

Culture and the Morality of Nationalism*

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Introduction

Nationalism, its theories, causes and consequences, represents a tradition that has generated a literature so massive that even the most conscientious of scholars will find it difficult to investigate and imbibe all that has been written on the topic. This paper takes a tentative step toward explaining and evaluating nationalism and the various aspirations it inspires. The task at hand eschews a comprehensive analysis of nationalism in place of a more focused and rigorous understanding of how moral argument can reveal important insights into the phenomenon of nationalism.

Drawing heavily on aspects of Charles Taylor, I develop the concept of “culture as framework” as a moral framework that both houses the traditional components of culture (language, religion, history) and generates questions that speak to the goods that have value for a particular conception of the nation. I deal with the more prosaic understanding of culture and its affects on a definition of citizenship and emphasize the types of moral questions culture elicits within nationalist arguments.

The general assault on the inclusion of culture within political theory can be characterized as a failure to definitively establish the normative value of religion, language, etc for the category of citizenship. I hope to show that what makes culture valuable when speaking about membership in a given political community has as much to do with its content as with the questions it generates and forces upon us within a moral context.¹ Culture thus represents certain attributes *and* a moral framework that helps explicate belonging and membership.

The way in which normative theories respond to the problem of culture provides moral guidance as to how we should understand national identity and nationalism. The debate about culture in normative political philosophy is ultimately a discussion about political morality. Joseph Raz argues that political morality “consists in the principles that should guide political action.”² When we talk about culture and its inclusion in a definition of citizenship we are speaking after a theory of membership that sets limits and structures political conduct. An argument about culture is an argument about the type of national identity we wish to construct, and a community to which we hope to belong. The inclusion or exclusion of culture from a theory of membership reveals different conceptions of political morality. And these different conceptions of political morality provide insights into the tangible goods associated with membership in a political community. These goods are a far more difficult aspect of political morality to reveal

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¹ A sample of positions that indict political philosophers for including culture as a normative criterion include: James Johnson, “Why Respect Culture?” *American Journal of Political Science* 44:3 (July 2000): 405-418, David Scott, “Culture in Political Theory” *Political Theory* 31:1 (February 2003): 92-115, Katherine Fierlbeck, “The Ambivalent Potential of Cultural Identity” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 29:1 (March 1996): 3-23, Chandran Kukathas, “Are There Any Cultural Rights?” in Will Kymlicka(ed.) *The Rights of Minority Cultures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

² Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 3.

and engage. But the hope here is that we can find some means of understanding these goods.

Focusing on *how* culture is incorporated into normative argument provides a basis for understanding the goods associated with nationalism. Ronald Beiner writes: "...it doesn't suffice to answer the question of whether accommodations with nationalism comport with what is *right* (what is normatively permissible); one must also address the more ambitious question, is nationalism (as a way of shaping the conception of how one should live) *good*?"³ The types of political morality furthered by various conceptions of culture in normative political argument reveal divergent understandings of why it is *good* to belong to a nation. This paper thus not only considers the emphasis on what a minority can legitimately claim as a right, but also focuses on how a cultural claim is implicated in how a nation shapes the good.

Culture is chosen as a framework because what differentiates cultural identity from other forms of identity is the nature and consequences of the claims made. A feminist who argues that a liberal definition of citizenship does not adequately address gender inequality, or arguments aimed at ameliorating socio-economic inequality, in some respect, require a revised understanding of membership in the political community. But neither of these claims can seriously challenge the territorial integrity of the state, nor can they be used as a means of establishing a national identity.⁴ The type of challenges culture raises for states appear more fundamental for they speak to the very nature and character of what constitutes a political community.

I. Culture as Framework: Articulation and Goods

Can culture and the various normative arguments it engenders contribute to a fuller understanding of nationalism and nationalist aspirations? To begin answering this question, or at a minimum, addressing the contours of the debate, requires first a substantive discussion of how a notion of goods is implicated with the concept of culture. Rather than simply presenting a definition of culture, the following section outlines a revised means of understanding culture within normative argument.

The section presents culture as a form of question that helps generate divergent understanding of goods. The section borrows extensively from the work of Charles Taylor to provide a theoretical blueprint for understanding how "culture as question" provides frameworks by which we construct and evaluate moral argument.

Before addressing Taylor directly, some explanation must be provided on this notion of "culture as question." The method adopted draws inspiration from Anthony Smith's remarks regarding the study of nationalism:

There is a further difficulty: the problem of defining the relevant questions in the field. Very often, we are dealing with theories, models and approaches which are equally plausible and valid, even if they appear to be based on opposed premisses, *because they seek answers to quite different questions*... This means that, in an important sense, we

³ Ronald Beiner, "Introduction: Nationalism's Challenge to Political Philosophy," in Ronald Beiner, ed., *Theorizing Nationalism* (New York: State University Press, 1999), 15-16. Emphasis in the original.

⁴ For an argument that gender or class identities are unable to mobilize large populations or provide a significant emotive appeal on par with cultural differences see Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 5-8.

cannot easily assess the relative merits of rival theories and models; and that their vaunted rivalry is more apparent than real, given the very different questions they seek to answer and hence the varied dimensions on which they focus. In the place of genuine theoretical dialogue, we often find monologues that intersect.⁵

Smith rightly points to the need for conceptual clarity when studying a phenomenon like nationalism. An emphasis on the subject matter quite often occludes other types of relevant considerations that, although implicit, constitute an important aspect of the enquiry. Much the same can be said about an understanding of culture. While a more substantial discussion about how culture is approached in normative argument will be broached below, for now an emphasis will be placed on understanding the subtle but important notion that the concept of culture provides a context in which normative discussion is both formulated and generated.

Although rival models of culture may be difficult to evaluate, the same cannot be said of the evaluation of the questions themselves. Thus, we may discern an evaluative framework that challenges a particular understanding of culture by challenging the very questions that inform that understanding of culture. Despite the fact that Beiner does not address the issue of culture, his critical assessment of liberal nationalists focuses on the types of questions they tend to ignore. In other words, according to Beiner, what makes the liberal consideration of nationalism problematic is its failure to consider the appropriate questions. This failure then results in a moral response incapable of dealing with the realities of nationalism.

Here “question” refers to the prosaic understanding of a question as something that seeks to elicit a response, or as something that evokes a particular epistemological value as either true or false. But there is a richer and more complex reading of “questions” that will guide our investigation of culture. The emphasis on “culture as question” is related to a larger moral project of not only eliciting the validity of a specific argument, but also of recognizing the necessity of having frameworks to evaluate these moral arguments. “Culture as question” represents such a framework.

Rather than begin from the premise that culture can be easily defined or categorized, I want to emphasize the idea that culture creates or forces upon us certain questions. These questions, in turn, generate various normative or moral responses that speak to the political morality that helps guide us in a construction of a national identity. The concept of culture creates a moral space (framework) by which we can both evaluate moral arguments and articulate certain goods.

The fact that moral responses can be identified or discerned should not be confused with an assumption that defining, characterizing or articulating a concept like national identity is a straightforward or unambiguous exercise. On the contrary, the recognition and evaluation of a moral framework and its relationship to national identity remains fraught with ambiguity and complexity, and speaks to the multifaceted nature of goods and moral outlooks.

A reductive understanding of moral argument presupposes that once certain questions are identified, it becomes easier to recognize and propagate a universally accepted definition of membership in a political community; instead, as will be revealed in the exposition of Taylor, moral arguments are not easily articulated or identifiable.

⁵ Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 222. My emphasis.

This thinking can be applied to an understanding of nationalism or national identity. Each concept has escaped simple definition and continues to bedevil both academic and popular commentators. It is because articulating a national identity is deeply connected to and implicated with moral argument that makes it such a difficult notion to understand. To get a clearer sense of these ideas we must turn to Taylor and his work on moral argument.

In his seminal study, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (*Sources*) Taylor seeks to uncover the moral topography that constitutes our modern human identity.⁶ It would be both foolish and ambitious to attempt a complete reconstruction of Taylor's arguments, and his indictment of what he sees as a predisposition, in some thinking, to ignore or devalue the capacity of human beings to make qualitative distinctions between competing moral outlooks.⁷ Instead, I want to focus on three concepts Taylor raises and relate it to culture: (1) frameworks; (2) the articulation of narratives and; (3) goods. These concepts do not function independently of each other, but instead form a complex, novel relationship, which once explored will help clarify how culture as question provides guidance on the issue of national identity. I hope to borrow judiciously from Taylor's thinking on morality and create a theoretical model to evaluate and manage the various narratives on culture and national identity.

Taylor begins with the assertion that, "Selfhood and the good, or in another way selfhood and morality, turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes."⁸ This notion of a link between selfhood and morality is central to Taylor's thesis for it establishes the importance of the individual as capable and constituted by an ability to make qualitative distinctions between different goods. The self for Taylor does not exist separate from the evaluation and espousal of particular goods. What is significant, and has bearing on a discussion of culture, is the claim that individuals cannot disengage from thinking about the good and continue to exercise a substantive moral capacity. The link between selfhood and morality is affirmed and perpetuated by what Taylor sees as the characteristically human feature of discourse, or the capacity of human beings to communicate within a linguistic community.

The nature of humanity means that evaluation of the good cannot occur outside a particular context. As Taylor writes: "They are not neutral, punctual objects: they exist

⁶ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989).

⁷ Taylor's project takes at aim at contemporary Anglo-American moral philosophy and its predilection, in his opinion, to ignore or neglect the importance of goods and their capacity to engender an evaluative framework, which allows individuals an opportunity to make qualitative distinctions. One may quarrel with Taylor's description of and antipathy toward the "naturalist" tendencies of contemporary moral philosophy without necessarily invalidating his contention that moral thinking should allow for qualitative distinctions. Will Kymlicka has argued that Taylor misinterprets contemporary moral philosophy and thereby underestimates the complexity with which many approach issues of morality. As a result, much contemporary moral philosophy, according to Kymlicka, does in fact allow for qualitative distinctions. The argument presented here accepts both Taylor's understanding of moral thinking and Kymlicka's defensive posture toward contemporary moral philosophy. It is because contemporary normative arguments regarding culture and national identity do in fact allow for qualitative distinctions between goods that I am able to propose a means of evaluating competing moral narratives. For Kymlicka's critique of Taylor see Will Kymlicka, "The Ethics of Inarticulacy," *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 34 (1991): 155-182.

⁸ Taylor, *Sources*, 3.

only in a certain space of questions, through certain constitutive concerns. *The questions or concerns touch on the nature of the good* that I orient myself by and on the way I am placed in relation to it.”⁹ The role of ‘questions’ within this moral ontology is both to frame and dictate the ways in which human beings come to know about themselves and their higher aspirations.

There exists a connection or link between the act of knowing (self-discovery or self-awareness) and the act of searching (questions and concerns). Each necessarily requires the other, and work in tandem to form a context in which the individual comes to formulate and understand moral argument. Normative prescriptions that emanate from such a context are ultimately also bound to certain questions and concerns. As with moral thinking, the nature of “questions,” in our conception means that culture serves a similar purpose by situating moral argument and driving normative prescriptions.

Proposing a concept like *culture as question*, or to offer an understanding of culture based on its role as a source of questions, is to see it as touchstone for larger moral concerns as they relate to notions of the good. Culture as question situates the individual, or perhaps the group, within a common moral discourse and helps define what it is to be human or, perhaps more provocatively, what it means to be a nation.

To borrow from Taylor, culture as question represents a moral framework that helps us make qualitative distinctions between competing goods. And the distinguishing features of culture that we recognize in characteristically more common terms like language, religion and customs cohere to form a certain moral space.

In thinking of culture as a framework—this formulation seems less cumbersome than ‘culture as question’—we see that the issues of language or religion that are so often debated are merely the products or goods that emerge from the questions generated by culture. Tangible and concrete goods like a particular language or religion often accompany or follow the questions *what am I, or how is my national identity defined*. Culture becomes a means of searching (act of knowing) aimed at self-discovery or self-awareness that has relevance for nations and national identity. As we saw above, the relationship between the self and goods is defined, in large measure, by the presence of “constitutive” concerns or questions. Neither an understanding of the self nor of goods can emerge outside of particular contexts.

Much the same applies to the notion of culture as developed here. While it is important to understand the characteristics of a culture (language, religion, history), it is also vital that we view culture as a framework that both houses and structures moral argument. An understanding of the place of language or religion is intimately tied to the questions and concerns they raise for moral argument. Culture represents the moral space in which this type of discourse occurs. On frameworks Taylor writes:

Frameworks provide the background, explicit or implicit, for our moral judgments, intuitions, or reactions in any of the three dimensions. To articulate a framework is to explicate what makes sense of our moral responses. That is, when we try to spell out what it is what we presuppose when we judge that a certain form of life is truly worthwhile, or place our dignity in a certain achievement or status, or define our moral obligations in a certain manner, we find ourselves articulating *inter alia* what I have been calling here ‘frameworks.’¹⁰

⁹ Ibid., 50. My emphasis.

¹⁰ Ibid., 26.

It would be presumptuous, and possibly erroneous, to argue for too close an alignment between Taylor's notion of framework and the concept of culture. When Taylor speaks of frameworks he is speaking of much larger and more inclusive moral categories. A discussion of culture, on the contrary, is limited primarily to narrower moral concerns. What must be stressed is that the discussion of culture here is related to normative argument and a grander project of managing different narrative accounts of the nation. Thus, what is argued after is a more limited account of a framework in hopes of generating a more ambitious and richer conception of the various normative arguments used when discussing nationalism.

The application of Taylor's philosophy is neither meant to draw a *direct* relationship between his understanding of a framework and culture *per se*, nor do we seek to create the impression that culture represents an all-encompassing and grand philosophical background that structures every moral judgment. Instead, at stake is finding a way of understanding culture as it relates to specific notions of goods or ends. The notion of culture as a framework refers to the type of discourse that occurs relative to and about culture. The discourse of culture represents such a framework because it serves as a backdrop for the type of discussions associated with national identity or membership in the political community. In short, we search for a means of appreciating and evaluating these discussions, and at the same time discerning what types of goods are forwarded as important.

Culture provides a backdrop for these discussions because of its content and the moral questions it raises. For Taylor qualitative distinctions are made possible through what he terms "strong evaluation" that "involve discriminations of right or wrong, better or worse, higher or lower, which are not rendered valid by our own desires, inclinations or choices, but rather stand *independent* of these and offer standards by which they can be judged."¹¹ The important point here is that these discriminations structure moral thinking by providing a moral space that provides a means for making moral distinctions. But not only do frameworks provide a means or space for moral thinking, they also contain the content by which this moral thinking is judged. A framework—something Taylor views as "inescapable" and not instrumental to human beings—serves as the basis for these evaluations to occur because they contain the "stuff" or goods that serve as standards for moral outcomes. Frameworks thus provide both the means for and the ends of moral thinking.

If culture represents such a framework, then the "strong evaluations" it furthers relates both to the space it creates for discussions *about* culture, and to the content as to the *value* of culture. In other words, culture serves as a framework because it generates specific questions and concerns related to the moral category of citizenship. It represents a type of backdrop from which we as citizens or nations can make determinations about certain goods as they relate to identity or membership. But this framework not only provides a space or context for these discussions, it also comes with certain content. Disagreements arise in normative argument, not necessarily about the presence of frameworks, but rather about their content. Or more precisely, at stake is the contested nature regarding the relative merits or value of culture in an understanding of citizenship. Understanding nationalism and the problems it engenders is akin to evaluating different

¹¹ Ibid., 4. My emphasis.

and competing moral frameworks and the various types of “strong evaluations” they contain.

It is important to note that Taylor’s understanding of how moral thinking occurs can be distinguished from his advocacy of a particular framework—most notably his contention that culture “is essentially linked to what we have identified as a good.”¹² We can accept his notion of frameworks without necessarily accepting the content of these frameworks. A disagreement about the content of a framework drives the discourse between James Tully who argues “that culture is an irreducible and constitutive aspect of politics,”¹³ whereas Jeremy Waldron contends that cultural identity makes civic deliberation virtually untenable, and should therefore not be seen as a definitive aspect of a citizen’s identity.¹⁴ Tully and Waldron disagree about the inclusion or exclusion of culture for a definition of citizenship, but each offers a particular moral framework that confronts and engages the questions generated by culture.

They both offer competing narratives of citizenship and illustrate another important component of Taylor’s theoretical understanding of moral thinking and its application to culture in normative theory; namely, that frameworks are often in competition with each other because of the varied and complex morality they contain: “...frameworks today are problematic. This vague term points towards a relatively open disjunction of attitudes. What is common to them all is the sense that no framework is shared by everyone, can be taken for granted as *the* framework tout court, can sink to the phenomenological status of unquestioned fact.”¹⁵ Taylor hopes to show that identity could be understood within a pre-modern context with reference to a single, over-arching framework. The centrality of God and dictates of a religious framework represents a type of moral framework that provides guidance for individual choice and action. Within the modern context, however, an all-encompassing, ubiquitous moral framework does not exist. Instead, many frameworks exist, often in opposition, and the dictates or prescriptions that emanate from these varied frameworks constitute the moral space occupied by individuals.

The oppositional nature of frameworks illustrates, in some respects, the contested nature of culture in political theory, especially if culture is seen as something that both drives and defines normative argument. One type of framework may view culture as a means of understanding the world and providing the individual with a means of making qualitative choices. An alternative framework may rebuke the importance of culture and argue instead for a moral outlook that does not see culture as an important aspect of an individual’s identity. As Taylor explains the individual finds meaning through the “articulation” of frameworks. This articulation is made doubly problematic by the fact that many frameworks exist and they often are both in competition and complementary.

The articulation of a moral framework is thus a task imperiled by the complexity involved in defining and furthering specific moral prescriptions capable of directing human agency. The “seeking” of frameworks relates to the tentative way in which

¹² Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 137.

¹³ James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity* (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 8.

¹⁴ Jeremy Waldron, “Cultural Identity and Civic Responsibility,” in Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman, eds, *Citizenship in Diverse Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁵ Taylor, *Sources*, 17. Emphasis in the original.

people understand moral thinking or the difficult way in which they articulate a moral ontology: “With these seekers...we are taken beyond the gamut of traditionally available frameworks. Not only do they embrace these traditions tentatively, but they also often develop their own versions of them, or idiosyncratic combinations of or borrowings from or semi-inventions within them. And this provides the context within which the question of meaning has its place.”¹⁶ Does Taylor’s discussion of articulation relate to the understanding of culture developed here? In important ways, Taylor’s emphasis on moral thinking and the difficulty that accompanies it applies to the understanding of culture as framework.

Recall that culture as framework operates on several levels. On the one hand, a framework generates important questions. In the case of culture, important questions relate to the nature of citizenship or national identity. But there exists an important second level in that culture as framework also provides moral prescriptions for how to conceive of membership in a political community. The consequence—both practically and philosophically—of culture as framework is that it creates both a context and means for generating an understanding of national identity. But this context is highly contentious and defined, in part, by the problematic enterprise that accompanies the articulation of moral sources.

As a result, culture as framework does provide insights into issues like national identity and membership in a political community for it serves as a foundation from which goods and ends are derived. In popular parlance, the citizen or member of the nation appeals to these goods and articulates in a rough, imprecise manner what it means to be part of a nation. Despite the imprecision of this expression, members of a national group coalesce around similar objectives and goals. Culture as framework allows us to understand the standards by which members of a nation make qualitative distinctions. In terms of an explanatory framework, culture as framework manages the larger discourse within political theory for it provides a means of distinguishing between competing normative accounts of the nation.

The discussion above has focused substantially on the concept of culture as a moral framework and its ability to generate certain goods or moral sources for issues like national identity. In order to fully understand how culture as framework coincides or furthers the management of narratives it is important to explicate what exactly we mean by goods. Again Taylor provides some guidance as to how we can understand goods operating within the concept of culture as framework.

The two types of goods I want to examine are Taylor’s notion of life goods and constitutive goods. For Taylor, life goods may include freedom, altruism or universal justice. These goods, however, are underpinned by what he sees as more fundamental, or perhaps, foundational goods that provide the moral sources from which life goods are derived—constitutive goods.

To simplify, constitutive goods inform any understanding or life goods and serve as the essence or guiding principle behind concepts like freedom or altruism: “The constitutive good does more than just define the content of the moral theory. Love of it is what empowers us to be good. And hence also loving it is part of what it is to be a good human being. This is now part of the moral theory as well, which includes injunctions not only to act in certain ways and the exhibit certain moral qualities but also to love

¹⁶ Ibid.

what is good.”¹⁷ A constitutive good provides the source that informs a particular moral framework. Whatever life good an individual may hold dear, there exists an underlying, and perhaps latent, constitutive good that provides the moral touchstone for its recognition and application.

The recognition of a life good—like freedom—may be easily grasped and promulgated as central to an individual’s moral framework, but its underlying constitutive good may be more difficult to recognize and articulate. This difficulty does not mean that freedom stands apart and alone from a constitutive good. Instead Taylor argues, “That is why we cannot consider the life goods in a culture as self-contained, as without internal relation to various possible articulations of constitutive goods. It is why we can speak of some articulations as the ones which fit, which capture the spirit of a certain unreflecting practice. The life good itself becomes something different when one is induced to see the constitutive good differently.”¹⁸ An understanding of freedom and its application may become a wholly different moral category and source if an individual is able to understand and articulate the constitutive good that underpins it.

In terms of national identity and citizenship, culture as framework provides a moral source for making qualitative distinctions about who is and who is not a member of a particular community. There exists within a national identity certain constitutive goods that provide the moral touchstone for the life goods that may emanate from this framework. If we see culture as a moral framework, which provide a context for generating questions as they relate to membership, then perhaps the moral sources we identify as constitutive of this framework can contribute to an understanding of national identity.

The suggestion is that culture as framework can provide some insight into the tangible goods that constitute a national identity. Amy Gutmann writes: “But our moral standards cannot be inferred from our political memberships, except in a probabilistic sense. By virtue of being a United States citizen, my identity need not embrace the principle of market freedom any more than Soviet citizens were (or Cubans are) morally obliged to identify with socialist economic principles.”¹⁹ Gutmann may be correct in that a particular political community may not provide special insights into moral standards.

But the argument is not aimed at assigning a set of moral standards as definitive of a particular nation or national identity. Rather, culture as framework allows us to contemplate national identity as a moral source that responds to and structures particular types of *questions*. What Gutmann has revealed are particular life goods and their application in various political communities, without considering the different narratives that drive a conception of freedom. The life good Gutmann refers to may become something very different if we seek to find the constitutive good that underpins it within the culture as framework method.

We are concerned with finding how belonging to a nation contributes to not only what is permissible, but to an individual’s conception of the good. A commitment to market freedom provides only partial insight about belonging. The concept of market freedom must be considered within a larger moral context and within the narrative of a

¹⁷ Ibid., 93.

¹⁸ Ibid., 308.

¹⁹ Amy Gutmann, “The Challenge of Multiculturalism in Political Ethics,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 22:3 (Summer 1993): 185.

particular nation. There may be similarities in the types of life goods each nation values, but differences in the constitutive goods that inform them. Or conversely, we may find that all nations share certain constitutive goods that speak to the very nature of nationhood and belonging. What will drive the analysis and help in the construction of an evaluative framework are the questions that culture forces upon national identity.

At its most fruitful, Taylor's arguments about moral thinking do not advocate for particular entitlements or rights, but instead propose an evaluative framework that asks the question: "What is good about being human?" The search for frameworks and the recognition and articulation of constitutive goods may yield pronouncements on issues like freedom and justice, but more importantly, they serve as a means of understanding the essence of human life. The hope is that by trying to come to terms with the issue of national identity in a similar vein, the various rights and responsibilities often attributed to membership in a political community will be seen in the context of: "What is good about belonging to the nation?" More provocatively, "Can belonging to the nation beneficially generate particular ends for the individual?" Culture as framework focuses these questions and provides a means of trying to understand the constitutive goods involved in the articulation and recognition of a national identity.

This section has articulated a project dedicated to evaluating and explaining the various narratives on nationalism within normative political theory. These insights may provide guidance and solutions for practical problems that arise within multinational, multicultural states. Taylor's work on moral thinking allows for a reconceived notion of culture as a moral framework that both generates and forces important questions. This context allows for us to think of culture as something more than a language or religion, but as a type of framework imbued with and dependent upon certain goods.

This section ends with the question: "Can culture as framework provide some guidance as to the morality of nationalist claims?" The subsequent section attempts an answer.

II. Culture as Framework and The Morality of Nationalism

The previous section hinted at the more prosaic understanding of culture as defined by a particular language, religion and history, and a more provocative notion of culture as a type of moral framework, which provides insights into the goods associated with nationhood. In this section I want to flesh out this second notion of culture and offer a more definitive understanding of how culture as framework helps explain how nationalist arguments should be understood and how they can be evaluated.

Any definition of culture must include particular linguistic, religious, ethnic and historical commitments. These commitments represent the types of goods members of a specific cultural community appeal to when defining their identity. Culture, in this respect, provides tangible markers to delineate one community from another. Quebec nationalists focus on the centrality of language to their identity and argue for its protection and perpetuation, in part, because it provides them with a means of self-identification. This type of self-identification represents a normative challenge to more traditional conceptions of membership in a political community.²⁰ Will Kymlicka

²⁰ On this point see Yael Tamir and Margaret Canovan. Tamir laments the paucity of liberal literature on membership by noting: "Surprisingly, liberal literature hardly deals with membership." Yael Tamir,

observes that in culturally plural states, individuals in cultural communities exercise their freedom with reference to a particular language, history and religion. At times, cultural communities co-exist, but may not coincide, with an existing political community, where the individual is defined and acts, not with reference to culture, but in terms of the institutional factors generated by a liberal emphasis on rights and justice.²¹ The existence of these culturally plural states, and the reality that individuals do bring their cultural experiences to bear on citizenship dictates that we generate a more complex understanding of national identity.

When Quebec nationalists promulgate the importance of language to their identity they are both articulating important goods that constitute their identity and challenging /re-inventing the public identity of a Canada comprised of mainly English speakers. Quebec nationalists are thus using culture as a means to articulate certain goods, and formulating and espousing a framework that at once substantiates, interrogates and repudiates what defines a nation. By demanding that their linguistic identity be recognized they are generating certain questions as to what should constitute a nation (Quebecois), and in turn are asking how living within a primarily English-speaking nation (Canada) furthers their particular goods. The questions themselves and their answers are often formulated with reference to nationalist arguments.

The notion of culture as framework links the tangible content of a particular culture (language, religion) with the act of articulating certain moral prescriptions or goods relating to nationhood. The type of identity this promotes requires a flexible understanding of nationhood where goods are articulated and defined with reference to other identities (read: cultural frameworks). Culture as framework allows us to conceive of a national identity as not fixed, but in flux and in constant dialogue with other types of moral arguments.²²

Michael Ignatieff describes the Serb-Croat conflict as a “narcissism of minor differences” where palpable similarities between the two ethnic groups are overshadowed by a persistent willingness to stress difference: “There is nothing timeless about this man’s national identity. It’s not some primordial essence, formed by history and tradition, latent within, waiting to carry him off to war. For him, identity is primarily a relational term.”²³ The same argument can be applied to Quebec-Canada relations. Wayne Norman argues that the impasse between Quebec and Canada is best understood by looking at a failure to establish a national identity, rather than one sustained by shared

Liberal Nationalism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 121. Canovan demonstrates how political theorists—from Mazzini to contemporary writers—treat nationhood, and by implication membership in the nation, as a tacit assumption when constructing normative arguments. Margaret Canovan, *Nationhood and Political Theory* (United Kingdom: Edward Elgar, 1996), 13. The inclusion of culture into a definition of the citizen ultimately raises the issue of membership by complicating how we define belonging.

²¹ Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 135.

²² James Tully makes a similar argument in his discussion of intercultural dialogue when he writes: “Hence a demand for recognition is never ‘merely symbolic.’ Along the second dimension, it alters, in complex and often massive ways, the social, economic and political relations of power that constitute the present system of social cooperation....” See James Tully, “Introduction,” in Alain-G. Gagnon and James Tully, eds. *Multinational Democracies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 15.

²³ Michael Ignatieff, *The Warriors Honour: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (Toronto, Canada: Penguin Books, 1998), 37.

values.²⁴ These insights do not mean nationalist arguments and aspirations can easily be dispelled as ephemeral and without substance, but confirm the importance of viewing nationalism as something contingent upon and inspired by the articulation of goods and ends difficult to ascertain.

What Ignatieff and Norman are appealing to is not only the notion that identities matter, but that different constitutive goods may buttress and inform particular conceptions of a national identity. The type of conflict that ensues between competing national identities may be better understood by looking at the ways in which these goods are expressed, and the types of mechanisms or institutions available for the articulation of moral frameworks. Moreover, by viewing nationalist aspirations through the lens of culture as framework we can see that what drives these arguments has as much to do with important questions each group asks about its own identity as with its relationship to other national groups.

As noted above the types of articulations expressed within a moral framework are often imprecise, they may contradict or complement other existing frameworks and they often contain constitutive goods that underpin their foundation. As well as providing a means of articulating goods, frameworks also allow for qualitative evaluations. They allow for certain types of “strong evaluations” to be made regarding the standards by which a nation judges certain goods. When these judgments are made—at times inarticulately—and how they are addressed takes us into the realm of normative argument for they inevitably contain an implicit orientation toward certain ends or goods and they offer prescriptions. We can better understand nationalism by examining how nationalist argument deals with the questions and prescriptions forced upon it by culture as framework.

²⁴ Wayne Norman, “The Ideology of Shared Values: A Myopic Vision of Unity in the Multi-National State,” in Joseph Carens, ed., *Is Quebec Nationalism Just? Perspectives From Anglophone Canada* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995).

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