Relational Group Autonomy:
Ensuring Agency and Accountability in the Group Rights Paradigm

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Introduction:

The discussion in this paper centres around one of the most debated concepts in political theory—that is, autonomy. While the concept of autonomy has been the focus of much work in political theory across time and trends, current shifts in both world events and academic foci have opened up new theoretical space in which to explore the political significance of autonomy. While the protection and facilitation of *individual* autonomy has always been a central component of modern liberalism, *group* autonomy-based approaches to multiculturalism have recently gained legitimacy both within academic and policy circles. From this perspective, the facilitation of autonomy, both at the individual and at the group level, is central in reconciling group-differentiated or asymmetrical approaches to citizenship with the principles of liberalism which, until recent decades, appeared more compatible with a "difference-blind" approach to multiculturalism. The increased legitimacy granted to cultural group autonomy distinguishes current trends in liberal theory and practice from the liberalism of the past and its increased acceptance has manifest itself in the practice of granting cultural group, or "minority" rights.[1]

In this paper I examine the centrality of group autonomy in the multiculturalism debate, particularly in the "Canadian school" approach of Will Kymlicka and Charles Taylor.[2] By critiquing the conceptualizations of autonomy central in their works I demonstrate that their responses to the dilemmas of liberal-democratic multiculturalism are, at best, partial responses with significant limitations and implications. Finally, I put forward the need for a relational conception of group autonomy that can address the shortcomings of the Canadian school approach while maintaining autonomy as a necessary guiding principle.

Group vs. Individual Autonomy:

It is difficult to discern the full meaning and implications of the concept of group autonomy. In general, group autonomy is associated with some form of group "self-determination" or provisions for group management over "their own affairs" (Kymlicka 1995, Taylor 1994). As such, the concept of *autonomy* as it applies to a group appears to be largely indistinguishable from the concept applied to the individual. The only clear differentiation between the two concepts as they are generally conceived appears in regard to the actual *agent* of autonomy. As Marilyn Freidman observes, "Shared or collective autonomy is possible for persons engaged as joint agents who choose to act together as single units" (Freidman 15, 2003). In other words, for a collective to practice group autonomy they must act as one, as an *individual* entity. Within the discourse of multiculturalism, conceptions of individual autonomy and group autonomy are further enmeshed by the fact that proponents of group autonomy often frame their arguments by

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[1] These rights refer to "a wide range of public policies, legal rights, and constitutional provisions sought by ethnic groups for the accommodation of their cultural differences" (Kymlicka and Norman 2000, 2).

[2] While there are a variety of approaches in political theory regarding potential ways to "deal" with "difference", the approach which has received the largest amount of attention is the liberal multiculturalism of Will Kymlicka and Charles Taylor—that is, an approach largely centered on the recognition of group-differentiated or "minority" rights within a liberal framework. The popularity of this approach within theory is mirrored in contemporary liberal democracies to varying degrees.

claiming it preserves and promotes the development of individual autonomy for group members. Given this degree of overlap between the two concepts, those of us interested in unpacking the concept of group autonomy are well served by attending to the characterizations and debates centred on conceptualizations of individual autonomy as well.

What Characterizes Individual Autonomy?

While most definitions of individual autonomy characterize it as referring to some form of "self-determination" (sometimes referred to as "self-government"), there are, in fact, many interpretations. As Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar note:

> In bioethics autonomy is often equated with informed consent. In rational choice theory, autonomy is equated with voluntary, rational choice. In other contexts, for example, within liberal political theory, autonomy is considered to be an individual right. For liberals of a libertarian persuasion, the right to autonomy is construed as a negative liberty, a right of the individual to freedom from undue interference in the exercise of choice (moral, political, personal, and religious) and in the satisfaction of individual preferences. For Rawlsian liberals, autonomy is understood in Kantian terms as a capacity for rational self-legislation, and is considered to be the defining feature of persons. (2000, 4-5)

Still, despite these divergences of interpretation, there are certain characteristics that are repeatedly associated with autonomy in discussions and debates. In general, autonomy is a capacity, an activity or exercise. More specifically, it is the capacity to make decisions for oneself based on one's own values and goals arrived at through processes of self reflection. This capacity is then demonstrated through behavior that is based on these values and is exercised under certain necessary conditions. These conditions include opportunities for meaningful choice and the ability to act without incapacitating coercion or manipulation. While autonomy can be defined both procedurally and substantively it is increasingly defined in a content neutral manner which emphasizes only that the opportunity for autonomy be ensured, while the individual chooses if, when, and how to act autonomously (Freidman 2003). As a valued political capacity within liberal democratic states individual autonomy is generally viewed as something that should be ensured, if not encouraged, by the state; often through the vehicle of individual rights.

As a central political principle in liberal democratic theory individual autonomy is also the target of many critics of liberal democratic approaches. These critiques have emerged particularly from various strands of feminism and communitarianism[3] and suggest that liberal theory's reliance on individual autonomy is significantly limited and

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[3] While feminist and communitarians share a critical view of liberal notions of individual autonomy I will draw on the former over the later in this chapter. I am focusing on the feminist critiques in particular due to the relevant parallels I see between feminist social movements and cultural social movements. I believe the same concerns that cause many feminists to both reject and embrace autonomy are relevant to the multiculturalism debate. For a good overview of the communitarian critiques see "Communitarianism" in Will Kymlicka's *Contemporary Political Philosophy* (2002).

problematic. While this line of critique is generally launched against a particularly narrow or "minimalist" conception of autonomy, it is a valuable line of critique for at least two reasons. First, theses critiques highlight important considerations regarding the conceptual implications of individual autonomy that, while not entirely overlooked by dominant or mainstream accounts, may nevertheless not be given adequate consideration. In so doing, they offer an alternative conception of autonomy, often referred to as "relational autonomy," that must be acknowledged and addressed within any attempt to unpack the concept of autonomy. Second, the critical attention given to this minimalist conception demonstrates the contested nature of the concept of autonomy. This is evident within theoretical debates but also extends beyond them to the worlds of social movements, government, and policy making. While critics may reject a particular understanding of individual autonomy few scholars of democratic politics advocate rejecting autonomy as a political principle all together. Instead they put forth a reconceptualization of autonomy that better suits their needs and concerns. Thus the principle of autonomy can be invoked simultaneously by opposite sides of a given conflict or argument. In political practice, this makes autonomy both something to be sought after and something of which one should be critically suspicious.

What's Wrong with Liberal Autonomy:

While critiques of individual autonomy have emerged from somewhat different starting points they generally share a deep suspicion of the dominant association of autonomy with a particular brand of individualism that is often associated with the liberal paradigm. As Bhikhu Parekh observes, liberalism traditionally defines the individual in "minimalist" terms. "It abstracts the person from all his or her 'contingent' and 'external' relations with other people and nature, and defines the person as an essentially self-contained and solitary being encapsulated in, and unambiguously marked off from, the 'outside' world by his or her body" (1992, 161). On this basis the liberal individual's central concern is two-fold, "to maintain his or her personal independence and autonomy and to live peacefully with others by respecting theirs" (163). Rights are then the tools used to ensure the appropriate degree of separation and respect amongst citizens of a liberal society. It is this vision of the liberal individual that lends to a specific conception or as Martha Albertson Fineman calls it, a specific "myth," of individual autonomy. Fineman observes:

> Autonomy […] connotes on an ideological level that an individual who conforms to the dominant notions of independence and self-sufficiency is both freed *from* the prospect of regulatory government action and freed *through* governmental structures from interference by other private actors. The freedom through the government is the nonintervention point stated in positive terms—the right to be let alone is also the guarantee of privacy. In establishing and adhering to a norm of nonintervention and regulation for those individuals deemed self-sufficient, the state grants them autonomy. (9, 2004)

Lorraine Code puts forward a similar sketch of a particular, and arguably dominant, understanding of individual autonomy according to which:

> Autonomous man is—and should be—self-sufficient, independent, and self-reliant, a self-realizing individual who directs his efforts towards maximizing personal gains. His independence is under constant threat from other (equally self-serving) individuals; hence he devises rules to protect himself from intrusion. Talk of rights, rational self-interest, expedience, and efficacy permeates his moral, social, and political discourse. In short there has been a gradual alignment of *autonomy* with *individualism*. (78, 1991)

While criticism of this nature certainly exists outside feminist approaches, much of the debate about notions of autonomy emerges out of the insights put forward by a particular strand of feminist criticism referred to as the "ethics of care" approach. This perspective characterizes the "liberal" or "minimalist"[4] understanding of autonomy as part of a broader paradigm referred to as "the ethics of justice." At the same time, these critics suggest the existence of another ethical paradigm. In general, the two paradigms have been characterized in the following manner:

> • The ethic of justice takes an abstract approach, while the ethic of care takes a contextual approach;
> • The ethic of justice begins with an assumption of human separateness, while the ethic of care begins with an assumption of human connectedness; and
> • The ethic of justice has some form of equality as a priority, while the ethic of care has the maintenance of relationships as a priority
> (Clement 1996, 11)

In short, the ethics of justice has been characterized by the primacy of personal autonomy through individual rights whereas the ethics of care is characterized by the individual's ability to recognize herself as part of a greater whole embedded within a set of particular relations. *Prima facie* then it may seem that the ethics of care is discordant with any privileging of autonomy. Indeed, Carol Gilligan states, "Illuminating life as a web rather than a succession of relationships, women portray autonomy rather than attachment as the illusory and dangerous quest" (1982, 48). Nevertheless few ethics of care theorists reject the principle of individual autonomy altogether as the notion of autonomy remains vital to feminist attempts to understand oppression and subjection, and work towards agency and emancipation (Nedelsky 1989, MacKenzie and Stoljar 2000, Freidman 2003).While care theorists work to demonstrate the value a care ethic brings to notions of the self, and more recently to notions of citizenship, much of the latest work suggests the need to find

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[4] As indicated earlier, this "minimalist" conception of autonomy is often taken by critics as interchangeable with "liberal" conceptions of autonomy. As will become, clear, however, I suggest there is room within liberalism for alternate conceptions of autonomy and will therefore generally stick to the term "minimalist" to indicate this particular interpretation of autonomy for the remainder of the discussion.

ways to synthesize the two paradigms.[5] A relational conception of autonomy works towards this synthesis.

Relational Autonomy:

The care critique of autonomy reveals that autonomous individuals must not be conceived in an overly abstract, self-maximizing, atomistic manner. Autonomy must be understood as social in nature, and contingent, or *processual*, in practice. Autonomy is about agency and that agency is always exercised by an embedded self. "Others" will always be part of the exercise of one's agency in some form or another. Care theorists tell us that contrary to certain conceptualizations of freedom and liberty, we cannot simply guard against the influence of others as these circumstances will never be entirely possible. Pretending that one can eliminate these influences not only puts some at a disadvantage—some individuals are more influenced by "others" than their counterparts—it also overlooks the possibility that these influences may be valuable to the "autonomous" individuals. As Nedelsky observes:

> There is a real and enduring tension between the individual and the collective, and any good political system will recognize it. The problem with our tradition is that it not only recognizes, but highlights the tension, and has a limited view of the non-oppositional aspects of the relation and of the social dimension of human beings [….] The collective is not simply a threat to individuals but is something constitutive of them and thus is a source of autonomy as well as a danger to it [….] The task, then is to think of autonomy in terms of the forms of human interactions in which it will develop and flourish. (1989, 21)

From this perspective, if we are to continue privileging the principle of autonomy we need to consider how relationships, voluntary and involuntary, intimate and distant, public and private, can work both to hinder and enhance the capacity for individual autonomy. Relational conceptions of autonomy put forward this sort of model.

There is no one specific definition of relational autonomy. Rather the term is associated with a broad philosophical approach. As MacKenzie and Stoljar observe:

> The term 'relational autonomy' […] does not refer to a single unified conception of autonomy but is rather an umbrella term, designating a range of related perspectives. These perspectives are premised on a shared conviction, the conviction that persons are socially embedded and that agents' identities are formed within the context of social relationships and shaped by a complex of intersecting social determinants, such as race, class, gender, and ethnicity. Thus the focus of relational approaches is to analyze the implications of the intersubjective and social dimensions of selfhood and identity for conceptions of individual autonomy and moral and political agency. (2000, 4)

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[5] Even Kymlicka has acknowledged the insights care approaches bring to discussions of justice. See Kymlicka's "Feminism" in *Contemporary Political Philosophy* (2002).

Evelyn Fox Keller provides a helpful example of what such an approach may look like with her conceptualization of "dynamic autonomy." According to Keller, "dynamic autonomy develops from the capacity to both relate to and differentiate from others." One develops agency and a sense of self but always in the context of "interacting and interpersonal agents." She contrasts her notion of "dynamic autonomy" with what she refers to as "static autonomy" which is centred on the capacity to deny connectedness and enhance separation. The static conceptualization positions "others" and forms of "dependency" as threats to individual autonomy (1985, 99-97). From the dynamic perspective, practicing autonomy is a process, an ongoing process that is constantly changing and adapting in relation to the ever changing surrounding context.

Jennifer Nedelsky also puts forth some guidelines for relational conceptions of autonomy. For Nedelsky autonomy must be reconceived as a participatory capacity that does not deny dependence but may work to transform it. As she explains, "The characteristic problem of autonomy in the modern state is not, as our tradition has taught us, to shield individuals from the collective, to set up legal barriers around the individual which the state cannot cross, but to ensure the autonomy of individuals when they are *within* the legitimate sphere of collective power (1989, 13). Autonomy, she argues, is not about creating barriers to keep others out so much as ensuring that individuals are effectively empowered when interacting with one another. She explains: "social context cannot simply mean that individuals will, of course, encounter one another. It means rather, that there are no human beings in the absence of relations with others. We take our being in part from those relations." (1989, 8-9)

While theorists of relational autonomy focus on relationships, context, contingency and constraint, they do not seek to narrow the notion of individual autonomy. Rather their attention to the inherent social nature of autonomy works to expand it. By centering in on the social and historical contexts in which agents are embedded and analyzing the way in which these contexts impede or enhance the capacity for autonomy, advocates of relational notions of autonomy highlight the need for a more "fine-grained and richer account of the autonomous *agent*" (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, 21). In putting forward this approach to autonomy advocates of the relational perspective are working to dissociate the concept of autonomy from the minimalist caricature of individual autonomy associated with dominant conceptions of liberalism[6] while holding on to autonomy for its emancipatory power.

To summarize then, although there is no one definition of relational autonomy, a number of characteristics associated with a relational account of autonomy have been identified. First, a relational perspective demands a contextual, dynamic, conception of the agent exercising autonomy. Such a conception requires acknowledging that both the agent and the agent's relationship with the external context will undergo constant change that will affect the agent's capacity for autonomy on an ongoing basis. Second, a relational perspective demands an account of autonomy that goes beyond conceiving

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[6] While Nedelsky goes so far as to say we need to reject autonomy's "liberal incarnation" I would argue that as there are many possibilities for conceptions of autonomy so too are there many possibilities for conceptions of liberalism. Thus, I diverge from Nedelsky in her rejection of the liberal paradigm.

collective forces external to the autonomous agent simply as threat to be contained or barricaded against. Rather than assuming and reinforcing the oppositional nature of such interactions a relational account insists that dependence and obligation are a part of autonomy that must be recognized and affirmed. In order to enhance autonomy, dependence must be transformed to allow for relationships which are interdependent yet balanced in regard to power and agency during interaction. In short, a relational conception of autonomy is a politically *active* account of autonomy.

Autonomy in Multiculturalism:

Writers supportive of liberal multiculturalism often contest traditional liberal understandings of autonomy by expanding the concept to include collective agents. In this vein, Will Kymlicka's work *Multicultural Citizenship* (1995), has served as a compelling and foundational contribution to contemporary liberal thought by outlining a conception of minority group rights that is congruent with the liberal principle of individual autonomy. Kymlicka's argument takes us from a particular conception of individual autonomy, to group autonomy via various forms of group rights, and finally to a particular conception of liberal-democratic citizenship. Similarly, in "The Politics of Recognition" (1994) fellow-Canadian, Charles Taylor, defends a particular form of multicultural citizenship. Like Kymlicka, Taylor advocates the development and maintenance of cultural group autonomy. As will be discussed, while Taylor's defense is centred on the fulfillment of individual "authenticity", his conception of authenticity is largely indistinguishable from dominant liberal notions of individual autonomy put forward in multiculturalism theory.[7] Thus, like Kymlicka, Taylor takes us from a particular conception of individual autonomy, to group autonomy via group rights, and finally to a particular conception of liberal-democratic citizenship.

Upon close review of their individual arguments, I will suggest that while both Kymlicka and Taylor[8] work to expand the notion of individual autonomy beyond its minimalist conception, their conceptions of group autonomy remain problematically narrow. Although the conception of group autonomy they put forward works to reconcile multicultural citizenship with certain principles associated with liberalism, it does not adequately reconcile multicultural citizenship with the practices and principles of democratic citizenship. In fact, despite good intentions, particular manifestations of cultural group autonomy may actually hinder certain democratic capabilities and thereby work against the kind of transformative change "accommodated" groups are seeking from the state. A more relational account of group autonomy is an important step towards reconciling multiculturalism with the necessary components of liberal-*democratic* citizenship.

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[7] It must be acknowledged that these two terms have very different theoretical genealogies with autonomy arising out of an Anglo-American liberal analytical framework and authenticity arising out of the continental traditions of Hegel, Herder, Rousseau and Kant. Nevertheless, the manner in which these two different conceptions are invoked by these thinkers *in their discussion of multiculturalism* are strikingly similar.

[8] Taylor's discussion on the inadequacies of minimalist conceptions of individual autonomy extends beyond his work on multiculturalism. For an in depth discussion on this topic see Taylor's "Atomism" in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (1985).

Kymlicka's Multicultural Citizenship:

As Kymlicka observes, a liberal democracy's commitment to the individual freedom of its citizens has long been conceived as incompatible with group-differentiated citizenship. As he states:

> To many people, the idea of group-differentiated rights seems to rest on a philosophy or world-view opposite to that of liberalism. It seems more concerned with the status of groups than with that of individuals. Moreover, it seems to treat individuals as the mere carriers of group identities and objectives, rather than as autonomous personalities capable of defining their own identity and goals in life. Group-differentiated rights, in short, seem to reflect a collectivist or communitarian outlook, rather than a liberal belief in individual freedom and equality. (1995, 34)

Kymlicka suggests that these concerns are based on misperceptions. He goes on to build a case for liberal group rights arguing that, "minority rights are not only consistent with individual freedom, but can actually promote it" (1995, 75). His argument for *liberal* multiculturalism through group rights is founded on his conception of a societal culture:

> --that is, a culture which provides its members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic life, encompassing both public and private spheres. These cultures tend to be territorially concentrated and based on a shared language. (Kymlicka 1995, 76)

According to Kymlicka, these "societal cultures"[9] provide a "context of choice" necessary for individuals to achieve liberty and equality and hence to lead a truly autonomous life. Culture is the bedrock of socialization. It is through one's culture that one learns the norms and values one is expected to emulate and exhibit throughout the various stages of one's life. He states, "liberals should care about the viability of societal cultures, because they contribute to people's autonomy, and because people are deeply connected to their culture." (Kymlicka 1995, 94). It is via the choices provided by an individual's culture that they determine the specific avenues by which they will achieve their personal autonomy. Once we recognize that individual autonomy is facilitated through cultural contexts of choice and that some of these contexts are disadvantaged by the neutral, or, "benign neglect" approach of universal liberalism, cultural *group* autonomy becomes a necessary part of ensuring the viability of *individual* autonomy. Thus, the protections offered by group rights can work to rectify disadvantage and "ensure that members of the minority have the same opportunity to live and work in their

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[9] It is important to note that for Kymlicka societal cultures are generally "national cultures." Thus, for Kymlicka, the right to group autonomy associated with societal cultures only applies to national minorities within multinational states as opposed to other cultural groups which is generally refers to as "poly-ethnic" groups. While his distinctions between the two groups have been subject to significant criticism Kymlicka distinguishes national minorities as those groups which were "involuntarily incorporated" through conquest or colonization. "Had a different balance of power existed, these groups might have retained or established their own sovereign governments" (1995, 10-11).

own culture as members of the majority" (1995, 109). This line of logic provides the foundation for Kymlicka's argument that, "'the cause of liberty' often 'finds its basis in the autonomy of a national group'" (1995, 75).

Within Kymlicka's approach to multiculturalism the individual remains the central unit of concern. From his perspective, "[c]ultures are valuable *not in and of themselves*, but because it is only through having access to a societal culture that people have access to a range of meaningful options" (1995, 83). Cultures provide the context for choice, choice fosters freedom, hence, the protection and preservation of minority cultures becomes instrumental in the liberal pursuit of free and equal citizenship. Overall, Kymlicka's multicultural citizenship maintains the liberal privileging of autonomy. He goes beyond strictly minimalist approaches to individual autonomy by highlighting the importance of socialization and context. In order to ensure that minority group members have opportunity to achieve individual autonomy equal to the opportunities of dominant group members he extends the principle of autonomy so that it also applies to "national" minority groups. In so doing Kymlicka places cultural group autonomy as a central principle for multicultural societies including Canada. In practice this principle results in the distribution of group rights, most notably, the right to "external protections"[10] which create borders of non-interference around the group as long as they do not engage in 'internal restrictions' of a kind that violates fundamental liberal rights.[11]

Taylor's Politics of Recognition:

In *The Politics of Recognition*, Taylor provides a theoretical analysis that explains both the rise and significance of identity based politics. He attributes the rise of recognition to two distinct yet related trends. First is the shift to the politics of "equal dignity" ushered in by democratic culture. This shift then leads to the second trend of "the politics of difference." According to Taylor, while the dependence on self-definition through some form of identity was always present in societies, in earlier periods of history recognition was built into systems of social hierarchies and was thus largely fixed. The uniqueness of the contemporary period is not the need for recognition, "but the conditions in which recognition can fail" (Taylor 1994, 35). For Taylor, the potential negative outcome this instability poses is the possibility of "misrecognition" (Taylor 1994, 25). When the collapse of social hierarchies is combined with the politics of equality ushered in by democracy, the force behind contemporary demands is fully revealed: "everyone should be entitled to recognition for his or her own unique identity and assimilation is the cardinal sin against this kind of authenticity" (Taylor 1994, 38).

How does the significance of recognition as such relate to issues of cultural group rights? One cannot understand Taylor's particular conception of multiculturalism without appreciating his conception of "authenticity." He explains:

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[10] According to Kymlicka there are two kinds of claims that can be made by a cultural group. "The first involves the claim of a group against its own members; the second involves the claim of a group against the larger society" (1995, 35). While both of these can be labeled as "group rights" Kymlicka attempts to advocates only for the latter which he refers to as "external protections."

[11] As such group autonomy is conditional for Kymlicka.

> Herder put forward the idea that each of us has an original way of being human [….] This idea has burrowed very deep into modern consciousness. [….] There is a certain way of being human that is my way. I am called upon to live my life in this way and not in imitation of anyone else's life. But this notion gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life; I miss what being human is for *me*. (1994, 30)

While earlier proponents of authenticity argued that authenticity comes through connection with the internal self alone, Taylor argues that there is in fact no such thing as inward generation "monologically understood." He explains:

> In order to understand the close connection between identity and recognition, we have to take into account a crucial feature of the human condition that has been rendered almost invisible by the overwhelming monological bent of mainstream philosophy. This crucial feature of human life is its fundamentally *dialogical* character. We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves and hence of defining our identity, through acquisition of rich human languages of expression [….] People do not acquire the languages they need for self-definition on their own. Rather, we are introduced to them through interaction with others who matter to us—what George Herbert Mead called, "significant others." (1994, 32)

It is this emphasis on the collective dimension of an "authentic self" that drives Taylor's particular defense of "multiculturalism." According to this perspective certain collective protections, or group-differentiated rights, may be required for minority group members to live truly "authentic" lives. Providing the conditions for cultural groups' "survival" (1994, 61) enables group members to acquire and practice the modes of expression and relationships necessary to define their identity and thus to develop to their full human potential. Overall, Taylor characterizes his concerns regarding identity on two levels. The first, he refers to as the "intimate sphere" which is the level at which our identity is "formed or malformed through the course of our contact with significant others." The second is the "social" or "public" sphere which is the level on which the politics of identity or, "equal recognition" takes place (1994, 36-37). For Taylor, the public sphere must provide adequate protection and recognition to minority group cultures through differentiated or "asymmetrical" citizenship in order to ensure the ongoing viability of their private spheres which then ensures the opportunity for group members to become fully realized, "authentic" individual citizens.

Authenticity then is at the heart of Taylor's case for multicultural citizenship. How is Taylor's notion of "authenticity" different from dominant liberal notions of "autonomy"? In, "*Authenticity and Autonomy: Taylor, Habermas, and the Politics of Recognition*" (1997), Maeve Cook has argued that it is *not* markedly distinguishable. According to Cook there is an unacknowledged tension in Taylor's work between the conceptions of authenticity and autonomy (Cook 1997, 258). As she states,

Taylor's initial (weaker) formulation of the politics of difference is that it affirms the equal *potential* of every individual (and culture) to form and define her or his own identity. The politics of equal dignity—as interpreted by procedural liberalism—affirms 'the ability of each person to determine for himself or herself a view of the good life'. The latter ability is referred to by Taylor as individual autonomy. It seems, however, to be scarcely distinguishable from the potential affirmed by the politics of difference. The latter, admittedly, does not confine itself to the individual subject and its emphasis is somewhat different; nonetheless, in its initial formulation the politics of difference, no less than the politics of equal dignity, selects autonomy as that which is worthy of recognition: it too, focuses on the individual's *power to determine for herself* a particular understanding of the good life, rather than on the value of any such particular understanding. (Cook 1997, 261)

For Cook *both* the politics of equal dignity and the politics of difference emphasize autonomy over authenticity.[12] From this perspective Taylor's authenticity is not in fact distinguishable in any meaningful way from the dominant liberal notion of autonomy that underlies Kymlicka's work. Still, Taylor's emphasis on the *dialogical* nature of identity seems to set him apart from other liberal theorists of multiculturalism. To a limited degree this is an accurate observation. Taylor is somewhat distinct from Kymlicka in his *explicit* recognition of the dialogical nature of identity. Again, however, upon close critical inspection, these differences are in many ways superficial. When one considers the way in which Taylor discusses the "significant others" that are the key players in his dialogical approach, it becomes clear that Taylor's main dialogical focus in his theory on multiculturalism is *intra*-group and this focus is, in fact, not unlike Kymlicka's acknowledgement of the role culture plays in socialization in his conceptualization of societal cultures.

Drawing on George Herbert Mead, Taylor introduces the notion of significant others as "those who matter to us" (1994, 32). It is through interaction with these significant others that the dialogical elements of identity formation are fulfilled. As he explains, "If some things I value most are accessible to me only in relation to the person I love, then she becomes a part of my identity." (1994, 34) Significant others refer to people with whom the individual has a kind of intimate relationship. It is not surprising then that Taylor characterizes the formation of identity and self as taking place within the

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[12] The only potentially significant difference between Taylor's authenticity and liberal autonomy centres on the emphasis on uniqueness and/or distinction that authenticity may bring. As Cook notes, however, "in its initial formulation the politics of difference—like the politics of equal dignity—does not presuppose distinctiveness; it leaves open the question of whether the identity formed, and life lived, by each individual is unique; nor does it imply that uniqueness is normatively significant. To this extent, in its initial formulation, the politics of difference is not connected with the ideal of authenticity. For this ideal attributes moral value to individual distinctiveness" (1997, 261). She goes on to argue that even a stronger formulation of the politics of equal difference has "no *necessary* connection with the ideal of authenticity." Instead she suggests, "the connection results from Taylor's selective reading of the demand for recognition that underlies this politics" (1997, 261). This selected reading, I suggest, is largely explained by Taylor's particular Canadian context. Taylor's primary cases of the politics of recognition are the Quebecois and the First Nations groups living within Canada. In the Canadian legal-political context that surrounds these two cases "distinction" has become central in the discourse.

"intimate sphere" versus the public and/or political sphere. Thus, while many observers have emphasized the dialogical element of Taylor approach to multiculturalism,[13] his discussion of the dialogical aspect of cultural identity is limited. Regardless of his acknowledgment of the danger of "misrecognition" which presumably is often committed by those outside one's "intimate sphere" Taylor himself says little to nothing about the role of dialogue with those who may be characterized as "in" or "non" significant others within his theory of multiculturalism. While he proposes that misrecognition violates a basic human need and he broadly alludes to a "fusion of horizons" approach when discussing multiculturalism in education, there is little to suggest that Taylor's concerns for dialogue go beyond a central need for "distinct" groups to be allowed to survive and practice their own modes of expression. Group members will define their identities through intra-group dialogue while the role of "in" or "non" significant others is to make space for this dialogue by ensuring a certain measure of cultural preservation for minority groups. The right to this preservation is a collective one and is essentially the granting of group autonomy to minority cultural groups.

The Canadian School Approach:

Prima facie, Taylor's emphasis on "authenticity" over "autonomy" seems to differentiate his work from fellow Canadian scholar Will Kymlicka. The contrast seems even more significant when one acknowledges Taylor's emphasis on the "dialogical" nature of identity.[14] As the above examination reveals, however, Kymlicka and Taylor have more in common than first appears. This overlap is most apparent when one looks critically at Taylor's particular conception of "authenticity" and its marked resemblance to the dominant liberal notions of autonomy invoked by Kymlicka. It is further revealed by the limited way in which Taylor discusses the "dialogical" nature of identity and how this aspect of identity becomes linked to what he refers to as the "intimate" sphere of "significant others." Overall, the limited conception of significant others and the surprisingly undeveloped discussion of the dialogical nature of cultural group identity leaves Taylor's intimate sphere of the politics of difference bearing a striking resemblance to Kymlicka's contexts of choice. Taylor's emphasis on protecting discursive cultural practices is almost interchangeable with Kymlicka's emphasis on protecting "minority" processes of socialization by granting group autonomy to societal cultures. Thus, one of the defining features of the Canadian school approach to multiculturalism is conceiving cultures as boundable individual entities to be "preserved" and "regulated" (Benhabib 2002, 68) by the granting of largely negative freedoms.

By positing group rights as the method to ensure cultural group boundaries Kymlicka and Taylor are also working from a rights-based paradigm that is consistent

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[13] See for example Amy Gutmann's discussion in her "Introduction" to Taylor's "The Politics of Recognition" in *Multiculturalism* (1994).

[14] For an explicit discussion on how Kymlicka and Taylor conceive their work as different from one another see pages 221-224 in Kymlicka's *Contemporary Political Philosophy (2002)*. In this work Kymlicka chronicles how Taylor rejects the liberal insistence that individuals have the ability to detach themselves from any particular social practice (223)—in other words Taylor's communitarianism leads him to reject the self as prior to its ends which is a central tenant in the liberal approach including Kymlicka's own instrumental approach to multiculturalism.

with an "ethics of justice" approach to autonomy. From this perspective rights are *resources* allocated by the state to individual cultural groups in order to foster equality with the dominant groups within society (Young 1990). In fact, their approach to multicultural citizenship fits perfectly with Fineman's description of the minimalist—or, as she depicts it, the "mythic"—individual autonomy presented earlier in this work. As she states:

> Autonomy […] connotes on an ideological level that an individual who conforms to the dominant notions of independence and self-sufficiency is both freed *from* the prospect of regulatory government action and freed *through* governmental structures from interference by other private actors. The freedom through the government is the nonintervention point stated in positive terms—the right to be let alone is also the guarantee of privacy. In establishing and adhering to a norm of nonintervention and regulation for those individuals deemed self-sufficient, the state grants them autonomy. (9, 2004)

The group autonomy put forward by the preservationist approaches of Kymlicka and Taylor is founded on this notion of autonomy. Minority group rights free cultural groups from certain government regulations[15] that may hinder cultural maintenance by creating certain administrative pockets of non-intervention. These pockets are created through rights, or "external protections" distributed by the non-intervening government itself. Once these rights have been instituted groups are assumed to be practicing autonomy within the "intimate" or private sphere of the cultural group. Thus, a second defining feature of the Canadian school approach to multiculturalism is its distributive approach to justice which treats rights as assets to be allocated and possessed outside of the public sphere.

The preservationist, distributive approach to multiculturalism of the Canadian school is contingent on a particularly narrow conception of group autonomy. While Kymlicka and Taylor have gone beyond the minimalist conceptions of autonomy on the individual level[16] their conceptions of *group* autonomy remain troublingly consistent with the minimalist caricature. Instead of individual persons, however, they are abstracting the individual *group* from its context and are defining individual *groups* as "essentially self-contained and solitary" entities. In reality, however, the individual cultural groups that exist within a state do not exist in complete isolation any more so

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[15] For both authors these freedoms are conceived as somewhat conditional. Both suggest restrictions on group rights in relation to liberal rights although criticisms have been raised (by feminist critics in particular) regarding the level of actual commitment advocates of group rights have to the prioritization of liberal principles. These criticisms (see for example Okin 1999 and Shachar 2001) appear to have some merit at least in regards to Kymlicka who eventually conceded that illiberal practices may be an unavoidable consequence of group autonomy. He states: "In cases where the national minority is illiberal, this means the majority will be unable to prevent the violation of individual rights within the minority community. *Liberals in the majority will have to learn to live with this just as they must learn to live with illiberal laws in other countries*" (Emphasis added. Kymlicka 1995, 108).

[16] Both Kymlicka and Taylor have made significant contributions in debunking the strict "minimalist" conception of individual autonomy. In addition to their works on multiculturalism see Taylor's **"**Atomism" in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (1985) and Kymlicka's *Contemporary Political Philosophy (2002)*.

than do individual selves. Regardless of various degrees of self-determination granted by the state these groups remain part of larger processes of socialization and dialogue, they remain in relationships with other citizens, other groups, and most significantly with the state. These relationships include dynamics of power and dependence and exist within particular social and historical contexts. As Ayelet Shachar observes:

> 'Non-intervention' is a misleading term. It re-enforces the myth that, left to their own devices, identity groups could exist as autonomous entities bearing little relation to the state. Of course, if this were the case, then there would be no need to envision a multicultural model of citizenship [....] The choice is not between 'intervention' and 'non-intervention', because [...] groups are always reacting to the effects of state power, even when they claim to be isolated from them. (Shachar 2001, 37, 40)

Failing to acknowledge the continued influence and authority of other agents, particularly the state, obscures relations of power that remain at work and promotes a static conception of autonomy which is then entrenched in law through group rights. As Young states:
> Rights are not fruitfully conceived as possessions. Rights are relationships, not things; they are institutionally defined rules specifying what people can do in relation to one another. Rights refer to doing more than having; to social relationships that enable or constrain actions. (1990, 25)

The same is true of opportunities:

> Opportunity is a concept of enablement rather than possession; it refers to doing more than having [….] Evaluating social justice according to whether persons have opportunities, therefore must involve evaluating not a distributive outcome but the social structures that enable or constrain the individuals in relevant situations. (26)

Rights alone cannot account for the dynamic, contextual nature of autonomy. In fact, rights may work to obscure the social political situatedness of autonomous groups. As Wendy Brown observes, "There is always something of a chasm between the discourses of rights and their concrete operations" (Brown 1995, 97). Brown contends that granting freedoms through rights can have a de-politisizing effect that not only fixes certain identities in law but also foists certain responsibilities onto the "freed" subject. Recipients of minority rights not only become subjects with autonomous agency, they also become subjected to the particular responsibilities and expectations associated with those rights. Here Foucault's notion of "subjected sovereignties" is useful in further illustrating the point. He states:

> Humanism invented a whole series of subjected sovereignties: the soul (ruling the body, but subjected to God), consciousness (sovereign in a context of judgment, but subjected to the necessities of truth), the individual (a titular control of personal rights subjected to the laws and nature of society), basic freedom

(sovereign within, but accepting the demands of an outside world and 'aligned with destiny'). In short humanism is everything in Western civilization that restricts the desire for power: it prohibits the desire for power and excludes the possibility of power being seized [….] The system of private property implies this conception: the proprietor is fully in control of his goods; he can use or abuse them, but he must nevertheless submit to the laws that support his claim to property" (Foucault 1982, 222).

Group autonomy is the 'benefit' of minority or *group* rights. Minority rights dictate that the group members are individually in control of their own 'goods' (this includes cultural 'goods', linguistic 'goods', lifestyle 'goods' etc.) and, as such, individual group members are free to pursue and maintain individual goods. The fact that said group members are 'free' is visible and entrenched in law. What is not so visible but yet what is also achieved by entrenching the notion that said individuals are 'free' is the placing of responsibility for 'unfree' experiences on the same individual group. As the group identity is de-politicized and individuals within the group are expected to emancipate themselves, the 'subjected sovereign' position of the group forces competition and alienation. The group, now separated by the law, is expected to achieve certain 'measures' of freedom in order to live up to the norm of autonomy entrenched in law. This double-bind created by rights can create a situation in which those groups who do not achieve autonomy, as defined by the minimalist standard of "self-sufficiency" are blamed for their lack of 'success.' Unsuccessful groups and/or individuals within the group may be cast as simply 'not strong enough' to make use of the freedom so visibly entrenched in legal discourse.

Thus, relying solely on a rights-based group autonomy paradigm enforces a de-politicized conception of multicultural politics. Group autonomy through rights "bounds" the threat of difference in neutralized spheres created through law and demarcates and individualizes these groups in a manner which marks them excluded from, if not in opposition to, the official public sphere. Inter-group relationships and dependencies, generally the basis of demands for change by the group, remain but become further obscured as multiculturalism is managed within the containment of the intimate or private sphere of the cultural group. As such, it is a politically passive approach that fails to deal with the public, political facets of autonomy.

Public Autonomy:

In his discussion of human rights and popular sovereignty in, *The Inclusion of Others*, Jurgen Habermas makes a valuable observation regarding the relation between public and private autonomy:

On the one hand, citizens can make adequate use of their public autonomy only if, on the basis of their equally protected private autonomy, they are sufficiently independent; but […] on the other hand, they can arrive at a consensual regulation of their private autonomy only if they make use of their political autonomy as enfranchised citizens. (1998, 260)

The interdependence between the two concepts problematizes the privileging of one form of autonomy over the other. From this perspective the Canadian school approach to multicultural citizenship will remain a self-defeating approach so long as it remains limited to securing private autonomy and disregards how the individual rights of private groups are related to the public autonomy of the group. Public autonomy is dependent on the process of law making itself and requires certain processes of communication and participation. As Habermas states:

> One must also not forget that when citizens occupy the role of co-legislators they are no longer free to choose the medium in which alone they can realize their autonomy. They participate in legislation only as legal subjects; it is no longer in their power to decide which language they will make use of. The democratic idea of self-legislation must acquire its validity in the medium of the law itself. (260)

Habermas's observations suggest that meaningful autonomy cannot begin and end with the allocation of rights. Instead, he argues, public autonomy requires the availability of democratic processes through which the very medium of autonomy can be deliberated.

Kymlicka and Taylor's approach to multiculturalism does not engage with the public component of autonomy. By focusing only on the private autonomy of cultural groups the Canadian school approach obscures the continued relations of power that exist between groups and the state; and, in so doing, risks the creation of new forms of democratic deficit. More specifically, if we accept that autonomous groups remain in relationships of power with the governing state in which the state maintains certain governing authority and influence in relation to the group, we must also accept that the state must abide by the minimal standards required by the principles of liberal *democracy*[17] particularly democratic accountability. Advocates of democratic multiculturalism must provide an approach that not only accounts for the ever changing relationships, institutional structures, and processes that make up the public context in which the group autonomy is to be granted and exercised, but also ensures the political avenues required for autonomous groups to uncover, address, and interrogate these relationships.

Reconceptualizing Cultural Group Autonomy:

The limitations of the existing group autonomy approaches to multiculturalism have led some critics to reject group autonomy all together as a method for dealing with difference in a truly democratic fashion. Iris Marion Young states:

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[17] While there have been concerns raised regarding the interplay between group rights and democracy, to date these concerns have primarily focused on how to maintain certain standards of democracy within the "accommodated" group—that is, how the state can and should hold the group accountable to democratic values, particularly in regard to "minorities within minorities." There has been little to no discussion of how the group can and should hold the state accountable to for it's continued exercise of power over and obligations to autonomous groups within the state.

Autonomy is a closed concept, which emphasizes primarily exclusion, the right to keep others out and to prevent them from interfering in decisions and actions. Autonomy refers to *privacy*, in just the sense that corporations are private in our current legal system. It should be distinguished from *empowerment*, which I define as participation of an agent in decision-making through an effective voice and vote. Justice requires that each person should have the institutionalized means to participate effectively in the decisions that affect her or his action and the conditions of that action. Empowerment is an open concept, a concept of publicity rather than privacy. (251)

Young is correct in her observation that the models put forth by Kymlicka and Taylor fail to recondition the public. As such, they cannot properly foster the public component of group autonomy. Still, there remain good reasons not to reject autonomy altogether.

The central importance given to the concept of autonomy by Canadian theorists of multiculturalism is far from incidental. Both Kymlicka and Taylor are undoubtedly influenced by their Canadian context where the politics of national minorities, namely the Québécois and First Nations within Canada, have been articulated by the groups themselves in the language of autonomy. The referendums on Quebec separation and the constitutional recognition of Aboriginal rights ensure a political context in which the discourse of "self-determination" and "self-government" will continue to play a powerful role in the politics of Canada in the decades to come. These are cases in which it is difficult to imagine autonomy, in some form or another, not remaining as a central part of the politics of multiculturalism. Rather than rejecting the concept of autonomy all together, I suggest that a relational conception of group autonomy can better meet the requirements of a politically active, public approach to multicultural citizenship.

While feminist scholars have focused on the necessity of conceiving individual autonomy from a relational perspective, a relational conception of group autonomy is urgently necessary. A relational conception of group autonomy suggests a dynamic conception of culture that acknowledges that cultural groups will always exercise autonomy within particular contexts and relationships. While rights are an important step in the empowerment of cultural minorities, relational conceptions of autonomy remind us that spheres of non-influence associated with rights are an ideal never fully realized in practice. Sub-national groups will remain affected by the actions of other agents including other citizens, groups, and most notably, the "autonomy granting" state. Ensuring the capacity for group autonomy thus requires certain conditions, certain processes, through which the interaction and interdependence between these agents can be acknowledged, challenged and potentially transformed. As such group autonomy becomes less a resource to be distributed and more a process of action and interaction that only makes sense when one recognizes the existence of other powerful agents. Autonomy requires not only that one is accountable for oneself, but also that one is able to *hold others accountable*.

In order to ensure autonomous groups have the capacity to hold other agents accountable for their relations with the group multiculturalism must remain a public,

political process, not just a private right. The central political relationship for the group is with the agent that creates and regulates their sphere of autonomy—that is, its relationship with the state. Due to the power of this particular relationship, a relational approach to group autonomy requires that specific attention be paid to the structures and processes of this relationship on an ongoing basis. It demands the development of avenues and procedures that ensure opportunities for dialogue between autonomous groups and other agents in which autonomous groups can continually address the medium of their autonomy as well as any ongoing or new obligations and responsibilities that arise between agents. In short, it takes us to a more robustly democratic model of cultural group autonomy.

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