

REBALANCING LIBERALISM:
DISCOURSE THEORY AS A REMEDY TO THE EFFECTS
OF ACCELERATED MODERNITY

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ABSTRACT

Balancing the rights of the individual to lead a self-determined life while accommodating traditional identity groups is a central goal of liberal society. The modernity argument suggests that processes within modernity are capable of liberalizing societies. The emergence of modern information technology has drastically increased the speed of the liberalizing influence of modernity to the point that this goal is threatened. However, using tools found within discourse theory, traditional identity groups may be able to mitigate these incoming influences to such a degree as to rebalance these liberal goals.

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Introduction

A central goal of a liberal society is to ensure both a commitment to individual self-determination while also ensuring an inclusive environment for those who choose paths of self-determination that do not align with the liberal conception of the good. According to Will Kymlicka, there are two parts to a liberal society, first is that we live our lives according to our beliefs as to what a good life should be, and second, that we are free to question those same beliefs, examine them in light of new information and even change our life course should we decide to do so.¹ Therefore, individuals must have the conditions necessary to develop an awareness of the choices they have been given, and the ability to examine these choices rationally. The forming and revising of conceptions of the good are as important to the character of a liberal society as the pursuit of those conceptions once chosen.² As such, I argue that the two most important components of a liberal society are the ability to choose our lifestyle and our ability to evaluate that lifestyle, modify it and even exit it if we choose to.

The two goals of accommodation and self-determination have been challenged by the inherently liberalizing forces of modernity that create pressures on traditional identity groups' ability for pursuing their established ends. This pressure comes from elements within modernity, and its advance, which create the conditions for the development and advancement of liberal ideas such as individualism and autonomy. In a more traditional interpretation of the modernity argument, the forces of modernity alone would produce overwhelmingly liberalizing influences on traditional identity groups that would be a threat to liberal goals.³ On this view, three primary liberalizing forces I will identify would, under the conventional understanding of modernity,

¹ Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). 81.

² Ibid. 81-82.

³ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990). 174-175.

produce irresistible forces that prevent traditional norms and beliefs from continuing and would lead to the transition of these groups from traditional to liberal.

However, although modernity produces a liberalizing influence on traditional identity groups, this pressure is not insurmountable by the groups in question, and does not pose an irreconcilable threat to the liberal goal of balancing individual self-determination with the accommodation of traditional groups. Traditional identity groups have mechanisms that have insulated their members and filtered out new ideas in a way that allowed group leadership and clerics to answer any challenges as they arise; this in turn allows individuals to make informed decisions as to whether or not they should accept liberal ideas and thus preserves the balance between accommodation and self-determination. These mechanisms include providing physical distance from cosmopolitan centers of modernity and the time it takes to traverse that space, and the need for face-to-face contact or written material, in order to be seen and read. This meant that not only was access to liberalizing elements of modernity limited, it was also slow to spread from liberal, cosmopolitan centers. Also, the liberal state itself has often strived to create policies and mechanisms to ameliorate the difficulties created for traditional identity groups via things like multiculturalism and more flexible ways of interacting with traditional identity groups that attempt to take their views into consideration. Though modernity in the classical sense produces conditions conducive for the development of liberal ideas as a result of word of mouth, written literature, newspapers and other artifacts of modernity, it does not occur rapidly enough to overwhelm the cultural and political defenses developed by traditional identity groups to insulate themselves from possible outside influences.

With the rapid development of new forms of information technology, however, the process of modernity is drastically accelerated. Information technology has become a fact of

modern life. Its proliferation and availability has created significant pressure on the cultural needs of traditional⁴ groups by becoming a conduit for the transmission of liberal conceptions of the good. Due to the proliferation and saturation of technology in society, there are few practical options for traditional identity groups to escape the effects of modernity, particularly if they are embedded within a liberal society. This challenge compounds an existing tension within liberal theory that juxtaposes the need for accommodation of differing conceptions of the good within a society with the need to promote basic individual autonomy. The rapid development and proliferation of advanced communications technology essentially creates an artificial advantage in favour of western norms that prevents individuals within traditional identity groups from making rational choices as to what they see as the good life. This thesis suggests that this kind of intense cultural pressure is not conducive to the liberal notion of self-determination in that it has the potential of immersing members of identity groups in modernity and removing the individual's decision to lead a self determined life while also corroding the cultural identity of these groups.

Though this pressure represents a significant change to the traditional understanding of how modernity affects people and groups by generating vast amounts of cultural pressure, there is hope that this pressure can be mitigated to some extent through the use of elements within discourse theory. I will argue that the use of tenets within discourse theory will allow traditional identity groups to engage this incoming cultural pressure by discussing it with members of their groups. This discussion will not only help traditional identity groups make the case that these new incoming ideas are not necessarily true or valid, but also provide them with a forum from

⁴ In the context of this thesis a traditional identity group is defined by the number of modern elements absorbed into its collective consciousness, these elements include how disembedded they are from their traditions, how much reflexivity the group displays towards new information and how they view time and space.

which they can present their own ideas, cultural understandings and insights. In this way members of traditional identity groups will be presented with a meaningful choice and true self-determination as well as provided with the ability to address new concerns facing their groups. I have selected discourse theory primarily because of the dynamic way in which discourse is able to sift through new and emerging ideas and attempt to find value in older ideas. This argument will attempt to bridge the gap between an ever-accelerating modernity and traditional identity groups that are experiencing increasing external cultural pressure.

The discussion is organized as follows. In chapter one, I will argue that elements within modernity and its advance essentially provide the foundation for the development of many liberal institutions. However, to be considered liberal these institutions must include both the desire for an autonomous and self-determined life and the goal of accommodating traditional identity groups, ensuring to accommodate those who have differing ideals with regard to the role of individuals in a society. Chapter one will argue that three elements within modernity provide the most powerful potential for the transformation of a traditional society into a modern and liberal one: the disembedding of traditional knowledge and norms, time-space alteration and reflexivity. First, I will discuss the disembedding of traditional knowledge and norms, how this process separates the individuals within an identity group from the identity group itself, and how this process creates the initial spark of individual self-determination by allowing individuals to separate themselves from their ideas and norms of the identity group. In a sense, individuals disembed themselves from the identity group and begin to see themselves as existing parallel to a pre-existing set of norms but not inextricably linked to it. I will argue that at this point the individual begins to develop the concept of a right of exit from an identity group as a minimum manifestation of individual self-determination. From a liberal point of view, the individual may

choose between maintaining their existing commitment to the identity group and leaving it in order to pursue other goals not in keeping with the identity group's norms.

Second, I will argue that a second element of modernity, reflexivity, allows individuals to take information and make decisions on it based on how it affects their individual lives. I will also argue that reflexivity is also one of the primary elements of liberalism and that the distinction between liberal reflexivity and modernity reflexivity is non-existent, suggesting a degree of co-originality. Though this element of modernity supports the emergence of individual decision-making, it does not threaten the liberal goal of balancing accommodation with individualism in that the traditional identity groups being challenged are still able to exert an influence over their membership and answer many of the challenges that may arise. This means that the individual is still making the choice between the identity group and emergent liberal norms.

Third, I will argue that the modernity element of time and space alteration also has an impact on the goal of balancing the liberal goals of accommodation and individualism in that as transportation increases in speed, the significance of physical distances with regard to how long it takes to get from point A to point B is diminished. I will argue that this alteration begins to take place quite early in the form of early communications devices such as telegraphs and early mechanical travel such as the steam engine. However, as with the other elements of modernity, this is not a significant threat to the liberal goal of accommodation due to the sparse availability of such technologies and how difficult it may have been to gain access to them. Though someone may be able to send a telegraph or phone call containing liberal ideas into a community such events represent a slow trickle of liberal ideas into traditional communities that were balanced by the traditional identity group's insulation measures. People would be exposed to

these ideas but they would also receive the alternative traditional point of view, thus creating a more conducive environment for true self-determination.

In chapter two I will argue that the increase in communications technology within society has essentially taken modernity and accelerated it to the point that there is little room for traditional identity groups to push back against incoming liberal ideas. This chapter argues that processes of modernity are accelerated to the point of creating an artificial advantage in favour of liberalizing modernity and as such threaten the liberal goal of balancing self-determination with accommodation of traditional identity groups. Essentially, I will argue that this imbalance is caused when individuals are exposed to so many overwhelming forces of modernity that it is questionable whether individuals within traditional identity groups are able to make a choice as to how they want to lead their lives or if the choice is made for them via this increased social pressure. In this chapter I will argue that the encroachment of modernity when compounded by the rapid development and proliferation of advanced communications technology creates an advantage in favour of western norms (like trying to choose what fruit to eat when all that is available is apples) that prevents individuals within traditional identity groups from making rational choices as to what they see as the good life. This chapter is divided into three sections that characterize the additional pressure on traditional identity groups via advanced communications technology. These sections will discuss the depth of penetration of liberal norms via technology, the scope of change and technological saturation, and the speed at which change occurs and information is disseminated.

The depth of penetration liberal ideas and norms have via communications technology concerns how liberal ideas can be transmitted via micro level social transactions that shape the way individuals view the world by subtly changing elements of their view of everything from

how science is viewed in society to how an individual's sense of humour is received by others. Though these microtransactions have always existed in some way or another, I will argue that these microtransactions have become increasingly important in the discussion of balancing the liberal goals of accommodation and self-determination because of the degree to which they can be disseminated via communications technology. Where under classical modernity such a microtransaction may occur while listening to radio, or seeing a local event, this flow of new ideas could be justified by liberals because of the fact that individuals still had the opportunity to weigh this new information against what they already knew and make a choice between the two. The traditional identity group may consider a joke that an individual may have heard in passing somewhere inappropriate, but the individual still has the opportunity to decide for him or herself whether such humour is acceptable. Advanced communications technology does not convey a single joke or idea; rather it conveys many ideas and liberal notions, often drowning out all other voices.

Next I discuss the scope of technological change and how technology has begun to permeate society, and how this change in technology has affected individuals in identity groups. The way we as individuals currently view the world is not so much a matter of religion, philosophy or other systems of belief but of how we define ourselves as individuals in the context of those around us and those who hold different beliefs. As humanity gathers more and more knowledge, the line between who is part of the identity group and who is not has blurred. I argue that this gradual inclusion of the 'other' into our understanding of whom we consider familiar is connected to the proliferation of communications technology that allows more regular contact with differing views of the world, and that a public sphere saturated with communications technology promotes a heterogeneous view of the world that dilutes the

influence of traditional identity groups. The increasing availability of communications technology has created a conduit between a large and growing portion of the world's population that is quickly blurring the line between the way identity groups perceive each other and how they in turn perceive the world.

Finally, I will argue that the speed of communications technology has enabled the near instantaneous dissemination of many liberal notions. Once accessed, these technologies are able to spread information at speeds never before seen. These technologies also transmit various forms of communication such as music, art, and even video of people from other identity groups. This access is fast becoming one of the primary contributors to the alteration of time and space, in that whatever progress modernity could make in spreading liberal ideals was before limited by how long it took a person to travel from one place to another, and how accessible technology was at the time. I will argue that the speed of modern communications technology has meant that these barriers of time and space have become all but irrelevant, providing a fast and efficient conduit to transmit liberal notions that individuals can become immersed in and absorbed in at a pace that precludes traditional identity groups from questioning or balancing their traditions with the onslaught of liberal ideals. This rapidly accelerating element of modernity changes the very way individuals interact with each other, along with the corrosion of feelings of local solidarity within the identity group.

In chapter three I will argue that discourse theory provides a number of tools that assist both liberal and traditional identity groups in sifting through this new information and allowing individuals within identity groups to determine for themselves what values they wish to hold as individuals. Chapter three is divided into three sections where I will discuss the three primary tools that provide discourse theory with the capacity to address many of the emerging issues

related to the acceleration of modernity by technology. These conceptual tools are the lifeworld (the comprehensive collection of interpreted iterations, expectations, experiences and belief systems that give an individual his or her identity), proceduralism within the discourse environment, and communicative action. I suggest that discourse theory does not insulate identity groups from change; rather it allows identity groups to recognize, identify and utilize important elements of traditional identity groups in the adaptation of newly modified lifeworlds that are compatible with liberal society. I will argue that these tools provide the needed flexibility and capacity for compromise that will allow many traditional identity groups to adapt to this new situation. This is not seen as the assimilation of these groups, but rather the metamorphosis of traditional norms within traditional groups into norms more consistent with emerging notions developed within the group itself rather than breaking under the pressure of this new accelerated modernity.

Firstly, I will illustrate my interpretation of lifeworld within discourse theory and identify how three different aspects of an individual's lifeworld (objective, subjective and social) can benefit from a discursive approach to the issues related to the previous two chapters. First, I will discuss the objective world and how essentially this world is the universe as it exists outside of any belief system or understanding. This world is essentially the world as it really is, or as Plato put it in his famous allegory, the world outside the cave. The important thing about this is not that individuals possess the ability to actually see this world, but that this world exists. This means that any interpretation of the world may be open to criticism or reinterpretation at any time. Through this reinterpretation, individuals can then view their own traditions in a way that allows flexibility and adaptation where rigidity and dogmatism once existed. Second I will discuss the subjective world, or the world that we commonly associate with 'truth'; going back to

Plato's allegory of the cave, this would be the world we see as reflections on the wall, only shadows of representations of what the world really is. The subjective world is, as we understand it through the various belief systems, experiences and feelings we hold. This world is two faceted in that first, it is dependent on individuals' assumptions that the beliefs they base their day to day actions on are true, and second, that the veracity of and claim to truth in this world can only be redeemed discursively. Finally, I will discuss the social world, which is the collective overlapping of social understandings of an identity group. This world includes the relationships we have with friends, relatives, employers and employees and other interpersonal relationships. The social world is essentially where the traditional identity group and the individual interact. Though the identity group has some ability to maintain itself at this level, it is constantly being fed and influenced by the objective and subjective levels.

Secondly, I will discuss how the proceduralism of the discourse environment allows different points of view and belief systems to engage in a productive balanced manner, paving the way for identity groups to better cope with the increasing forces of modernity and liberalism and thus preserving the opportunity for the individuals within these groups to make decisions based on how they wish to lead their lives. First I will discuss the principles of conduct within the discourse environment that allow free and balanced discourse. These principles allow discourse to proceed and prevent the arbitrary dismissal of speech within the discourse environment. Second, I will discuss the primacy of the individual within the discourse environment. By this I mean that the right of the individual to lead a meaningful and self-determined life is placed above the desire of an identity group to maintain control over its membership. This does not preclude the right of the identity group to exist, or of its members to practice its customs; rather it means that individuals cannot be coerced into these customs and

practices. This thesis supports the idea that collective rights in a liberal society refer only to the protection of traditional identity groups from external influences that threaten the social and cultural fabric of a group. This is not to say that there is not any acknowledgement of the right of an identity group to implement ‘internal restrictions’ on its membership, but any liberal society should remain very skeptical of internal restrictions.⁵ The right of individuals to determine their own course through life is essential to a commitment to liberal goals. This includes a basic right of exit from any identity group should the individual decide that they no longer wish to participate in the identity group’s culture.

Thirdly, I will discuss how communicative action allows individuals within traditional identity groups to sift through various kernels of information being developed for use in the norms and resolutions of an identity group’s public sphere. This section will discuss how the various elements of discourse allow a flexible blending of incoming liberal influences with the pre-existing traditional identity group while maintaining the important elements of both. I argue that this synthesis provides both the ability for the individual to lead a self-determined life and for the effective accommodation of traditional identity groups within liberal society without threatening the liberal goal of balancing both. First, I will discuss the connection that discourse theory makes between morality and legality. I argue that both these elements are required to implement any resolution created through discourse because morality without legality is a guideline while legality without morality is baseless and arbitrary. The connection of these two principles allows authority to rest in the decisions made by traditional identity groups without falling victim to dogmatism. This connection rests in the ability of the members of the identity group to help determine what is considered appropriate or moral behaviour on an ongoing basis through various steering media such as the opinion of the group’s membership, practicality and

⁵ Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). 7.

other elements within the social world that have a dynamic nature. Second, I will discuss the basic nature of discourse as consisting of a series of proposals that are accepted or rejected based on what individuals within the identity group feel are appropriate or consistent with their views. When a proposal is rejected the individual rejecting the proposal identify what it is that is unacceptable to them, addresses this concern in a way they see as appropriate and suggest a new course of action. This new proposal is then examined and modified and re-proposed until a version of the resolution is seen as acceptable. As proposals are examined, the important elements of a traditional identity group's norms and culture can be discovered and synthesized with the important goals of a liberal society to ensure both individual self-determination and the accommodation of traditional groups. Finally, I will discuss how other norms within the group can then gradually evolve and grow to suit the needs of both the group and its individual members by the iterative process and how this iterative process essentially occurs every time someone repeats a statement or discusses an element of a tradition. No knowledge is static; it is always subject to interpretation by new individuals and as such is not immune to change, nor should it be. This commitment necessitates the understanding that any conception of the good, including the majority or mainstream one, can be flawed or in error so as to avoid the pitfalls of clinging to a single dogmatic ideal to the detriment of all others.

The encroachment of modernity, and its liberalizing influence, represents a threat to the goal of accommodating traditional identity groups within a society by producing an irresistible pressure on group identity. Without a choice, this pressure essentially becomes assimilationist in nature, removing the possibility of a self-determined life from individuals within these groups. However, there can be reconciliation between the liberalizing nature of modernity and the needs of traditional identity groups to maintain their sense of identity. In an environment increasingly

saturated in technology, discourse provides tools that can promote the balancing of new ideas with traditional ones in an effort to synthesize an identity group's culture with the liberal norms being presented. The reconciliation being presented in this thesis hopes to balance the liberal goals of accommodating traditional identity groups and promoting self-determination by providing the tools and knowledge of discourse theory to various traditional identity groups being overwhelmed by the accelerated forces of modernity being presented here.

Chapter 1 The Modernity Argument

Introduction: The Liberalizing Effect of Modernity

In this chapter I will argue that there is an important link between the encroachment of modernity and liberalization in the discussion of how best to reconcile the tension within liberal theory between the accommodation of illiberal identity groups and the promotion of liberal ideas. This link means that as modernity spreads and intensifies liberal ideals spread and intensify as well. I will argue that liberalism and modernity are co-original in that they are both complimentary to each other and encourage each other. I argue that the presence of modernity does have an inherently liberalizing effect through a number of diverse and subtle changes to the way individuals perceive the world. Three specific elements of modernity help to create conditions for the development of liberal ideas and norms: the disembedding from tradition, the development of reflexivity in assessing information and the alteration of space and time. Though other elements of modernity may be present as well, these three have been highlighted due to their significant impact on illiberal identity groups. These three elements of modernity will make up the three sections within this chapter where I will highlight the way modernity liberalizes societies.

It is, however, important to note that though modernity has been a major conduit for liberal ideas, it is not irreconcilable with the liberal goal of balancing the ability for individuals to lead a self-determined life and the goal of accommodating the desires of illiberal identity groups. I will argue that under normal circumstances modernity does not transmit liberal ideals quickly enough to threaten the liberal goal of balancing self-determination with accommodation.

In the first section I discuss the concept of disembedding individuals from traditional belief systems and how this helps to change the way individuals look at various norms and ideas. Disembedding from tradition means that individuals and groups may retain traditions as important cultural artifacts that convey a sense of identity and shared heritage, but they do not have a direct link to the core 'self' of individuals and groups. When groups and individuals become disembedded from tradition they are able to assess traditions in light of new information, historical context and other methods of analysis to determine whether a tradition should be kept or discarded. Where an embedded group or individual may have their core sense of identity threatened by these challenges, the disembedded individual or group separates their sense of self from their traditions and are able to discard or modify them without causing irreparable damage to their core identity.

Reflexivity is the way individuals are able to take information, both old and new, and objectively evaluate it through critical analysis. This analysis usually involves the employment of systems of evaluation such as scientific method, mathematics and other systems that attempt to employ some kind of universal benchmark of knowledge to understand incoming information. This is very much tied to the disembedding of individuals from tradition in that it takes a universal perspective that does not tie the identity of a group to the validation of a specific way of life. The key to reflexivity is that any knowledge may be incorrect, or at least subject to error, and as such must be subject to scrutiny. No knowledge is considered sacred or untouchable. This means that as opposed to a tradition based culture, a culture embracing modernity would subject even deeply rooted religious tenets to the scrutiny of the microscope to determine if they are worthy of continued support. As tradition is never fully abandoned, some parts may be preserved but many will be discarded and possibly reinstated at a later time. Though reflexivity means that

there will be the attempt to evaluate information based upon objective criteria there will still be disagreement on many issues. In fact it is this disagreement and argument that suggests reflexivity is beginning to take root. For example, dissidents represent segments of the population that are attempting to change or criticize the status quo. The difference between a reflexive society and a non-reflexive society is that members of reflexive society see the possibility that their ideas may be in error and do not suppress disagreement where a non-reflexive society is adamant in its own righteousness and suppresses dissent.

Finally, the alteration of space and time relates to the boundaries of physical distance and the amount of time it takes to overcome these boundaries when attempting to form social networks. In traditional identity groups, the limitations of physical distance tend to isolate identity groups and restrict the number of new ideas and norms that enter their public sphere to a manageable amount. A slow trickle of ideas can easily be suppressed or labeled as opposing the religious and traditional tenets of a group.

Although these three elements of modernity create powerful influences on traditional identity groups to shift away from traditional norms and beliefs, they do so in a way that allows individuals to choose what they believe and provide a meaningful choice between traditional and modern ways of life. Classical modernity does not operate in such a way as to choke out other belief systems; it grows within those belief systems as new information increasingly becomes irreconcilable with old beliefs. This means that though classical modernity creates pressure to change, it does so in such a way that challenges individuals to reconcile their beliefs with new information in a gradual way. This gradual process allows room for traditional identity groups to adapt to emerging information while also allowing individuals the opportunity to choose for themselves what they see as the good life.

Section One: Disembedding Traditional Social Norms and Knowledge

Traditional knowledge is knowledge that flows from the reproduction of the past. In the most traditional of oral cultures, information is passed from one generation to the next in a way that assumes a continuity of context from generation to generation. Over time, the context of knowledge may shift to a point where members of a community have little perspective on the context in which this knowledge was developed.⁶ This leads to the restraint, and even repression, of those who fail to abide by traditional norms even if the norm itself retains little relevance in the group in question. Traditional knowledge is adhered to because of its place as an interpretational anchor within the cultural, religious and social worldviews of the individuals within a given identity group. Tradition is an assumed benchmark of understanding that is used to understand new information as it is encountered. Tradition may be created based upon experience, mythology or even observation and documentation but is retained based on its role as a cornerstone of an identity group's identity. For example, a group may prohibit the consumption of a particular substance based on an historical tradition. This prohibition may have originally been enacted for safety reasons, yet remains in force despite advances in cleanliness or medicine. The group retains its attachment to this prohibition based on the role it has in maintaining the group's identity rather than the evaluation of whether such measures are necessary or even relevant in today's context.

It is the evaluation rather than the belief itself that distinguishes an identity group rooted in modernity from one rooted in pre-modernity. When an identity group is disembedded from a set of beliefs, it moves those beliefs to a less critical role in the support of their cultural identity so that they may be re-evaluated and kept or discarded without damaging the identity of the

⁶ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990). 37.

group. Traditional cultures value the past and symbolism because they contain and perpetuate the experiences of past generations and serve as cornerstones for systems of interpreting the world around them. Tradition is not entirely unchanging, as it is subject to the reinterpretations of new generations.⁷ However, tradition is also closely linked to the way individuals view the world, and can be very sensitive areas for those desiring quick change. As traditions became more firmly rooted in the system of beliefs held by individuals within the society, the question of whether the individual proposing a change to firmly held beliefs ceases to be the true point of contention. Rather, the tradition is part of a system of belief structures that make up the way individuals filter, organize and understand information about the world around them. This structure of beliefs and interpretational filters is what Jurgen Habermas calls the lifeworld, an ever present inescapable way of viewing the world that allows us to make sense of the world around us.⁸ In order for identity groups to move beyond their attachment to any specific tradition they disembody themselves from their specific system of beliefs by shifting their perspective to a broader understanding of the world they live in.

This change in perspective is not so much a minor cultural anomaly as it is a major paradigm shift from viewing the world from a parochial view filtered through conjecture and mythology to viewing the world from a detached perspective by applying universal principles to local interpretation of phenomena; as Hannah Arendt states in her book *The Human Condition*, “the astounding human capacity to thinking terms of the universe while remaining on the earth...” and to “use cosmic laws as guiding principles for terrestrial action.”⁹ Importantly, the change in perspective from viewing the Sun revolving around the Earth to the Earth revolving

⁷ Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998). 372.

⁸ Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Lifeworld and System a Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, Vol. 2, 2 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989). 131.

⁹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). 264.

around the Sun is not simply a matter of cosmic order, but a matter of perspective; the rise of rationalism and science changed the concept of absolute truth drawn from religious texts to certainty based upon measurable, objective evidence by recognizing that our ability to interpret the world around us is limited by our own ability to measure and interpret information obtained from that world.¹⁰ In this way the human perspective becomes ‘disembedded’ from both parochial tradition as well as the world as a whole.

The early contention that the sun revolved around the earth may be considered an example of a traditionally held belief. The revolution of the sun around the earth was an assumption based upon early observations with little or no other information on the universe to contradict this position. It was the adherence to this position as a matter of loyalty to past assumptions that created the tradition. The importance of a geocentric universe to the traditional culture was not in its assertion of the orbit of heavenly bodies, but rather its role as a critical part of the lifeworlds of those who hold it as a belief. The shift in perspective created by the adoption of a heliocentric universe was not the understanding that the earth orbits the sun, but rather the shifting of our perspective to a universal ‘Archimedean point’ that “we no longer feel bound even to the sun, that we move freely in the universe, choosing our point of reference wherever it may be convenient for a specific purpose.”¹¹

A traditional belief that was once maintained based upon its traditional identity maintaining role may be validated and carried on in light of new evidence to support it. A good example of this is hand washing. Originally, hand washing was not a widely practiced measure; originally it was a Jewish spiritual ritual that was meant to maintain spiritual cleanliness, and in hindsight was likely responsible for protecting many Jewish people from the onslaught of the

¹⁰ Ibid. 265.

¹¹ Ibid. 263.

Black Death in the 14th century.¹² This tradition was not the result of a desire to eliminate germs but a desire for spiritual cleanliness.¹³ Modern hand washing by medical professionals was later introduced by Ignaz Semmelweis, who found that mortality in childbirth could be drastically reduced by instituting a regimen of hand and instrument washing before and after medical procedures.¹⁴ Semmelweis was considered one of the first to discover the correlation between contamination of patients and the handling of contaminated materials such as cadavers. On the other hand, if evidence is discovered that contradicts a deeply held tradition, it may be rigidly opposed and even disregarded. In a modern context, hand washing has been shown to have significant health benefits for a community.¹⁵ However, Semmelweis was not rewarded by the medical community for his discovery of washing hands and instruments; rather, he was stripped of his position, and left to die in an insane asylum.¹⁶ The discoveries of Semmelweis not only challenged the traditional understanding of how diseases were transmitted from one patient to another, it also challenged the idea that doctors were divinely blessed and that supernatural intervention prevented doctors from doing harm.¹⁷ Semmelweis challenged an established cornerstone in medical science at the time and was subjected to the wrath of an established identity group struggling to maintain its identity.

Even in more modern traditional communities there are some fundamentally different perspectives that set these identity groups apart from modern liberal societies. These include first, that individuals lack the necessary conscience or capacity to make decisions regarding their own lifestyle in the private sphere, and as such the paternal state must intervene as it would with

¹² P.A. Jumaa, "Hand hygiene: simple and complex," *International Journal of Infectious Diseases*, 2005: 3-14. 4.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Stephen P. Luby, et al., "Effect of handwashing on child health: a randomised controlled trial," *The Lancet*, 2005: 225-233. 229.

¹⁶ M Best and D Neuhauser, "Ignaz Semmelweis and the birth of infection control," *Qual Saf Health Care*, 2004: 233-234. 233.

¹⁷ Ibid. 234.

criminals or the mentally ill to show these individuals how to lead a 'proper' life.¹⁸ This proper life is usually defined by metaphysical doctrine or religious policy and can be seen in both modern and historical contexts. Often the adherence to the tradition becomes more important to the group than the impact the action has on the group itself. A modern example of this tendency to pursue adherence to tradition despite limited impact on an identity group's cultural identity is many religious organizations desire for theocratic control of individuals' private lives. The distribution of anti-gay propaganda disseminated by various elements of the Christian right and the, often violent, implications of such intolerance are examples of such dogmatic adherence to traditional viewpoints.¹⁹

Even though disembedding individuals from traditional knowledge separates their sense of self from the beliefs they hold, this separation does not mean that those beliefs are abandoned. The process of disembedding opens the door to individuals in a sense that they are now able to choose for themselves what they see as the good life. This may or may not include the traditional beliefs that make up the norms of their identity group or it may involve a synthesis of old and new knowledge or it may mean that the individual abandons their traditional beliefs in favour of new ones. This being said, traditional knowledge is never truly abandoned in any complete sense as it is even present in the most modern of societies and continues to play a role.²⁰ The difference between tradition in a traditional and modern society is that traditional societies justify traditional ways of life based on knowledge which itself is authenticated by tradition, where modern societies justify tradition using independent knowledge.²¹ This does not mean that

¹⁸ Thomas M. Franck, "Is Personal Freedom a Western Value?," *The American Journal of International Law* 91, no. 4 (1997): 593-627. 600.

¹⁹ Cynthia Burack, "From Doom Town to Sin City: Chick Tracts and Anti-gay Political Rhetoric," *New Political Science* 28, no. 2 (2006): 163-179. 169.

²⁰ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990). 38.

²¹ *Ibid.*

traditional knowledge is irrelevant or invalid, but merely to say that traditional knowledge cannot legitimately validate itself and must be validated through independent evaluation. The point being that it is possible for traditional societies to validate at least some of their traditional knowledge and carry it forward should they approach the encroachment of modernity in a way that allows for such discovery.

Disembedding oneself from traditional knowledge means that rather than being an immutable truth of our own self-identity that is dogmatically followed, regardless of fact or reason, it is a valued piece of information that has been given to us by those who came before. When we disembed ourselves from tradition we are no longer personally threatened by the debunking of false knowledge that has taken on the moniker of being traditional. Instead, we take a broader perspective on history, tradition and our place in it and evaluate what our traditions are, where they came from, and if they are still valuable in a modern context. Commitment to tradition for tradition's sake is removed from the calculus of how an identity group should respond to new and incoming information, such that tradition ceases to be the group's plan for action written on a stone tablet and becomes one possible blueprint for action penciled into a list of other possible solutions.²² Tradition becomes a choice of action rather than the only action available.

The important consideration when addressing the impact of modernity on identity groups in a contemporary context is that although all cultures have some method of moving forward in history via intrinsic conventions and altering social practices in light of new knowledge, the reproduction of culture in modernity integrates reflexivity into all aspects of life and redefines what knowledge is considered valid or invalid.²³ Once a group has shifted its perspective to a

²² Ibid. 38.

²³ Ibid. 39.

position open to the broad knowledge available in the world, nothing remains sacred; all knowledge in modernity is subject to scrutiny, regardless of its origin. This creates a pressure on identity groups to explore new and emerging ideas rather than dismissing them. However, despite this increased pressure to explore new ideas, this does not eliminate the choice between tradition and modernity as traditional identity groups still have the opportunity to practice their traditions as they see fit while individuals are able to make meaningful choices regarding what they see as the good life.

Section Two: Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the examination and reexamination of social practices and norms formed in light of new and incoming information about those practices. Reflexivity is not only one of the three earmarks of modernity as defined within this chapter; it is also one of the defining features of liberalism. I argue that many assumptions we make about the good life may be false and must be open to individual interpretation and revision.²⁴ This kernel of skeptical inquiry reveals to humanity the depth and complexity of the world in a way that may shake the foundation of previously unassailable religious and cultural truths.²⁵ This influence is linked to the development of various basic interpretational ciphers that make sense of information about the world. These interpretational ciphers are drawn from the three dominant sources of dynamism in modernity as defined by Giddens; disembedding social relations through abstract systems, the reflexivity of knowledge and time-space separation.²⁶ Reflexivity is the core of individuals'

²⁴ Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). 81.

²⁵ Thomas M. Franck, "Is Personal Freedom a Western Value?," *The American Journal of International Law* 91, no. 4 (1997): 593-627. 598

²⁶ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990). 37.

ability to make rational decisions, and it provides individuals with the tools to evaluate what they believe and, most importantly, why they believe it.

Liberalism grants people a broad number of choices on how to live their lives, and gives people the freedom to reconsider these decisions for themselves.²⁷ This choice will inevitably lead to individuals pursuing activities and beliefs that many individuals and groups may not see as useful, productive or even good for the individual performing them, but that choice is the individual's to make and, according to the principle of reflexivity, that is how it should remain. However, within liberalism, the concept of liberty includes the right of individuals to pursue their idea of what constitutes the good life without interference from other individuals and groups. This means that although other individuals may see, say, art as less important to a social group than prayer or prayer as less important than industry, individuals are still allowed to do or not do any action, creating the conditions for a self-fulfilled life.²⁸ For example, the concept of freedom of religion according to a modern liberal definition and a modern theocratic definition both include the ability to pursue one's own faith. The difference between the theocratic tradition and the modern liberal tradition is not simply a matter of maintaining a belief; it is also a matter of revising and rejecting ideas of the good. Where the modern liberal group of people is free to seek new adherents (proselytization), question the doctrine of the religion (heresy) and abstain from any religion at all (apostasy) the theocratic version of freedom of religion does not allow such flexibility in doctrine.²⁹ The reason for this commitment to freedom is that even a small identity group within a community may have valuable information and cultural practices that may later be adopted in place of the current cultural paradigm.

²⁷ Ibid. 80.

²⁸ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Revised Edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). 177-178.

²⁹ Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). 82.

Not only is it possible that the majority of people are incorrect about their position, they may be performing the additional disservice to the community by suppressing possible alternatives to the majority viewpoint.³⁰ So by allowing a free exchange of ideas between individuals who are willing to re-evaluate their own cultural assumptions, a culture is simultaneously fulfilling one of the major elements of modernity and liberalism at the same time, suggesting a degree of co-originality between the two.

The individual's ability to evaluate and re-evaluate new and emergent knowledge, and to make meaningful choices on what one sees as the good life is the result of reflexivity. Reflexivity is the way in which norms and values are approached and dealt with. It means there are no 'taken-for-granted' norms that can be assumed without the possibility of re-evaluation.³¹ As such, reflexivity is the encompassing spirit behind the primacy of science over religion, and reason over conjecture. Anthony Giddens suggests that one of the primary sources of change within modern societies is the rolling of social life away from the fixed norms and assumptions of tradition by embracing a norm of reflective evaluation when faced with new external stimuli.³² Thought and action become focused on the ongoing evaluation and re-evaluation of new and incoming information based on a system of understanding that attempts to make rational and meaningful choices on the good life.

Reflexivity is the ability of an individual to reconcile new information with previously held information. This process involves the ability to discard inconsistent ideas and adopt new ones. When an individual is reflexive, she is able to engage in this process without collapsing her sense of identity. Religion, tradition and science are all essentially identity maintaining

³⁰ Ibid. 81.

³¹ Daniel M. Weinstock, "Saving Democracy from Deliberation," in *Canadian Political Philosophy*, eds. Ronald Beiner and Wayne Norman, 78-91 (New York: Oxford, 2001). 81

³² Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990). 53.

interpretive systems that prevent the onset of pervasive meaninglessness or anomie. Traditional religious interpretations of the world provide people with a comprehensive source of understanding for both social and natural phenomenon in the absence of any other explanation for them.³³ This understanding is, then, rooted in tradition and determined to be in the realm of infallible sacred tradition.

However the meaning religion attempts to impose on the universe has always been somewhat Janus-faced; in that on the one hand, it provides meaning by encouraging people to seek truth in place of fictitious explanations for natural and social phenomenon, and on the other it attempts to enforce the belief that the ‘truth’ it maintains is accurate, even if there is evidence to the contrary. Alternately, it has always promised that the truths being offered must be accepted in order to make chaotic phenomenon such as sickness, death and famine bearable when they cannot be explained.³⁴ This attachment to the various beliefs serves as a useful method for providing people with meaning and order in a chaotic world where there is little to no control or understanding over natural phenomenon. This fades with increased secular knowledge about the world and the eventual primacy of science as the legitimate way of interpreting the natural world.³⁵ Reflexivity is the point at which pursuit of the most objectively identifiable truth becomes paramount over the preservation of religious and traditional systems. In a sense, reflexivity itself becomes a kind of system where the pursuit of truth becomes the system of meaning that secures societal stability.

Reflexivity is important when considering the liberalizing influence of modernity because it is related to the tension between traditional, communitarian, or religious groups and liberal

³³ Jurgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992). 118.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 119.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

thought. Once reflexivity is accepted, the concept of a single concrete ‘truth’ disappears and those who profess alternative or traditional belief systems are allowed to participate in the public sphere.³⁶ Reflexivity allows individuals to accept the idea that any concept, fact or norm is open to review and discontinuation should new information show it to be false or inadequate in the current context. At the heart of the matter is the ability of a group or individual to admit the *possibility* that their belief system may be incorrect or inaccurate. Those who believe that their system of understanding the world is an invincible truth must inevitably work to suppress any information contrary to their belief structure.³⁷ However, as this information becomes increasingly common and easily ‘tripped over’ by members of the community, suppression becomes increasingly unmanageable.

As long as a group maintains a concept of truth that is dogmatically justified against all reason, the development of respect for differing beliefs cannot occur. The reason is that persons are not autonomous if they are placed in a situation that is either devoid of adequate choices, (such as a person denied the right of exit from a community or coerced into a specific way of life (for instance, given the choice between this and either death or torture).)³⁸ Alternatively, there cannot be the expectation that individuals are banned from choosing such a strict life due to legal interference. This kind of legal effort to force someone to be free only results in the same kind of coerced lifestyle, because individuals are not given meaningful choice in the matter of their own life. As a result, it becomes an endorsement of the ideas that enforced conformity and coercion into a specific way of life and is irreconcilable with the prosperity and the aspirations of

³⁶ Thomas M. Franck, “Is Personal Freedom a Western Value?,” *The American Journal of International Law* 91, no. 4 (1997): 593-627. 626.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). 373-374.

individuals.³⁹ Toleration neither coerces individuals into a certain way of life nor does it prevent them from making the choice to live in the way they choose; while toleration also does not actively encourage illiberal ways of life.

Reflexivity does not imply that all people will have the same opinion on moral issues or on the nature of the right. Disagreement on morals is not a sign of unreason or a lack of reflexivity in approaching an issue; rather, disagreements are the result of individual autonomy. In a life of coerced choices there are no disagreements because members are coerced to agree with those in leadership roles. Disagreement results because individuals become aware of their options in life and make decisions based on what they, as autonomous people, feel is best under their circumstances.⁴⁰ Rather, reflexivity means that people will attempt to reason through issues to the best of their ability and use some degree of critical thinking when approaching any issue whether it is the latest fashion fad or the most deeply held religious tenet. This commitment to the choices made by individuals on what they see as the self-determined good life means that while reflexivity places pressure on individuals to re-evaluate their beliefs, it does not compel them to do so. Individuals are still provided with meaningful choices as to what beliefs to hold and how to lead their lives autonomously.

Individuals exercising autonomy are doing so because they feel that given the information they have available, they are doing the right thing. This however does not guarantee that they will be correct, or even helpful to themselves. Human beings are finite and limited by the amount of information they have at their disposal and so may rank norms or values

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 371.

differently according to the different bits of knowledge they have acquired through their lives.⁴¹ That said, people's lives do not work better when the leadership of an identity group has a paternalistic 'big brother' approach to directing the members of that group from the top down, especially if the individual in question does not agree with or endorse the values underlying that decision.⁴² The wellbeing of individuals is simply not served by being coerced into doing things we do not want to do, unless we embrace these things as necessary, such as in the case of children being coerced by parents.⁴³ As John Stuart Mill says in *On Liberty*, "neither one person, nor any number of persons, is warranted in saying to another human creature of ripe years, that he shall not do with his life for his own benefit what he chooses to do with it."⁴⁴ What Mill means is that any society that overrules the will of an individual for the benefit of a group is doing so under the assumption that what is good for the group as a whole is good for the individual. Mill, however, does not agree that this is true and indeed argues that this type of presumption is incorrect and that even if assumed to be correct it is likely to be misapplied to individuals due to the differences in people's lives.⁴⁵ Even in situations such as when parents coerce children the idea of autonomy is still important. If persons are to be the author of their own lives, they must have some minimum of mental abilities and a level of rationality to comprehend their life choices and act upon them.⁴⁶ In the case of children, this level of comprehension has yet to be developed, and as a result they are dependent on those who have formed their own life choices to guide and instruct them on how to pursue their own goals.

⁴¹ Daniel M. Weinstock, "Saving Democracy from Deliberation," in *Canadian Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner and Wayne Norman, 78-91 (New York: Oxford, 2001). 80.

⁴² Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). 81.

⁴³ Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). 369.

⁴⁴ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (London: Penguin, 2010). 111.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). 372-373.

Despite the pressures that reflexivity creates for traditional identity groups, they are not irreconcilable with the liberal goal of both accommodating traditional identity groups and promoting the self-determination of individuals within those groups. Reflexivity is at its core the rational evaluation of new information and the ability of the individual to make meaningful decisions. This decision making process both allows individuals to determine what they think is the good life while also allowing traditional identity groups the opportunity to defend their beliefs against emerging information and norms.

Section Three: Time-Space Alteration

Time-space alteration refers to the amount of time it takes for information to travel through space, and is important when considering the proliferation of liberalizing ideas from one identity group to another. When individuals communicate with each other they do so with the intent of sharing experiences, beliefs and identity affirming norms that help to create a bond between individuals. In identity groups that do not make use of technologies that allow this communication to take place over extended distances this bond is largely dependent on physical proximity to maintain ties. In small tightly knit communities the time it takes individuals to travel great distances limits the number of social connections individuals can make in a community. Identity groups exposed to the pressures of modernity are confronted with rapid advancement of telecommunications technology, changing scope of the political public sphere and new challenges brought about by a lack of clarity over how identity groups can accommodate the erosion of geographic boundaries. The rapid proliferation of social networking has caused a tremendous expansion of the public sphere and created a new level of

interconnectedness that both ignores cultural boundaries and diminishes the significance of physical space by reducing the amount of time it takes to communicate over large distances.⁴⁷ As one of the three key features of modernity, time-space alteration removes one of the key boundaries that help to insulate traditional identity groups from the liberalizing effects of modernity by bridging gaps between liberal identity groups and traditional ones, allowing a flood of new ideas to seep into previously isolated groups.

The important liberalizing influence of this separation is the ability of different identity groups to connect to various other groups that share views despite geographical location. Though traditional social networks were able to provide individuals with connections and discussion on a variety of topics, modern social networks provide rich crosscutting discussion that exposes participants to different political and social views and opinions.⁴⁸ Modern social networks also help to create an environment that is characterized by heterogeneous debate rich in dissent, rational disagreement and reciprocity.⁴⁹ Various liberalizing influences including crosscutting ties between identity groups, increased choice in the identity groups individuals may become involved in, and a decrease in the ability of each identity group to control the behavior of their individual members promotes the development of other elements of modernity such as reflexivity and disembedding.⁵⁰ This pressure created by modernity through time-space differentiation has always been somewhat mitigated by the limitations on the technology available to citizens. Limitations such as cost, availability and access all assisted traditional identity groups in preventing modernity from completely overrunning their norms and beliefs.

⁴⁷ Gill Valentine and Sarah L. Holloway, "A window on the wider world? Rural children's use of information and communication technologies," *Journal of Rural Studies* 17 (2001): 383-394. 383-384.

⁴⁸ Diana C. Mutz and Jeffery J. Mondak, "The Workplace as a Context for Cross-Cutting Political Discourse," *The Journal of Politics* 8, no. 1 (2006): 140-155. 141.

⁴⁹ Kerill Dunne, "Cross Cutting Discussion: A form of online discussion discovered within local political online forums," *Information Polity* 14 (2009): 219-232. 230.

⁵⁰ *Ibid* 224.

In *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam refers to the growth of Internet technologies as a potential catalyst for the rapid evolution and development of discourse in the public sphere. He says, “(c)ommunity, communion, and communication are intimately as well as etymologically related. Communication is a fundamental prerequisite for social and emotional connections.” Putnam argues that by removing time and space from the formation of relationships we are essentially putting network formation and the development of social capital on the fast track.⁵¹ An example of this new kind of social networking is how organizations create networks of alliances and exchanges rather than relying on monolithic cartels and political trading blocs and how communities are able to survive as far flung loosely knit communities by maintaining long distance connections with each other as an alternative to assimilating into the local identity group.⁵² This new level of social interactivity brings both tremendous potential to allow individuals to engage with other identity groups and a larger public sphere in general, but also presents a number of challenges, such as the declining importance of territory in the maintenance of group identity and the proliferation of information in the public sphere to the extent that citizens become saturated and simply stop paying attention and engaging.⁵³ This rapidly changing landscape of culture and norm generation is the basis for the alteration of time-space.

This change does not eliminate physical barriers to accessing traditional communities; rather the importance of barriers in limiting communication between and within these identity groups is diminished. For example, a letter that is printed on paper is much more dependent on a time-space relationship than one that is digital. The letter must be created, posted, and physically

⁵¹ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000). 171.

⁵² Barry Wellman, "Physical Place and Cyberplace: The Rise of Personalized Networking," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 22, no. 2 (2001): 227-252. 227.

⁵³ Roger Gibbins, "Federalism in a Digital World," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 33, no. 4 (2000): 667-689. 673.

carried from one place to another where the electronic message is composed on a device and then transmitted to its recipient in seconds. The distance that the letter must be carried affects the amount of time the letter consumes in order to communicate information from the writer to the reader. An electronic message can be transmitted to any point in the world almost instantaneously, and only consumes as much time as it takes to be composed and received by the reader. In the same way as the telephone and telegraph removed the need to meet physically with another person to discuss a given political event, digital communications and social media have made information available between groups in ways unheard of in the past. In this way, modernity is dependent on the speed at which information can travel. As information travels faster so too does modernity and its liberalizing influences.

Time and space have historically been locked in a positive correlation relationship such that as the amount of space between two actors increases, so does the time it takes to communicate. In pre-industrial times, when identity group socialization was dependent on face to face contact and limited transportation options to exit a given area, the social network within an identity group tended to be directly linked to a specific geographic location that was often difficult to escape or venture away from. Only the very wealthy and a select elite were able to avoid the parochialism that came with living in a limited geographic area. Communities were limited to densely knit and spatially compact units where many individuals within the community knew each other personally and were able to communicate in a face to face setting with relative ease.⁵⁴ This limitation to personal contact meant that traditional identity groups were able to mitigate incoming influences of modernity in a much more effective way than is possible today.

⁵⁴ Barry Wellman, "Physical Place and Cyberplace: The Rise of Personalized Networking," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 22, no. 2 (2001): 227-252. 231-232.

The introduction of more advanced forms of travel and communication has led to two important things that have ensured a separation between time and space. First is the rapid rate in which we are able to travel physically (space to space). Since the invention of rail travel during the industrial era people have managed to increase the speed of transportation from roughly 30-50 mph in early trains to 60 mph in automobiles, 150 mph in high speed trains and 600 mph in airliners.⁵⁵ Second is the speed at which we are able to communicate from one place to another. Since the invention of the telegraph, the speed at which a twenty-page document takes to travel 1000 miles has gone from over thirty hours via train to mere seconds over the Internet.⁵⁶ This enormous increase in speed has rendered the time it takes for information to travel from one physical location to another location virtually irrelevant. Time is simply no longer a significant factor when it comes to communication between locations; this in turn means that more information can be transmitted into traditional identity groups more quickly than ever before. As the alteration of time and space as we know it continues to change at a rapid pace, traditional identity groups face an increasingly difficult challenge in maintaining their beliefs, values and identity against the glare of modernity.

These influences help to drive a positive feedback loop where communications networks linked with people, institutions and knowledge in a computer supported social network demand an ever increasing scope of collaborative communication: this in turn, nourishes the transition from insular communities to large social networks.⁵⁷ The result is that as modernity advances via various media, the demand for more access is created feeding the growth of access points. Identity groups that wish to maintain the purity of their culture and traditional beliefs are, then,

⁵⁵ Ibid. 233.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 223.

⁵⁷ Ibid.228.

faced with an ever-challenging task of insulating their community from the infiltration of external influences in an environment that is mounting ever-greater cultural pressure by offering group members increasingly easy access to liberalizing external influences. Increased access to countless forms of information and methods of communication create difficulties for identity groups that do not subscribe to liberal ideals. In the hopes of maintaining some form of group cohesion many groups may attempt to isolate themselves and try to prevent too much change in their norms and beliefs too quickly.

This transition represents an ongoing move from location dependent social networks and discussion to an individualized person-to-person form of interaction seen in computer mediated social networks.⁵⁸ These new social networks create a rich environment of individuals engaging in crosscutting dialogue characterized by rational, reciprocal debate on a variety of topics that is independent of any single physical location, making the necessity of physical travel unnecessary to expand the scope of debate. However, modernity's liberalizing effects are limited by a number of possible actions traditional identity groups may take to attempt to mitigate its influence. Traditional identity groups may isolate themselves and attempt to shield their members from liberal influence by putting up barriers such as creating ethnic enclaves, putting physical space between the group and liberal society and shielding themselves from the influence of modernity by reinforcing traditional explanations for the world around them. Even as groups must take greater and greater steps to accomplish this goal the ability for them to create meaningful choices for their members exists and thus maintains a balance between accommodation of traditional identity groups and the right of the individual to lead a self fulfilled life.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 231

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the liberalizing influence of modernity on traditional identity groups within a society, and how this influence leads to the synthesis of liberalism with illiberal cultural norms and practices. The modernity argument posits that the advance of modernity has an inherently liberalizing influence on identity groups and cultures. The development of political movements dedicated to the promotion of freedom of conscience can be in part attributed to the development of toleration and disestablishment of churches from state. However, the creation of this momentum can be most attributed to the shifting emphasis from dogma and faith to skepticism and reason. This chapter discussed three primary elements of modernity that have a tendency to promote liberal ideas and norms; disembedding individuals from traditional norms, reflexivity, and time-space alteration. These three aspects of modernity are the key elements that open the way for liberal norms to take root and push out traditional ways of life in favor of a balanced approach that takes the rights of individuals into account while still maintaining community identity.

Many traditional communities see the advance of liberalism as a threat to beliefs that may be many generations in the making and represent a significant portion of the self-worth of many within the identity group. The liberalization of illiberal or traditionally based societies and identity groups is a source of tension within liberal theory primarily due to the seemingly inconsistent ideals of promoting accommodation while also seeking to spread liberal ideas to those who desire them. Although traditions are never wholly abandoned they are sometimes opened to scrutiny and revision or, if need be, replacement when the identity group sees the need. The degree to which each identity group subscribes to various traditional or modern

knowledge systems is also not dichotomous but includes many 'shades of grey' in between. An example of these shades of grey may be a society that embraces many elements of modernity but retains traditional gender roles as a model for the family. The key is that modernity demands the rational justification of maintaining a tradition in the face of internal challenges by the individual members.

Traditional and illiberal identity groups existing in proximity to liberal groups and communities have been able to insulate themselves from the influences of liberal ideas and norms by sheltering their members from liberalizing influence within cultural enclaves and insular communities. However, this insulation is of limited effectiveness when confronted with the rapid spread of modernity through increasingly common technological sources that are easily accessed. The following chapter explores how processes of modernity accelerated by new communication technology threaten the liberal goal of maintaining space for effective pursuit of ways of life based on non-liberal views of the good.

Chapter 2: Effect of Information Technology on Modernity and Liberalism: Depth, Scope and Speed

Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued that although modernity has an inherently liberalizing nature that is capable of gradually changing traditional values into liberal ones, this process is not a threat to the balancing of accommodation with individual self-determination because of the slow rate at which modernity alone changes norms and society. This more gradual change allows individuals the chance to make informed decisions about how to lead a self-fulfilling life and offers traditional identity groups the time to answer some of the challenges posed to their belief systems.

In this chapter I will argue that with the introduction of information technology,⁵⁹ this process has been drastically accelerated to the point that the liberal goal of balancing accommodation with self-determination has become threatened. The increasing saturation of information technology in today's world is accelerating this process by creating a multiplicity of channels for individuals to become exposed to stimuli that challenge their traditional views. Information technology saturation has not only begun to spread liberal ideas and norms, such as individualism and consumerism, to many who do not necessarily agree with these positions, it has also made these ideas readily available to people to the point of being pervasive in their influence, despite efforts to resist such change. Information technology presents a unique twist in the traditional debate within liberalism regarding the balance between accommodation of traditional and illiberal views of the good and the promotion and affirmation of liberal values.

⁵⁹ These technologies include many modern digital devices such as cellular and smart phones, portable computers and tablets, broadband and wireless internet and the advent of social media.

I posit that these technologies change the dynamic of traditional groups from small tightly knit groups where all interactions are carried out in face to face settings to social networks that are often far flung but connected by shared ends over long distances via technologically mediated channels. An example is how an online game is able to bring many different individuals ‘together’ in cyberspace to engage in an online activity despite the differences in location. Physical distance and the time it normally takes to travel that distance ceases to have meaning and causes traditional face to face communities to lose cohesion. When this happens, the ability of a traditional identity group to maintain its unique sense of identity begins to corrode as individuals increasingly identify with people that may be thousands of miles away from where they live. Even if liberals actively promote the accommodation of illiberal identity groups technological proliferation has ensured that access to modernity has been spread to almost all members of society in at least one form or another through various communication devices, and has created a kind of information saturation within society where many are able to access a growing body of public knowledge steeped in the tenets of modernity.

This chapter is divided into three sections that highlight the main characteristics of information technologies’ effect on modernity as I see it. These elements are the speed, scope and depth to which individuals can engage with identity groups that have differing cultural norms, languages and ideas of what constitutes the good life.⁶⁰ The resulting pervasiveness of liberalizing norms compounds tensions between liberal accommodation and promotion of norms by subjecting identity groups to an externally generated version of liberalism being carried by new technological mediums that conflicts with traditional and illiberal identity groups.

⁶⁰ Gavin Kendall, Ian Woodward and Zlatko Skrbis, “Impediments to Cosmopolitan Engagement: Technology and Late-Modern Cosmopolitanism,” in *TASA Conference Proceedings 2005* (University of Tasmania, 2005), 1-8. 2.

Section One: Depth of Cultural Penetration

Depth is the degree to which elements of modernity and liberalism are able to penetrate the everyday mores of people within an identity group. This is the micro level of cultural penetration and includes concepts of memetics, expressives and other subtle changes in the way people view their world. Depth does not refer to the number of normative issues being addressed by individuals within an identity group but rather how deeply modernity and liberalism have been able to embed themselves in the psyche of the individuals within the identity group. An example is that rather than focusing on issues such as women's rights as a normative issue, depth refers to the way women's rights are assessed at an individual level, including questions of whether or not the individual sees the rights as universal, whether the individual has a right to agree or disagree with the issue, or whether the individual uses generalizable reasons to justify her position on this issue or if she falls back on religious or cultural tenets to justify her position. Information technology exposes individuals to many kernels of modernity that can embed themselves in the collective consciousness of members of traditional identity groups. Even if individuals in private homes eschew modern technology and the growth of modernity, it still continues to have an increasingly powerful role in the public sphere. As individuals in an identity group are exposed to conduits that connect them with members of other identity groups influences are exchanged and absorbed at the individual level. These exchanges have seemingly limited influence on the surface, and may even be seen as superficial or trivial in nature, but also carry with them kernels of common understanding that help to build connections between groups.

When discussing the depth of technological influence on identity groups it is important to acknowledge the subtle nature of cultural penetration that occurs through various electronic communications. This cultural penetration is often the result of individuals imitating something

they see or hear or read in music, literature, news, movies and any number of other sources. These pieces of culture that are passed through advanced communications technology and other media are called memes. Memes are essentially an element of culture that is passed on via non-genetic means such as imitation.⁶¹ This imitation then passes these kernels of culture and modernity on to yet more and more people until they become part of the identity of those imitating the action.

Memetics is the analysis of memes in society and how the replication of cultural understandings leads to constant dynamic change at the normative level. In a sense, memetics are the microanalysis of culture at the visceral level. Many things have the potential to become a meme from the spoken word to the printed one. When passed on from person to person a meme can slowly become part of our collective consciousness albeit slowly. However, these same memes become much more effective when they are communicated to many individuals over an electronic broadcast such as radio or television or even printed such as in newspapers.⁶² However, even these forms of meme are rather limited in that a very small number of meme sources are broadcasting a small number of memes to a large audience. Modern communications technology allows anyone to transmit memes to a large audience resulting in the source of memes being as large as the audience itself. Rather than grandiose moral theories, memes transmit very basic understandings and reactions to the environment surrounding people in identity groups.⁶³ This micro-cultural exchange is a simple and subtle element of culture that is seen as trivial by most standards but can have significant effects over time. The corresponding

⁶¹ Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). 43.

⁶² *Ibid.* 37.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 7.

visceral reaction to this exchange, the expressive, is near instant acceptance or rejection of micro cultural exchanges.

An example is how a simple joke spread by email may carry a common thread of understanding as to why it may be considered funny or not. Whether a person finds the joke funny or not indicates either an acceptance of this cultural exchange or a rejection of it. This commonality can then alter the way one group views another, positive or negative. The reason these cultural micro-exchanges are important when considering technology as an influence is that in the absence of the extensive networks of communication provided by modern technology these micro-exchanges would be sent and received at a significantly slower pace due to the limitations of time and space as discussed in chapter one. In much the way a light drizzle of rain evaporates before making the earth wet, a slow trickle of memes has a significantly smaller effect on the mores of identity groups.

Memes are certain cultural understandings that can be disseminated and reproduced based on how much they resonate with an individual at a basic cultural level.⁶⁴ Imitation is the root of the ability of memes to affect a society and spread from one person to another. In a traditional face-to-face sense, one person may hear a joke from a travelling merchant or other individual from outside an identity group, find it humorous and re-tell it to one of their friends. This process repeats itself until much of the community has heard the joke, and it is adopted into the collected knowledge of the group. A practice is adopted from an external source, accepted as useful and then some of those practices are carried into everyday life. This is not a new phenomenon; individuals have been spreading memes in the form of informal jokes, song and poetry as long as those forms have existed. What is new is the way these memes are distributed.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 4.

Replication of memes can now take place digitally over mediums such as the Internet in significantly greater numbers than was possible in the past making the previous trickle of cultural micro-exchanges into a torrent.

The reactions people have when exposed to different memes and norms are called expressives. Expressives are informal evaluations of norms based on a reflection of their congruence with the individual's lifeworld; humor, emotional comments and acknowledgements can all be considered expressives.⁶⁵ The use of expressives in everyday speech is closely related to memetics in that they make use of visceral emotion based reactions to various elements of cultures being transmitted from one identity group to another. These visceral reactions help to interpret new and emerging norms in an informal and efficient way for the individual. The individual may reject, accept or modify a given meme based on the nature of their reaction to it. These expressives are inherent to deliberation in that they encompass not only the rational and cognitive capacities of individuals, but also their emotional and visceral capacities as well.⁶⁶ When individuals in discourse use expressives they often acknowledge the relevance (or irrelevance) of a given meme being transmitted and in turn whether this meme is worthy of them imitating and thus replicating it.

Memes and expressive, emotional reactions may be considered irrelevant by some and lacking a logical or rational basis. However, this assumption may not be entirely tenable and the inclusion of expressives and other visceral reactions may provide useful input into the discussion of emerging norms. Jeremy Rifkin discusses the way new technology and communications affect the emergence of new social arrangements, social priorities and temporal and spatial orientation;

⁶⁵ Todd Graham, "What's Reality Television Got to Do with it? Talking Politics in the Net-Based Public Sphere," in *Political Communication in Postmodern Democracy Challenging the Primacy of Politics*, ed. Kees Brants and Katrin Voltmer, 248-264 (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011). 251.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

he posits that the various epochs of human consciousness can be roughly divided into stages that are closely related to the level of technology and communications present in a society.⁶⁷ If enough people in an identity group are exposed to certain kernels of modernity and liberal culture as a result of countless memes being expressed through communications technology, these memes will eventually begin to find traction and begin replicating within the identity group. New stages of consciousness tend to begin forming alongside old forms of consciousness as new ways of communication and technological innovation take place. As these new forms of communication begin to seep into an identity group, new social arrangements begin to emerge that are more responsive to the world in which an identity group lives.⁶⁸ As technology proliferates and permeates identity groups, individuals within identity groups begin to interpret their traditions and norms in the context of instant global communications and virtually unlimited access to information.

There is also the iterative process that modifies and incrementally shapes the lifeworld of those who are engaged in communicative action and this process is accelerated by the use of information technology.⁶⁹ Seyla Benhabib argues that every time we replicate a piece of knowledge, we are reinterpreting it. This results in what she calls democratic iterations; these ‘iterations’ do more than simply reproduce another culture, they gradually transform meaning, add to and enrich its significance to the identity group reproducing it.⁷⁰ New iterations of a meme are the product of an antecedent meme and each iteration involves the interpretation of the original in the context of the identity group it is introduced into.⁷¹ When this process is introduced to near instant forms of communication, the transmission, reception, interpretation,

⁶⁷ Jeremy Rifkin, *The Empathic Civilization* (New York: Penguin, 2009). 181-182.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 182.

⁶⁹ Seyla Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). 47-48.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 47.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 48.

retransmission, reinterpretation and so on of memes accelerates to the point that it becomes difficult to understand where the ‘original’ meme came from. The importance of these changing contexts when discussing the importance of memes and expressives can be taken back to how we as human beings interpret our surroundings and norms to begin with. Traditional norms rely not only on the maintenance of a relatively stable interpretation of meaning, but also on the maintenance of an environment that reinforces that meaning. Benhabib argues that the concept of ‘original meaning’ is rather flexible and depends on the way people interpret norms in the context of what they see as an authoritative antecedent of that same norm. New norms are often the reinterpretation of preceding versions of that norm in the context of how the people at that time interpret the world around them. As such each repetition of a norm is different from its antecedent.⁷² As the context for traditional identity groups is influenced by the influx of external cultural particles, change will inevitably occur at the cultural level despite the best efforts at isolation or other attempts to preserve cultural identity. Because of the influence of various information technologies on people’s lifeworlds, their world views become altered by experiences causing new norms and understandings to form.

An interpretation of tradition and culture held by a member of an earlier generation, such as an interpretation of who is considered to be an insider or outsider, may not be held by a later generation even though the two generations claim to maintain the same traditional belief system. Before modern communications technology, an outsider may have been someone who did not attend the same religious enclave within a parochial community. After the development of modern communications, this out-group classification may be redefined to only include those who are not part of the same religion. As technology becomes commonplace among members of

⁷² Seyla Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). 48.

a traditional community, this classification may come to only include those who do not speak the same language; since as familiarity with other cultures and norms increases, fear and resistance to them decreases.

Section Two: Scope of Change to Technological Landscape

Much of the way we view the world is not so much a matter of technological, religious or philosophical criteria, but of how we define ourselves in the context of the 'other'. As humanity has expanded its consciousness and accumulated more and more knowledge about the universe in which we live, the difference between in-group and out-group has gradually blurred and faded. At each stage of technological development humanity has gradually expanded the group of people we see as familiar and decreased the number of people we see as the 'other'. Today, global satellite networks internet, air travel, cellular telephones and a plethora of other technological sources have connected a large portion of the human race in a continuous feedback loop of culture, norms and other information resulting in a broad sweeping sense of cosmopolitanism.⁷³ In a public sphere that is saturated with modern communications technology access to information technology becomes increasingly easy and cost effective. As barriers to accessing this technology fall, the ability of traditional identity groups to insulate themselves from the norms they carry begins to erode. An example may be the ease in which an individual can procure a cellular telephone from even a gas station where once these devices were only available through telecommunications companies.

Technological advancement is not an indigenous western concept. However, it can and does affect identity groups in ways that can facilitate the corrosion of traditional ways of life,

⁷³ Jeremy Rifkin, *The Empathic Civilization* (New York: Penguin, 2009). 183.

comprehensive religious and philosophic norms and even the very lifeworlds of individuals and groups.⁷⁴ It is the method in which these forces are approached and dealt with that defines the nature of the society rather than the phenomenon of modernity itself. Technological improvements carry social norms and understandings that can potentially facilitate the erosion of traditionally held knowledge developed through comprehensive philosophical and religious doctrines, such as loyalty to a given state, church or moral code of conduct.⁷⁵ Technology is not the source of corrosion, but it must be addressed as it is the medium that transfers these liberal norms.

Technological saturation is particularly acute in liberal countries such as Canada. In 2007, 39% of Canadians with Internet access had visited a social networking site and 29% had created a profile, while in 2008 that number had jumped to 59%.⁷⁶ The 2008 election saw one of the most interesting phenomena to hit Canadian politics in some time when a Facebook group called Anti-Harper Vote Swap Canada was formed and called for those in the social networking site to work together to stop the Canadian Conservative party from gaining a majority government.⁷⁷ This group essentially sought to override the geographic boundaries set out for the election by creating online allegiances between different constituency members with hopes of stymieing the Conservative leader's political aspirations. Though it is impossible to know how much influence the anti-Harper movement had in 2008, the website had attracted some 13,000

⁷⁴ Thomas M. Franck, "Is Personal Freedom a Western Value?," *The American Journal of International Law* 91, no. 4 (1997): 593-627. (Franck discusses the advancement of secularism in Europe and how the forces of modernity, rationalism and such tend to push out traditional, conservative views.)

⁷⁵ Gavin Kendall, Ian Woodward and Zlatko Skrbis, "Impediments to Cosmopolitan Engagement: Technology and Late-Modern Cosmopolitanism," in *TASA Conference Proceedings 2005* (University of Tasmania, 2005), 1-8. 2.

⁷⁶ Tamara A. Small, "The Facebook Effect? Online Campaigning in the 2008 Canadian and US Elections," *Policy Options*, November 2008: 85-87.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

users by Election Day, and made something of a media flap at the time.⁷⁸ Given enough public involvement, the idea of online ‘vote-swapping’ could play a role in an election to turn the tide on any number of close political races where all that is needed to win is a plurality of votes.

The criticism of such online discussion groups is that they do not fulfill the requirements of deliberative discourse. Cass Sunstein argues that the growth of communications technology can hamper the growth of discourse by increasingly allowing individuals to filter the content that they see when utilizing these technologies. He suggests that this filtering process is essentially a blind spot in the goal of protecting people from the dangers of censorship.⁷⁹ Sunstein argues that above all, two things are necessary for the successful growth of a well functioning system of free expression. First, individuals need to be exposed to materials that they would not have chosen in advance to help protect against the possibility of extremism developing from having only like-minded individuals talking amongst themselves. Second, they must have a range of common experiences to act as common ground for addressing social problems in a heterogeneous society.⁸⁰ There is a danger that when individuals obtain their information from only like minded sources a kind of self reinforcing radicalization occurs, and very few individuals who frequent politically entrenched web sites actually give substantive consideration to the positions of those on the other side of the political fence.⁸¹ Given this information, one may suggest that the spread of information technology may actually allow identity groups to further insulate themselves by filtering out any information that is seen to threaten the cultural wellbeing of its members.

However, this concern is based on two assumptions that are not necessarily true. First, the information assumes that people only frequent politically based websites and, second, that there

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Cass R. Sunstein, *Republic.com 2.0* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007). 5.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 5-6.

⁸¹ Ibid. 149.

is no political discussion on websites without an established political basis. To the contrary, research into the use of Internet forums and similar social networking media shows that social media outlets that may be dedicated to non-political topics host a multitude of participants from varying political backgrounds and discussion groups that may have a topic unrelated to any political issue may trigger political discourse.⁸² It is possible that there are those individuals who do only frequent politically based websites and blogs who may actually insulate themselves from the political views of others, but given the variety of topics available on the internet that are not politically based, chances are that differing political views of the world may be encountered.

Research has found that online discussion groups focusing on informal entertainment based topics such as reality television fulfill the conditions for vibrant political discussion more often than those dedicated to the topic of politics and that there needs to be a broader acceptance of the sources and forums we accept political speech from.⁸³ Often the informal nature of forums dedicated to less serious matters create an environment more suitable to participatory dialogue than more rigid formal forums created for the purpose. Political discussion environments that are considered traditional, serious forums for political debate can also result in more competitive discourse environments revolving around individuals seeking victory over their colleagues rather than seeking consensus and understanding.⁸⁴ What this means is that citizens are able to engage in political conversation with other citizens in a spontaneous and informal way allowing people to develop understandings based on common experiences individuals with others.⁸⁵ Popular science, the new left movement, environmentalism and social welfare were all issues brought to

⁸² Todd Graham, "What's Reality Television Got to Do with it? Talking Politics in the Net-Based Public Sphere," in *Political Communication in Postmodern Democracy Challenging the Primacy of Politics*, ed. Kees Brants and Katrin Voltmer, 248-264 (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011). 249.

⁸³ Ibid. 262.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 260.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 249.

the fore by the communicative power of the informal public sphere.⁸⁶ Political discussion emerges in many forums regardless of the topic of the forum being utilized.

An example of the scope of technological change that has been occurring is the case of cellular telephones and Chinese culture. Since cellular telephones entered the Chinese market in the early 1990s, cellular communications have eclipsed conventional land line communications by nearly 55% with 300 million land line telephone users utilizing 37,765,320,000 minutes and as many as 800 million cell phone users utilizing 2,061,302,070,000 minutes.⁸⁷ More interestingly though is that most cellular users are part of the younger generation of Chinese who increasingly use information technology to construct their own cultural private spheres through the use of text messages, social media and other functions that modern cellular phones fulfill.⁸⁸ This means that the younger generation within traditional identity groups has begun to separate themselves from their traditions in a way that offers little in the way of synthesizing old ways with new ways. The broader implication of this proliferation in communications technology is that traditional forms of cultural transmission such as the one from parent to child and from teacher to student are being subverted to the point that new generations who grew up with technology live in two worlds, with one foot in the digital age and the other in their traditional culture.⁸⁹ These young people simply adopt modernity without attempting to reconcile it with the norms of their traditional identity groups, possibly abandoning elements within their traditional culture that they may find valuable.

This infusion of information technology does not simply stop at one generation; although there is a digital divide between generations (for example, how children often need to program

⁸⁶ Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998). 374.

⁸⁷ Zhou Xiaohong, "Cultural Feedback and Intergenerational Transmission in Artifact Civilization," *Social Sciences in China* 33, no. 2 (2012): 46-60. 51-52.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 52.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 50-51.

digital devices for their parents) there is also a kind of cultural feedback occurring from the younger generation to the older generation to help bridge the divide caused by the flood of new technology.⁹⁰ This reversed flow of cultural information has, for example, greatly weakened the control many Chinese families have over their children while at the same time presenting Chinese young people with unprecedented autonomy.⁹¹ This weakening means that individuals who would traditionally be responsible for passing on cultural traditions and norms to the next generation have become disconnected from the younger generation by a weakness in technological prowess. This weakness also results in the younger generation feeding modernity back into the older generation due to their increased understanding of technology and their increased exposure to forces of accelerated modernity.

Section Three: Speed of Access and Change

In the context of this chapter speed can be seen in two ways. First, is the speed at which technology is proliferating and how this rapid pace of technological saturation is a contributing factor to the change in people's views of the world. The second is the speed at which information can be accessed, processed and sent into the public sphere. This means that as much as technology has changed the social and political landscape for traditional identity groups, this change is far from over and is accelerating due to technological proliferation. Identity groups are facing ever increasing pressure from liberal ideas and modernity in no small part thanks to the incredible rate at which this technology is growing and the incredible rate at which it can transmit information and ideas.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 53.

⁹¹ Ibid. 55.

The center of any identity group's capacity for absorbing and synthesizing new cultural information is the public sphere. The public sphere is connected through media, informal coffee houses and artistic communities, amongst other sources, all contributing to each other through the porous channels of communication present in modern technology.⁹² These informal social networks are the producers of social change and cultural adaptation that enable more formal legal and normative structures to develop generally held social rules. This is where various individuals take information they have gathered from external sources and present it to other members of the identity group. The proliferation of mobile communications devices and mobile access to Internet, cell and other forms of communications technology means that as technology increasingly spreads to every place, it decreases the importance of where communications take place.⁹³ As the development of various standardized mobile communication formats such as Bluetooth technology and cloud computing becomes more prevalent previously isolated communities that were unable to access technology will be able to take advantage of these devices.

Everything from satellite communications in remote communities to the ability of the Bedouin people being able to use cellular text messaging to communicate with each other and those outside their identity group creates a very interconnected and small world.⁹⁴ This means that for individuals using information technology, the public sphere of discourse and communications becomes a much more accessible and broad concept that includes a variety of viewpoints, norms and worldviews that may or may not mesh with their own views.

⁹² Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998). 374.

⁹³ Barry Wellman, "Physical Place and Cyberplace: The Rise of Personalized Networking," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 22, no. 2 (2001): 227-252. 230.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

Speed of access has an impact by increasing the amount of information accessible at a given time as well as the speed at which it can be accessed. An example would be how mobile phones have increased their capability for transmitting data; at one time a phone may have been able to send only text from one device to another, while now one is able to transmit rich media content such as books, pictures, music, and even video from one device to many devices at a time. As this new cultural information flows into traditional identity groups, methods of interpreting this information that were successful in limiting the impact of modernity in the past become overwhelmed by the pressure being exerted via technological conduits.

When determining which social issues to address, the core of the public sphere – the formal structures of government, and other legalistic edifices – now generally lacks initiative and depends on the ability of the periphery to pose and solve problems.⁹⁵ However, the illegitimate separation of social and administrative power in this respect is only avoided if the periphery has both a specific set of capabilities and sufficient occasion to exercise those abilities.⁹⁶ The first issue relates to the capacity of the periphery to ‘ferret out’ and identify latent issues to be addressed and to introduce them into the political and legalistic core of society. The second issue relates to the loosening of social differentiation between sectors.⁹⁷ The ability of the periphery to present issues in an innovative and visible way depends on its power of spontaneous opinion formation while being anchored in civil society and liberal patterns of political culture and socialization.⁹⁸ Essentially, the ability of the modern periphery to effectively pose and solve complex social problems depends on the rationalized lifeworld; precisely the kind of lifeworld

⁹⁵ Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998). 358.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

highly informal discursive environments that advanced communications technology facilitate.⁹⁹ When introduced to a preexisting collection of social networks in the political public sphere, information technology has a catalyzing effect on social change.

The speed of technological access to information has rapidly risen in the last half century to the point that enormous amounts of information can now be transmitted from place-to-place and person-to-person in mere seconds. The harbinger of communication being divorced from transportation is the telegraph. Although originally only intended to be used for a select few very important messages, it ushered in an era where communication no longer had to be carried somewhere by someone.¹⁰⁰ Since the mid 1970s, the amount of information that is capable of being transmitted through telecommunications technology has risen from 110 bits per second (bps) to modern broadband connections transmitting up to 1 million bps.¹⁰¹ This speed of access is important to the spread of liberal norms and practices in that it not only enables the rapid transmission of text messages and other text based information such as large documents to be accessed but also the transmission of rich media content such as pictures, videos and other forms of more direct easily absorbed information.¹⁰² When transnational channels of information technology are added to an already impressive scope of discourse the potential for the public sphere to expand in an ever more abstract and diverse way becomes vast indeed.

Public access to communication technology has also increased significantly. In Egypt, for example, internet users have increased from around 3000 in 1993 to 8.6 million users in 2008. This is compared to the fact that in 2006 the number of Internet users was around six million, a

⁹⁹ Ibid. 358-359.

¹⁰⁰ Barry Wellman, "Physical Place and Cyberplace: The Rise of Personalized Networking," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 22, no. 2 (2001): 227-252. 233.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 229.

¹⁰² Ibid.

2.6 million-user increase in two years.¹⁰³ Although not all members of the Egyptian public have a private subscription to the internet, many are able to access the service via public access points such as internet café's, youth centers, libraries, schools and universities.¹⁰⁴ The result of this explosion in the availability and speed of new forms of Internet communications has meant that the monopoly that state owned and controlled television and Internet once enjoyed is no longer possible maintain.¹⁰⁵ This is not only limited to the monopoly of information held by the state but also by powerful non-state bastions of political authority, such as the church, that have also begun to see their positions challenged on a number of political and theological issues.¹⁰⁶ The Internet has given a voice to those who do not have one in the public sphere due to repression, lack of mainstream approval, alternative lifestyles and other factors not approved by the traditional order.¹⁰⁷ The lesson to be learned from Egypt is that when traditional identity groups are exposed to advanced communications technology, individuals who hold alternative views to the traditional status quo become empowered to voice their positions and gain popular support in ways that are incredibly difficult to suppress. The speed at which individuals are able to communicate makes the need for traditional public spaces to voice these opinions less and less relevant; even physical proximity to those who have similar views is not critical to this new electronic discourse.

¹⁰³ Omnia Mehanna, "Internet and the Egyptian Public Sphere," *African Development* XXXV, no. 4 (2010): 195-209. 196.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 197.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 201.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that advanced communications technology facilitates the acceleration of cultural and normative change but does not determine the content or direction of discourse within identity groups. It is easy to fall into the trap of viewing technology as deterministic of society in either a negative or positive light. Often the image of the influence of technology in the public sphere is either a libertarian technological utopia or a dystopia dominated by surveillance.¹⁰⁸ Technology is a powerful force that allows modernity to spread at an astonishing pace, but the power of technology to affect people is limited by a society's ability to address pre-existing pressures and tensions presented by modernity. Too much emphasis on the extremes of technological determinism has a tendency to distract from the opportunities opened in the public sphere by the streamlining of public political participation.

The public sphere evolves because individuals within it adapt their views and reinterpret traditions – this process occurs whether the environment is saturated by technology or not. The presence of technology expedites the process and creates the opportunity for more people to join the discussion than would be possible in the absence of technology.¹⁰⁹ Though the power of wealth and vested political interests have the potential to impact these channels to their own ends, it is essentially the 'galleries that decide the value of the artist'; once a communication network is beyond the control of any one actor, the value of information is defined by the

¹⁰⁸ Barry N. Hague and Brian D. Loader, "Digital Democracy: an introduction," in *Digital Democracy: Discourse and Decision Making in the Information Age*, ed. Barry N. Hague and Brian D. Loader, 3-22 (New York: Routledge, 1999). 3.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

audience consuming it and in turn changed by it. In the next chapter, I will argue how discourse theory can be utilized to address tensions presented by accelerated modernity and argue that, though there will still be a degree of pressure placed on traditional identity groups by modernity, this pressure may be ameliorated so as to preserve the liberal goal of balancing accommodation with self-determination.

Chapter Three: The Discourse Approach

Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to present an argument for the use of discourse theory in ameliorating the pressure placed on traditional identity groups by the introduction of accelerated modernity, largely drawing on the work of Jurgen Habermas. Discourse is the process by which individuals taking part in discussion are able to coordinate their efforts and move towards a rationally acceptable consensus. This means that as differences between traditional identity groups and liberal identity groups are addressed, communicative action can occur. When all parties accept other positions on various topics, and move on to coordinate efforts to remedy them, the process of discourse has yielded a ‘communicative action’.

This chapter will be divided into three sections, each discussing an element of discourse theory that I feel provides tools necessary for addressing some of the most pressing concerns presented by this new technologically accelerated modernity and why these strengths assist in the preservation of traditional identity group culture and norms. First is the lifeworld, or the sum of all individual experiences, beliefs and understandings of the world around them. The lifeworld is a collection of interpreted iterations, expectations, experiences and belief systems within a given identity group or individual. When a lifeworld applies to an individual, various interpretations and iterations of beliefs become specific. When applied to an identity group these things become more generalizable. The lifeworld is the background context we draw many of our interpretations of the world around us from. These assumptions are unquestioned and the background is the

source of many of our questions and perceived problems.¹¹⁰ I argue that the lifeworld is not a thing that can be stripped away, as it is essentially a product of being embodied, learning individuals. I suggest that the lifeworld can only be changed incrementally, and much of the change is limited by the available opportunities for new experiences and education. As it is an essential part of the individual, autonomous, life the lifeworld is the source of both our sense of self and our self-interest. Individuals are embedded in their lifeworlds and cannot separate themselves from it; metaphorically the lifeworld is a ship constructed of life experiences and beliefs that we sail through life on. One cannot simply deconstruct a ship or abandon it in the middle of the ocean without 'drowning' so to speak.

Next, in section 2, I discuss the discourse environment and how this environment puts into place procedures that allow everyone participating in discourse to do so on equal footing. From the perspective of this thesis, the procedural regulations that make up the discourse environment are sources of legitimacy that require better arguments to be tabled in various forms of deliberation.¹¹¹ The discourse environment requires the same standards of conduct, discourse and respect from all participants. This means that no *a priori* normative assumptions should be considered valid in and of themselves. Rather, all maxims claiming universality must be submitted to the public sphere for discursive testing.¹¹² Identity groups must submit their claims to discursive testing to be considered legitimate. Only those positions that have been ferreted out through the discourse process are held to be valid.

¹¹⁰ Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Lifeworld and System a Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, Vol. 2, 2 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989). 131.

¹¹¹ Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998). 278-279.

¹¹² Thomas McCarthy, "Kantian Constructivism and Reconstructivism: Rawls and Habermas in Dialogue," *Ethics*, 1994: 44-63. 45.

The primary reason for this lack of normative assumptions is that the validity of normative claims cannot be explained without some grounding in discursive consensus.¹¹³ Any appropriate model of identity group action must stem from a community of communicating actors that are able to arrive at a consensus based on reason. This means that even though various parties may have certain irrational or volitional interests, the rationally motivated recognition of norms that may be questioned at any time separates those self-serving interests from the legitimacy of the process as a whole.¹¹⁴ Thus, the process of discourse does not recognize the validity of *a priori* assumptions held by the participants, even though individuals taking part in the process may hold such assumptions.

Certain moral reasoning used by traditional identity groups can, if processed within the discursive crucible of the discourse environment, maintain both validity within the traditional identity group and comprehensive philosophical and religious doctrines, and at the same time, satisfy the demands of liberal thought with regards to procedural legitimacy. The arrival of discourse at the position that a given action or norm is considered 'right' is not so much an empirical statement of truth or even a position beyond reproach, as a recognition that the given assumption has been tested to the best of the ability of those taking part in the process of discourse.

Finally, I will discuss the process of discourse itself and the goal of developing communicative action within the identity group and even between identity groups. Discourse must do two things: test the consistency of values and test the realizability of goals selected from values.¹¹⁵ This means that discourse must both identify the values held by traditional identity

¹¹³ Jurgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992). 105.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Jurgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992). 107.

groups and determine whether those goals can be accomplished given the current environment. Discourse can be understood as communication that is removed from experience and action and whose structure assures that validity claims, recommendations, and warnings are the exclusive objects of discussion.¹¹⁶ The only universally held maxim within discourse is that no force except that of the better argument is exercised. Some may argue that the question of what argument is better may be subject to the dangers of *a priori* assumptions in that one must assume a certain degree of value exists independently of any argument. An example of this may be the categorical imperative of universalization, or a utilitarian equation of good versus harm.

I will argue that discourse allows identity groups to avoid some of the pitfalls that may affect the legitimacy of proceduralism by utilizing two important maxims.¹¹⁷ First, discourse is based on the notion of reaching consensus through communication. This means that a clear boundary is placed between the creation of certain liberal notions within an identity group and their use for individual ends.¹¹⁸ Individuals engaging in discourse must either accept or reject notions of truth that emerge in discourse; these are also called validity claims and operate on a binary accept or reject premise. If an individual makes a validity claim, the person hearing this claim may either accept or reject the claim; should it be rejected, the person making the claim is required to provide valid reasons for their claim.¹¹⁹ Second, discourse assumes a continuum between morals and law, allowing it to separate the realms of morality and justice without abandoning either one.¹²⁰ Discourse allows the generalizable interests of people within an

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 197.

¹¹⁷ Michel Rosenfeld, "A Pluralist Critique of Contractarian Proceduralism," *Ratio Juris* 11, no. 4 (1998): 291–319. 303.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 303.

¹¹⁹ Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, Vol. 1, 2 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984). 117-118.

¹²⁰ Michel Rosenfeld, "A Pluralist Critique of Contractarian Proceduralism," *Ratio Juris* 11, no. 4 (1998): 291–319. 305.

identity group to be filtered through the sluices of power and into institutions. Discourse operates through the use of iterative process that continually change the meaning and intent of actions organically over time. As discourse takes place, a synthesis occurs between what traditional knowledge was and what it will become as a result of careful interpretation and reinterpretation through the procedures of discourse. Once communicative action is attained, the structures within an identity group can effectively implement the synthesis of traditionalism and modernity.

Section One: Lifeworld

The lifeworld can be thought of from three angles: the subjective lifeworld, objective lifeworld and the social lifeworld. These different shades of our background context shape and colour our interpretation of what others see as problems and benefits, as well as frame what we see as issues in the world today. The understanding of an identity group's lifeworld can be conceptually linked to the depth of change presented by modernity identified in the previous chapter. An individual's lifeworld is the deepest foundation of our beliefs and ideas of the good. The lifeworld is the crucible that allows us to take new information and determine its validity, usefulness and morality in the context of our individual circumstance.

The importance of the lifeworld in discourse theory and in reconciling tensions between liberal and traditional groups has to do with the way people are embedded within their cultural, societal and religious identities, and how they cannot discard the significant influence this identity has on their interpretation of the world. One would be mistaken to assume that individuals engaging in discourse in the public sphere can compartmentalize various parts of their life and engage in the public sphere outside of the influence of their various moral philosophical and political views. People simply cannot separate themselves from the

foundational views that shape their opinions.¹²¹ Our positions on what is moral, ethical and good is shaped and defined by our lifeworld and may be contested by those who have a different understanding of the world.

Objective World

The objective world is the world as it exists outside of the belief systems of those taking part in discourse. It refers to the world as it exists independently of our interpretations and includes the totality of statements that can be considered true in the purest sense of the world.¹²² Truth statements regarding the objective world are dependent on the assumption that first, the world exists independently of the belief systems of those living within it and second, that any truth claim must either be true or false based upon justifiable acceptability.¹²³ The assumption here is that the world exists independently of the lifeworld, and is subject to interpretation of truth that is subject to re-interpretation should new evidence present itself. The objective world is essentially unchanging for the sake of our interpretation; only our perception of it changes. This perception is shaped by our lifeworld including information, culture, religion, ethnicity, gender and a host of other potential sources.

When our lifeworld encounters new information we see it through the filter of all the things that make it up. When something changes in our lifeworld, such as learning a new skill, certain things we held as beliefs at one time may be called into question. An example may be how an individual believes that all snakes are dangerous. This belief may be maintained by

¹²¹ Daniel M. Weinstock, "Saving Democracy from Deliberation," in *Canadian Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner and Wayne Norman, 78-91 (New York: Oxford, 2001).

¹²² Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Lifeworld and System a Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, Vol. 2, 2 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989). 120.

¹²³ Axel Seemann, "Lifeworld, discourse, and realism," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 30, no. 4 (2004): 503-514. 511.

religious beliefs that associate snakes with negativity and death. Without any information to the contrary this individual may hold such a belief indefinitely. However, if this same person is exposed to docile snakes in a controlled environment such as a pet store or zoo, this belief may be called into question. Even if the person's belief changes from 'all snakes are dangerous' to 'some snakes are not dangerous' the belief ceases to be an absolute and is subject to reconsideration. As a result of this reconsideration, some of the religious tenets that were once believed to be absolute are less secure. Whether snakes are dangerous or not has remained constant, while the individual's interpretation of snakes has changed to include possible exceptions to the rule. This means that the objective world can only be interpreted so far as our individual perceptions allow. These perceptions become true in so far as they fulfill all the criteria we have set out to be considered a truth in the subjective world.

Subjective World

The subjective lifeworld is the realm of experience and can be different based on the life chances and opportunities experienced by different individuals taking part in discourse. The subjective world refers to the experiences, beliefs and normative background to which a speaker has had the privilege to access as well as the issues, opinions and beliefs the speaker may express in the public sphere.¹²⁴ The public sphere is divided into core and periphery components where the core includes various formal structures, such as governing bodies, tribunals and clergy, while the periphery is divided into the inner periphery and the true periphery. The inner periphery includes educational institutions, semi-formal clubs and associations and organizations related to occupation. The true periphery includes civil society, informal groups of friends and other social

¹²⁴ Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Lifeworld and System a Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, Vol. 2, 2 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989). 120.

organizations with minimal formal structure. The true periphery is the source of much of the incoming information into any identity group and is characterized by the many highly differentiated and cross-linked channels.¹²⁵ These aspects of the public sphere are the forums where various individual lifeworlds coalesce into what we see as identity groups.

The subjective world is important because it is a collection of norms and experiences that make up the lifeworld of individuals and identity groups. The subjective world is where we form our conceptions of the good and what we see as true so far as our interpretation of the world around us will allow. The truth in discourse theory, then, is two faceted: first, the truth is dependent on individual actors' assumptions that the beliefs their day to day actions are based upon are true and second, the veracity of truth claims can only be discursively redeemed.¹²⁶

The subjective world is the way in which the individual or identity group sees facts of nature and science, but the dual faceted nature of truth in discourse theory ensures that discourse takes a reactive rather than a proactive role in determining the nature of any given truth claim. This essentially means that without discussion, the 'truth' is only as deep as the information we have access to. It is Plato's proverbial shadows on the wall of the cave; the truth is the best interpretation of how the world is based on what we see, but not definitive enough to be considered real or consistent across all individual and group perspectives. Only when a given assumption fails to succeed or function does truth come into question and trigger a discursive quest for what truth really is.¹²⁷ Since innumerable numbers of truth claims can be present at any given time the truth must be assumed until it is proven otherwise.

¹²⁵ Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998). 355-356.

¹²⁶ Axel Seemann, "Lifeworld, discourse, and realism," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 30, no. 4 (2004): 503-514 503-504.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 505.

This means that when modernity presses in on the lifeworlds of traditional identity groups the danger exists that elements of pre-existing cultural norms may erode without adequate discussion. Also, there is the possibility that any statement made has the possibility to be true or contain kernels of truth despite an apparent lack of available evidence for it. The discursive redemption of truth claims cannot be *positively* verified against the objective world due to the imperfect interpretation of information obtained from it; but persons can attempt to get as close as possible to positive verification through continued review. Evidence is only available as long as it is observable and interpretable by people in the subjective world and new evidence can only be uncovered through active discussion and review of new ideas.

Various technological devices and advanced telecommunications present unique situations to identity groups that seek to isolate and preserve traditional ways of thinking and interpreting the world. If enough individuals have access to certain privileged opportunities, the identity group in question may actually change their priorities, desires and generalizable interests. For example, a society that places a high value on passing knowledge from the older generation to the younger generation may experience a subversion of the traditional cultural exchange between generations as a result of younger generations becoming more adept than older generations at the use of technological devices. This cultural feedback can produce tension between generations and even produce cultural feedback where the younger generation passes lessons of modernity to the older generations.¹²⁸ The crucial element in discourse is that individuals realize that any truth they believe is a subjective interpretation of the world around them and admit that their perspective *may* be flawed in some way, and as a result engage in discourse with a good degree of humility and desire to work with others to discover the closest

¹²⁸ Zhou Xiaohong, "Cultural Feedback and Intergenerational Transmission in Artifact Civilization," *Social Sciences in China* 33, no. 2 (2012): 46-60. 59.

representation of the objective world as possible. Participants must be akin to Socrates and claim their greatest wisdom to be that they really have none. When this occurs, participants will be prepared to engage meaningfully in the discourse process.

Social World

The social world is the collective overlapping social understandings of an identity group in the public sphere. The social world is where individuals within a specific identity group or society exchange social information in the public sphere. This includes legitimately regulated interpersonal relations, the amalgamation of overlapping individual views of the good and group norms. The importance of the social world in understanding the lifeworld as a whole is that the social world is where individuals find commonality with other members of their respective identity group and solidify their identity as members of these groups resulting in the creation of a more generalized lifeworld for the group as a whole.

Legitimately regulated interpersonal relations refer to the various social relationships formed between individuals and groups of individuals within identity groups that are moderated by normative assumptions.¹²⁹ This would include the relationships between family members, friends, employers and employees, and other interpersonal relationships. The primary distinguishing factor of the social world is its lack of formality and the malleability of various regulating norms. Importantly though, the social world is not an entirely independent entity from the subjective world in that it is a kind of amalgamation of individual subjective worlds that results in a bell curve of norms ranging towards some social mean.

¹²⁹ Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Lifeworld and System a Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, Vol. 2, 2 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989). 120.

As identity groups are increasingly exposed to modernity certain changes begin to occur in the social world that lead to significant cultural developments. These changes include the development of specialized occupations, rising levels of formal education, changes in gender roles, changing sexual norms, declining fertility rates, increasing levels of political participation, an increasingly skeptical view of top down power structures that leads to a less easily led public.¹³⁰ Although it is possible to resist these changes, it becomes increasingly difficult and costly for those in leadership roles to resist these changes.¹³¹ Eventually modernity overtakes the social world and leads the identity group in a new direction.

Discourse theory offers identity groups a way of reconciling the incoming change modernity has on traditional lifeworlds by recognizing the importance these norms have on the identities of individuals within the group. Discourse theory encourages the inclusion of various traditional understandings in the evaluation and formation of new synthesized lifeworlds but also requires consideration of other alternative perspectives on what the good life may be. The tension between the promotion of liberal values in a society and accommodation of traditional ones often revolves around the perceived threat traditional lifestyles have on the integrity of liberal lifestyles; however, this preoccupation with lifestyles only focuses on a single part of what a liberal society is.

Section Two: Discourse Environment

Discourse environment is quite possibly the cornerstone of effective discourse theory.

Essentially, the discourse environment shifts the frame of reference from substantive ideas to the

¹³⁰ Ronald Inglehart and Wayne E. Baker, "Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values," *American Sociological Review* 65 (February 2000): 19-51. 21.

¹³¹ Ibid.

procedural dimension. In order to construct a legitimate discourse environment that produces legitimate conclusions, certain principles must be assumed so as to ensure universal interpretation of dialectic reasoning within the discourse environment. The discourse environment must ensure that all interested parties participating in discourse are able to contribute, discuss and analyze truth assertions within an environment that is governed by principles of conduct, proceduralism and a commitment to ensuring the largest possible contribution of ideas to the process. This allows as many ideas and perspectives as possible to be presented thus giving the identity group the means of discovering the most acceptable and legitimate principles as a whole through dialogue.¹³² Though this seems to impose certain universals that some may argue will limit the scope of the discourse environment, it is necessary to impose some degree of restriction on the discourse environment to ensure the procedural aspect of discourse. Proceduralism ensures the integrity of discourse and protects the right of everyone to raise issues. This may include the caveat that a thin set of rules must be used to ensure as many points of view are presented in discourse as possible without overburdening the system with dogmatic, unsupported or poor arguments.

The Proceduralism of Discourse

The legitimacy of will formation within the discourse environment is based on the procedural justification of political practices based on how various interests and arguments are included

¹³² Thomas McCarthy, "Kantian Constructivism and Reconstructivism: Rawls and Habermas in Dialogue," *Ethics*, 1994: 44-63. 46.

within the public sphere.¹³³ The proceduralism of the discourse environment ensures that only generalizable interests survive the process of will formation and that all individuals participating within the discourse environment are able to effectively communicate and provide reasons for their beliefs. As a result, only the cooperative search for truth remains as a valid motive for those participating in discourse.¹³⁴ Proceduralism allows identity groups to include many different perspectives into the discourse environment, and as a consequence, evaluate as many different perspectives as possible.

Within the discourse environment, identity groups must adhere to two procedural elements that ensure the validity of any outcome. First, that everyone has the opportunity to participate in the development of outcomes.¹³⁵ Essentially, those who are impacted by the outcomes generated can also claim to be authors of the outcomes. Second, the deliberation of these outcomes must proceed under the assumption that only rational outcomes will be acceptable.¹³⁶ This means that as individuals challenge assertions within the discourse environment, those who introduce assertions must provide reasons that can be generally accepted by those taking part in the discourse. It is this requirement to provide reasons for what is said that prevents the use of irrational, selfish and discriminatory validity claims in the discourse environment. These two primary conditions within the discourse environment are then supported by a number of principles of conduct that, although not rigid, do provide guidelines for how individuals should behave towards others within the discourse environment.

¹³³ James Bohman, "Beyond Overlapping Consensus: Rawls and Habermas on the limits of Cosmopolitanism," in *Habermas and Rawls Disputing the Political*, ed. James Gordon Finlayson and Fabian Freyenhagen, 265-283 (New York: Routledge, 2011). 267.

¹³⁴ Jurgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992). 108.

¹³⁵ Jurgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009). 121.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

Principles of Conduct

Certain principles of conduct should be present in a discourse environment to assist in the equitable participation of all members of an identity group in the development of social norms. These principles include coherence, continuity, reciprocity, reflexivity, empathy, discursive equality and discursive freedom.¹³⁷ Other important conditions may include sincerity, honesty and legitimacy.¹³⁸ These principles help prevent the arbitrary dismissal of discourse raised by individuals in the communications environment and assist in the emergence of truth to the extent that individuals within an identity group can claim their norms are as firmly grounded as possible. Particularly, this applies to the use of religious and comprehensive philosophic doctrines in the discourse environment.

These principles mean that when a proposal is made it must follow certain basic principles of falsifiability and logic the absence of which may impair the process of discourse to adequately ferret out the desires of the individuals within an identity group. One of the primary targets of these principles of conduct is the use of irrational dogmatic positions based in slavish attachment to a position. These also help individuals within the discourse environment acknowledge basic tenets of logical argument, including the principle that any position must be falsifiable and free from logical fallacies.¹³⁹ In the discourse environment, the use of language is an illocutionary act that carries with it some intention of action. When people discuss issues in good faith with these principles in mind it follows that individuals will then give the same level of respect to resolutions created within the discourse environment. Discourse theory uses this

¹³⁷ Todd Graham, "What's Reality Television Got to Do with it? Talking Politics in the Net-Based Public Sphere," in *Political Communication in Postmodern Democracy Challenging the Primacy of Politics*, ed. Kees Brants and Katrin Voltmer, 248-264 (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011). 250.

¹³⁸ Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Lifeworld and System a Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, Vol. 2, 2 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989). 26.

¹³⁹ Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998). 279.

understanding as a foundation for developing a community that can create legitimate cultural knowledge out of a mixture of secular and sacred knowledge.¹⁴⁰ When this occurs, the community is then ready to engage in discourse.

Importantly, these conditions are not legally binding but rather moral imperatives for the discourse process to function.¹⁴¹ These principles of conduct are organic and tacitly accepted by participants in discourse. If these principles were legally coercive it would ensure the process itself proceeded but would undermine the legitimacy of the process by generating top down pressure on an identity group rather than the bottom up acknowledgement of each individual's contribution. This does not separate these conditions from the realm of legality but rather places them somewhere between moral and legal reasoning.

Maximum Inclusion

Finally, the discourse environment must seek to be as inclusive as possible when intergroup discourse occurs. This follows from the principle of discourse theory that as many people as possible participate so as to create a plurality of views. Though the ideal discursive situation is not something easily developed in a practical sense, it is nevertheless possible to imagine a situation in which discourse is regulated by an elegant system of rules that enables a plurality of views to exist and interact in a constructive manner. The key contribution of discourse theory in establishing a legitimate pluralistic community is the way in which it places political will-formation in the hands of those who are most affected by such action.

¹⁴⁰ Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Lifeworld and System a Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, Vol. 2, 2 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989). 89.

¹⁴¹ Jurgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009). 121

The primary reason it is important for the discourse environment to be as inclusive as possible is that many traditional identity groups already face significant barriers to entering into discourse with liberal groups. Traditional identity groups must reconcile three forms of dissonance that threaten to corrode their lifeworlds.¹⁴² First, they must develop a position towards other religions and cultures that may espouse very different values. Second, they must develop a position on the internal logic of secular knowledge and on the institutionalized monopoly on knowledge of modern scientific experts. Modern liberal perspectives often support scientific views that sharply contrast with comprehensive philosophic and religious doctrines. Finally, traditional identity groups must develop an epistemic stance recognizing primacy of secular reasoning in the political arena.¹⁴³ Because of this, it is important for the discourse environment to be inclusive and adopt a lean view of what any rules within the discourse environment should be. In situations of intragroup discourse with individuals who disagree with traditional views, the importance of inclusiveness is as important, as it is easy for certain groups to be excluded from discussions based on anything from views on religious interpretations to gender to sexual orientation.

Although there may be a range of interpretations on what constitutes a legitimate discourse environment, one that includes the largest number of interpretations of the good life as possible is most favourable to maintaining the liberal goals of balancing accommodation with self-determination. So long as a more sparing definition of what constitutes a legitimate discourse environment is used, traditional identity groups will be given ample room for proposing their own belief systems and allowing for a more discursive ‘bubbling up’ of norms rather than their external imposition.

¹⁴² Ibid. 137.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Section Three: Discourse

Discourse is the actual process of discussion taking place within an identity group between individuals, and between various identity groups. Discourse at its simplest is the use of language to attempt to reach a consensus between two individuals on a specific topic that could achieve consensus should the discussion be open enough and proceed long enough.¹⁴⁴ At its core, discourse consists of an assertion that rests upon a validity claim and either the acceptance or rejection of that validity claim by another party.¹⁴⁵ If the individual who hears the assertion accepts the premise of the validity claim, discourse moves forward. However, should the individual hearing the assertion reject the validity claim, the individual making the assertion must then justify her validity claim with generalizable and rationally acceptable reasons why her claim is valid.¹⁴⁶ As such the principle of discourse is that individuals within the discourse environment engage in a binary accept-reject exercise that is based on the three types of validity claims (truth, rightness and truthfulness).¹⁴⁷ These three types of validity claims relate to the worlds located within the lifeworld and correspond to the objective world, the social world and the subjective world. Truth claims are addressed by theoretical arguments on what objective truth is (the sky is blue), rightness claims relate to the social world and that which is considered moral by the identity group (stealing is wrong) and truthfulness claims relate to the subjective world and personal taste (that painting is ugly). The individual or individuals hearing an assertion can utilize each of these types of validity claims, and the corresponding response can relate to the speaker's reasons behind making a claim. However, only truth claims can be universally justified

¹⁴⁴ Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, Vol. 1, 2 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984). 42.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 22-23.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 301.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 42.

based on objective information. I argue that rightness claims are only generalizable to the extent that two identity groups share the same values, whereas truthfulness claims relate to the preferences of an individual.¹⁴⁸ As such discourse between identity groups must resort to generalizable understandings while discourse within an identity group can utilize at least truth and rightness claims. The individual has a right to reject truthfulness claims through their right of exit from the group.

The discourse principle sets out the rules for legitimate discussion when developing policy and normative culture. According to the discourse principle, discourse must include as many individuals in decision-making processes as possible in a well regulated discursive environment where all opinions may be brought forth, but at the same time all positions may be critiqued and the final position reached must be followed. Finally, no individual may be coerced into a given position within discourse.¹⁴⁹ If a person has a reasonably informed position they are entitled to participate in this process and bring their concerns, worldviews and suggestions to the deliberation.¹⁵⁰ This means that discourse protects against logical issues within arguments, inclusion issues and protects individuals against the will of the strongest. Only the strength of the better argument is valid within discourse.

Binary Discourse: Accept or Reject

Discourse theory states that individuals communicating within a legitimate discourse environment will develop political will through binary dialectic reasoning; that is, the acceptance or rejection of norms, values and statements based on assessment of the validity attached to those

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 42.

¹⁴⁹ Jurgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990). 89.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

statements. Questions of truth, rightness and truthfulness within the lifeworld are subject to this same standard and are critical in the shaping of individuals within the identity group. As individuals incrementally shape their own views and perceptions of the world, elements within the lifeworld are taken to be either true or false and thereby shape new iterations of an individual's views of the world. However, each individual must have two key assumptions in place before this process can occur at any progressive pace. First, that the world exists independently of their beliefs such that evidence obtained from the outside world must have precedence over comprehensive philosophical and religious doctrines.¹⁵¹ Second, that every belief about the world, and objects within it, are either true or false depending upon evidence discovered within it.¹⁵² An individual, or group of individuals, within an identity group puts a position forward; this position is then either accepted by the other individuals within the group or rejected. If the position is accepted then the process moves on to another issue. If the position is rejected, those who reject the position must then provide reasoning as to why the proposal is flawed and revise it to suit their conception of how the identity group should conduct its affairs. A proposal is then introduced and the process continues. This basic accept or reject scenario is the most rudimentary form of discursive will formation within the group context, and it will form the foundation for the development of liberal notions within traditional identity groups.

This binary discourse also allows traditional identity groups to ferret out certain values that are valuable in the context of modern society while rejecting norms that no longer reflect the values of the group. An example might be the use of corporal punishment as a punishment for behaviour the group finds unacceptable. The group might make the validity claim that it is necessary to maintain order, while individuals may dispute this validity claim suggesting that

¹⁵¹ Axel Seemann, "Lifeworld, discourse, and realism," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* (Sage) 30, no. 4 (2004): 503-514. 507.

¹⁵² Ibid.

other sanctions for unacceptable behaviour may be utilized, or that the behaviour in question is no longer considered taboo and as such does not warrant corporal punishment, or that the use of corporal punishment is no longer considered right or moral within the group. At the moment individuals within the identity group dispute the validity claim of the speaker, discourse has begun. Though this discovery process has much to do with how various groups in the public sphere manifest their influence into actual political power, the ability of discourse to instill legitimacy through procedural methods ensures that all normative and moral claims arrived at in more informal procedures are also considered legitimate via their grounding in discourse theory.

This is not to say that a validity claim is objectionable on random or arbitrary grounds, as all of discourse must be based in some sort of rational reasoning. The validity claims cannot be explained without some recourse to rationally motivated agreement or the position that consensus on a norm must be achieved through reason.¹⁵³ Each individual participating in discourse may recognize what he or she wants but unless it can be rationally applied to all, such narrow interests will not be able to gain traction. Through discourse, any attempt to claim truth in an issue is tested in the crucible of the public sphere rather than being simply assumed, and as a result, remains its primary strength.

These reasons then lead the parties involved in discourse to accept certain normative claims in a certain context as true. These rational reasons can be differentiated from irrational acceptance of behavioural expectations by the cognitive supposition that they can be discursively redeemed.¹⁵⁴ In short, the argument that an identity group should continue to engage in a traditional behaviour solely on the argument that ‘it has always been done this way’ is not an argument at all, but rather a dogmatic position that defies evidence to the contrary. This also

¹⁵³ Jurgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992). 105.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

works the other way, however, and forces those who object to a norm or practice to likewise base their objections on a validity-claim that is grounded in rational reasoning. This provides a degree of support to the liberal goal of balancing the accommodation of traditional identity groups with the rights of those individuals who make up the group.

Primacy of the Individual

Discourse places priority of the individual's right to lead a meaningful and self-determined life ahead of the desires of an identity group to maintain control over its membership. As in all variants of liberal theory, discourse theory places importance on the ability of the individual to lead a meaningful and self-determined life. In this spirit, the understanding that individuals within an identity group have the basic right of exit remains despite what the conclusions of any political will-formation within the identity group may be. This means that if any persons find that their ability to lead a self-determined life according to the values they hold is impaired by their identity group, they have the right to leave the identity group in order to pursue their autonomous life unhindered by any decision made by the discourse of the identity group.

The most important aspect of respecting the primacy of the individual is to ensure that the discourse environment respects autonomy. The autonomous life consists of diverse and heterogeneous pursuits as opposed to the life of coerced choices.¹⁵⁵ As an example, a person may subscribe to a particular religious faith that assumes a lower status for women based on religious tenets. When placed in the context of a person who is given no choice in whether or not they have the ability to escape such a life, the individual is essentially denied the basic right to lead a self-determined life as they see it. Such a traditional notion may be considered legitimate to a degree, so long as the notion is framed against the right of any affected parties to exit the

¹⁵⁵ Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). 371.

traditional identity group in question.¹⁵⁶ In such an environment, women would be given the same consideration as men and could only accept religious tenets restricting them as a result of free choice. A self-inflicted restriction, with the ever-present escape clause of being able to leave the community should that be the wish of the individual, would then fulfill the requirement that the individual be given the right to choose her own life. This recognition of the individual's right to 'opt out' as it were is an example of limitations on the ability of an identity group to impose its will within a traditional context. Essentially, it is a basic escape clause within the society where the individual has a final inalienable right to say 'yes or no' to the requirements of an identity group. This right is essential to any traditional identity group that wishes to engage in discourse due to the third rule of discourse that prevents individuals from being coerced in any way.

Although the traditional identity group is given generous latitude to develop normative actions based upon how those individuals understand what the good life is, this latitude stops short of making normative and moral value judgments as to the best action for the group ahead of those of individual self-determination by coercing an individual to follow a set of beliefs and norms that are detrimental to the individual's autonomy. As a result, discourse theory provides certain guarantees to those taking part in discourse that individual voices will not be silenced due to religious restrictions, arbitrary prejudice and other invalid criteria.

Morality and Law

Morality and law is the point at which various traditions and norms are viewed to be important enough to an identity group to implement on a broader scale. Morality and legality are not compartmental concepts; rather they are a part of a continuum of subjective reasoning that

¹⁵⁶ Martha Nussbaum, "Women and the Law of Peoples," *Politics Philosophy Economics* 1, no. 283 (2002): 283-306. 294.

enables as many individuals to take part in discourse as possible without imposing objective reasoning as a condition for participation. Although law and morality exist on two separate ends of a spectrum, they are linked via their grounding in the lifeworld through three distinct media.¹⁵⁷ It is important to realize that law is not necessarily a product of the state but also of tradition, religion and reason. Morality and law have a common goal of interpreting cultural knowledge but law goes beyond interpretation to constitute both a system of knowledge as well as a system of action designed to address any infringement of normative values within an identity group.¹⁵⁸ Laws take the normative and informal discursive resolutions developed informally and systematize them for broader implementation. Without the legal aspect morals would be guidelines and without the moral aspect laws would be arbitrary. Both aspects are essential for the construction of legitimate discursive resolutions.

When liberal influences begin to permeate the core of a traditional identity group's normative structure, pressure from changing opinions in the private sphere can create tensions between emergent norms and traditional ones. Discourse creates a continuum between morality and legality that allows both to exist without eliminating either one. This connection between what is considered moral and what is considered legal helps to build a tangible link between emergent norms and traditional ones. This continuum can be conceptualized via the following three elements. First, law and morality respond to the steering media of money and administrative power rooted in the social world. These steering media have their source in the legalized institutions of markets and bureaucracy, and have power to influence all identity groups that have even minimal links to the public sphere.¹⁵⁹ Second, any moral dispute can, and most likely is, solved via the reference to legal institutions for remedy. By legal institutions it is meant

¹⁵⁷ Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998). 75.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 79.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

that individuals with a dispute must take their matters to courts rather than engaging in violence or coercion with each other. This is contrasted to the less reliable methods of habit, loyalty and trust.¹⁶⁰ In traditional identity groups, morality is often drawn directly from moral sources such as tradition or religion and distributed and enforced from the top of the identity group's power structure downwards. Because moral edicts are drawn from religion and tradition they tend to be viewed as infallible and beyond question, resulting in strict enforcement. Finally, membership is universalized and ensures equal participation in the public sphere. All members are given the right to take part in discourse and to question any aspect of the social order within an identity group.¹⁶¹ These connections mean that law and morality within identity groups are both rooted in the social lifeworld of the members of these groups and tacitly linked to the discursive process as a whole. When individuals take part in discourse they are both acknowledging the system that will enable resolutions to be implemented and cycling those resolutions back into the moral and normative fabric of the identity group.

When the link between morality and legality is established via discourse, the result is an environment that values the input of moral and traditional sources on the implementation of rules governing the group, but also realizes that these rules are flexible and subject to change. In a manner of speaking this aspect of discourse prevents various traditional norms and beliefs from being broken by the forces of accelerated modernity by allowing them to bend and flex under the pressure. In this way, identity groups will be able to guide their beliefs and see them grow and adapt to the forces of modernity while maintaining a vibrant and independent culture.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 79.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

Iterative Process

The iterative process is the process by which discourse develops communicative action or some consensus within discourse. This consensus may be on something as major as the idea that corporal punishment is no longer considered acceptable within an identity group, or as minor as consensus that snow is cold. Nevertheless, all consensuses within discourse are subject to iterations in that no single thing is ever seen exactly the same way as its antecedent.

All positions developed through the discourse process are subject to the process of iterative development and evolution. According to Seyla Benhabib, in the process of repeating a term or concept, we never simply produce a replica of the original usage and its intended meaning; rather, every repetition is a form of variation.¹⁶² Even if media and communications transmit facts as human interest, mix information with entertainment and arrange material episodically into small fragments, the public sphere is still provided with kernels of truth to fuel grand societal discussions.¹⁶³ As a result, discourse proceeds in a way that builds future interpretations of norms and beliefs on the foundation of reinterpreted ones. An example may be how a person in the 1970s would imagine a computer when asked about it versus what a person now would think of it. Though this is a crude example of a subtle and elegant process of evolving understandings, it serves to detail how various elements of a traditional identity group's culture may change as time goes on and with the use of discourse these changes can be identified.

Although it may be difficult to know what the original meaning of an iteration was at one point or another, it can be assumed that every act of iteration refers to an antecedent iteration that can be considered authoritative in some respect. It follows that the use of iterations involves

¹⁶² Seyla Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). 47-48.

¹⁶³ Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998). 377.

making sense of the authoritative original in some new context.¹⁶⁴ When individuals engage in discourse about a specific topic or norm, it is the modern interpretation of this antecedent that is being discussed and assessed. Often, a norm or belief that once held great importance to a group may over time fade into little more than a ritual that is observed simply because of tradition. Consistent with the tenets of discourse theory, all norms are subject to revision at any time. As these norms are revisited, they evolve in subtle ways that ensure their relevance to the identity group that holds them.

Utilizing the iterative process, an identity group is able to revisit assumptions and hold them to discursive scrutiny through informal will formation. Every repetition transforms the meaning of iterations, and adds to them. Iterations are linguistic, legal, cultural and political transformations through repeating emergence within the discourse environment.¹⁶⁵ This process enriches and deepens the understandings developed within the discourse environment in a consistent and subtle way while ensuring the constant organic development of new and relevant discourse positions.¹⁶⁶ Though the formal channels of democratic will formation, such as legislatures and courts, may reiterate the conclusions of discursive will formation, these institutions are not the source of legitimacy for any specific iteration, rather, legitimacy rests in the procedural nature of discourse and its ever changing interpretations of normative assumptions.

Iterations allow identity groups to explore their own beliefs and cultures in a way that both reassesses them according to how the identity group lives in the present and still reflects on and gives credit to the past and why such beliefs and norms came into being in the first place.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 48.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

This process is a kind of bubbling up of emergent liberal norms that are created from within the group rather than imposed from without. It is important that external forces not interfere with this process as it prevents identity groups from evaluating and discussing issues that affect them on their own terms.

Conclusion

In this chapter I identified three primary pillars of discourse theory that I feel are conducive to reconciling the tension created by the processes of accelerated modernity. These pillars allow identity groups to address issues that affect them in and on their own terms and also allow them to reconcile emerging liberal norms within their ranks with pre-existing traditional norms and beliefs. This chapter has addressed how each of the pillars of discourse theory might be used in the context of traditional identity groups affected by the pressures of accelerated modernity.

First, I highlighted the concept of the lifeworld and how this approach to individuals within traditional identity group helps to reveal the difficulties faced by many within traditional identity groups when facing pressures associated with accelerated modernity. Key points include the fact that the lifeworld is like a ship at sea; once on board, one cannot simply rebuild it at sea without sinking, so to speak. The lifeworld is divided into three parts that correspond to the various aspects of life and how we view it. Objective world, subjective world and social world all have different views and must be acknowledged to move forward in any kind of meaningful discourse.

Second, I discussed the proceduralism of the discourse environment and how this proceduralism ensures fair and equitable discussion between individuals and groups. This includes the establishment of specific concrete rules that allow all to take part in discourse and

that such proceedings move ahead with the understanding that only rational outcomes are acceptable. These two tenets are complimented by a number of principles of conduct that are held in high esteem and encouraged within the discourse environment but are not mandated or written down. These principles of conduct are aspirational in nature and help to enrich the discourse environment and allow it to function as effectively as possible. Above all, however, the discourse environment must strive to be as inclusive as possible. Many traditional identity groups face significant challenges when attempting to engage in any kind of speech with liberal groups or where emerging liberal norms are in place. This means that the rules and principles must be as unobtrusive as possible while still promoting a fair and equitable discourse environment.

Finally, I addressed discourse itself and how this process, as the centerpiece of this project, allows individuals within traditional identity groups to address, discuss, evaluate and re-address various issues emerging as a result of processes of accelerated modernity. This was divided as follows. First, I examined discourse as a whole and how it functions according to my interpretation of it. This includes the presentation of a validity claim, the acceptance or rejection of that claim and how each claim must be grounded in some form of rational argumentation. Second, I discussed the binary accept-reject aspect of discourse in more detail and describe how this process is able to simplify the evaluation of emergent norms and run them through a kind of discursive scrubbing process whereby the elements of the claim that are unacceptable are purged until all that remains is the kernel of truth at the heart of the validity claim. Third, I discussed how this process must place the individual at the center of the process and that the individual must always have at least the right of exit from the group for this process to be considered valid. Fourth, I discussed how discourse connects the concepts of morality and law and how this connection both adds purpose to the creation of rules within the identity group while also adding

rationality to the morality in which they originate from. In this way, discourse allows rules shaped by morality to be questioned by the discursive process and removes them from being considered infallible and sacred. Finally, I discussed how the iterations developed within this process eventually result in the bubbling up of norms that are created within the traditional identity groups themselves and both respect the traditions they have in place while also allowing a more flexible and malleable culture that is able to adapt and withstand the increased pressures of accelerated modernity.

The sum of these parts is a case for utilizing discourse theory as a potent tool in addressing the emergence of a new, accelerated modernity that is placing increasing pressure on the ability of liberals to balance their twin goals of ensuring that identity groups within liberal states are fairly accommodated while also ensuring that individuals within these identity groups are given real choices as to how they should go about leading a meaningful and self-determined life. Although the processes of modernity will continue to move forward at an increasing pace as a result of new and increasingly accessible technology, the tools within discourse theory allow a degree of balance to be restored.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the tensions created within liberalism between the pursuit of the twin liberal goals of accommodating differing visions of the good life and promoting the ability of individuals to pursue a self-determined and meaningful life. I have argued that this tension is created to a degree by the development of modernity and how the forces of modernity create liberalizing tendencies that tend to favour the development of individualism over accommodation of differing, non-liberal, visions of the good life. However, I argue that this tension is not irreconcilable with the balancing of accommodation and self-determination due to various pockets of possible action available to identity groups to maintain their group integrity while also offering individuals the opportunity to make a meaningful choice as to which vision of the good life they feel will fulfill their desire to be self-determining. Thus, despite the pressure modernity places upon traditional identity groups, it is not irreconcilable with liberal goals of accommodation and self-determination. I argue, however, that the introduction of advanced communications technologies upset this balance, and that the various forces I identify with these technologies combine with the previously identified forces of modernity to overwhelm the ability of traditional identity groups to reconcile and insulate their beliefs with those of liberal groups. I argue that these pressures can be addressed to a certain extent via the use of various tools within discourse theory in an effort to re-balance the goals of accommodation and self-determination.

In review, chapter one discussed the three primary forces of modernity that make up what can be called the modernity argument, according to which, the forces of modernity have essentially liberalizing influences on traditional identity groups. I argued that although these forces create pressure on traditional identity groups to liberalize this pressure is not so overwhelming as to upset the balance of liberal goals. These pressures include: the disembedding

of traditional norms, the introduction of reflexivity to decision making and the alteration of time and space as it relates to the distribution of information and norms. In each of these areas, traditional identity groups experience new pressures in how they view the world, how they assess new and emerging norms and how they view themselves in relation to their own traditions. These forces have powerful influences and can and do influence how traditional identity groups view themselves and others. However, these forces do not necessarily drown out the norms of traditional identity groups and in fact continue to allow for individual self-determination in the form of individual choice as to what they see as the good life, and allow the traditional identity groups to respond to these incoming pressures through explanation, isolation, and reconciliation of ideas.

Next I discussed the introduction of advanced communications technology and how this essentially upsets the balance of accommodation and self-determination. I identified three primary areas in which these technologies overwhelm traditional identity groups. These include the depth to which advanced communications technologies are able to penetrate a traditional identity group's norms and belief system, the scope of the change in terms of proliferation of devices and availability, and the speed at which this change is taking place as well as the speed at which new information is accessed. I argued that these changes essentially overwhelm the ability of traditional identity groups to mitigate the influence of modernity on their members and create a situation that funnels members into a modern liberal way of thinking without offering traditional identity groups an opportunity to respond or attempt to reconcile their beliefs with incoming modern notions. Essentially the traditional identity group is drowned out in a flood of liberal ideas. I argued that this new influence creates an unanticipated difficulty when attempting

to reconcile accommodation with self-determination because of the overwhelming pressure individuals are placed under to conform to an emergent liberal norm.

Finally, I argued that this imbalance might be effectively addressed by utilizing some important tools within discourse theory. I argued that some of the pressure might be addressed by allowing individuals to engage in meaningful discourse regarding the changes their identity groups are facing and to allow them to recognize these pressures and actively work to preserve and recognize traditional norms and their potential value. Some of the tools I identified in discourse theory include: recognition of the lifeworlds of individuals within identity groups, the proceduralism of the discourse environment, the process of discourse and its ability to discover the core of many norms so that the most valued parts of traditional norms may be preserved even if some parts are discarded in the end, and the ability of discourse to create new iterations of traditions and understand that all norms and ideals change over time regardless of influences from external sources. These tools provide individuals with the opportunity to maintain their group identity while also allowing individuals within the group to pursue what they see as the self-determined good life.

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