

they would respect the choice of individuals not to be ethnic. The competition between trans-ethnic 'lifestyle' subcultures and ethnic communities would sharpen the identities of both entities, arguably leading to a revitalization of both.

National ethnicity

A corollary of the previous positions is that 'homeland' (national) ethnicity is no less legitimate than diasporan (transnational) ethnicity. The Malays of Malaysia or Castilian Spaniards of Spain would be viewed as no less ethnic or exotic than their Chinese or Moroccan fellow citizens. Indeed, contrary to what some theorists of globalization imply, transnational ethnicity would not survive for long in a world shorn of ethnic homelands.²⁴ For these reasons, nations should not be compelled to divest themselves of their ethnicity. Instead, members of national ethnic groups should feel just as free as members of diasporan groups to express their ethno-cultural particularity, and both should do so along liberal lines. That is, so long as national ethnicity does not masquerade under the name of the state – which brings us to our last concern.

The separation of nation and state

A final difference between traditional and liberal ethnicity concerns the relationship between ethnicity and the politico-economic sphere. In contrast to many contemporary ethnic leaders, liberal ethnic advocates would attempt to divorce their ethnicity from political and economic claims, striving to divert politico-economic concerns towards relevant political actors like interest-groups or broad-based parties. This should not, however, be taken as an endorsement of the classical liberal position that ethnicity is a purely voluntary matter. The state's official culture necessarily privileges charter groups over others, so it becomes necessary for ethnic minorities to retain some control over cultural matters like education, funded either through tax rebates or public spending. Official recognition of multi-ethnicity is thus an essential part of the liberal ethnic model. Yet such recognition would remain largely *cultural*, falling well short of consociationalism (though this would have to be considered in highly divided societies like Northern Ireland). Ideally, ethnicity would only play a politico-economic role in two cases: a) if the group considered itself the target of explicitly ethnic discriminatory practices, and b) if the group's cultural autonomy was threatened.

A corollary of the above argument is that national (that is, homeland) ethnic groups would abandon the quest to control a state's political structures. This functional divorce would involve nothing less than the separation of 'nation' (specifically, the national ethnic group) from state. Again, a national ethnic group would seek to influence the policies of

the jurisdiction in which its homeland rests only if it were the target of ethnic discrimination by powerful minority groups (Xhosa under apartheid) or if its cultural autonomy were threatened (Welsh). This distinguishes liberal ethnicity (national or minority) from many current ethno-nationalist movements, most of which seek to attain political and economic power, even at the expense of their cultural particularity.

Indeed, in a liberal-ethnic world order, a national ethnic group like the English, shorn of its embryonic attachment to the British state, would be no more opposed to European or global levels of government than their Scots and Welsh counterparts are today. Cultural powers, such as immigration control, linguistic policy and education would remain under the sway of national ethnic groups, though such groups would have to acknowledge the collective rights of transnational ethnic communities within their borders. The status of Åland in Finland might serve as a model in this regard. International norms of *global multiculturalism* would reinforce the collective security of ethnic communities, whether inside or outside their home territory, just as international norms of human rights would continue to safeguard individual rights. In sum, the advent of liberal ethnicity would lead to a considerable revision of current liberal and ethnic thinking, to the benefit of both.

Conclusion

I began this essay by identifying an axis of conflict between liberal communitarians and liberal individualists over the role of ethnic community. Both believe in the core ideas of procedural liberalism, but differ in their vision of the good life. Accordingly, this article accepts the tenets of procedural liberty, but is concerned with the substantive issue of positive liberty – what one ought to do with one's liberty. It therefore attempts to delineate a cultural project which balances the ideals of autonomy and ethnic community.

To do so, I have argued that we must clarify our terminology, specifying the difference between ethnic groups and cultures. We must similarly take care to synthesize liberalism with the practices of *active* ethnic communities, not just their passive cultural products. This requires a theory of liberal ethnicity, not merely one of liberal culturalism. Coming face to face with the reality of ethnicity reveals that much contemporary liberal communitarianism is in fact cosmopolitan. This 'pluralist' creed, originally sketched in the first two decades of this century as an anti-nationalist reaction, champions a multiculturalism of *hybridized individuals*, not a multiculturalism of discrete groups. Progressive liberal culturalism thereby seeks to retain ethnic culture without ethnic community. Therefore, I maintain that liberal culturalism, as it stands, fails to come to terms with ethnicity.

This is not to suggest that no syntheses between aspects of liberalism

and ethnicity have been generated by contemporary political theorists. However, new developments have fallen short of the significant breakthroughs achieved by the liberal nationalists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The notion of liberal ethnicity represents an attempt to generate just such a breakthrough.

It begins by addressing the four features of ethnic community which seem to conflict with liberalism, namely, symbolic boundary-maintenance; exclusive, inflexible and thick ethnic mythomoteurs; the use of ancestry and race as group boundary markers; and the desire among national groups to revive or maintain their ethnicity. Taken at once, this essay contends that none of the above features is an obstacle to a liberal-ethnic synthesis. The key lies in separating the issue of entry criteria from that of symbolic exclusivity. In short, the liberal-ethnic perspective presses the liberal case for ethnic groups to maintain low entry criteria, while backing the communitarian goals of cultural particularism and secure symbolic boundaries.

Hence, so long as we insist on low barriers to the entry of personnel into a group, the demands of ethnic groups for a well-defined symbolic identity may be granted. Furthermore, the use of descent and race as *symbolic* boundaries is not illiberal so long as these criteria inform neither barriers to entry nor a status hierarchy based upon ethnic capital. Newcomers, by adopting the myths and symbols of the ethnic group and attaching themselves to its genealogical history and destiny, can thereby join an *ethnic*, as opposed to a merely *national*, entity.

A final cornerstone of the liberal-ethnic outlook is that ethnic leaders should strive to separate their politico-economic concerns from the state wherever possible. This holds for both dominant and minority ethnic groups. In recognition of this neutrality towards particular groups, states would abandon their 'national' character and adopt a multicultural policy at the symbolic level which privileges no single community. Together with a vision of liberal ethnicity, this would ensure a cultural order shorn of bias in favour of individualism, as in the West, or ethnicity, as in many non-Western societies. This state of affairs thus provides a realistic option for advancing both liberal and communitarian principles.

Notes

1. For example, Michael Walzer distinguishes between a 'Liberalism I' covering basic liberties, and a more communitarian 'Liberalism II' which encompasses collective rights (Walzer 1994, p. 99).
2. Taylor nevertheless qualifies his remarks to emphasize the greater significance of national and ethnic culture (Taylor 1994a, pp. 38, 42).
3. Notably the distinction between indigenous and immigrant groups which underpins claims to national self-determination. For discussion, see Horowitz 1985, pp. 201–203.
4. Clearly, the definition of 'nation' remains contested. Walker Connor, for example,

defines the nation as a 'self-aware ethnic group', while Anthony Giddens speaks of nations as 'bordered power containers' created by the state (Hutchinson and Smith 1994, pp. 34, 45). I prefer to navigate between these positions along the lines set out by Smith—a current of thought which treats nations as integrated communities of shared history, territory and mass culture. Modern nations thus draw upon pre-modern ethnic myths and symbols, though the link may become attenuated over time.

5. This picture was complicated not only by differences of usage between the court and the masses, but also by distinctions based on regional dialect (Haugen 1966, pp. 922–935).

6. To be sure, there were numerous exceptions to this rule, such as the ancient Israelites or medieval French and English (Armstrong 1982, chs 1, 3; Smith 1986, pp. 32–119; Grosby 1991, pp. 229–65).

7. I refer, of course, to consumer society as a whole, not to consumer lifestyle subcultures.

8. On traditionalism versus tradition, see Eriksen 1993, p.101, and Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983. For discussion of cultural revival, see Smith 1981, Hutchinson 1987 and Kammen 1991.

9. Segmental communities are spatially and genealogically delineated units.

10. Here we must distinguish between state-nationalism, or nationalism from 'above,' and ethnic nationalism, which arises from the ethnic group(s) 'below'. Multi-ethnic states usually seek to foster a sense of civic nationalism among their citizens, but this is a more difficult process than the modern transformation of ethnic groups into nations (Plamenatz 1973; Kohn 1994, pp. 162–5).

11. This term refers to the 'constitutive myth of the ethnic polity', used here as being analogous to the ethnic group's myth-symbol complex (Armstrong 1982, pp. 8–9, 293; Smith 1986, p. 15).

12. On the universalism-cosmopolitanism distinction, see Hollinger 1995. The relationship between modern individualism and cosmopolitanism is discussed in Bell 1996, p. 13.

13. This body of thought germinated with the Pluralist ideas of William James and Felix Adler in the 1890s, and, later, engaged John Dewey, Jane Addams and other Chicago intellectuals and social workers. The best treatment of this subject may be found in Lissak 1989. Broadly speaking, the Liberal Progressive model of ethnic relations continued to hold sway in progressive secular and religious circles in the twenties and thirties, and eventually fed into multiculturalism in the late 1960s.

14. Philip Gleason, *Speaking of Diversity: Language and Ethnicity in Twentieth-Century America*, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, pp. 13–22.

15. A sample of the debate between 'instrumentalists', who view ethnicity as constructed for political and economic gain, 'ethno-symbolists', who treat it as a cultural-historical force, and 'primordialists', who consider it a pre-cultural, biological drive, is provided in Smith and Hutchinson 1996, part II.

16. In the Turkish case, the Turanic idea persists in the form of pan-Turkic ties to post-Soviet successor states in central Asia (Smith 1986, p. 134).

17. This argument, related to the rise of 'scientific' history, may be found in Plumb 1969 and Kennedy 1977. A counterargument is that of Anthony Giddens, who contends that high modernity leads to a compression of individuals' time horizon, and hence greater mytho-symbolic amnesia (Giddens 1991). I would point out that this potential mass amnesia (due to information overload) cannot translate into collective amnesia without the consent of symbolic 'experts' in the scientific and journalistic communities. These specialists (collectively) are not overwhelmed by information mass, and their training and information retrieval capacities endow them with an enhanced power to debunk myths that lack empirical plausibility.

18. Hawaiian phrase referring to a white American.

19. This position constitutes the essence of Jürgen Habermas' constitutional patriotism (Habermas 1992, pp. 1–19). A similar argument may be found in Mason 1999, pp. 261–86.

20. Refers to the politically and economically dominant ethnic group in a state (Doane 1997, pp. 375–97; Kaufmann 2000).
21. I refer to the difference between the abstract society of *Gesellschaft*, where social ties are rational and instrumental, and the personal, affective and irrational ties of the local village *Gemeinschaft* (Tönnies [1908] 1957). Ethnic ties may be considered a transmutation of the *Gemeinschaft* principle on to a wider plane, described by Max Weber as *Gemeinsamkeit* (Weber 1996, p. 35).
22. This doctrine emerged as cultural pluralism after World War I, a doctrine which (in soft form) influenced Robert E. Park's ethnic studies school in Chicago from the 1920s. Progressive ecumenical clergyman Everett Clinchy later remarked (in 1934) that the 'more thoughtful among American youth think in terms of cultural pluralism'. David Riesman and his co-contributors made similar observations in 1950 (Clinchy 1934, pp. 175–78; Riesman *et al.* 1950, p. 284; Persons 1987).
23. Kymlicka and Taylor also point to the importance of ethnicity and nations in providing individuals in a liberal society with a cultural context for their life choices (Taylor 1994b, p. 259; Kymlicka 1995a, p. 83). However, I tend to side with those critics who maintain that this argument against cosmopolitan liberalism remains unconvincing (Bauman 1995, p. 545; Waldron 1995, pp. 102, 106–7).
24. Malcolm Waters, for instance, favours a complete de-territorialization of ethnicity, coupled with the hybridization of ethnic homelands and large-scale cultural and demographic intermixture. How this atmosphere can sustain ethnic difference in the long run remains unexplained (Waters 1995, pp. 136–37). The Jews, Armenians and other diasporan ethnic groups do not constitute exceptions to the postulate that homelands are central for ethnic survival. In their case, the *idea* of the homeland, coupled with an important demographic presence there, ensured territorial continuity (Smith 1986, pp. 114–19).

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