

Polar Models of Culture-Regressivism Versus Progressivism

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The culture wars that simmer within any nation may have been escalating recently; but regardless of their national settings or milieus, many of these wars are informed by two opposing paradigms of culture. This paper analyzes two of these leading paradigms, designated here as Regressivism and Progressivism. Other theorists have long chronicled the differing strengths and weaknesses of these paradigms, taking the former as expressing more conservative, traditional, and nationalistic values, and the latter as expressing more liberal, pluralistic, and cosmopolitan values. Going beyond these perennial distinctions, I argue that Progressivism is more benign and beneficial than the former—by meeting basic human needs better and supporting more effective adaptation to changing exigencies. I also argue that Progressivism does not express merely subjective or relativistic preferences and values, but objectively preferable and quantifiable ones, that benefit not only our personal lives more but also our global village and communal lives more.

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Introduction

We have grown all too accustomed to various culture wars being waged, as clashes between ethnic or racial groups (e.g., Israelis versus Palestinians, Anglo-centric versus Afro-centric or Latinx heritages, etc.), or social movements and subcultures (e.g., liberals versus conservatives, Pro-choice versus Pro-life advocates, LGBTQ and “rainbow coalitions” versus adherents of “traditional family values,” etc.). The vitriol of these clashes seems to have escalated lately, up to the point of violent and deadly outbreaks between those, e.g.: for and against stricter immigration and border security, for and against Critical Race Theory, “Woke”- and Black Lives Matter movements, in support and critique of “Blue lives” and police force(s), etc.

On a broader level, many of these clashes have been informed by two polar models of culture. These are best viewed as polarities on a spectral range—with the one model emphasizing certain values and ideals over others—rather than viewed as total(izing) opposites. The first model hearkens more to the past and to conservative values (especially those of traditional mores and heterosexual families, nationalism and patriotism, unity and purity, integrity and self-preservation), while the other focuses more on the present and on cosmopolitan, liberal values (including openness, tolerance, freedom of choice, creativity, diversity, and plurality). The former is in many ways regressive, in looking backwards to its cultural traditions to clarify what values and courses of action its members should take now. The latter model is culturally progressive, in looking to vistas that lay ahead or outside, more than to traditions that lie behind or within. Such progressivism may cast glances to the past, but with a readiness to appropriate these past influences in creative ways. Both of these paradigms have long had their own *elan vital* and sets of proponents and critical arguments. Extending these long-recognized divisions and

debates, in this paper I systematically analyze these and argue why the progressive model of culture is not only more benign than the regressive one, but also more beneficial—in terms of imposing less restrictions on members’ choices, freedoms, opportunities, and development, and in meeting their basic human needs more effectively. These include needs to grow and adapt to changing circumstances and exigencies. And the decreased restrictions and increased benefits that progressivism offers, I argue, are compatible with whatever cultural and communal, and not only liberal, values that members have—at least when these are not repressive of others’ values. And perhaps counter-intuitively, I also show how progressivism offers a better blueprint for community and (non-repressive) communal values than regressivism. In establishing these things, I will not attack strawman versions of regressivism; i.e., I will not present it simplistically, in its weakest or most easily critiqued form, but I will admit stronger features of it that may hold genuine merit and appeal.

Cultural Regressivism

Using it as a term of art, I take “cultural regressivism” to bear strong affinity not only with cultural conservatism in general, but with cultural nationalism and idealization of “the homeland”. Consequently, an appropriate first order of business is to define nationalism *simpliciter*—as an elevated valuing of one’s own nation (including one’s main ethnic identity, history and cultural heritage, citizens, and institutions) in contrast to other nations (and their identity, et al.). We should recall a threefold distinction here, between *nations* (as groups of people doing the valuing) and *nation-states* (as the political bodies exercising sovereignty within certain territorial borders) and *cultures* (as the collective, non-political corpus of what is valued by the relevant groups)¹ (McKim and McMahon, 1997, pp. 107-109, 158-160, 177-178, 287-290). Although these valuations may not explain all the variations of nationalism, nevertheless they may be taken as marking essential characteristics of them. More extreme nationalistic forms of regressivism may be represented by many of the agendas and policies of President Trump and Stephen Miller (Trump’s chief immigration advisor who has been connected with white nationalist groups and rhetoric)—for instance, in their attempts to restrict immigration and DACA, push Muslim bans, build the Border Wall, label COVID-19 as “the Chinese flu”, etc. (Guerrero, 2020).

Even in less extreme forms, though, regressivists as cultural nationalists privilege and prioritize “their own” nation and culture over others. And what they privilege is their culture as a whole, *in toto*, rather than merely isolated features of it. To mark this distinction, e.g., people who love Goethe are obviously not, for this sentiment alone, thereby Aryan nationalists—especially if they also appreciate the works of, say, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Toni Morrison and Shakespeare. But regressivists of this nationalist type are connected to their culture in a comprehensively exclusive or excluding relationship. This nationalism and exclusivity may take a few forms. The first and most potentially virulent form of this exclusivity is based on supposed *ideological superiority*: “My national culture comes first because it is superior *in toto* to others.” To extend the above example, this extreme nationalist would not merely assert that Goethe was superior to Marquez, et al. Rather, he would posture (as was common in Berlin in the 1930’s) that his nation and culture were superior in *most or all* ways to others. When he tried to defend this global superiority, he would do so in very ethnocentric terms, perhaps based on his nation’s “racial or moral superiority or purity”, or their “destiny and chosenness” or social Darwinist “evolutionary advantages.” Similarly, he would do so in aggressively patriotic terms, insisting that his nation deserves or

¹ For more and less self-referential definitions of these three terms, see McKim and McMahon, 1997, pp. 107-109, 158-160, 177-178, 287-290.

demands greater allegiance than any other. This would be in accord with Samuel Johnson's depiction of patriotism as "the last refuge of scoundrels", or as a fairly intolerant, exclusivist, and decidedly non-cosmopolitan stance towards own's own nation in relation to others² (Nagel, 1991, pp. 63-74, 130-138; MacIntyre, 1984). Subsequently, there is nothing to prevent this extreme type of nationalist from gladly accepting the waxing of his supposedly superior culture with the correspondent waning (if not extinction) of other "inferior cultures." Such strongly exclusivist forms do not apply to people who argue for superiority in broadly humanistic or universalist terms, say, in respecting human rights more, being more charitable toward the poor, supporting education or limiting corruption more, etc. Such people (who are really are progressivists as much or more than they are regressivists) are making claims about objective and/or measurable aspects of their group's excellences, rather than merely subjective claims about their nation's ideological superiority over others. Even if these assert the overall superiority of "their" culture, then, we could presume—insofar as they honor humanistic or universal values like human rights, charity, education, etc.—that they acknowledge equal or comparable value in other people(s), so as to be more impartial egalitarians or more benign "partisans," or more progressive.

A second form of cultural exclusivity is based on concerns for *self-preservation*, in the face of threatened marginalization or extinction. Aboriginal and native Indian cultures of Canada and the United States, and Australia and New Zealand, come to mind here. These cannot be faulted for wanting to maintain, and immerse themselves in, native cultures that have long been threatened by the harsh impositions, exploitation, broken treaties, etc., of non-native cultures. This is the only other type of regressivism (along with the one immediately mentioned above) that may be immune from criticism and mandate support. For in the face of significant injustice, it might show insensitivity, or perpetuate the injustice, to criticize such types for being regressive and, especially, for condoning practices that hasten the extinction of their cultures. One culture—especially that has benefitted and become dominant from past injustice—cannot rightfully criticize and oppose another one for its drive to survive. I extend these concerns below (cf. Kymlicka, 1989, pp. 136-144, 154-157; 1995, pp. 34-56). This kind of defensive, self-preserving regressivism should not be confused with nations who "use defense as an excuse for their offense" or, in other words, who commit aggressive acts with the excuse of protecting themselves. For instance, Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia with the excuse that the rights of German citizens there had been violated; in the 1980s, Serbian President Milosevic burnt down churches, killed civic leaders, and massacred and sent thousands of Croates into exile with the excuse that they posed a dire threat to "poor victimized Serbs" and Serbian culture. Putin's Russia that is aggressing against Ukraine comes to mind here, as well. As such examples illustrate, some forms of regressivism based on self-preservation (or "national security", as exemplified by China's "defensive" encroachment into Tibet and Hong Kong) will be much less legitimate than others.

A third form of regressive exclusivity may be based on assumptions of *particularity*: My culture comes first, such a regressivist might admit, because it is mine, because it's the particular culture I've been born and situated in and become familiar with; and it's because of this situatedness that I especially cherish and support it. This type of cultural nationalist prefers his own culture simply because it has become so familiar and dear to him, as "his culture". This may be the most common type of regressivism. It isn't necessarily built on aggressive, oppositional, or condescending thinking, as the first type seems to be; it doesn't have to put down others to elevate itself.

² Cf. Nagel, 1991, pp. 63-74, 130-138; and MacIntyre, 1984. And for other views exposing the illegitimacy of such patriotism, see Nussbaum's (1996) presentation of a cosmopolitanism that encourages us to treat everyone (whether co-nationals or foreigners) equally, as "fellow-citizens of the cosmos".

It would be easy, and has been commonplace in recent decades, to point out the serious problems and dangers of this first type of nationalism (elitist or exclusivist regressivism), which may be exemplified by forms of white supremacy, Aryanism, and Nazism. So I will not aim at such easy targets here. Conversely, it may be wrong to criticize this second type of nationalism (defensive or self-preserving regressivism), because, as I've explained, this type often has valid concerns, and thus merits support more than criticism (as do Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims, Australian Aborigines, and native Quebecois). Subsequently, in what follows I will focus on this third or particularist type of cultural regressivism. It is not as obviously flawed, and, although it may be less dangerous and strident than the first, it may still be fairly insular, backwards, and self-defeating, as I will show.

Before engaging in my critical analysis, though, we should consider regressivism (as cultural nationalism) as defined and distinguished from its political cousin: *Political nationalism* takes political self-rule as its driving impetus. Even if political nationalists want some degree of self-determination, and feel somewhat frustrated if they don't realize themselves within the apparatus of a hegemonic state government, at least non-extreme political nationalists will be willing to share fair representative governance with other blocs, within pluralist societies. As a historical illustration of this distinction between cultural nationalists and political nationalists, we might recall first-century Greeks, or Hellenists (whose culture was in many ways hegemonic at the time) as paradigmatic of cultural nationalists, even though the Romans at the time enjoyed political hegemony and tolerated no political competitors (like Jewish nationalists or Zionists) within their midst. These Greeks could thus represent cultural nationalists, or regressivists—insofar as they bore little ambitions against Roman rule even as they appreciated the excellencies of their own Hellenistic culture. Avishai Margalit distinguishes such political nationalism from cultural nationalism as follows:

Political nationalism is centered on the idea that a nation's supreme expression is its sovereign political will as embodied in the nation-state. Individuals participate in the nation by being citizens of the nation-state. According to this conception, obeying the commands of the state and being loyal to it are considered the outstanding expressions of belonging to the nation. Only a member of the nation can be a "true" citizen of a nation-state... Cultural nationalism, in contrast, considers the nation an organic entity whose supreme expression is the national culture—particularly the national language. For this sort of nationalism, politics is not an essential expression of the nation but only a means for ensuring independent and creative cultural expression in cases where the culture and the language are threatened. According to this conception, politics is a means rather than an end. The culture, rather than the manifestation of political will, is the focus of national identity (Margalit, 1997, p. 77)

Along similar lines, Will Kymlicka (1989, pp. 135-136) has distinguished political citizenship in a nation from cultural membership in a national community. Recognized as moderate cultural (and not extreme political) nationalism, then, regressivism will not hold political self-rule through its own exclusivist state apparatus as a necessary condition of its existence. Using these other types of nationalism as backdrops, then, we can now focus on this cultural type of regressivism.

Regressivism Versus Progressivism

Cultural regressivists are counterpoised to cultural progressivists: whereas the former are enamored with their own culture and history, progressivists are also enamored with the culture and histories of others. Whereas the former are impressed by the reasonableness of their own values, progressivists are intrigued and impressed by the reasonableness or internal logic and values of other peoples. Whereas the former are only comfortable operating in their own language, progressivists would agree with Wittgenstein that "the limits of my language are the limits of my world"; so they enjoy learning the languages and *Weltanschauung* of other peoples. Whereas the

former claim their own nation as *the* great cultural heritage and reservoir to draw from, progressivists take the whole world as their heritage, and draw from any number of cultural sources and watering holes. Whereas regressivists especially celebrate the values of purity, preservation, and faithfulness to tradition, progressivists celebrate the more cosmopolitan values of openness, challenge, diversity, and variety. In short, regressivism primarily looks back or inward, while progressivism primarily looks forward or outward.

For the most part, these two cultural paradigms mutually exclude one another, situated as polarities at the opposite ends of a spectrum. But, someone might ask, couldn't there be a melding of the two? Couldn't someone be both of these? and couldn't some culture express both these regressive and progressive compartments, in some compartmentalized way? For example, couldn't someone be regressive in their linguistic and immigration policies (e.g., American citizens who insist that all immigrants from Latin America gain proficiency in English and U.S. history), while being progressive in their cultural pursuits (avidly enjoying, say, salsa dancing, Mexican cuisine and Muralist art, and celebrating Carnival and Dia de los Muertos)? While such "compartmentalized people" may not be uncommon, it would be inconsistent to classify anyone as being both a cultural regressivist and progressivist, in an overall way. Unless someone remains stubborn or narrow-minded, becoming familiar with the excellences of other cultures as well as her own usually has broadening and broadminded effects—enhancing appreciation of these others while ameliorating inordinate zeal and idealizing for one's own culture. Gaining circumspect familiarity with foreign cultural traditions, customs, worldviews, etc., thus entails more culturally progressive attitudes and makes it more difficult to maintain narrow and narrowminded regressive ones.

Progressivism More Benign Than Regressivism

In these ways, let us grant these two models of culture as being distinct and polarized. If so, why is cultural progressivism better, and less benign, than regressivism? We may begin answering this question by examining the main virtues and selling-points of the latter. To many, regressivism has been a positive force in the world, for several reasons. Regressivism supposedly fosters more of each of these elements and structures:

- more meaning/meaning structures—given that each national culture has its own traditional narratives, belief systems, and ways of ordering the world, members do not have to create meaning or order for themselves, *ex nihilo*. Rather, they can draw on the ready resources and meaning structures of their culture, to enjoy more meaningful existence and experience less anomie;
- more stability/stabilizing identities—as individuals born and raised in particular cultures, members do not have to be baffled as much by unsettling “Who am I?” or “What should be the roots or well-springs of my identity?” types of questions. Rather, as they appropriate the values and virtues of their culture, they can answer these questions with meaning-laden responses like “I’m a son of Mother Russia!” “I’m an American, or Native American, or ‘daughter of the American Revolution’”, or “I celebrate Kwanza and my African heritage!”, etc.
- more secure inclusion—so people do not have to feel as isolated or marginalized when they can draw meaning and stability from membership in a national community. Although wealth and prestige may come and go, this membership promises a secure birthright and belongingness that one can never lose; and
- more social responsibility: as members experience the benefits of inclusion in a national community, they do so not merely as detached, selfish or atomistic individuals, but as vital contributors to their community, proudly and responsibly extending to fellow nationals the same benefits and values that they themselves have come to receive and enjoy.

Yael Tamir encapsulates these points and structural attributes as follows:

The strong communal dimension of all forms of nationalism is undeniable, and liberal nationalism indeed assumes that living within one's national community is of value to individuals. [There is] an instrumental dimension of national membership, namely, its ability to provide a set of beliefs, interests, and behaviors, as well as a coherent transparent, and intelligible environment in which individuals can become self-determining. It was suggested that in the open and ever-changing modern world, life in a cultural environment that is familiar, understandable, and thus predictable is a necessary precondition for making rational choices and becoming self-governing. Life within one's nation has a further advantage. It offers the possibility of being acknowledged by significant others, be it peers or superiors: they understand me, as I understand them; and this understanding creates within me a sense of being somebody in the world.³ (Tamir, 1993, p. 30)

While these advantages of cultural nationalism may seem benign, or “undeniable”, as Tamir says, we should scratch beneath their surface to see what limitations and problems may lie underneath. On the surface, as many writers on these subjects have noted, most cultural communities worthy of the name do equip their members with these building blocks of meaning, identity, inclusion, and responsibility. We might also characterize these blocks and structures of national culture as *stories*—that people assimilate to make their lives more orderly and meaningful and less chaotic and foreign (cf. Berlin, 1984, p. 57). Alasdair MacIntyre has described these as follows:

Man is ... essentially a story-telling animal, ... a teller of stories that aspire to truth. But the key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question “What am I to do?” if I can answer the prior question “Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?” We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters—roles into which we have been drafted—and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed. It is through hearing stories about wicked stepmothers, lost children, good but misguided kings, wolves that suckle twin boys, youngest sons who receive no inheritance but must make their own way in the world and eldest sons who waste their inheritance on riotous living and go into exile to live with the swine, that children learn or mislearn both what a child and what a parent is, what the cast of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are. Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words. Hence there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources (MacIntyre, 1984b, p. 216)

These stories (or “cultural structures”, as Kymlicka calls them) inform at least seven other basic areas of human activity, needs, and concerns. So as to be able to use them, initially, to better understand national cultures, and, ultimately, to compare the strengths and weaknesses of regressivism with progressivism, it will help to explicate these stories as answering questions about: (i) *our personal and social characters* (E.g., what moral and personal qualities should I aspire to and avoid? What manners of relating to others should I recognize as (un-)desirable, as praiseworthy or blameworthy?); (ii) *our work* (How should I find my proper place and vocation in life? What career shall I find (dis-)honorable, or fulfilling, or alienating? Shall I carry on my parent's and forebearer's, or strike out in my own new endeavors?); (iii) *beauty* (What kinds of aesthetic ideals or visions does my culture hold up as beautiful? Shall I appreciate these as lovely and inspiring, or distasteful or unattractive?);

³ It is tempting to see Tamir as providing a counterexample here—as someone who is both a cultural regressivist *and* progressivist. For she defends liberal nationalism *along with* strong advocacy for cultural pluralism, and thus provides a more balanced, open form of nationalism: “Individuals can benefit from cultural plurality in two distinct ways. [C]ultural plurality ensures that reflection about one's culture takes place within a genuine context, one offering models for imitation and even options for assimilation. [This plurality is also] aesthetically valuable... We prefer [it] because it broadens the range of possibilities for pleasure and enrichment.” (p. 30). But such balance ultimately seems to represent cosmopolitan progressivism more than regressive nationalism. If so, she is not a typical nationalist or regressivist, and so provides no real counterexample to my central claim that these two models are polar and mutually exclusive.

(iv) *love and marriage* (What kind of persons and bonds should I hope for? If I'm to be legally joined with a mate, what kinds of rituals, rites of passage, and legal arrangements should govern these? How should we court? Will my elders and traditions determine who is right for me, or should I follow the dictates of my heart? How shall I celebrate these unions? Are there taboos or injunctions concerning procreation I should observe?); (v) *our families* (Are there certain familial norms I should recognize and pass on? How shall I raise my children, and with what kinds of rewards and punishments? What obligations, and what shows of honor or submission, or (in-)dependence, should hold between my family members?); (vi) *suffering and tragedy* (How should I respond to the inevitable misfortunes and disappointments that befall me? What resources of encouragement will I draw on, to buoy me with hope and perseverance?); and finally (vii) *death* (How should I face the passing of loved ones? to my own inevitable end? What symbols and ceremonies offer a good response to these dread but inevitable passages? And how, if at all, should these not-too-distant considerations affect my present life?); etc. All these things comprise the basic structures and stories that, ideally, any culture will provide its members. Whatever answers, benefits, and advantages are (or are not) provided here, and whatever basic needs are (or are not) met, all provide good grounds for assessing the relative (de-)merits of any community and cultural paradigm.

Needs for Diversity and Pluralism

If a culture does not adequately equip its members in these important areas, they could experience a serious lack of development and become, as MacIntyre says, merely “ill-formed, unscripted, anxious stutterers” in the world. A lack of healthy input and growth in any one of these areas could potentially destabilize all the other areas of people's lives. While this is so, it is doubtful whether any one culture or pure community (if such a thing could exist or be isolated) has all the resources to comprehensively equip people so. Has any national culture, in and of itself, cornered the market to wisdom or truth in all these areas? Any culture that did provide more of these resources and wisdom would have to have substantially incorporated and amalgamated from others, i.e., it would have to be *multi-cultural*. Admittedly, some cultures will be richer or more developed in some particular area. So this premise (about the need to go beyond single “pure cultures”) has pluralist implications—viz., cultures and nations that do provide for their members' needs in all these areas will have done so by assimilating and amalgamating foreign cultures' masterful development of this-or-that area. Conversely, when people resist such pluralism and stubbornly honor *only* their own traditions, they often “cut off their nose to spite their own face,” i.e., they cut off (what would be) very helpful and healthy foreign cultural influences and contributions. This is akin to pure-breed dogs, who often prove constitutionally weaker and more susceptible to disease than “mutts” or cross-breeds.

Post-war Japan comes to mind as an illustration of this lesson. By humbly incorporating some American social welfare policies and business models into their society after WWII, Japanese citizens ended up enjoying some of the longest lifespans, highest per capita incomes and GDP levels in the world. We can also derive such pluralist conclusions through the lens of MacIntyre's stories, as they pertain to families. Some of the most distinctive features of cultures are the ways they encourage whole sets of practices and norms governing families and childrearing. Children are supposed to be raised this way and not that way, they are to be taught such-and-such values, etc. In turn, children are supposed to perpetuate the same traditional practices and values to their children, when they grow up. In this diachronic or cross-generational context, cultural pluralism holds great value, for many reasons. First, the effectiveness and value of any one model of childrearing—considering, say, the way children are best disciplined—is difficult to discern without contrasting models and methods. E.g., if parents

spank their children (as do many traditional parents and Christian subcultures), it's hard to see how effective this is or how beneficial or damaging it is to the child's developing personality and behavior, without contrasting models. Traditional parents often assume that the Biblical "spare the rod, spoil the child" model is best or optimal. But parents should have some idea of how children respond and develop without being spanked or physically disciplined, say, by being only verbally reprimanded and instructed instead. If a culture provides no exposure to, and precludes consideration and practical experimentation with, other models of childrearing, it will not have contrasting perspectives to be able to make such judgments or discern such (sub-)optimal methods. Their critical powers for being able to make improvements in their parenting styles, to raise healthier children by adjusting in this or that direction—by using physical discipline more or less, or being more strict or lenient—will be blunted. When bound *only* with traditional ways that a culture does things and supports later generations, then, its members may only be able to wishfully think or hope that dumb luck will leave their posterity in as good shape. For instance, we may recall here Spartan children who were rigidly physically disciplined and rigorously trained primarily in the arts of war, compared to Athenian children who were also rigorously trained in the arts and sciences. But we need also recall here which of these two cultures (the Athenian one) thrived longer and bequeathed greater gifts to posterity, long after the Peloponnesian War.

Needs for Adaptability and Innovation

Another way that these meaning structures and need satisfactions reveal the value of cultural pluralism involves the inevitability of cultural change and the need to adequately adapt to such change. Change is often the only constant in our world and cultures, such that, even if a culture handled one important area of human life (such as childrearing) successfully in the past, it might still need to significantly modify its practices in the present and future and in light of developing knowledge. As Isaiah Berlin noted, "A social order which responded to genuine needs in its own day might tend to hamper the movements of a later time, becoming a straitjacket." (Berlin, 1984, p. 68). For example, increasing trends in family mobility, needs for advanced technical training at younger ages, exposure to new information, and increasingly easy access to other cultures (as, say, Eastern cultures have been exposed to Western rock and roll, jeans and tank tops, McDonalds, and cosmetic products, not to mention technological innovations and scientific progress), etc., might all require corresponding modifications to be made in the way children (who are exposed to these new conditions) are raised. In this context, regulating children's early training poorly will arrest their development or at least leave them confused and frustrated. It will leave them ill-equipped to deal with new social developments, as parents essentially use old wineskins (of outmoded cultural traditions and assumptions) to prepare their children to process new wines of cultural diversity. This is not to say that all cultural traditions lose value so as to mandate abandonment; but they should at least allow for modification when exposed to new social conditions. If a culture rigidly clings to the way it has always done things, it can be(come) maladjusted to the outside world. Adequate adaptation to inevitably changing conditions can only come through openness. Such ossified cultures can be represented by John Stuart Mill's nationalist, who "sulks on his own rocks, the half-savage relic of past times, revolving in his own little mental orbit, without participation or interest in the general movement of the world" (Kymlicka, 1995a, p. 53). Instead of preserving their cultural integrity, then, such regressive cultures and community members—who prefer isolation and stasis to interaction and change—actually serve to weaken the virility and staying power of their culture. As Jeremy Waldron has argued,

A society may have remained static for centuries precisely because it did not come into contact with the influence from which now people are proposing to protect it. If stasis is not an inherent feature, it may be important to consider, as part of *that very culture*, the ability it has to adapt to change in circumstances. To preserve or protect it, or some favored version of it, artificially, in the face of that change, is precisely to cripple the mechanisms of adaptation and compromise (from warfare to commerce to amalgamation) with which all societies confront the outside world. (Waldron, 1995, p. 110)

In this way, regressivists and nationalists who strive to *preserve* their culture by maintaining its “purity and integrity” might actually be mummifying it. This is akin to the Caesarean emperors who wanted to preserve the purity of their family lineage but were actually stunting or retarding it, to the degree they insisted on incestual inbreeding. Nationalists who want to truly preserve their culture are thus seem faced with this exigency: they can survive only to the degree they are open to being influenced by other cultures. For their nations to thrive and not ossify, such nationalists thus need to become cultural pluralists. In this vein, Mill has argued that:

There is always need of persons not only to discover new truths, and point out when what were once truths are true no longer, but also to commence new practices, and set the example of more enlightened conduct, and better taste and sense in human life... These few [persons] are the salt of the earth; without them, human life would become a stagnant pool. (Mill, 1987, p. 79)

For Mill, the values of innovation, interaction, plurality, and diversity comprise the foundation for any enduring or successfully evolving society. Furthermore, he credits whatever progress European culture has made, in relation to other cultures, to such open, adaptive values:

The interests of truth require a diversity of opinions... What is it that has hitherto preserved Europe from this lot [of ossified culture]? What has made the European family of nations an improving, instead of a stationary, portion of mankind? Not any superior excellence in them, which, when it exists, exists as the effect, not as the cause; but their remarkable diversity of character and culture. Individuals, classes, nations, have been extremely unlike one another: they have struck out a great variety of paths, each leading to something valuable; and although at every period those who have traveled in different paths have been intolerant of one another, and each would have thought it an excellent thing if all the rest had been compelled to travel his road, their attempts to thwart each other's development have rarely had any permanent success, and each has in time endured to receive the good which the others have offered. Europe is, in my opinion, wholly indebted to this plurality of paths for its progressive and many-sided development.⁴

Nationalism Not Needful

We might now consider how such openness, diversity and adaptability help progressivism to meet people's needs more than nationalist and regressivist models of culture, on both individual and communal levels. Meeting people's needs is a function of distal or outlying national cultures less than it is a function of social entities more proximal to them, including good families, schools, and neighborhoods. As I will now show, regressivists (perhaps even including communitarians like Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor, and Kymlicka) may exaggerate the contributions of national culture in meeting people's essential needs.

⁴ Considering the relevance of such arguments and nations, it will be worthwhile to consider their “Eurocentrism.” In his *Multicultural Citizenship*, Will Kymlicka repeatedly accuses Mill of ethnocentric thinking—suggesting that Mill assumes a smugness or inordinate superiority about his British culture and its supposedly universal cultural values (MC, p. 53). Kymlicka claims that such thinking has rationalized colonialist practices. But we might in turn question Kymlicka here: Doesn't this charge of ethnocentrism apply to nationalists more than to such cultural pluralists? Can such thinking as Mill's here—which downplays the inherent worth of any one culture and emphasizes the overriding value of a broad variety of cultures—aptly be called “ethnocentric”? Are the values of cultural pluralism and diversity just like any other “ethnocentric” values, or the product of merely idiosyncratic outlooks? And is someone who boasts about his culture because of its openness and diversity really akin to someone who boasts about his culture because it *opposes* openness and diversity?

Admittedly, community plays a key role in meeting people's needs for social development; but the cultural nationalist needs to demonstrate why community and culture on a national level—more than on a familial, neighborhood, or local level—are so crucial in meeting these. Doesn't this have it backwards? Doesn't it make more sense to say that our national culture (as if this were a unitary thing) isn't as important to our emergent character, sense of identity and belonging and social responsibility, as the early, more intimate environment that our parents and neighbors provide us with? If people do lead healthy and effective lives, how necessary is it that their development of these be tethered to their nation or national identity? Conversely, if people lead dysfunctional lives, how much can their national culture save them, and turn them into mature, responsible, well-adjusted adults?

In defense of national culture arguments, Kymlicka argues that the value of cultural membership lies largely in the way it gives us a familiar and, as he says, *secure* context in which to live, learn, and blossom:

The decision about how to lead our lives must ultimately be ours alone, but this decision is always a matter of selecting what we believe to be most valuable from the various options available, selecting from a context of choice which provides us with different ways of life. This is important because the range of options is determined by our cultural heritage... What follows from this? Liberals should be concerned with the fate of cultural structures, not because they have some moral status of their own, but because it's only through having a rich and secure cultural structure that people can become aware, in a vivid way, of the options available to them. Without such a cultural structure, children and adolescents lack adequate role-models, which leads to despondency and escapism, a condition poignantly described by Seltzer in a recent article on the adolescents in Inuit communities. The cultural structure they need and value is being undermined, and the Inuit have been unable to protect it (Kymlicka, 1989, pp. 164-165)

This argument may be plausible except for one assumption Kymlicka makes. He seems to assume that this "familiar and secure" cultural structure be the national heritage a child is born into and thereby belongs to, whether by blood or by geography. For instance, he suggests that Inuit children *need* Inuit culture and community; just any patchwork of cultural traditions and family structures will be inadequate to meet the formative needs of Inuit youngsters; they *need* the framework of their particular traditional culture. But is this always true? What if a child is born to a father who is half Eskimo and half English, and a mother who is part English and Inuit, or Jewish and Arab? What should comprise his or her "secure cultural heritage"? What if the child is born into a polyglot nation or into a family and neighborhood expressing many cultural influences? Will this child lack a coherent framework and cultural foundation from which to grow and mature? Not necessarily: such a child, who might be born of racially mixed parents who are avidly cosmopolitan, may grow up to be just as (if not more) healthy and well-adjusted as a child born of racially identical parents, who are ethnocentric nationalists and raise their child strictly in "the ways of their forefathers." Or consider Amish children: they may come to need more than "their" culture here, considering they'll likely have to maneuver through very different cultural and socio-economic milieus later, when older. Even if their native or original communities used to be supportive and resourceful, this will not guarantee more secure development in their future. One's national cultural heritage is thus only one (and perhaps a small and secondary) factor among many other important factors—including family, school, neighborhood, socio-economic contexts and opportunities—that will each just as significantly bolster or arrest their development. As Waldron has noted:

If each of us is the product of a community, is that heritage limited to national boundaries, or is it as wide (as *worldwide*) as the language, literature, and civilization that sustain us? Are we talking about particular communities, at the level of self-contained ethnic groups, or are we talking about the common culture and civilization that makes it possible for a New Zealander trained at Oxford to write for a symposium in the *University of Michigan Journal of Law Reform*? I suspect that

the popularity of modern communitarianism has depended on *not* giving unequivocal answers to these questions, and that it depends on using premises that evoke community on one scale (usually large) to support conclusions requiring allegiance to community on a different scale (usually small). (Waldron, 1995, p. 96.)

We should thus suspect that regressivists including strict communitarians exaggerate the importance of the national culture and community in meeting people's *needs*.⁵ This holds in regard to people's developing "identities, inclusion, and responsibility"—which, remember, were supposed to be attributes and selling points of regressivism.

Nations that do emphasize such norms are usually less stable or long-lasting, like shooting stars.

(a) More Stable Identities (?)—Regarding this supposed attribute of regressivism, we should ask, "How mature can individuals be if their identity is rooted only in some cultural group?" This question does not tendentiously assume that individualistic values are superior to communal ones. This is *not* an assumption I am defending here. Rather, this question suggests that when our emergent personal identity is fixed in some sense of group identity or nation, then, to that degree, our maturation will be fairly limited, tenuous, or immature—like a girl or young woman who defined herself only in reference to her parents and husband or patriarchal community, rather than by a sense of who she is, and could become, as a unique and uniquely gifted individual. Community identification may be a later waystation on the road to a robust self-image and maturity, but it is not a necessary condition of healthy development or a sure mark of maturation.

We should also ask what kind of cultural values are being promulgated here. If a nation pushes, say, cultural hubris or xenophobia, surely these are not worth promoting. Gillian Brock raises these concerns this way:

The argument seems to be that, because culture is so important to people's self-image, we should ensure that their cultural communities flourish. But surely what must also be shown to give an adequate philosophical defense is that this [or that] feature of identity deserves protection and it deserves protection in this way. Whether or not our cultural interests are worth promoting depends on the culture at issue, what it values, how it expresses itself, and so forth. If it promotes racism and sexism, for instance, it is not clear whether this is a feature of anyone's identity that is, or should be, worth promoting. Indeed, everyone might be better off abandoning such destructive ideas and adopting more cosmopolitan or global humanist views instead (Brock, 1999, p. 369).

Discerning which values should be perpetuated or abandoned requires some critical distance from one's own "near and dear" values and communities. And this discernment and circumspection may come only through some decent open range of alternatives, rather than through a very narrow set of cultural or communal values that someone just happened to be immersed in earlier.

(b) Supportive Inclusion (?)—We should have similar reservations about the greater inclusiveness that regressivism supposedly offers. Are members warranted in taking pride in, or deriving security from, belongingness to groups with strong racist, sexist, or exclusivist tendencies, as Brock says? Even if persons feel real pride and security here, we should still question the legitimacy of this. For what is important is not just any kind of secure inclusion that people feel—say, as a thief might feel within his den or a wolf might feel within

⁵ I will not address the first meaning structure here, or engage in the contentious business of arguing why one culture might provide more or less meaning than another. Any culture or national community that has endured for long, we may assume, must have provided rich reservoirs of meaning, guidance, and inspiration for its members. Their meaning structures and norms may be the most meritorious, and least impeachable, features of regressivism. And more broadly, again, we might ask whether communitarians overemphasize the essential necessity and importance of national culture to persons', in comparison to, say, good educations and familial upbringing, in meeting their developmental, emotional, social and cognitive needs. For arguments about such possible overemphases, see Sandel, and Taylor.

his pack—but that they develop a legitimate and benign rather than malign kind, that members of aggressive or aggressively exclusive communities can hardly share. We might imagine poor gang recruits here, who perceive no other options besides belonging to some criminal street gang, that offers strong inclusion but at the cost of fostering aggressive attitudes or hostile behaviors toward non-gang members or, as S. E. Hinton has documented, toward “those outsiders” (Hinton, 2007). Hinton famously illustrated how some people (especially young people who feel socio-economically marginalized from membership in mainstream society) tend to embrace any groups, including criminal gangs, that offer them acceptance and security. Similarly, Thomas Edsall has established how these tendencies and vulnerabilities are re-emerging in contemporary America, to many people who feel abandoned or marginalized by the “elites and powers-that-be”:

the more socially marginalized people feel, the more likely they are to gravitate toward the fringes of the political spectrum. Voters who feel a loss of standing, who experience themselves as marginalized, often turn left or right—whites in this category may turn to the right; African-American, Latino and other minority voters can find that the left has more to offer. “Changes in cultural frameworks”... are leading people who hold traditional social attitudes to feel socially marginalized as a result of incongruence between their values and the discourse of mainstream elites. The growing prominence of cultural frameworks promoting gender equality, multiculturalism, secular values and LGBTQ rights is the most notable of such changes. They go on: steps toward inclusion are double-sided—they can lead people who hold more traditional values to feel marginalized vis-à-vis the main-currents of society (Edsell, 2020).

The heightened sense of identity and inclusiveness that membership in traditional cultures and groups promises can prove double-edged, then, insofar as these can also become sources of felt marginalization. In turn, this marginalization (with fears of it and the allure of relief from it) has triggered downright hostility towards competing progressive views and groups—that are no longer in the minority and seem to make traditional majority views and groups feel threatened, as if they were becoming new minorities, vulnerable to extinction. As Edsall documents, many virulent counter-protesters in America (including opponents of Black Lives Matter- and “Woke” movements) are marginalized white nationalists and supremacists, who feel insecure in losing their preeminent position in America’s social hierarchy and then feel entitled to regain this, sometimes through violent means (Edsell, 2020).

(c) More Social Responsibility (?)—These concerns also raise questions about the social responsibility nations may either undergird or undermine: Are the elders of, say, patriarchal nations acting more or less responsibly when they try to pass on their traditional values? How will girls and women be affected by this? And will the people(s) involved, both male and female, really become more responsible in the process? Shouldn’t we shift the emphasis here, and focus less on the civic responsibility to preserve one’s culture or perpetuate one’s national traditions, whatever these happen to be, and focus more on the basic moral responsibility to act humanely to *all* one’s fellow citizens, and to leave *all* of one’s posterity in as good or better shape?

As Sigmund Freud, Eric Hoffer, and Erik Erikson have established, people who feel responsibility only to their own kind—to their own “kith and kin and true fellow patriots”—may become fanatical “true believers”, who use their group or nation as surrogates for their imperfect parents or families, or as fill-ins for their underdeveloped sense of self (Freud, 1965; Hoffer, 1951; Erikson, 1963, pp. 326-358). But a truly healthy and responsible relationship with one’s nation and fellow citizens seems more a result than a “precondition” (as Tamir says) of one’s social development. In other words, it seems more plausible that we become good citizens by first learning how to be good family members and neighbors; and conversely it seems backwards or confused to say that we become good, mature individuals by first being good citizens or nationalists. Considering these concerns,

many of the supposedly strong selling-points of regressivism turn out to be weak points and flaws, running into serious theoretical and practical problems once their logic is revealed and extended.

Regressivism ⇒ Cultural Preservation ⇒ Cultural Ossification

The fact that national cultures are not monolithic but are more often products of international elements and influences has never been more apparent than today. This is so largely because of the diverse economic and technological forces that have shaped our world into such an inter-connected global village. Marx noted over a century ago how these forces infiltrate and subvert the forces of insular nationalism:

...the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization. The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst (Marx, 1990, p. 225).

I do not mean to suggest by this that we're becoming one big homogeneous civilization, but rather that an increasingly thick web of communication between all nations and cultures has become a permanent feature of global life, and that isolation and insularity of any one is increasingly difficult to maintain and often self-defeating.⁶ Nations that try to resist this, as Marx showed, do so at the risk of ossification or extinction. (One might think of North Korea under Kim Jong-un here.) These *de facto* trends remind us how out of touch a staunchly nationalist culture (that stymies the open character of a pluralistic one) will become; and they are worth remembering for other reasons. They remind us what any nation must do to insulate its citizens from foreigners and other cultures: it must impose not only strongly paternalistic measures but also draconian censorship-, immigration-, and command-economy policies (cf. Berlin, 1979; Sartorius, 1983).

One way to recognize this is to consider access to and use of social media and the worldwide web. These arenas of technological innovation cannot be underestimated in their potential social, political, and economic impacts. E.g., a key reason why communism collapsed in Eastern Europe in the late 1980's was because the communist authorities became unable to restrict the tide of information more freely flowing across the internet (Tismaneanu, 1992; Crossette, 1999). National governments generally have three options regarding restriction of this information superhighway. First, they can simply deny their citizens free access to it. But such action is obviously ham-fisted, and puts their citizens at serious disadvantage for educational and intellectual growth and scientific and technological progress, not to mention keeping up with current events. China has often provided examples of this: as when, in July of 1999, its government condemned a pacifist religious sect named Falun Gong for being "menaces and threats to culture" and for their underground use of the Internet; or when, in July of 2020, it increasingly violated the autonomy and self-governance rights of Hong Kong (Landler, 1999; Burma, 1999; Buckley, 2020). As a second more moderate option, governments can (try to) regulate what their citizens are and

⁶ Moreover, the idea of any fixed, unitary national culture seems illusory: What nation today (besides those in isolated island societies such as Papua New Guinea) has a culture that is distinctly its own, free of mixing or "mongrelization" with others? What culture today is the product solely of its own national ethnic or historical lineage, rather than a mix of cross-fertilization and multicultural influences? The idea of a pure and static culture seems more the creation of extreme nationalists who prefer the simplicity of black and white mythologies to the complexities of multicultural life. Of course, we can identify cultures that have a fairly distinct national character; but even these, upon close analysis, harbor syncretic elements—of art forms, religions, values, belief systems, dialects, etc. So the distinctiveness of any one culture results not from its pure *de novo* character, but from the way it combines elements from other cultures to achieve its own synthesis. Any national culture is thus always already a pluralistic one.

are not exposed to (as China has again done by ruthlessly censoring Google and other search engines). And while it may not impose complete blanket censorship, such “purity maintenance” is inordinately paternalistic. For while it is defensible for parents to paternalistically limit, say, their children’s exposure to internet pornography, it is usually not morally or legally defensible for governments to tell their adult citizens what is and isn’t appropriate for their eyes. As a third option, governments can allow free reign to their citizens in their use of worldwide web, short of egregious misuse involving obvious harms and clear and present dangers for these (as with child pornography, instructions for bomb-making and terrorism, divulgence of national security secrets, etc.). But this allowance is obviously progressive more than regressive in character, expressing openness to extra-cultural influences more than guarded concern to preserve cultural purity. Any culture that preserves its “pure identity” and resists openness, diversity and innovation, then, can do so only through stifling, paternalistic or authoritarianism measures, that stymie the choices, liberties, autonomy, growth and adaptability of its citizens.

Nations’ purported rights to control what their citizens are exposed to raise further questions about the freedoms that may be unduly restricted in the process: Does a majority have the right to dictate to minorities what *the* national character will be? What if this majority becomes the minority or minority view? Can one generation justifiably extend this right into the future, to decide the national character for future generations (Burke, 1987, pp. 24-30; Paine, 1984, pp. 42-45, 91, 124)?⁷ Furthermore, isn’t “national security” to protect a nation and the public interest and all its members sometimes used merely as an excuse for the security of only a cabal or slim portion of these members, or for the continued dominance of more narrow, private interests? (E.g., did John Bolton’s disclosures really compromise national security, as the Trump administration claimed, or merely compromise Trump’s personal reputation?) What should be emphasized here is that such regressive measures—to guardedly preserve the “integrity” of the nation and its culture—rest on tenuous grounds. Or at the very least, we should insist that no group can legitimately preserve “the” national culture, unless it allows some fair system of input and exit rules, where other groups and members, besides those who have traditionally predominated, can dissent, opt out or become non-members (cf. Raz, 1994, pp. 67-79).

Kymlicka has proposed a provisional system of group rights that includes the rights of cultural self-preservation and self-determination. But as he rightly points out, these rights are mostly geared to the protection of minorities who have suffered at the hands of repressive or very regressive majorities. Given this proviso, his proposals do not rightfully extend to the preservation of *any* culture, or to the claim that *any* national group possess these rights.⁸ For the situation wherein a group’s endurance is threatened due to injustice is different from the situation wherein a group’s endurance is threatened merely because of the apathy of its members and its waxing appeal and relevance. In this former case, the group or subculture unfairly loses the chance to maintain

⁷ Such questions recall the Burke-Paine debate: whereas Burke argued for the right of one generation to determine its national character in conformity with tradition, “for posterity in perpetuity”, Paine argued for the right of each generation to determine its own destiny.

⁸ Judith Lichtenberg has offered a surprising pro-nationalist reason why we might strive to preserve national cultures: for the way this helps to protect pluralism. She argues that “The defense of nationalism can be understood in terms of five central arguments, [the fourth of which is] The Pluralism Argument: the view that the world is a better or more interesting place if it contains diverse cultures. Even if some cultures are correctly judged superior to others, a diverse world is better than a homogeneous world.” (1997, p. 161). Although she doesn’t elaborate the rationale behind this argument, apparently it is because, if we resist nationalism to a point, the world will lose its distinct individual cultures and become one big pastiche or melting-pot culture. But this scenario is unlikely: nations will usually continue for a long time to preserve at least some of their own unique heritage even if they become technologically advanced, capitalist countries (consider Singapore). In addition, such an argument is dubious for its suggestion that some nations remain in their present state merely for the sake of those who, as if in a museum, benefit from “having such a quaint culture to enjoy.”

what might be its great worth and relevance. And the injustice here should be resisted regardless of what its worth(lessness) might be. In this latter case, by contrast, its waning and shrinkage is not caused by any injustice, so that if it is dying out, its remaining members may not justifiably claim *a right* to preserve or perpetuate itself. Waldron nicely encapsulates these points:

To preserve a culture—to insist that it must be *secure*, come what may—is to insulate it from the very forces and tendencies that allow it to operate in a context of genuine choice. How does one tell, for example, whether the gender roles defined in a given culture structure have value? One way is to see whether the culture erodes and collapses as a way of life in a world, once different ways of doing things are perceived. The possibility of the erosion of allegiance, or of the need to compromise a culture beyond all recognition in order to retain allegiance and prevent mass exodus, is the key to cultural evaluation. It is what cultures do, under pressure, as contexts of genuine choice. But if that is so, we cannot *guarantee* at the same time the integrity of a given community and say that its culture (or the fate of its culture) can *tell* people about the value and viability of this particular way of life. Either people learn about value from the dynamics of their culture and its interactions with others or their culture can operate for them at most as a museum display on which they can pride themselves. There is, I suppose, nothing wrong with such fierce nostalgic pride, but it certainly should not be confused with genuine choice and evaluation. To confer meaning on one's life is to take risks with one's culture, and these are risks that dismay those whose interest is the preservation of some sort of cultural purity. In general, there is something artificial about a commitment to *preserve* minority cultures. (Waldron, 1995, p. 109)

Presumably, cultures are worth preserving at least in part because of their instrumental value, through ways they help meet members' needs. To assume otherwise—that cultures have only intrinsic value and no instrumental value—seems incoherent, or at least calls into question whether they really are worth preserving. Regarding such instrumental value, we should acknowledge that, while people's basic human needs stay the same, the specific ways and means through which these needs are satisfied will vary. Unless we allow for some form of cultural omniscience or dictatorship, the range of people's choices must be neither imposed nor unduly restricted: people should be free to choose how their needs will be met. And insofar as this freedom is honored, the preservation of any one culture or tradition must always be provisional, never rigidly dictated. Citizens should remain free to enjoy and preserve whatever cultural artefacts they like—up to the point where this preservation restricts the freedoms, rights, and needs of others. Especially as their numbers diminish, from when they were a majority and they become a minority subculture through no injustice, their regressive insistence that newly emerging majorities must sacrifice for their continued preservation will be a form of cultural dictatorship, or at least an unjustly imposed subsidy or form of mummification.

Such subsidies may be seen through many of the oil, gas, and automotive companies that have long been mainstays of the American economy and culture and have long enjoyed protectionist government subsidies for their industries. These industries received these subsidies in the assumption that what was best for them was best for America. (“Support the USA—buy Ford”, or buy domestic.) While this assumption may have been true for these “mammoth industries” during the mid-twentieth century, it raises questions of how bad it will be if these mammoths become extinct, or at least wane in dominance. As is becoming painfully apparent, other industries and sources of energy offer cheaper, cleaner, and more environmentally friendly sources and forms of transportation (Snell, 1994, pp. 276-289). In the face of these emerging alternatives, politicians like Trump and Joe Manchin have pushed for continued support and subsidies for oil, coal and gas and the fossil fuel industries, under the archaic premise that these will best support America or, as Dick Cheney claimed earlier, that these represent the “non-negotiable American way of life.” For the sake of argument, let us assume that there is *some* truth to this—that continued subsidies for these flagging energy sources and industries would protect some

American workers and companies and their standard of living. Even if so, this obscures ways that these supports and subsidies undermine other workers, groups and companies, that would grow more without such protectionism. But we should consider not only the American or *intranational* implications here, for such regressivist protectionism also has *international* implications. Subsidized maintenance of, say, American oil, coal and gas contributes to global warming and to externalized environmental costs on other nations. That is, artificially supported perpetuation of this American way of life may hurt the cultural and socio-economic lives and environments of many more non-Americans and their cultures. And since such nationalistic biases could result in significant climate catastrophes including melting of our North and South poles—along with extinction of many non-human species in and between these poles such as polar bears, arctic foxes, etc.—whichever polar model of culture is adopted may have truly “polar and global implications.”

Conclusion

These increasingly apparent truisms about such industries and communities imply this about our regressive and progressive models of culture: Within our global village, the cultural choices and directions that any one nation takes, or fails to take, will have far-reaching impacts on other nations, cultures, peoples, and species. It should be obvious that these choices are not merely local, subjective, or cosmetic in nature; they do not merely involve, say, choosing this particular cuisine or style of art or dress, or enjoying that particular lifestyle or tradition. Rather, people’s choices at these cultural crossroads will have concrete, global, and objectively measurable socio-economic impacts on others. In recent years, social scientists have become increasingly adept at making cross-cultural comparisons of different peoples’ levels of happiness and need-fulfilment—according to objective indices such as life span and rates of morbidity and disease, levels of (il-)literacy and (in-)numeracy, per capita rates of poverty, suicide, drug abuse, crime, incarceration and execution, etc. We should thus remember the “butterfly effect” here: “the butterfly or mosquito that flaps its wings in India may cause a storm in Texas,” or vice versa. Communities that adopt and apply a more regressive or progressive model of culture will thus hurt or help not only their own chances of meeting their needs and effectively adapting to changing exigencies, but will usually significantly hurt or help others’ chances for these things, as well.

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