

*Identity and the Need for Recognition: The Ontological and Political Specter of Communitarianism according to MacIntyre and Barry, Anthony Vecchio*

***Identity and the Need for Recognition: The Ontological and Political Specter of Communitarianism according to MacIntyre and Barry***



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### I. Canada and Communitarianism

In 1992, Charles Taylor received the Léon Gérin prize for "his extraordinary contribution to the civic and intellectual life of Québec." His intellectual contributions had been wide-ranging – among other achievements, a professorship at McGill University, impressive contributions to moral philosophy, the philosophy of language, social science, political theory, the history of ancient and modern philosophy, and over a dozen book publications. His civic contribution was mostly comprised of his active engagement in the constitutional debate in Canada about the recognition of Québec as a "distinctive society within the federation, reformed in 1982" and the adoption of the Canadian Charter of Rights. His proposal, expressed, for example, in his rejections of both the 1990 Meech Lake accord and the 1995 Québec independence referendum, was of the "recognition" of Québec's distinctiveness, and an asymmetrical and decentralized form of federalism. Québec's exit would imply a shock to something characteristically Canadian, which he called "deep diversity."<sup>1</sup>

Although, in principle, communitarianism is concerned with all kinds of communities, in practice, Canada has probably been the most fertile land for these ideas to develop.

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<sup>1</sup> For Charles Taylor's political engagements, see Stephen Mulhall's "Articulating the Horizons of Liberalism: Taylor's Political Philosophy", in *Charles Taylor*, ed. Ruth Abbey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 113-22.

## ***Identity and the Need for Recognition: The Ontological and Political Specter of Communitarianism according to MacIntyre and Barry, Anthony Vecchio***

Taylor is generally placed among the four horsemen of liberalism's "communitarian" critics,<sup>2</sup> and one more of the "communitarians" who deny the label. One point which distinguishes him from other recent critics of liberalism is his suggestion that ontological questions do not directly play into the formation of a certain kind of government or a particular kind of politics; so that contest between the priority of the right or the good, which typically serves as the point of demarcation between liberals and "communitarians", respectively, is not a test applicable to Taylor in the usual sense. We may get a picture of his political outlook with two considerations.

First, he does not find that liberalism is necessarily wrong in its core respects, although it needs ancillary clarifications. "There is a form of the politics of equal respect", Taylor notes, "as enshrined in a liberalism of rights, that is inhospitable to difference, because (a) it insists on uniform application of the rules defining these rights, without exception, and (b) it is suspicious of collective goals."<sup>3</sup> He rejects this variant of liberalism on both counts, and ancillary clarification would show both how liberalism does not uniformly apply rights, and that it should not be suspicious of collective goals.

Secondly, and on the latter point of collective goals, Taylor is of the mind that the goods captured by a communal analysis – that is, which take some overarching and agreed upon communal norms as the criteria by which something is evaluated as good or bad – are not the only goods which should be taken into account. We can get some clarity on Taylor's suspicion of the suspiciousness of collective goals when he writes:

A society with strong collective goals can be liberal, on this view, provided it is also capable of respecting diversity, especially when dealing with those who do not share its common goals; and provided it can offer adequate safeguards for fundamental rights. There will undoubtedly be tensions and difficulties in pursuing these objectives together, but such a pursuit is not impossible, and the problems are not in principle greater than

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), vii. See also pp. 96-101.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition", in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 60.

## ***Identity and the Need for Recognition: The Ontological and Political Specter of Communitarianism according to MacIntyre and Barry, Anthony Vecchio***

those encountered by any liberal society that has to combine, for example, liberty and equality, or prosperity and justice.<sup>4</sup>

The move here is to emphasize "respecting diversity" in the face of divergent goals, and the protection of "fundamental rights" which allow these different objectives to be pursued in the same society.

### **II. Charles Taylor's Ontology of the Self**

Despite his denials, Taylor may very well be the only multiculturalist with an ontology of sorts. Among the three other 'horsemen' – Michael Sandel, Michael Walzer, and Alasdair MacIntyre – only MacIntyre, in his later stage, starting from *Dependent Rational Animals*, has something comparable to Taylor's ontology.<sup>5</sup>

Taylor's seminal work *The Sources of the Self* has as its starting point an analysis of language. For Taylor, the notion of an "ego" or "self" as a responsible human being implies the faculty to desire as well as the capacity to discriminate between the wishes held in common with other animals and specifically human desire – that is, the desires oriented by our evaluation of them as really desirable or undesirable.

Some human desires are evaluated in such a way that they are rank-ordered as lower or higher, as virtuous or vicious, noble or vulgar, profound or superficial; so humans act as moral beings by exercising that capacity to make a "strong evaluation" about the real worth and dignity of those desires.

The use of this capacity is the background scheme of our moral reactions or intuitions. As Taylor states in a preliminary conclusion in *The Sources of the Self*,

So our moral reactions in this domain have two facets, as it were. On one side, they are almost like instincts, comparable to our love of sweet things, or our aversion to nauseous substances, or our fear of falling; on the other, they seem to involve claims, implicit or explicit, about the nature and status of

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition" p. 59.

<sup>5</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (Chicago and LaSalle: Open Court, 1999), pp. ix-x.

## ***Identity and the Need for Recognition: The Ontological and Political Specter of Communitarianism according to MacIntyre and Barry, Anthony Vecchio***

human beings. From this second side, a moral reaction is an assent to, an affirmation of, a given ontology of the human.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, moral reactions or intuitions are characteristically "instinctive", as well as characteristically driven in the direction of certain ontological claims about what it is to be human. And as "strong evaluators", we have a language rich enough to articulate especially the second of these two "facets" by means of different ontological justifications.

[An ontological justification of this kind] tells us, for instance, that human beings are creatures of God and made in his image, or that they are immortal souls, or that they are all emanations of divine fire, or that they are all rational agents and thus have a dignity which transcends any other being, or some other such characterization; and that therefore we owe them respect. The various cultures which restrict this respect do so by denying the crucial description to those left outside: they are thought to lack souls, or to be not fully rational, or perhaps to be destined by God for some lower station, or something of the sort.<sup>7</sup>

*The Sources of the Self*, as a whole, is an examination of different frameworks that present such ontological justifications of the self and its sources along three axes:<sup>8</sup> (1) views about our relationships with others; (2) a conception of the good life for all human beings; (3) the idea of our own dignity and status as human beings.

It is important to remark that, for Taylor, the self's identity is not just what we happen to think about ourselves – a reductive thesis which would allow us to dispense with what Taylor takes as an inclination of moral reactions to form ontological judgments – but depends on a web of various non-arbitrary conceptions active even in ordinary life:

I want to defend the strong thesis that doing without frameworks is utterly impossible for us; otherwise put, that the horizons within which we live our lives and which make sense of them have to include these strong qualitative discriminations.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Taylor, *The Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 14ff.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 27.

## ***Identity and the Need for Recognition: The Ontological and Political Specter of Communitarianism according to MacIntyre and Barry, Anthony Vecchio***

To reject this "strong thesis" would be to disorient, to put the self out of "moral space."<sup>10</sup> Humans are self-interpreting animals, and the language that we use to articulate our strong evaluations helps to define us. But language is only possible within a community, the self only exists among other selves, and it cannot be described without reference to others.

This is the sense in which one cannot be a self on one's own. I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors: in one way in relation to those conversation partners who were essential to my achieving self-definition; in another in relation to those who are now crucial to my continuing grasp of languages of self-understanding-and, of course, these classes may overlap. A self exists only within what I call 'webs of interlocution'.<sup>11</sup>

The crucial feature of human life is that it is dialogical, that is, identity is defined through the interaction with others whom we consider to be significant others. I am a self, a strong evaluator, and those strong evaluations shape me, but all of this presupposes 'webs of interlocution' which extend beyond my own self. Thus, in "The Politics of Recognition", Taylor emphasizes that:

.... discovering my own identity doesn't mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others. That is why the development of an ideal of inwardly generated identity gives a new importance to recognition. My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others.<sup>12</sup>

What Taylor calls the "naturalist temper", a "reductive thesis" in the sense above which tries do without strong evaluations and to keep simply to our moral reactions and actions, is thus pitted against his notion of 'webs of interlocution,' which are supposed to be crucial features of human life.

### **III. The Good, the Self, and the Just**

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<sup>10</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 28.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 36.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition", p. 34.

## ***Identity and the Need for Recognition: The Ontological and Political Specter of Communitarianism according to MacIntyre and Barry, Anthony Vecchio***

We may take this opposition as the analogue to the usual liberal-"communitarian" point of demarcation, that is, the question of the priority of the good.<sup>13</sup>

This "naturalist temper" thus includes utilitarianism, which abandons all qualitative distinctions and reduces the self to a subject of calculated (or calculable) action, as well as Kantian constructivism, which takes as irrelevant any distinctions based on the cosmic order or ordinary human nature.<sup>14</sup> What has moral value in either case is what is implied by the principles of duty, without any substantive considerations of the good – or, that it unwittingly conceals those substantive considerations in the first place – thus rendering them characteristically universal and non-substantive.

Morality is narrowly concerned with what we ought to do, and not also with what is valuable in itself, or what we should admire or love. Contemporary philosophers, even when they descend from Kant rather than Bentham (e.g., John Rawls), share this focus. (...) [Moral philosophy's] starting point should be our intuitions about what actions are right (Rawls), or some general theory about what morality is, conceived in prescriptive, i.e., action-guiding, terms (Hare).<sup>15</sup>

Now, Rawls' "thin theory of the good" asserts the priority of the just over the good,<sup>16</sup> and as this is the usual point of demarcation between liberals and "communitarians", it is necessary for finding Taylor's functionally equivalent place. Although Rawls' thin conception is useful to fight shallow utilitarianism, wielding such a prioritization as a benchmark may result in the deprecation of any conception of the good. Quoting Taylor:

Where 'good' means the primary goal of a consequentialist theory, where the right is decided simply by its instrumental significance for this end, then we ought indeed to insist that the right can be primary to the good. But where we use 'good' in the sense of this discussion, where it means whatever is marked out as higher by a qualitative distinction, then we could say that the reverse is the case, that in a sense, the good is always primary to the right. Not in that it

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<sup>13</sup> Fergus Kerr, "The Self and the Good: Taylor's Moral Ontology," in Ruth Abbey (ed.), *Charles Taylor*, pp. 84-104.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 22ff.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 84.

<sup>16</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999) p. 347ff [§60].

## *Identity and the Need for Recognition: The Ontological and Political Specter of Communitarianism according to MacIntyre and Barry, Anthony Vecchio*

offers a more basic reason in the sense of our earlier discussion, but in that the good is what, in its articulation, gives the point of the rules which define the right.<sup>17</sup>

So, again, there is a sense in which Taylor finds Rawls' thin conception correct, i.e. in opposition to consequentialism. But, again, this is characteristically non-substantive. This thin liberalism gives full priority to individual rights as the basis for organizing society, and this prioritization affords such a universal political outlook. However, this prioritization neglects what is usually and even sometimes correctly called "the common good"— good precisely in its being commonly shared, commonly good.

Rawls himself tries to identify some primary goods, among which, along with income and wealth, he includes the social bases of self-respect. But he privatizes a rank of goods whose essential value implies sharing and which, on Taylor's analysis, is dialogically constituted – such as a joke told to a group, a public performance of an orchestra, or French conversation in Québec.

Taylor narrates a history beginning with the loss of social hierarchies, which were the basis for honorific and unequal social structures, and ending with the universalist and egalitarian notion of dignity.<sup>18</sup> "With the move from honor to dignity", writes Taylor in *Multiculturalism*, "has come a politics of universalism, emphasizing the equal dignity of all citizens, and the content of this politics has been the equalization of rights and entitlements."<sup>19</sup>

It seems, therefore, that Taylor would qualify as a liberal of sorts, despite a great deal of disagreement about what exactly liberalism beyond some vague references to freedom or individual autonomy. But, as Adam Swift comments, "The problem is that both 'liberalism' and 'communitarianism' mean different things to different people."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 89.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition" p. 26ff.

<sup>19</sup> Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition" p. 37.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), viii. See an attempt at characterizing "communitarianism" in pp. ix-xii.

## *Identity and the Need for Recognition: The Ontological and Political Specter of Communitarianism according to MacIntyre and Barry, Anthony Vecchio*

### IV. "The Spectre of Communitarianism"

Whereas the previous influential and important critiques of the excesses of liberalism came from Marxism, as Alasdair MacIntyre suggested in a 1993 joint review of Daniel Bell's *Communitarianism and its Critics* and Stephen Holmes' *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, many of the best critiques against certain deep-seated excesses of liberalism are now levied by very different philosophers who have received the common name of "communitarians" (or some near-cognate, such as "anti-liberals").

The "communitarians" have frequently rejected the label, however, and MacIntyre explains that he, Christopher Lasch<sup>21</sup> and Roberto Unger<sup>22</sup> – three "communitarian" targets in Holmes' book – cannot be targets of the fantasy collective of Holmes' invention. Actually, critiques of "communitarianism" had by then become fairly widespread, as though it were a new "spectre" and haunting, not Europe, but academia: not a unified Marxist or communist resistance, but a unified "communitarian" resistance.<sup>23</sup>

There seems to be a disjunction between the scale of the liberal reaction and the actual opposition of the critics. In connection with Bell's piece, MacIntyre notes how much similarity there is even between liberalism and Bell's (explicit) communitarianism, where the latter is "anxious to accommodate liberal concerns" and "[correct] liberal principles."<sup>24</sup> Even Holmes admits that those such as MacIntyre are actually "soft anti-liberals" who "malign liberalism verbally, but when faced with practical choices, reveal a surprising fondness for liberal protections and freedoms."<sup>25</sup>

If the criticism from the (only sometimes acerbic) liberal side should in substance amount to, not an alert of a reinvention of totalizing politics from pre-1945 – being

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<sup>21</sup> Stephen Holmes, *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 134.

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Holmes, *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, p. 162.

<sup>23</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Spectre of Communitarianism", *Radical Philosophy* 70. (March/April 1995): pp. 34-35.

<sup>24</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Spectre of Communitarianism", p. 35.

<sup>25</sup> Stephen Holmes, *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, p. 88.

## *Identity and the Need for Recognition: The Ontological and Political Specter of Communitarianism according to MacIntyre and Barry, Anthony Vecchio*

instead a more quasi-benign anti-universalism, to abuse Brian Barry's words even out of context<sup>26</sup> – but a "deeply unrealistic and utopian" alternative to liberalism, as MacIntyre characterizes the would-be criticism; if at least something like this is the case, one might expect "communitarianism" to simply be ignored, almost how Barry remarks that "within academia [Marxism] has lost ground to the point at which it is not even attacked any more, let alone defended." <sup>27</sup>

Instead, "communitarians" receive "spluttering outrage" in books such as Holmes' – a spluttering apparently endorsed by distinguished liberal theorists, if the book cover endorsements are supposed to mean anything. (In the edition MacIntyre was reviewing,<sup>28</sup> Richard Posner had written that Holmes' targets have, at least as a collective, "roots" in the same "soil" as Fascism; this is seemingly unwarranted even if we dispel the word "blood" from mind.)<sup>29</sup>

Why then are many liberal theorists bent on turning "communitarians" or "anti-liberals" into a school of thought, and a dangerous one at that? Or, put differently, "why is contemporary liberal theorizing thus haunted by phantoms?" asks MacIntyre. "Here" he continues, "I can make only a suggestion":

Is it that such [liberal] theorizing is now informed by an imperfectly suppressed consciousness of its own irrelevance? In liberal periodicals and among university teachers the battles of the concepts proceed, with liberals continually announcing victories over some new set of enemies or dissidents. But in the social and political order at large the ugly realities of money and power are increasingly badly masked by the games played with the concepts of utility, rights and contract. The spectre haunting contemporary liberal theorists is not communitarianism, but their own irrelevance.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality*, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Stephen Holmes, *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1993). Posner's remark is apparently absent from the Revised Edition.

<sup>29</sup> A displeased MacIntyre comments: "[A]s Richard A. Posner puts it in his dust jacket endorsement, [Holmes' book] 'exposes [these antiliberals'] roots in the soil that nourished Fascism'. The implied history is even more dubious than the arguments." Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Spectre of Communitarianism", p. 35.

<sup>30</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Idem*, "The Spectre of Communitarianism", p. 35.

## ***Identity and the Need for Recognition: The Ontological and Political Specter of Communitarianism according to MacIntyre and Barry, Anthony Vecchio***

MacIntyre does not have Barry in mind, at least not in the way he has Holmes and Posner in mind (spewing as they do "liberal agitprop"<sup>31</sup>), but perhaps it is "the games played with the concepts of utility, rights, and contract" masking "the ugly realities of money and power" which MacIntyre would take Barry's anti-particularism to be defending as well, effectively.

Where does multiculturalism fit into a debate about the "spectre of communitarianism"? Insofar as misapplied "communitarianism" is a specter of liberal theorists' imagination, we might expect that liberalism is irrelevant in some way, that it fails to be effective where it aspires to be effective – and that the variety of outside complaints, including those of multiculturalists, seem like a more or less unified resistance.<sup>32</sup>

Both "communitarianism" and multiculturalism would fall under the rubric of quasi-benign anti-universalism, to continue to abuse Barry's words. There are those, such as Will Kymlicka, who have insisted upon a multicultural liberalism – to which we will turn in the penultimate section – and whom liberals such as Barry denounce. But the haunt of liberal academia, to whatever extent it is a void left by Marxism, is possibly also a void left by a liberalism bearing too much in common with a dead enemy. "[T]he anti-liberal rhetoric of multiculturalists," Barry remarks somewhat tellingly, "is not uncongenial to the reactionary right. Thus, exponents of the 'politics of difference' typically inveigh against the 'abstract universalism' that they attribute to liberalism."<sup>33</sup>

### **V. Losing Our Way in Post-Marxist Territory**

Another mention of the specter haunting liberalism comes, paradoxically, from very different quarters. Brian Barry begins his book *Culture and Equality* with Marx's famous

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<sup>31</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Ibidem*, "The Spectre of Communitarianism," p. 35.

<sup>32</sup> Although Barry does not find there to be a single "Enlightenment project" in any positive sense, he does find there to be a curiously unified anti-Enlightenment resistance from the left and from the right. Again, he does not use the term "communitarian." See *Culture and Equality*, 9ff, esp. p. 16.

<sup>33</sup> Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality*, p. 11.

## *Identity and the Need for Recognition: The Ontological and Political Specter of Communitarianism according to MacIntyre and Barry, Anthony Vecchio*

sentence: "A spectre is haunting Europe..." The specter is no longer communism, but "the politics of difference, the politics of recognition or, most popularly, multiculturalism."<sup>34</sup>

It has been a long time since communism has haunted Europe, but a specter haunts Europe nonetheless: The void left by communism and academic Marxism, which is now filled by tendencies of nationalist or ethnic "self-assertion" as well as poverty in the wake of destroyed command economies.<sup>35</sup> There is a corresponding situation in academia.<sup>36</sup>

According to Barry, Marxism agreed with other modern projects in that it proposed itself as universally applicable. Especially insofar as liberalism used to fill the role of countering academic Marxism, it tried to match that Marxism in its universality.<sup>37</sup> With the decline of academic Marxism, and as some dogmatically universalizing tendencies in liberalism were recognized and abandoned, this has seemed to leave liberal theorists without a clear picture about the future of an international liberal community.

It is not inevitable that political situations tend today in the direction of "particularism" – nationalist or ethno-culturalist, or something more nonthreatening.<sup>38</sup> What matters in crucial part is the ideas in circulation, and in this respect the continuing development of arguments in favor of an international liberal community cannot simply be ignored. Nor should the history of those ideas; it was the anti-particularism of post-war liberalism, as famously expressed in the landmark Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, which has served as a touchstone in the development of an international liberalism.

There are importance differences between liberalism with post-war aspirations, however developed since then, and what has come to be called "the politics of recognition" or "multiculturalism", which has, curiously, evolved alongside the development of the post-war international community. Multiculturalism has some overlap with the nationalist and ethnocentrist particularism, which Barry denounces as a

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<sup>34</sup> Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality*, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality*, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>37</sup> Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality*, p. 4.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality*, pp. 4-5.

## ***Identity and the Need for Recognition: The Ontological and Political Specter of Communitarianism according to MacIntyre and Barry, Anthony Vecchio***

step backwards. Multiculturalism is a far more unproblematic particularism, he assures us, but this does not dissipate the anxiety:

My concern is with views that support the politicization of group identities, where the basis of the common identity is claimed to be cultural. (...) Those who advocate the politicization of (cultural) group identities start from a variety of premises and finish up with a variety of policy prescriptions. Nevertheless, there is enough overlap between [multiculturalism and nationalist or ethnocentrist particularism] to make it feasible to discuss them within a single book.<sup>39</sup>

More generally, in the West, political thinkers seem decreasingly sure of the universal efficacy of liberal ideas. Some of these "anti-universalistic" but "benign" thinkers have merited (but not by Barry) the label "communitarian" if we can take "communitarianism" to signify a set of at least loosely connected positions. Neither the "communitarian" thinkers nor "communitarianism" would be free of Barry's particularist charge, whatever the case. Even so, there might be a different meaning to "communitarianism", which is revelatory about the development of multiculturalism and its relationship to liberalism.

### **VI. Ontological and Political Differences**

Taylor qualifies Rawls' priority of the just over the good; the MacIntyre of *After Virtue* believes Rawls' and Nozick's defense of liberal ideas to be incommensurable, and points to their shallow ideas of the good life. But they could hardly be qualified as upholding the case of moral particularism (as, for example, Bernard Williams). But both Taylor and MacIntyre think there is an unresolved tension between Rawls' and Nozick's ideas, and what they consider the excesses of certain kinds of liberalism.

Brian Barry goes further and thinks that most communitarians and the politics of recognition simply depart from the Enlightenment idea of universal morality and are truly incompatible with liberalism. Will Kymlicka thinks, on the contrary, that there is no

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<sup>39</sup> Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality*, p. 5.

## ***Identity and the Need for Recognition: The Ontological and Political Specter of Communitarianism according to MacIntyre and Barry, Anthony Vecchio***

contradiction between the politics of recognition and "group-differentiated rights" <sup>40</sup> and liberal ideas. He argues that liberals need to endorse group rights.

Surely, Kymlicka acknowledges that, as more and more national groups "mobilize and assert their identity" and the rules of political life are challenged by the new politics of cultural difference that, for instance, outrage Brian Barry, are gathering support within academia.<sup>41</sup> However, while many people see this politics of difference as a threat to liberalism, Kymlicka presents a more optimistic view, trying to show that many demands of cultural or ethnic groups are consistent with the liberal principles of individual freedom and social justice.

He does not try to solve the baseline difficulties with liberalism and anti-liberal cultural or ethnic groups. Instead, he looks to show that they can be "managed", so to say. He acknowledges that there is hatred, segregation, pogroms, and genocide, and that given these abuses, many people feel a strong temptation "to push aside the very idea of minority rights." In his opinion, that response is misguided, but not owing to the impoverishment of a naturalistic temper. In many cases, more individualism would actually dissolve many conflicts. Kymlicka's point is that political life has an inescapably national dimension, whether it is in the drawing of boundaries and distributing of powers, or in decisions about the language of schooling, courts, and bureaucracies, or in the choice of public holidays. Moreover, these inescapable aspects of political life give a profound advantage to the members of majority nations.<sup>42</sup>

Kymlicka suggests some practical steps. Ethnic groups and other disadvantaged groups should be accommodated by polyethnic and representation rights or, in certain cases, minorities should receive self-government rights within majority nations. But he also asserts that there are two constraints on any conception of minority rights. The first, an external constraint, is that a group should not be allowed to oppress other groups. The second, an external constraint, is that a group should not be able to oppress its own

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<sup>40</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 26. See Ch. 5.

<sup>41</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, p. 93.

<sup>42</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, p. 194

## ***Identity and the Need for Recognition: The Ontological and Political Specter of Communitarianism according to MacIntyre and Barry, Anthony Vecchio***

members. "Within these limits" he insists "minority rights can play a valuable role within a broader theory of liberal justice. Indeed, they must play a role if liberalism is not to be condemned to irrelevance in many parts of the world."<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, Kymlicka thinks that the future of a just liberalism integrally involves minority rights. "Without such measures" he says, "talk of 'treating people as individuals' is itself just a cover for ethnic and national injustice."<sup>44</sup>

Thus, Kymlicka ultimately determines that the liberal principles of justice are consistent and indeed require certain forms of special status for minorities. Some of these minorities may be illiberal. But liberals do not have an automatic right to impose their (liberals') views – only a responsibility to identify what those views are. In his opinion, the questions on how to deal with illiberal cultures are not specific to minority cultures. There are many illiberal majority cultures, and many liberal homogeneous nation states. The liberality of a culture is a matter of degree.

### **VII. Concluding Remarks**

We tend to agree with MacIntyre that there seems to be a disjunction between the scale of the liberal reaction and the actual opposition of the critics, but we assert nonetheless that we should not minimize the differences. In fact, Will Kymlicka's easy pragmatic solution may turn out to be more intrusive than a sheer liberal view, because we cannot simply dispel entirely all conceptions of the good – and there is indeed a strong difference about the status of the recognition of human dignity that is both metaphysical and political.

Charles Taylor asserts that from his ontological view no concrete political stances necessarily follow. And MacIntyre has a diagnostic of our dystopian moral situation but does not really have a political proposal at all. However, it is surely surprising that the four "communitarian" horsemen tend to describe themselves as: "I'm not a communitarian,

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<sup>43</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, p. 194.

<sup>44</sup> Regarding immigration, Kymlicka does not think it is wrong for a liberal state "to insist that immigration entails accepting the legitimacy of state enforcement of liberal principles, so long as immigrants know this in advance, and none the less voluntarily choose to come."

***Identity and the Need for Recognition: The Ontological and Political Specter of Communitarianism according to MacIntyre and Barry, Anthony Vecchio***

**but..." Both the specter of communitarianism and the crises of liberalism have flesh and bones. To the extent that all of them consider that a substantive conception of the good always necessarily underlies any idea of justice or procedures in public life, that is why they deny that moral value can be defined without any substantive considerations of the good. Often, universalist liberalism just conceals its own substantive considerations (let us call them an "ontology"), rendering it characteristically universal and apparently non-substantive.**

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***Identity and the Need for Recognition: The Ontological and Political Specter of Communitarianism according to MacIntyre and Barry, Anthony Vecchio***

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## BIO NOTE

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***Identity and the Need for Recognition: The Ontological and Political Specter of Communitarianism according to MacIntyre and Barry, Anthony Vecchio***

**ABSTRACT**

In this paper we will start from a distinction established by Charles Taylor between the metaphysics of the self as a dialogical being and the politics of recognition. With this distinction in mind, we inquire why (1) most so-called communitarians are often uncomfortable with the epithet, and (2) why the "specter" of "the politics of recognition" (Barry) or the "spectre of communitarianism" (MacIntyre) seem to be a threat to impartial liberal rights. We tend to agree with MacIntyre that there seems to be a disjunction between the scale of the liberal reaction and the actual opposition of the critics, but we assert nonetheless that we should not minimize the differences. In fact, Will Kymlicka's easy pragmatic solution may turn out to be more intrusive than a sheer liberal view, because we cannot simply dispel entirely all conceptions of the good and there is indeed a strong difference about the status of the recognition of human dignity that is both metaphysical and political. Both the specter of communitarianism and the crises of liberalism have flesh and bones.

**Keywords:** Politics of recognition; communitarianism; liberal rights, universalism.

**RESUMO**

Neste artigo, partiremos de uma distinção estabelecida por Charles Taylor entre a metafísica do eu como ser dialógico e a política de reconhecimento. Com essa distinção em mente, perguntamo-nos, primeiro, por que motivo a maioria dos chamados "comunitaristas" muitas vezes se incomoda com o epíteto e, em segundo lugar, por que o "espectro" da "política de reconhecimento" (Brian Barry) ou o "espectro do comunitarismo" (Alasdair MacIntyre) parece ser uma ameaça aos direitos liberais imparciais. Tendemos a concordar com MacIntyre que parece haver uma disjunção entre a amplitude da reacção liberal aos comunitaristas e a oposição real dos críticos do liberalismo, mas afirmamos, no entanto, que não devemos minimizar as diferenças. Na verdade, a solução pragmática fácil de Will Kymlicka pode acabar sendo mais intrusiva do que uma visão liberal pura, porque não podemos simplesmente dissipar todas as concepções do bem nem da esfera privada, nem da esfera pública e há, de facto, uma forte diferença sobre o estatuto do reconhecimento da dignidade humana que é tanto metafísica como política. Tanto o espectro do comunitarismo como a crise do liberalismo têm carne e ossos e não são meras fantasias e conclui que há uma forte diferença sobre o estatuto do reconhecimento da dignidade humana que é tanto metafísica como política.