

## Cultural Success

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### 1. Cultural Rights

To care about one's culture is in part to care that it succeed. It would be hard to know what to make of somebody who professed to value her culture but was indifferent to whether the culture was successful or not. As Samuel Scheffler has observed, to be attached to some project or relationship is in general to be committed to the idea that the project or relationship in question should flourish and be preserved.

Because cultural attachment is bound up inseparably with a desire to see the culture succeed, it seems natural to think that one of the points of strong cultural rights, if people do indeed have such rights, must be to promote the success of the cultures to which people are attached.\* This characterization of cultural rights might be developed in two different directions. One possibility is that cultural rights are not just *grounded* in the aim of cultural success but are also, in some sense, rights *to* cultural success. On this view, cultural success itself is the measure of whether some group of persons sharing a culture is in full enjoyment of their cultural rights. Depending on how one spells out the view, one might say, for example, that full enjoyment of cultural rights is a matter of surpassing some threshold level of success, or, more demandingly, that it requires that any given culture enjoy an equal level of success with other comparable cultures.

The other possibility is that promoting the aim of cultural success is the point of cultural rights but does not define the content of such rights. The reason why cultural rights are justified is that they somehow respect or accommodate the desire that people have in virtue of their cultural attachments to see their cultures succeed. But this claim about justification does not imply a right *to* the success of one's culture. Instead, the content of the right is defined in terms of certain forms of assistance, accommodation, and recognition that enable cultural success. These conditions give people a fair opportunity to realize success in their cultural endeavors but they do not guarantee success to anybody. Which cultures are successful will depend not just on the forms of assistance, accommodation, and recognition that are offered by public institutions but also on the choices that people make under fair background conditions as well as on other background circumstances.

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\* The notion of a "strong cultural right" is explained in the previous chapter. To affirm strong cultural rights is to believe that there are *basic* (as opposed to derivative) reasons of *principle* (as opposed to pragmatism) for thinking that certain policies of recognition and accommodation are *owed* (as opposed to permitted) *to cultural minorities* (and not merely impersonally desirable).

So cultural rights might be thought of as rights to cultural success or as rights to various forms of fair treatment in the pursuit of cultural success. The main claim of the next chapter will be that the first of these views is not, in general, terribly plausible. Under certain specific empirical conditions, a case can be made that individuals have a right to the success of the culture to which they are attached. But, in general, there is no good reason in liberal political theory to think that persons have such a right and there are good reasons to think that they do not. Subsequent chapters of the book go on to argue, however, that the second view of cultural rights is more generally defensible. Even if people do not have a right to the success of their cultures, they do, under certain conditions, have a right to various forms of fair treatment in the pursuit of cultural success, including particular policies of cultural assistance, accommodation, and recognition.

The aim of the present chapter is to consider a series of threshold objections to the idea that there are cultural rights relating (in one of the two ways just described) to cultural success. I devote much of the chapter to dealing with a fundamental challenge to the very idea of cultural success (secs. 2-4). Can we make sense of the notion that a culture is the sort of entity or process that can be more or less successful? And can we do so in a way that is responsive to widely acknowledged facts about cultures and that, at the same time, does not obviously rule out the possibility that cultural success is something that might be valued normatively? A second objection addresses the problem of normative desirability more directly (sec. 5). The main question to be considered here is whether policies promoting cultural success are, in general, likely to be illiberal because they involve sustaining and reinforcing patterns of economic and civic exclusion. Finally, a third objection takes a somewhat different tack and asks whether someone committed to cultural success would have any good reason for demanding policies that are not anyways guaranteed by familiar principles of liberal justice (sec. 6). According to this challenge, the best way of promoting cultural success is to give individuals the freedoms they need to adapt their cultures to the changing circumstances of the world. These freedoms are already guaranteed by standard models of liberalism and thus there is no good reason for adding any specifically cultural rights to those models (Scheffler 2007).

The chapter attempts a response to each of these three objections. I respond to the first by introducing a conception of culture that allows one to think of cultures as being more or less successful. I argue that this conception is compatible with widely acknowledged facts about cultures and with regarding cultural success as something that matters normatively. I respond to the second objection by acknowledging that, in some cases, adopting the sorts of policies of economic and civic inclusion that are favored by liberals will have the foreseeable, if unintended, effect of making the culture of the hitherto excluded group less successful. In general, however, economic and civic exclusion is not the only factor driving the success of distinct cultures and thus policy-makers concerned to enable cultural success do have certain means at their disposal for advancing such an aim that do not involve compromising liberal principles of inclusion. Finally, in response to the third objection, I acknowledge that change and adaptation are often crucial for cultural success and thus that cultural success is only likely to be possible if people belonging to the culture have the freedoms required to make adaptive changes. But, while these assumptions seem correct to me, I do not think it follows that the standard schedule of liberal freedoms is all that is needed for cultural success. Adaptive change sometimes requires the freedom for collective action by

public institutions, and this takes us beyond the standard list of liberal freedoms and into the realm of public policies consciously adopted in order to enable cultural success.

[Note: Only Secs. 2-4, dealing with the first challenge, are included in this paper]

## 2. The Idea of Cultural Success

Whether cultural rights are thought of as rights to cultural success or as rights to particular policies that establish fair conditions under which people can pursue the success of their cultures, there is no avoiding the need to clarify the idea of cultural success. If it turned out that there was no coherent way of distinguishing successful from unsuccessful cultures, then the project of defending either form of cultural right would be undermined. Nobody would be in a position to complain that their culture was unsuccessful (or was facing unsuccessful prospects) and thus there would be no need for policies that enabled success.

So what then does it mean for a culture to be more or less successful? One component of an answer that might quickly be agreed upon is that a culture is not succeeding if it ceases to exist or is in real danger of ceasing to exist. Cultural success entails cultural *survival*. It seems plausible to think, however, that survival is not the only component of success. A culture that is managing to survive might be closer or further from the threshold where its survival is in jeopardy. It might be that it would only take some minor demographic, economic, or technological shock, or some minor development in other, competing cultures, and the culture would be driven below the survival threshold. Alternatively, the culture might be robust to even major shocks. I shall refer to these variations in robustness above the survival point as the degree to which the culture is *flourishing*.

On its own, cashing out cultural success in terms of survival and flourishing does not get us very far. It is true, of course, that survival is one of the most frequent and prominent terms that advocates of cultural rights employ to characterize what they are after. Cultural-rights advocates mourn the disappearance of traditional and local cultures under pressures of nationalism and modernization and often draw a parallel with the loss and extinction of biological species. In addition to the language of survival, extinction and loss, it is common to hear cultures described as “intact” or “damaged”, “healthy” or “unhealthy”, “vibrant” or “decayed”. All of these terms give rise to the same basic question, however. What could it mean to describe something that is as abstract and slippery as culture as doing well or poorly?

The puzzle is reinforced when one reflects upon the inadequacy of one very simple way of understanding cultural survival. An obvious way in which a culture might cease to exist is if all of the living members of the culture were to die of disease or to be wiped out in an act of genocide. It is not true then that we can make *no* sense of the idea of a culture’s survival being in jeopardy. It is in jeopardy when the lives of all its members are in jeopardy. It is also not true that we would have any problem understanding why cultural survival in this sense matters normatively. It matters because of the importance we attach to preventing the premature death of the individuals who belong to the culture.

Analytically speaking, this simple proposal for understanding cultural survival does not get us very far (Blake 2002: 639). Nobody doubts that the cases in which cultural survival is threatened by the attempted physical destruction of the individual members of the group – Rwanda and Sudan are recent examples – are the ones that deserve our most urgent practical attention. But most claims made in the name of cultural survival or flourishing do not come in the context of a grave threat to the lives of the individual members of the culture. The danger cited by the proponent of cultural protection is not that the individual members of the culture will be killed by violence or disease but that they will all become absorbed into some other culture and no trace of their original culture will remain. Cultural death can occur without the death of the individual members of the culture.

Even when cultural death does involve the death of the culture's members, it is not necessarily clear that the death of the individuals is all that we care about morally. The definition of genocide in the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide does not equate genocide with all mass killings. Only killing members of the group "with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such" conforms with the definition of genocide adopted in the Convention. In the eyes of international law, there is some further evil involved in setting out to destroy a cultural group that does not reduce to the evil involved in murdering a certain number of people.

To make progress in specifying what it means for a culture to be more or less successful, we need to take a step back and ask what it is that we mean by the concept of a culture itself. If we could say what it is for some entity or process to count as a distinct culture then we should be in a position to specify when a culture is at or near the point where it ceases to exist. Since the general question, "what is culture?", is likely to be unmanageably difficult to answer, and to admit of different answers in different discursive and disciplinary contexts, we might ask, more narrowly, what it is that political theorists mean by culture when they use the term in debating cultural rights.

A fairly standard view is that a culture consists, roughly speaking, of a distinctive pattern of thought and practice. This general idea can be cashed out in a variety of different ways, the details of which are not ultimately relevant to my purposes. One might emphasize the "thought" component and characterize cultures as defined by distinctive frameworks for representing the world in concepts and language. Or one might pay more attention to the "practice" component and think of cultures as ways of life. A distinctive culture, on this view, involves a distinctive set of ways of doing things – in the areas of cuisine, architecture, courting and mourning rituals, styles of dress, gender relations and child-rearing practices, rites of passage, etc., or in some sub-set from such a list. Or, again, one might try to keep both thought and practice in view and insist that cultures, properly understood, involve distinctive patterns of thought that correspond to particular practices, practices that are shaped by the forms of thought in question and that afford people the opportunity to lead their lives in ways that are informed by those forms of thought.

A possible problem with the thought-and-practice conception of culture (as I shall call it) is that it under-appreciates the heterogeneity found in cultures of any size or complexity. A standard refrain amongst theorists of culture these days maintains that cultures are not monolithic or uniform in character. A

conception of culture is plainly inadequate to the extent that it assumes that everyone in a culture shares certain beliefs and values, and ignores the fact that cultures are sites of contestation and difference.

Proponents of the thought-and-practice conception might try to dodge this problem by conceding that people sharing a culture do not necessarily all hold some common set of beliefs and values. Instead, the claim is that they form, revise, and pursue their particular beliefs and values against the background of a common *horizon* (Behabib 2002). Such a horizon is made up of a collection of concepts, narratives, and forms of discourse that together provide a context in which people work out their beliefs and values and some materials with which they do it. The horizon orients people to a common set of questions and problems, and limits in certain ways the moves that would count as intelligible in addressing those questions and problems, but it does not imply that people will arrive at a common set of answers.

Arguably, this response to the heterogeneity objection still does not go far enough. Someone pressing the heterogeneity point might question whether the cultures that we know really do involve a common horizon. Should we not expect that contestation and difference would run all the way down? Some differences would concern particular beliefs and values and would unfold against a backdrop of shared narratives, forms of discourse, and so on. In others, people contest the narratives and forms of discourse themselves. They disagree about what the questions are and not just about the appropriate answers. Of course, there needs to be something shared for deliberation and disagreement to get off the ground. But communication and deliberation can occur across cultures and not just within them. We do not need the idea of a common cultural horizon to make sense of the possibility of communication and disagreement.

I shall return to the question of how cultures should be conceptualized in sec. 4. For now, let us adopt the thought-and-practice conception for the sake of argument and see what it implies for the ideas of cultural disappearance, survival, flourishing, success, and so on. On the basis of the earlier analysis, I assume that cultural survival means something more than the physical survival of the individual members of the cultural group. We want to get a grasp of what it might mean for the culture to disappear even though the individual members of the culture live on.

A necessary constraint on this investigation is another commonplace fact about cultures, which is that they are capable of changing (Kymlicka 1995: 104; Tomasi 1995; Blake 2002; Appiah 2005: 136-7). As theorists of culture are fond of repeating, cultures are fluid and dynamic processes, not fixed and immutable entities. Just as a person can change her beliefs without ceasing to be the same person, the distinctive patterns of thought and practice that make up a culture can undergo certain changes without that culture ceasing to exist. An account suggesting that a culture ceases to exist any time that its members abandon one of its distinctive forms of thought or practice would fail to do justice to the possibility of cultural change. The challenge then is to identify what exactly it is that must happen to a culture for it to cease to exist, given that not all changes in beliefs or practices automatically imply that the culture has disappeared.

There are two broad ways of answering this challenge. One is to say that, even if not every abandonment of a form of thought or practice implies the end of the culture that had previously included that form, there are certain forms of thought and practice that are sufficiently fundamental to a culture that their abandonment would spell an end to the culture. I will call this the “loss of fundamentals” answer. The second answer focuses less on which forms of thought are abandoned than on the character of the historical process in which they are abandoned. Sometimes the circumstances under which some form of thought or practice (perhaps even a “fundamental” one) is abandoned are consistent with the judgment that the culture did not disappear but changed. Under different circumstances, the opposite conclusion is warranted: the loss of the form of thought or practice has the wrong history for us to judge it a case of cultural change. Call this the “wrong history” answer. The two answers might be combined. One might claim that a culture disappears only if (1) there is a loss of sufficiently fundamental forms of its thought and practice, and (2) that loss occurs under the wrong historical circumstances to support a judgment that the loss should be considered a change.

In the remainder of the present section, I will argue that the “loss of fundamentals” view is not, on its own, a satisfactory account of cultural disappearance and survival. The section that follows then considers the “wrong history” view and proposes a particular way of understanding it. Sec. 4 argues further that the “wrong history” view not only provides a plausible way of understanding the ideas of cultural disappearance and survival but also points the way to a hypothesis about how culture should be conceptualized (the “weak culturalist hypothesis”).

On its own, the loss of fundamentals view is unsatisfactory because it does not fit well with our intuitions about actual cases. There are cases in which people abandon fundamental forms of thought and practice and yet still we think that that their culture has changed rather than disappeared. A standard example is Quebec’s Quiet Revolution, which has been discussed by Kymlicka and others in the context of an effort to distinguish a culture’s “character” from its “existence” (Kymlicka 1989: ??, 1995: 104; Tomasi 1995). The Quiet Revolution consisted of a fairly dramatic and precipitous transformation of Quebec society during the 1950s and 60s. It involved a significant weakening of the role of the Catholic Church in Quebec society, together with the creation of important new state institutions. The impact of this secularizing revolution was felt in religion, politics, family, sexuality, education, and in numerous other spheres of thought and practice. If the concept of a “horizon” answers to any empirical determination, then the Quiet Revolution involved a dramatic transformation of horizon. Quebecers turned away from a traditional, Catholic set of concepts, narratives, and forms of discourse which they had previously relied on in forming their beliefs and values and embraced a secular alternative. Intuitively, however, as Kymlicka notes, this transformation feels like a case in which a culture changed its character rather than one in which it ceased to exist. But given the scale of the societal transformation that Quebec underwent, this judgment might leave one wondering whether a transformation could *ever* be fundamental enough to count as the disappearance of culture rather than its change.

This analysis might be resisted in a number of different ways. To begin with, not everyone will share the intuition that the Quiet Revolution can be described as a case of cultural change. No doubt there were fierce partisans of the pre-revolution culture who feared that their culture would cease to exist as a

result of the transformation of their society. Some people may well have continued to think that after the fact, and the view that a particular culture died in the 1950s and 60s may still enjoy some currency today. The cost associated with this line of resistance, however, is to render the idea of cultural survival morally unattractive. If enabling cultural survival means enabling societies to avoid events such as the Quiet Revolution, then hardly anyone starting out from liberal principles is likely to conclude that cultural survival is worth enabling. A morally tenable theory of cultural survival, in other words, would regard the Quiet Revolution as a change rather than disappearance (Tomasi 1995; Appiah 2005: 124-5).

A different objection warns against over-simplification of the case of the Quiet Revolution. The transformation of Quebec society in the 50s and 60s did not sideline the Catholic Church completely, even if its social and political role in Quebec society was significantly reduced. Likewise, it may be worth noting that, since at least the French Revolution, there had always been a secular strand in Quebec society; it is a mistake to see it as suddenly appearing out of nowhere in the 1950s. Moreover, it would also be a mistake to see the Quiet Revolution as simply pitting the forces of secularism against the Catholic Church. Catholic figures and institutions played a major role in some of the most important developments associated with the period. The more carefully one looks at the case, in short, the more one picks up strands of gradual evolution, and even continuity, as well as major transformation. One starts to wonder whether the Quiet Revolution did, in fact, involve a “loss of fundamentals” and thus whether it should be considered a counter-example to the “loss of fundamentals” view of cultural disappearance. Perhaps the example is poorly chosen and there are more black-and-white cases that do support such a view?

The problem with this line of objection is that the “black-and-white” cases are likely to be very hard to find. Examined closely enough, typical cases of major cultural transformation will involve many of the same complexities as Quebec’s Quiet Revolution. As I noted earlier, and as theorists of culture routinely emphasize, the normal state of a culture is one of heterogeneity and contestation. Moreover, cultures are typically permeable to the influence of other cultures and show evidence of this permeability in the hybrid character of many of their forms of thought and practice. If a culture is shared by people whose conditions of life vary, and who enjoy at least a modicum of liberty, then these qualities of heterogeneity, contestation, permeability and hybridity are exactly what one should expect. The point is that this richer and more careful understanding of culture makes a story about cultural disappearance through “loss of fundamentals” even more difficult to tell. It becomes nearly impossible to distinguish a situation in which people have abandoned fundamental forms of thought and practice from one in which a culture is intensely interacting with, and permeated by, surrounding cultures, or from one where a culture is undergoing a particularly intense period of contestation and change.

A third possible objection suggests that the “loss of fundamentals” view ought to be understood more narrowly than has been the case in the above discussion. Given the importance of language to a distinctive form of thought and practice, a loss of language should be given special importance in thinking about whether a loss of fundamentals has occurred. The easiest way of doing this would be to stipulate that a group of people abandon a fundamental form of thought and practice, and thus lose their culture, if and only if they abandon their language. Since the Quiet Revolution did not involve the abandonment of French, it is not a counter-example to the claim that cultural disappearance consists in

the loss-of-fundamentals. There are cases, however, in which groups stop using their historical language, and thus the loss-of-fundamentals view does not look to be completely empty.

The fact that French remained the language of Quebec's culture even after the Quiet Revolution does strike me as a plausible and significant reason for thinking that the Quiet Revolution represented a case of cultural change rather than disappearance. The account that I develop in the next two sections will help to explain why language is a major factor in the persistence of culture. At the same time, it would be a mistake to think that cultural survival *requires* the preservation of the language. Just as the members of a culture can abandon certain concepts, narratives, and forms of discourse, without losing their culture, they can also abandon the use of a particular language without their culture ceasing to exist. To pick the most frequently mentioned example, Irish culture seems alive and well even though the Irish language is no longer widely spoken. So, although there is something right about the objection (I return to this below), the general point I have been making about the loss-of-fundamentals view still stands. In general, it seems wrong to equate cultural disappearance with the abandonment of any particular aspect of thought or practice, however fundamental. It is hard to think of any form of thought or practice that people might abandon which, under the right circumstances, would not be consistent with our judging that their culture had changed rather than disappeared.

### 3. The Wrong History View

An alternative to the "loss of fundamentals" view is what I earlier called the "wrong history" view. According to the wrong history view, the abandonment of some form of thought or practice can be judged a case of cultural disappearance only if the circumstances under which the abandonment occurs have a certain character. With the right history, the abandonment of a particular form of thought or practice can be considered a change in the culture, but without that history it is evidence – if the form of thought or practice is fundamental enough – that a culture has ceased to exist.

For this view to gain any traction, it is obviously necessary to say something more about what kind of history goes with the persistence of culture and what kind goes with its disappearance. A simple suggestion would be to understand persistence as involving choice and disappearance as involving its absence. When the abandonment of some relevant form of thought or practice is the result of the choices of members of the culture, then we can say that the culture has persisted. When it is the result of conditions imposed from the outside, then it is possible to talk of cultural disappearance (Kymlicka 1995: 104-5).

This simple suggestion does not work, however. A major problem with it is that it over-dichotomizes choice and externally imposed conditions. Typical cases in which particular forms of belief or practice are abandoned will involve a bit of both (cf Kymlicka 1995: 43-4). External conditions being what they are, it will make sense for people to choose to revise their practices, or to put themselves into situations in which, predictably, they will abandon certain forms of thought.



Even if we ignore this problem, a further difficulty with the suggestion is that, intuitively, cultures sometimes disappear as a result of the choices of their members. Choice need not imply persistence. To see this, consider the following story. For reasons of economic opportunity, all or most of the members of some small rural cultural group R choose to migrate to a nearby city. Upon arrival in the city, they do not re-constitute themselves as a distinct group, but are absorbed into the larger cultural formations that predominate in that place. They work with and marry members of other groups, send their children to schools that operate in the language of the majority culture, find that it is convenient to use the majority language as a lingua franca on many occasions (including child-rearing if their spouse does not come from R), enjoy the higher production values of majority-culture forms of popular entertainment, and so on. Within a generation or two, through inter-marriage and other socialization processes, R has disappeared.

This strikes me as a perfectly familiar and plausible story about how cultural loss sometimes occurs. The key point is that the events of the story are triggered (as I stipulated) by the choices of members of the culture that disappears. Choice and its absence cannot be what distinguishes the “right” history from the “wrong” history.

The story does, however, point in the direction of a more defensible account. A number of the key facts in the story are facts about socialization processes. The decision to move to the city makes members of R and their children subject to a number of new socializing influences. It is plausible to think that it is exposure to these new forms of socialization, and the disruption of the previous processes in which the culture of R had been transmitted to new members of R, that accounts for our sense that the R culture has disappeared. To see this in more detail, contrast the socialization processes that members of R would have been subjected to in their original rural community with those they face in the city. Two areas of contrast stand out.

1. First, in their original community, we might suppose, members of R were subjected to *a common and distinctive set of formative influences*. To a significant degree, their socialization was conducted through a set of institutions and practices that operated at the R-level. To a greater or lesser degree, they were applied to all members of R and only to members of R. So, for instance, significant formative influences on members of R included:

- the language of R, together with the specific narratives and forms of discourse that prevailed in the language at the relevant point in time;
- norms and practices of child-rearing that were widely adopted by parents in R;
- the economic conditions and circumstances of R;
- the educational system of R;
- the norms and practices of government and bureaucracy in R;
- the physical character of R – its geography, natural spaces, village layout, public architecture, and so on;

- the media, literature and popular culture of R;
- and so on

All of these processes apply in general to all and only members of R living in their original rural community. Of course, some of them will apply with greater or lesser strength to particular individuals. A child in R might have idiosyncratic parents who consciously raise her in a manner that rejects the prevailing local norms of child-rearing. Or a child might be sent away to boarding school in the city, thus missing out on one of the crucial institutions of R-socialization. Ordinarily, the fact that someone missed out on certain elements of a standard R-socialization – even important ones – would not prevent us from judging that she had been socialized as an R, so long as she was subject to other significant R-socialization processes. But if someone missed out on too many of the processes of R-socialization then I think we would hesitate to regard them as culturally an R. Someone who grew up outside of R, and whose parents did not speak the R-language or follow what they took to be R-norms of child-rearing, should not be regarded as culturally an R, unless of course (and this confirms the main point) she takes later steps to immerse herself in the culture of R. In the same spirit, if it turned out that members of neighboring group S were subject to the same socializing influences as R – a common set of institutions and practices applied to both – then I think we would judge – whatever the conventions of group labeling might be – that the relevant culture is not R or S but R+S.

If we turn to the situation of members of R once they arrive in the city, we find a very different story. On the facts I have stipulated, once they arrive in the city, members of R begin participating in formative practices and institutions that transcend the R community. Of course, the migrants themselves bring with them whatever R-socialization they received prior to their departure, and they may maintain some contacts with their home community and with fellow urban members of R after their arrival. But they and their children soon find themselves subject to a powerful set of socializing institutions and practices that apply, not just to members of R, but much more broadly. These include: the economy, political institutions, and education system of the city (and perhaps the larger society that the city is part of); the language, narratives and forms of discourse that predominate in the city; the main forms of popular culture and entertainment of the city; the commercial and neighborhood life of the city; and, for some of them, marriage outside of the R culture and the rearing of children in a non-R medium.

2. Second, the main socializing practices and institutions in the original R community, we might suppose, are *administered mainly by other members of R*. Most of the other participants in those practices and institutions are fellow members of R, and persons in positions of authority in those practices and institutions are also drawn mainly from the ranks of the R. In this way, it is, to some significant degree, the beliefs, values, priorities, and so on, of members of R that determine the character of the processes that transmit the culture to new members.

Again the contrast with the experience of the urban members of R is important. To the extent that members of R are a small and relatively powerless (or no more than averagely powerful) minority, and the main socializing processes they participate in operate on a city-wide basis (or even more extensively) one can no longer expect that those processes will be controlled and populated mainly by persons who

belong to R. The urban members of R will work alongside non-members of R and answer to a boss who is a non-member; their children will go to school with non-members and the teachers will be non-members; and so on.

Putting these two points together, we can say then that, in a very real sense, upon migration into the city, members of R experience a significant rupture in the socialization processes to which they and their children are subject. Whereas before, they and their children had been socialized by and as members of R, now this is no longer the case. Now they are being socialized by and as members of the larger society and its culture. It is this fundamental rupture, I think, that accounts for our sense that the culture of R disappears by the end of the story.

To return, then, to our original problem of distinguishing between cases of cultural change and cultural disappearance, suppose we change the story slightly. Now imagine that half of the original members of R stayed at home and the other half migrated to the city. For the city-dwellers, the story unfolds just as I described it above. At end of the story, they (and their children) have been strongly socialized by the non-R institutions and practices of the city. This experience leaves them with certain forms of thought and practice that differ from those that prevailed prior to the migration. Those who stayed behind, by contrast, continued to be socialized by and as members of R. Imagine, however, that, by some fluke, they end up with exactly the same forms of thought and practice as their city cousins.

My proposal is to say that the first group has lost its culture and the second group has changed its culture. Since the *ex ante* and *ex post* forms of thought and practice are assumed to be the same for both groups, it could only be the differing histories of the two groups that explain this difference. One group arrived at its final forms of thought and practice through a series of steps in which R-socialization processes were extinguished and those who had been subject to those processes absorbed into other formative processes. The other got there via a different series of steps in which R-socialization processes continued to operate the whole time. On the view I am proposing, then, the fundamental feature of cultural disappearance is the rupture of processes of cultural transmission. A culture is dead when these are processes are dead and other processes are fully operative on its former members. A culture survives when at least some of these processes continue to function, and it flourishes when the culture reproduces itself through institutions and practices that operate across the range of different areas of human life. Quebec's culture survived the Quiet Revolution (and, indeed, flourished because of it) because the new institutions and practices that were established in the 50s and 60s continued to be ones that, by and large, applied generally to Francophone Quebecers and were populated and controlled by Francophone Quebecers. There were dramatic changes in the character of those practices and institutions, and in the character of the forms of thought and practice that they in turn engendered. But underlying these changes there was the continued existence of Quebecer-to-Quebecer mechanisms of cultural transmission operating across the range of different areas of human life.

The urbanization story is just one possible illustration of how cultural disappearance might occur, but of course there are other routes to that same outcome. In general, migration, changes in economic

conditions and opportunities, rising literacy and access to new media and forms of popular culture, improvements in transportation and communication, and other broad social changes of this kind all have a tendency to expose people to new influences and give them opportunities and incentives to take themselves out of traditional socialization mechanisms. Without anyone ever intending to kill the culture, it is predictable that these social processes will sometimes collude to bring about precisely that result. Moreover, in typical cases, the weakening (if not the outright destruction) of historic cultures is consciously encouraged by nation-building policy-makers, who see value in integrating all citizens into a statewide national culture. The state imposes a national school system, requires service in the national military, supports national broadcasting media, controls settlement in new areas of the country, and designs various institutions of the state in such a way as to integrate members of minority cultures into statewide processes of cultural transmission. In some cases, states have gone so far as to attempt to disrupt processes of familial and community socialization, e.g. by taking children from their families and communities and placing them in state-run residential schools. Measures of this kind, which are condemned by the Convention on Genocide's definition of genocide, amount to an especially blatant and brutal effort to extinguish a culture.

#### 4. The Weak Culturalist Hypothesis

It is very hard to think about culture without a certain picture in mind. In this picture, cultures consist of shared patterns of thought and practice that come into existence as a result of a common exposure to socialization processes of the sort that I have been mentioning. Since the institutions and practices responsible for socialization differ from one culture to the next, any given culture's pattern of thought and practice tends to be quite distinct from that found amongst its neighbors. Although everyone recognizes that there are immigrants who are still in the process of being socialized into a particular host culture, on the whole, according to the familiar picture, it is possible to assign each person to one and only one culture. This is the culture by which the individual was socialized and that accounts, to some significant degree, for the individual's ways of thinking and acting.

I will call this picture *strong culturalism*. It should be pretty obvious that strong culturalism is an unsatisfactory view. There is no reason to think that everyone exposed to a common set of socialization conditions will respond to those conditions in a similar way. On the contrary, in any typical human group, one would expect to see a great variety of responses, ranging from a warm embrace of the characteristic beliefs and practices made possible by the socialization process to total alienation from them, and from navel-gazing fascination with the history and distinctiveness of those beliefs and practices to utter indifference. This diversity of responses is all the more likely once one recognizes what might be termed the *self-differentiating* character of many processes of socialization. One of the functions performed by some processes of socialization is to assign different people to different roles and spheres of activity, often depending on perceived ascriptive characteristics, such as sex, race, ethnicity, social class, and so on. These roles and spheres of activity correspond to their own distinctive sub-processes of socialization that are nested in the broader-scale ones. The fact that different persons' experiences of a common set of socializing institutions and practices will often be mediated by the

operation of the differentiated, nested sub-processes makes it all the less likely that they will all respond to the higher level processes in a similar fashion.

This last point indicates a further problem with strong culturalism. As the phenomenon of nesting illustrates, it is fundamentally mistaken to suggest, even as an approximation, that each person can be assigned to one and only one culture. One of the things that institutions and practices responsible for socialization often do is assign a person to some further, nested institution or practice that only some persons participate in. In reality, people are exposed to a great variety of different processes of socialization in the course of their lives. In part this is because of the mechanisms of social self-differentiation (e.g. on gender and race lines) just referred to, but more generally it is due to the fact that a typical person is likely, over the course of her life, to take part in a multiplicity of different practices, associations, institutions, and so on. Some of these forms of participation will again affiliate her with all other members of the society to which she belongs. But in others she will be put into a relationship with different groupings of people, be it a subset of all the members of her society, a group that mainly includes people from a different society, or a group whose membership straddles the boundaries between her own society and others.

As critics of strong culturalism point out, the assumption that each person can be assigned to one main culture is not just empirically false but may also be pernicious (Phillips 2007: 14, 23-4). The classification of people according to culture often occurs in a context in which the "multicultural" character of modern societies is being discussed and even celebrated. When claims about multiculturalism are combined with the thought that each person has one main cultural membership, the result is to exaggerate the difference between people who belong to the same society. One is forced to overlook the fact that, although people may be exposed to socializing influences that are local to a particular subgroup, there are many other institutions and practices to which they are subjected that are operative on all (or almost all) members of the society. The assumption of individual monoculturalism also courts the opposite error, which is to assume that, because each person should be assigned to one main culture only, multiculturalism is merely a thin and insignificant veneer. This error risks under-appreciating the significance of the fact that some people really are socialized in some areas of their lives by processes that are not universally shared in the society.

A third problem with strong culturalism lies in its assumption that cultures are wholly distinct entities that can easily be distinguished from one another. Once one recognizes that individuals can be simultaneously subjected to a multiplicity of socializing processes, there is little reason to insist on this assumption. Individuals who participate together in a given set of institutions and practices will bring to the table various experiences of also participating in institutions and practices that unite and apply to different groupings of people. Through their consumption and reading choices, their associational memberships and religious affiliations, their family's and community's migration history, their own travel and migration for work or other purposes, and so on, individuals will find themselves under the influence of processes that are not generally operative in the society in which they live. In many cases, their contributions to the general processes may reflect these influences. As the general processes get shaped and negotiated under these conditions of multiple affiliation, they may increasingly acquire a

“hybrid” character that makes it hard to distinguish those who are formed by them from those who are formed through other processes of socialization (Waldron 1992; Tully 1995; Scheffler 2007).

If strong culturalism is basically a mistake, should we therefore abandon the idea of culture altogether? An intermediate position between strong culturalism and the total renunciation of culture is a hypothesis that I shall call *weak culturalism*. According to weak culturalism, the fact that some group of people has been shaped by a common set of institutions and practices is itself of significance. Even though it is predictable that the impact of this formative process will vary from individual to individual, and it is likely that any given individual will be subjected over the course of her lifetime to a number of different socializing processes that impact on varying sets of people, weak culturalism attaches importance to the mere fact that some group of people have been subjected to a particular common set of socializing conditions. Indeed it matters enough that we might sometimes legitimately use the term “culture” to describe a group of people who have been influenced by common formative conditions, although we should be careful not to reinstate the various errors associated with strong culturalism.

By calling weak culturalism a “hypothesis”, I mean to suggest that the jury is still out on whether its claim is defensible or not. The question is partly empirical and conceptual, but is also normative. The claim is that the subjection of some group of people to a common formative process *matters*. To be in a position to assess this, one would need to know what difference such an experience makes and why this difference is something that we should care about normatively. Ultimately, then, we will not know whether culture in the weak sense is a useful and significant concept until we have answered certain empirical and normative questions. A full answer to the normative questions, at least, will only become available in the course of working out the argument of the next few chapters. As is often the case in political philosophy, although one seems to need clear concepts in order to embark on a particular normative inquiry, it turns out that the right way to specify the concepts depends in turn on the pragmatic discursive needs of the inquiry itself and hence on the direction in which the inquiry ends up going.

So as not to defer too much of the story I plan to tell, however, let me at least mention, by way of illustration, a few of the important reasons why one might think that subjection to a common formative process matters empirically and normatively. I have already hinted at one such reason. Some groups of people find themselves subjected to a common formative process because broader society-wide social processes have assigned them there for reasons having to do with race, gender, class, etc. Even though the impact of such race-, gender-, and class-specific processes will vary significantly from individual to individual, it is predictable, in typical cases, that many people will be adversely affected. Their formative conditions will prepare them inadequately for opportunity and success in the broader society and/or their formative background will lead others to assume that they have been inadequately prepared to meet various challenges and to treat them accordingly. In these cases, culture in the weak sense matters in a negative way. It corresponds to a predictable set of ills that have obvious relevance for public policy. If a particular culture only mattered in this negative way, one might think that the appropriate course of action to adopt would be to try to dismantle the processes that were assigning the group to a separate sphere of socialization and to integrate them into the mainstream formative processes of the society.

Culture in the weak sense can also matter in positive ways, however. A particular formative process may predictably make available options that would be difficult or impossible to find if different formative processes were operative instead. There is something about the institutions and practices of British culture, for instance, that is relatively hospitable towards vegetarianism. British culture clearly does not make everybody a vegetarian – far from it – but, by comparison with many other national culinary cultures, it does encourage enough vegetarianism so as to make vegetarian options fairly reliably available. Whereas in some national contexts, vegetarianism seems barely intelligible to people, in Britain, those who provide food – in shops, restaurants, public cafeterias, at private parties and public gatherings – all routinely expect a certain number of people to be some kind or other of vegetarian.

The fact that specific formative processes correspond with the availability of particular options matters for several different kinds of reasons. In some cases, people socialized under certain conditions may *rely* in some strong sense on the ongoing availability of the options that those conditions are disposed to generate. It may be that their socialization has left them ill-equipped to access other kinds of options and thus they are reliant on the options thrown up by their own culture if they are to have an adequate range of options and/or if they are to enjoy equal opportunities with others in their society. Language provides a good illustration of this possibility, one which I will explore in more detail later in the book. Someone raised to speak a minority language may not speak the majority language as a second language. To be able to access options available only in the majority language, they would need further language-training, which may be unavailable or likely to be unsuccessful. These circumstances make them highly dependent on the options available in their own minority language community. If those options are too limited, then their life prospects may suffer accordingly.

In certain cases, then, some of the people formed by a particular set of conditions rely on the continuation of those conditions to generate for them an adequate range of options. In other cases, it would be implausible to maintain that people would lack an *adequate* range of options were a particular set of socializing conditions to suddenly disappear, because they would have the capacity to access options associated with other practices and institutions (which may, given the fact of multiple affiliation emphasized earlier, also have been formative for them). They might still complain, however, that they would lose access to particular options that they *value* were a particular set of socializing conditions to disappear. In these cases, cultures in the weak sense matter because of their disposition to generate options that correspond to the values that, at an earlier stage, they encouraged individuals subject to their influence to acquire. If, all of the sudden, a distinctive British culture were to disappear, for instance, then those who had been socialized by that culture to think that eating meat was wrong might find it increasingly difficult to access vegetarian alternatives.

A different reason why culture in the weak sense matters positively has to do with the sense of community that shared exposure to a common set of socializing conditions often engenders in people. Even though it is predictable that they will end up with different beliefs and preferences, people who shared a socialization experience often find that they share a reference point that fosters a sense of solidarity and makes their ideas and actions immediately intelligible to one another in a way they might not be to other people. Moreover, they may come away from their socialization experience attached to the institutions and practices of socialization themselves, and not just to the options that those

conditions are disposed to support. It is one of the marks of just and effective institutions that they tend to inspire allegiance in those who are shaped by them. These various sorts of feelings of community are valuable instrumentally – they foster trust and a willingness to accept burdens and sacrifices – and may be regarded by some as also valuable intrinsically. The success of the culture may matter to people because it involves the continuing replenishment of a community that they value for its own sake.

I will return to these issues when I deal with the normative questions concerning culture more systematically in the chapters that come. To close out this part of the discussion, let me just relate the weak culturalist hypothesis to a few further ideas that are often invoked in discussions of culture. These include the ideas of ethnicity, identity, and language.

*Ethnicity.* A common charge made by critics of cultural rights is that the proponents of such rights are tacitly relying on an unavowed ethnic or even racialist understanding of culture. Since cultures clearly do not have the integrity and distinctiveness assumed by the strong culturalist view of culture, there must be something else that those who engage in culture-talk have in the back of their minds when they talk as if cultures do have those qualities. An obvious idea that may be playing this role is that of an extended kinship group (Appiah 2005: 136-8; Phillips 2007). What the members of a culture may be assumed to share in common are not commonalities of thought or practice but relationships of blood and genealogy. Lurking behind culture-talk may be the notion that cultures are determinate, bounded, and fairly homogenous entities, which are threatened by too much interaction with other cultures, if and because they denote groups of people who share in common the fact that they descend from some common, originary group. Needless to say, if this is what cultures are all about, liberal solicitude towards cultural success becomes highly suspect.

Weak culturalism, I should say from the start, does share a structural similarity with an ethnic, or descent-based view. On the ethnic view, as I understand it, a group of people constitute a culture if and only if they can all trace themselves back, by a chain of genealogical relations, to some common originary group of families. To say that some group of people share a culture in the ethnic sense is to say, in other words, that, by and large, they were the product of common formative conditions, where those conditions are understood in a biological or genealogical sense. The current members of the culture are the sons and daughters of people who were the sons and daughters of people who were the sons and daughters, and so on, of the members of some originary group. Weak culturalism is also “descent-based” in a certain sense. A group of people share a culture in this sense if and only if they were subjected to a common and distinctive socialization process. A culture in this sense extends back in time when the current members of the culture were socialized by people who were socialized by people who were socialized by people, etc., all the way back to an originary group of people who established institutions and practices that would have a formative influence on newcomers and subsequent generations.

It is easy to conflate genealogical and sociological transmission processes because sometimes they overlap. Take a case like Iceland, where the population is known for having an unusually pure line of descent from the original Norse settlers. One and the same group – the present population of the country – can trace itself back both genealogically and sociologically to one and the same originary



group. Still, the genealogical and sociological processes are distinct, and it is necessary to be clear about the distinction because they come significantly apart once one moves away from extreme cases of purity like Iceland. Genealogical transmission works through the parent-child relation. In its simplest form, it is a biological relation between parents and their children. The sociological transmission works, by contrast, through social practices and institutions. It is a relation in which one group of people socializes another (children, immigrants, etc), and more generally in which the members of the group socialize one another, through social practices and institutions.

For people who adhere to an ethnic or racialized picture of their culture, it is a serious embarrassment to learn that the supposed members of the culture share much less in common genetically than one would expect if they all descended from a single cluster of families. On the weak culturalist view, by contrast, this is not embarrassing at all and, indeed, is just what one would expect in much of the world, where migration and the inter-mixing of ethnic populations have been the norm rather than the exception. The reason why a gulf opens up between ethnicity and culture on my understanding of the latter is the tremendous formative power of social institutions and practices. People coming from with the most diverse ethnic origins, arriving from the most far-flung places, can be absorbed into common socializing institutions and practices that were established long ago by somebody else's ancestors and these institutions and practices will have a profound effect on them. Within a generation or two the process of ethnic transmission – if it is operative at all – may have been entirely disconnected from the process of cultural transmission.

To be sure, I do not want to paint too rosy a picture here. The experience of being absorbed into new socialization processes will likely be a painful one for many newcomers. This will be especially true if the socialization processes to which they are subjected operate in a differentiated way that assigns persons of a perceived ethnic or racial group a subordinate or partly excluded position. As I noted earlier, the fact that several people were exposed to some common set of formative practices and institutions does not imply that they will all have the same experience of those practices and institutions. It may be a constitutive feature of those practices and institutions that they assign different roles to different people, depending on gender, ethnicity, etc. I am also not arguing that the processes of cultural transmission whose sociological power I am acknowledging are either good or bad. Perhaps it would be better if newcomers were not subjected to the same socializing forces as everybody else, but were given a chance to at least partially reconstitute their original culture in their new home? These are normative questions that I reserve for later. The key points for now are simply (a) that we can think of sociological "descent" as a distinct and separate process from that of ethnic descent, and (b) that, given the tremendous socializing power of the practices and institutions of the world that we know, it should not surprise us in the least to find that members of the same culture do not share ethnicity.

*Identity.* Another question is how culture, on the account I have been developing, relates to identity. In my view, the two concepts are distinct but related. To have a particular cultural identity, as I understand the term, is to have a certain set of beliefs and attitudes with respect to a culture with which one is affiliated. One thinks of oneself as a member, values one's membership, cares about the obligations and traditions associated with the culture and about the success of the culture, and lets one's membership in the culture count as a factor in one's practical reasoning in appropriate contexts. If this is what it

means to have a particular cultural identity, then it follows that being a member of a culture in the weak sense does not imply having an identity that is connected with that culture (contrast Blake 2002: 641). It is perfectly conceivable that someone could have been shaped in important ways by a set of formative conditions also imposed on others in a group, and in this sense be part of the culture defined by those conditions, and yet not have the set of beliefs and attitudes required for us to judge that she has an identity associated with that culture. As I noted earlier, one recognizable way in which people respond to the conditions of their socialization is by adopting an attitude of indifference, or even disdain, towards the group associated with the formative experience. Such an attitude, to the extent that it is genuine and not simply a pose, suggests that the person does not have an identity relating to the cultural group in question.

Culture and identity are thus distinct concepts, but we should not lose sight of the important ways in which they are related. A common result of having shared a socialization experience with some group of persons is that one comes to feel a sense of belonging in, and attachment to, the group. As I suggested earlier, the value of these feelings of community is one reason why culture in the weak sense matters. Culture does not imply identity, but it is no accident that they often go together.

In addition, in some cases, a person would never find herself subjected to a set of formative influences if it were not for the fact that she felt some attachment to that way of life. Consider biker culture, for instance. Setting the case of children of bikers to one side, in general exposure to the socializing influences of biker culture is not something that is simply imposed on people. They put themselves in the path of those influences, presumably because they think that there is something attractive or interesting about that particular way of life. Here it is not culture that leads to identity, but something like the opposite. Having a certain set of beliefs and attitudes triggers a willingness to expose oneself to certain influences, which in turn reinforce the beliefs and attitudes, and so on.

A final point about the relationship between culture and identity worth noting is one that has been emphasized by Anthony Appiah (2005: 114-20). Just as one can think of cases in which a person belongs to a culture – in the sense that she received the relevant socialization – but never adopts an identity based on that culture, one can also think of cases in which a person develops a strong identity associated with a culture that scarcely exists. Appiah argues that this situation has become increasingly typical in the United States. America's powerful national culture is constantly at work erasing sub-national processes of cultural transmission. Immigrants arrive in the country with their own languages, traditions, and attitudes, but the economy and popular culture, and high rates of inter-marriage, quickly undermine the transmission mechanisms that would allow immigrant groups to maintain themselves as distinct cultures. Even while this pattern repeats itself, however, and perhaps, Appiah speculates (117-8), because of it, distinctive cultural identities have become increasingly salient for people. According to Appiah, Americans are more likely than ever to identify themselves as members of groups, care about how the group fares and is treated, and so on, even though the groups barely exist as distinct cultural entities.

*Language.* Rather like identity, language, on the weak culturalist view, is important though not essential to culture. Language is itself a major socializing practice. Although in principle languages are elastic and

versatile enough that they could be made to express almost any idea, in practice, at any given moment in time, particular forms of discourse are likely to be dominant in a given language, and they will privilege certain ways of viewing the world over others. To be socialized as a speaker of a particular language is to become entangled in the various ways of organizing and interpreting the world that are current at the time of socialization. Since the prevailing discourses of a speech community are often assumed to have a major impact on what can be said or thought by a speaker of that language, it is widely claimed that language is fundamental to thought and thus to culture.

A further reason for thinking that language is fundamental to culture follows from the simple fact that most people can only speak a few languages and many people can only speak one. Limited competence in additional languages places a fairly hard constraint on how far individuals can go in exposing themselves to formative influences other than ones that originally socialized them. The realm of cultures thus corresponds, in a rough and ready way, with the realm of languages, both because language is a major socializing influence that corresponds with distinctive ways of thinking about the world and because language acts as a kind of customs barrier that impedes the free flow of people from one culture to another.

For these reasons, it seems correct to think of language as a major reason why cultures as distinctive socialization processes exist and a major factor in explaining how they maintain themselves. When a group abandons its historic language, its culture is weakened and less successful. Having recognized these points, however, we should resist the stronger claim that language is somehow essential to culture. There are, as I mentioned earlier, examples of groups that abandoned their languages but managed to maintain themselves as distinct cultures. More generally, there are examples of groups that share a language with powerful neighbors and yet still possess distinct cultures. In places such as Canada, Scotland, Ireland, Belgium, and Switzerland, groups share a language in common with larger, more powerful neighbors, but still manage to maintain distinct cultures. The neighbors exert an influence, to be sure – through economic ties, popular culture, and so on – but there are political, educational, and social institutions that impart a distinctive socialization experience and thus keep the smaller cultures intact. These processes are boosted by the fact that members of these groups identify with their cultures and thus make certain choices about consumption, reading, place of residence, etc., that expose them to the ongoing operation of the distinctive formative influences.

**Works Cited [Note: the paper in its current form is incompletely referenced]**

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