

INDIVIDUALISM, PLURALISM, AND COMMUNITY

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Everywhere we look, we see people commenting on the loss of community. In the popular press, articles appear almost weekly. Last March 29 the Orlando Sentinel produced a series of articles entitled, "One nation, indivisible?" which discussed racial intolerance; while hopeful in some respects, the series also warned about the growing racial and ethnic segregation. Several years earlier (November 3, 1997), Newsweek presented an article reviewing several books that were quite pessimistic about the racial divide in our country; Newsweek called the article, "Why We Can't Get Along."

But the problem is not simply racial or a matter of ethnic diversity. Sociologist Robert Putnam (1995) wrote a much cited article, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," which argued that Americans are participating less and less in group activities, which are the glue that hold democracy (and, by extension, community) together. Rather than acting in community, we act alone. We seem to have a crisis of individualism. Whereas America has prided itself historically on its rugged individualism, viewing it as a source of strength, many are now worried that both individualism and diversity are undercutting any sense of community.

Analyses from a number of disciplines can provide insight into why we are losing our sense of community; there is no reason to think that any one version will tell the whole story. But, I propose to approach this subject conceptually, examining the concept of self in the Modern world¹ as the relationship between the individual and the community. I will argue that there has been a tension in two key ideas that form our modern understanding of self and community, and in the past decades one of these key ideas has become dominant, resulting in our inability to conceptualize a robust notion of community. I will then offer some suggestions about adopting alternative concepts through which we can develop an adequate understanding of self and community.

The Modern Notion of Self

The Modern notion of the self is composed of two ideas: the self as atom, and a common human nature. Let me consider the ideas in turn.

a. *Atomism*. Science as we understand it developed in the 16th and 17th centuries with the rejection of Aristotelian science and the adoption of atomism. Given the success of this new science with its atomistic assumptions, atomism became the appropriate method for all explanations which aspired to be scientific, so atomistic explanations were offered not only in the physical sciences, but also in psychology, economics and political theory.

As a theory, atomism contained three aspects:

- 1) Reality is composed of independent, self-sufficient, indivisible units that form the stuff out of which all things are made.
- 2) Atoms exist in an empty space, or void; this notion serves the function of emphasizing the radical independence of each atomic unit. Space separates the atoms.

¹ Philosophers talk about the Modern world beginning in the seventeenth century; at this time, fundamental changes in thought over a range of areas was introduced. I will use the term "Modern" to apply to the time period beginning in the seventeenth century and going into the twentieth century.

3) The job of science is to explain the laws whereby the atoms associate or unite to form larger associations. Hence, in physical theory, the world was conceived as being made up of atoms in a void which connected with each other in various ways to form tables and chairs and trees; the job of science was to develop the laws of how these atoms conjoined to form all the objects in the world.

In his influential argument for the Social Contract, which became one of the models for the American conception of government (and which especially influenced the Declaration of Independence), John Locke (1952) applied the general approach of atomism to the formation of the state. In our natural condition, which Locke called the state of nature, humans are political atoms existing in a void. In other words, people in their natural state have no natural association, but they are radically independent without a civil society. So far, Locke has employed the first two ideas, that we exist as political atoms in our natural condition of separation.

The job of political science is to explain how the individual atoms join to form a larger association. Locke postulated a social contract, a condition in which individuals freely form an association out of convenience and in order to accomplish ends that we as individuals desire. In other words, Locke argued that political association was not our natural condition, but that it was agreed to in order for individuals to achieve the peace and security that they desired, but did not completely find in the state of nature.

Two important ideas can be derived from the social contract. The first is that the self is viewed as an atomic unit, without any direct, natural ties to others. The second idea is that community is not a natural condition for humans, but it is derivative, contingent on human desire for certain goods. Combined, these ideas imply that humans are not naturally in community; ties with others are merely external to our true selves. Relationship with others is not a defining part of our self; rather, isolation and independence are.

It is easy to see how American individualism has its basis in the social contract, which postulates people as political atoms. However, the second idea contained in our concept of self--somewhat in tension with the first--counterbalanced atomism and provided a robust idea of human community. This second idea forming our Modern notion of the self is that there is a common human nature.

b. *Human Nature*. It is logically possible that these early thinkers could have argued that each atom is different from each other, and this would have emphasized even more the notion of individualism, but these philosophers were influenced by a traditional idea going back as far as Plato and taken up by Christianity, the idea that there is a universal human nature, common to all. Christianity argued that we are all creatures of God, that this was the most important fact about ourselves as humans. In this view, we all shared this common human nature, and that any difference was secondary and not essential to our true condition.

The import of this view made community fundamental to our human nature; after all, we share the essential human condition of being creatures of God, who loves each of us equally. Our identity is formed out of our common condition of being God's creatures made in the image of God, and so what is essential to us is shared by all. According to this view, we form the community of God.

c. *Balance of the Two Ideas*. Thus, the Modern notion of self contained these two ideas which were in tension with each other, but which provided a balance between separateness and sameness, and between individualism and community. Modernity held both of these notions, with the idea of an extended community based on a common human nature tempering any excessive individualism.

Since Christianity propounded this emphasis on a universal community, at least as an ideal, the moral dimensions of this idea were strong and acted as a counter force to excessive individualism. Actions had to display the moral component of acting for the good of others in the community. Therefore, even individualism was justified as helping the community. For instance, utilitarianism argued that it was natural and normal for us to be concerned with our own happiness, and, indeed, the good was defined in terms of calculating individual happiness. But, moral acts were defined as bringing about the happiness of the greatest number; this dictum took both community² and individualism into account. While utilitarianism aims at the happiness of the community, nevertheless, it is based on an individualist ontology--the greatest good was calculated in terms of adding up the happiness of individuals.

Likewise, laissez-faire capitalism worked on the theory that individuals could act solely in terms of their own good and an invisible hand would necessarily turn these actions into the good of all. Each person trying to become rich would attempt to produce a better mousetrap, and the success of an individual would produce the social good. Hence, the good of the community was employed by individualist capitalism to morally justify individual selfishness.

Nevertheless, this idea of a common human nature has formed the basis of most of the liberation movements over the last two centuries. After all, if we are all essentially alike, there can be no justification that any of us can be treated as fundamentally different from others. Hence, simply because one is a woman, or because one is an African American, or because one holds a different religious view, or because one is gay, it has been argued, we are fundamentally the same, and we share a common human nature. The natural rights that each of us has as an individual are based on the idea that we share this common essence; we are all fundamentally the same, and hence any sort of discrimination is morally repugnant. Therefore, this ideal has played a powerful and positive role in American tradition.

The Dark Side

This is not to deny that there have been abuses of this idea of the community based on a common human nature; examining these abuses will be instructive. Take, for instance, slavery in America. On the face of it, from our perspective today, the idea of each person having a common human nature and possessing inalienable rights denies the possibility of one person enslaving another; however, the idea of a human nature was actually employed to argue for slavery.

To understand how this is possible, note that the idea of human nature is not simply a descriptive concept, but it is normative as well. Once one knows what it means to be human, to share this common essence, then it is morally imperative to honor this nature. So, if it is part of our nature to have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, it is morally necessary to honor these rights (and a moral necessity for every person to fight for them for themselves and for others).

This points to the second aspect of the idea of human nature that is implicit in our modernist notion: the idea must have some positive content, a particular description of what human nature is. I mentioned earlier that Christianity has described our nature as being creatures of God. Philosophers, however, have usually argued that

² In fact, I believe utilitarianism has an inadequate concept of community, which is viewed as the aggregate of individuals. There are no natural connections among people in this approach. It is a typical atomistic approach to community rather than being a more robust relational view, which I will describe later.

rationality was human's most essential characteristic; it is rationality that separates us from all other animals.

On the positive side, giving specific content to the idea of human nature gives a moral imperative about how we should treat others. But, notice what defining human nature also does--it separates humans from not humans in a hierarchical order. Those who do not show the requisite rationality are not to be considered human (or, at least, not fully so, deserving of complete moral respect). Hence, African Americans were not considered fully human because they did not display British/American rationality and could be enslaved. Indeed, it was sometimes argued that we had a moral responsibility to do so in order to educate them, particularly in Christianity, to bring them into full humanity.

We can leave aside questions of the inadequacy of this argument; for our purposes, it is important merely to note these two aspects of our traditional idea of human nature: that it is a normative concept, and that there is a specific content to this idea.

The Demise of the Idea of Human Nature

This idea of a common human nature has been undercut, however, by the advance of science. One task science sees itself engaging in (especially in psychology and sociology) is describing humans scientifically, describing their nature. But, notice the following. While science is trying to offer specific content in describing human nature, it does not offer a normative concept since science as a discipline is thought to be merely descriptive, not normative. The fact that tables and chairs are composed of certain kinds of atoms does not in any way imply a moral obligation about how they ought to be treated. Therefore, the scientific concept of human nature is a fundamentally different concept from the traditional normative one used to understand who we are as human beings. Even though science may talk about describing human nature, what they have essentially done is to deny that there is a human nature in the traditional sense. While this denial is more methodological than ideological (the job of science is merely to describe), the success of science over the last centuries has made the substitution of this new idea of human nature natural to us. In ways that are not even conscious to us, many in this culture have adopted the scientific idea of human nature as the standard usage. I think this is what Bellah (1985) had in mind when he said that, although there is a secondary language of morality in American culture, we have a difficult time making sense of our moral commitments using the primary language, which has been influenced by the scientific worldview.

The second way in which science has undercut the traditional notion of a normative human nature is that it has brought into question the traditional idea of rationality. Whereas tradition held that rationality was implicit in humans, even innate in some important sense, much of contemporary psychology has questioned this idea. Freudian psychology argues that we are often mistaken about what our conscious, rational motives are, and that we often act out of subconscious motives, hidden to our waking consciousness. Further, behaviorism (and, implicitly, even much cognitive psychology) has argued that what we think--and how we act--is determined by our past, starting at birth as a tabula rasa. All behaviors are learned behaviors. In other words, rationality under this view becomes an achievement for humans, not a description of our nature. Rationality is simply what we have been taught, an accomplishment based on conditioning, and not a normative essence we all

necessarily share as humans. Thus, psychology now says that humans have personalities, not a common nature.

Terrifying Isolation

Robert Bellah has described our contemporary American condition as one of "terrifying isolation." According to my argument, this condition has been the result of a growing imbalance between the twin pillars of modernity: atomism and a common human nature. The loss of the idea of human nature (or its transformation into a merely scientific, descriptive term) leaves only one of the terms, atomism, current. The force of this term, however, separates us in a radical individualism, with no natural glue to bind us together. Community is merely based on convenience and whim, a mere contingency; only when it serves the good of all individuals does it make sense to form community. And, one might argue, even if community exists, it might be that individuals could opt out of it based on their needs and desires. Indeed, it makes community a very fragile institution.

And given atomistic descriptions of humans, that all of nature is engaged in a competitive struggle for survival and dominance, including humans, then it is difficult to find any natural place for community in this worldview. We can't help it, this *Weltanschauung* goes; we are merely individuals asserting our natural competitiveness and search for dominance like all natural creatures.

Before turning to a more adequate description of self and community, we can sharpen the analysis given so far by examining feminism, one of the more important and insightful twentieth century philosophical movements, because I think that feminism both displays the problem and points a way out of the traditional problem of self and community.

Feminism and Political Liberation

The language of a common human nature is still being used in political liberation movements, where it still serves as a powerful justification for human freedom. As I mentioned earlier, virtually all liberation movements over the last decades have employed the idea that discrimination is unacceptable since all people have basic human rights. We all share a common human nature; therefore, we all deserve respect. These rights are not granted by any government, but they attach to us simply as humans having a common moral nature.

However, even here counter forces are muting the call. Take for instance women's liberation. While the demand is clear that women should be treated the same as men, and hence feminism implicitly employs the traditional view of a common human nature, nevertheless there are cross currents in feminism. In fact, it often does not talk about sameness, but about difference.

Ann Ferguson (1989)³ writes that feminists traditionally have offered two different analyses of the self. Those whom she calls the Rational Maximizers have propounded the traditional view of the self with a common human nature. These feminists argue that women do not differ fundamentally from men in terms of their ability to reason and to choose reasonable goals, but that social forces have created a

³ Ferguson rejects both of these views in favor of what she calls an aspect view of the self, and I think that she is essentially right in general in this formulation. However, since she is concerned with a slightly different issue concerning self-identity, I will not discuss her theory.

negative view of women, which women have taken onto themselves as their own identity. The cure for this problem is consciousness raising and psychological re-training. In this view, difference is admitted, but it is contingent and not essential. Women, like men, share a common human nature. This approach grows out of the Lockean social contract view and utilitarianism.

On the other hand, the Difference Theorists, as she calls them, have argued that the differences between women and men are either innate or formed so early in infancy that they create different natures; these differences are such a part of our identities that they cannot be changed. One school of Difference Theorists argues that these natures are biologically determined; for instance, testosterone makes men inherently more aggressive than women. A second school sees the differences formed early in personality. For instance, psychoanalytic feminists argue that differences in child rearing practices produce essentially different genders (so long as the mother is the primary care giver, girls and boys are going to react differentially to separation from the mother). Gender differences attach as essential components of who we are because we are formed out of our relationships.

Thus, feminism creates a tension between the argument for liberation based on sharing a common human nature, and the argument that difference defines us. The more that one is concerned with liberation, the more the idea of a common human nature is emphasized, and thus the more that community is extolled. On the other hand, the more one wants to emphasize the difference between women and men (that women have different cognitive and moral ways of thinking from men so that they speak in a different voice), the more the idea of community seems to be undercut.

The Problem: The Definition of Community

This problem is not isolated to feminism; I think it is embedded in postmodern and post-structuralist views, which emphasize the context dependency of knowing and of our self-identity. The more we define ourselves in terms of our embeddedness in context, the less we can think of ourselves as sharing a common human nature. The more we think of knowledge as context-dependent, the less we can think of it as universal and accessible by a common rationality. I believe this tension, however, shows a way out of the contradictions of modernity and helps us emphasize the unique individuality of each person, as well as firmly, and even necessarily, placing all people within community. Let me turn now to another analysis of our traditional Modernist notion of self and community and then argue for a solution.

If we examine our traditional notion of community, it is based on two ideas:

- 1) the idea that community is based on sameness, and
- 2) the idea that each member of the community is an atomic unit.

I have already discussed that Modernity posits a common human nature based on rationality or on being creatures of God--of each of us sharing an essential characteristic--as being the conceptual basis of community. And, practically, we seem to feel more comfortable with others who are like us. I used to be amused when my daughter would come home from school excited, telling me that she had met a wonderful friend, and giving me the reason for the friend's superior qualities as, "she's just like me." The sense of familiarity provides a basis for comfort. Even Bellah (1985) defines a community as being a group of people based in memory and hope; in other words, he seems to say that a community was founded on a common history and a common set of goals.

The problem with this view becomes obvious when we see that our society is growing more diverse. It is becoming more multicultural, not only racially, but also in terms of religion and ethnicity. And more and more difference is celebrated and is identified with. The more we value and experience and identify with difference, it seems, the less we are able to conceptualize a community. It is no wonder that the problem of community has become one of the most pressing problems of our day.

A Relational View

I want to argue that the Modernist notion of self in community does not make sense. However powerful the idea has been in political liberation, it is fatally flawed as a view of ourselves and our relation to others. In the first place, the atomistic social contract view is flawed. The idea that we are an atomic unit as our basic human condition overemphasizes our separation. We become at birth a separate physical entity, but it should be obvious that this a very limited notion. Rather, we need to ask how we become fully human, and the answer seems obvious. We develop into humanness; we become socialized into personhood. We are enculturated, which means that we become part of a culture, with language and with morals that are taught through culture. It is only in being a part of the cultural community that we develop into our full humanness. The view of ourselves as atomic units in the state of nature essentially makes us like the wild child, having no language or culture; but, without the community supplying a common medium, we are incapable of human action and thought. Rather, it is in taking on the culture that we become a human (as opposed to the category of homo sapien).

Culture introduces us to what Charles Taylor (1992) calls public space . We can, for instance, only be shamed before others. Only insofar as I identify with the public ideals and values can I be shamed. I am irreducibly in relationship in my essential nature. I am no atomic unit, cut off from others, but it is only through relationship and having developed self-identity through culture that the idea of my having an individual nature makes sense.

Notice that this view makes community basic to my nature. Far from being an atomic unity, essentially separate from others and forming no natural association with them (but only a contingent one chosen by us through social contract us to further our individual aims), I find myself necessarily in relationship. We do not define ourselves as atoms but in relationship.

The first step, therefore, to establish a more robust concept of community lies in our rejecting an atomistic notion of self and accepting a relational one. Our natural condition as humans is to be connected, not isolated. Whereas atomism makes connection secondary and contingent, a relational view makes it basic to our understanding of ourselves as human. As human, we find ourselves in connection, and therefore in some form of community.

A relational view of the self, therefore, is necessary for us to have a robust idea of community, but it is not sufficient. We have to deepen our analysis by trying to find a form of connection that supports and maintains a robust community. I turn now to communitarianism, which I do not believe provides a sufficiently robust means of maintaining community, at least in some of its versions.

Communitarianism

Communitarianism is a contemporary movement in political theory and politics which attempts to make a relational, non-atomistic, view basic to its theory. As yet theoretically uncodified, communitarian views have been expressed in several ways by Amitai Etzioni, Charles Taylor, and Michael Sandel, among others. I want to criticize one expression of communitarianism before discussing a sounder foundation that is expressed in Australian Aboriginal thought. Robert Putnam's analysis in "Bowling Alone" made a major impact on those who see a decline of community in America, and his book, *Making Democracy Work* (1993), attempted to give a solution to this problem. Although he decries atomistic individualism and wants to emphasize relationship, I believe his approach is inadequate.

I believe he relies on an assumption of Modernist liberal thought, that there is a category difference between public/political institutions on the one hand, and private/voluntary associations on the other. Putnam's distrust of public institutions places the role of character formation and the bonding of community within voluntary associations. It is only there that "social capital" can be developed, he argues. But in emphasizing the benefits of volunteer organizations, he retains the split between the public and the private, placing the weight of community on the side of the private. He believes that trust engendered in these informal associations can develop the trust and reciprocity that is necessary for community.

While trust and especially reciprocity are basic for community, I cannot accept the premise of Putnam's argument that the solution lies in the informal, private associations to the virtual exclusion of public, formal structures. In fact, I believe that the structure of society is the key to solving the problem of community. To illustrate my position, let me discuss aspects of Australian Aboriginal culture, especially since I first gained the appreciation for the necessity of structural/public support for community through my study of this traditional culture.

Australian Aboriginal Culture

Far from being an atomistic culture, the Australian Aboriginal culture is based on a relational ontology; and rather than individualism being important to them, individuality is fundamental.

a) Self-identity as relationship. Self identity in Aboriginal culture is not based on atomism, but rather it is grounded in relationships--relations with other people, with other groups, and, importantly, with the land. All Aboriginal societies (language groups) are divided into two opposing groups, or moieties, with many of these language groups further subdivided into sections and subsections. Social relations among the Aborigines are far more complex than in Western societies, but it is not necessary to delve into this complexity. The important point is that these divisions are regular and everyone fits into the classificatory scheme. These divisions are grounded in different totems, as some anthropologists have named them--identification with animal or plant species.

b) Totemism. Perhaps the best way to introduce this idea is to briefly discuss conception totemism. According to their worldview, at some time in the mythic past, ancestor beings awoke and come out of the ocean, sky or ground (depending on the language group) and began walking the featureless plane of the Australian continent. These beings sometimes appeared in human form, sometimes as animals, or they changed back and forth. As they hunted and gathered, as well as fought with others, stole wives, etc, their activity formed the features of the environment. The slithering of the great Rainbow Serpent formed the river bed, or the impression of the great

sitting kangaroo formed impressions in the hills, or the emu egg formed a mountain. Where they camped or where they engaged in some other important activity, or when they finally retired back into the earth, they left behind part of their essence and at places these formed spirit children.

Their mythic explanation for pregnancy (they are well aware of the physiological explanation for conception) is that when a woman walks close to one of these sites, a spirit child jumps into her body, forming (or completing) conception. The important point is that this explanation makes each individual part of the essential nature of that particular totemic ancestor, and since each feature of the landscape is also identified with the essence of an ancestor spirit, the connection is made between the person and a specified part of the land. Land is not undifferentiated as it is in Newtonian space, but rather it is impregnated with the essence of the ancestor, which also has become the essence of the person; in Aboriginal thought, there is no land but only a set of countries, each identified with an ancestral being, and each a living being. People talk about and to a country as they would another person, and each country has a personality as each person does. So close is the relationship between a person and his or her country that if someone harms a country, it is taken as the same as damaging the person. And having such an intimate relationship with a living country means that one does not own the country in a Western sense, but rather one has a custodial relationship with it. As the Aborigines say, they do not own the land but the land owns them, in the sense that their primary responsibility towards it is its upkeep.

c) Individuality vs. Individualism. As the countries are related due to the Dreaming (mythic) stories, so people become related in an extensive kinship relationship (since marriage is regulated according to one's totem), and the kinship relations set up specific responsibilities and obligations among people. The point I want to emphasize here is that self-identity is formed out of totemic relations and relations among others. There is no atomistic unit that can have self identity since there is no isolated unit conceived in their worldview. All things are related in specific ways. And conception totems are only one kind of totemic relationship. An individual may have a half dozen totemic relations that form part of his or her identity, and these may differ from anyone else in the hunting and gathering group. Hence, since self-identity is formed out of one's totemic relationships, it is clear that each person has a unique personal identity, a unique individuality. Since there is no atomism, one can deny that individualism is fundamental in Aboriginal society, but rather individuality is emphasized.

It is just the opposite in traditional Western thought, contrary to our popular conception; as odd as it sounds, individuality does not form a fundamental part of Western individualism. In Modern thought each person is an atomic individual, sharing a common human nature. What is most fundamental about a person's essence, therefore, is that it is shared with all other humans; hence, sameness, not uniqueness, forms the basis of the self in Western thought. Difference is only a matter of contingency, not an essential property. Contrast this idea to Aboriginal thought in which self-identity is formed out of relationships. One's totemic and social relations mark one off as different from all others; individual difference, therefore, forms the basis of Aboriginal thought. Individuality and difference is not only accepted in Aboriginal thought, but it is expected. Each person has a unique set of relations in the world, a unique perspective in the world, and since all countries must be honored and maintained, these differences are life giving.

d) Interdependence of Owners and Managers. One of the obligations one has in maintaining one's country is to perform what have been called increase rituals, or

cosmic balance rituals, the purpose of which is to maintain the balance of a particular species (usually this means increasing the species, but in some cases, such as rituals concerning mosquitoes, the idea is to decrease them). These rituals would be the responsibility of all those who share in the particular totem, say the kangaroo totem. However, in addition to there being owners of the totem (those who have the kangaroo as their totem), there are managers of the kangaroo rituals, people who have a special relationship with the owners. The owners of the ritual cannot perform it without the aid of the managers, so an interdependent relationship is found between these two groups, and so it is with all totems. No one group has independence or separate power, but rather Aboriginal society is formed out of mutual interdependence, and the rituals are carried out through a process of reciprocity and negotiation.

In fact, reciprocity forms one of the basic values of Aboriginal society. All exchanges must be fair and equal and reciprocal. The reciprocity may be direct or indirect. The interdependent society is structured such that person A may have obligations to B, who has obligations to C, who in turn has obligations to A. But the point is that reciprocity is expected. Diane Bell describes this reciprocity in the following way: "The ritual roles of these *kirda* [owner] and *kurdungurlu* [manager] are essentially interdependent and complimentary. 'We are level,' said one witness in a land claim and pressed his thumbs together to indicate this closeness." (1983, p. 140).

e) Summary. Let me try to sum up what seem to me to be the essential principles discussed above.

1. The self is not atomistic but relational; self-identity is formed out of one's relationships.
2. Individuality and uniqueness are expected and valued. Each perspective needs to be represented and valued as the only way to maintain the whole country.
3. While the interdependence may have a basis in emotional connection, as Myers (1991) has asserted, it is supported structural as well. Owners of land may not carry out their ritual responsibilities without the cooperation of managers. Rose puts it this way: "No country is ruled by any other, and no country can live without others. It follows that no country is the centre toward which other countries must orient themselves, and, equally, that each is its own centre" (1996, p. 38).
4. Reciprocity is a basic value of Aboriginal culture.

Community Based on Relational Self-Identity

The Aboriginal model presents a different model of self and community from the Modernist notion, and it seems to me not only to be truer to our experience of self, but it presents a solution to the problem of diversity and community.

First, the self is not a unitary atom that shares a common human nature with all others. Rather, the self is defined in terms of the specific relations an individual maintains, which means that each person is essentially unique, having individuality. Diversity, even a radical type in which each person has a different essence, is a fundamental part of the Aboriginal worldview.

Second, community is not defined in terms of a group of people sharing a common essence, but rather it is seen as the interdependence of individuals and groups.

Third, the interdependence is displayed in the structure of society. All countries and people are interdependent. No one or group is permanently in a hierarchical relation over another; no one person or group controls another. Each group depends on the other (owners on managers, who in turn will be owners in the reciprocal ritual) for their survival and well being. No one can act independently in important matters.

Fourth, diversity is a necessary part of the community. Therefore, people are expected to act differently and hold different views. Notice that this position does not value independent action, but it values acting out of difference. Independence is not a value; one should not disregard others, considering oneself separate and superior to the other. Rather, acting out their separate natures, people will naturally have different opinions and behave in different ways from others. Community decisions are based on group consensus, and if a person does not like the outcome, they may leave. Thus, mobility in this hunter/gatherer society is fundamental.

Thus, we can see that the problems modern communities face in light of growing diversity and multiculturalism is, in part, due to inadequate notions of self and community. Traditionally, we have expected others to be like us, and when we find that they are not, we cannot identify with them; we doubt they share the common essence which forms community. Difference becomes a stumbling block to community rather than being conceived as a natural part of it. Further, the hierarchies that we have traditionally viewed as normal--and result in what many conceive of as the normal dominance of rich over poor, of white over minority, of English speakers over non-English speakers, etc.--in fact are not natural and are a deterrent to community, which should be based on mutual interdependence.

In our atomism, we view competition as the fundamental law of nature, with a struggle for dominance and the resulting hierarchy as not only normal but justified. The winners deserve the spoils. But this model of competitiveness is now being questioned and replaced by ecological thinking, the view that all parts of the system are equally important and mutually interdependent. The Aboriginal model, thus, can be seen as a kind of ecological model as opposed to the modernist atomistic one. One can not talk about one part being better than or superior to another; rather, all of the parts of mutually supporting and necessary for the whole to survive. Therefore, care for all of the parts is necessary. This doesn't mean that one part of the system may not feed off of another part, but it does mean that there is a fundamental reciprocity and interdependence in the system.

Individuality, Diversity and Community

According to Modernist ideas of community, diversity presents a problem in at least three ways. First, the social contract view argues that community is formed and maintained based on the advantages the union brings to all the members, so if there are members against whom the community systematically discriminates, then it was obvious that this association is wrong. Second, insofar the community is supported by the idea of a common human nature, implying that all the people are, in a sense, members of the same family, then radical diversity put into question the view that sameness provides the glue that holds them together. Third, the radical atomism of modernism puts a strain on the possibility of community by emphasizing our essential separateness. Over the past decades, I have argued, this atomistic side of the modernist tension has gained ascendancy and has put a strain our sense of community.

On the other hand, I have proposed a more ecological view of community, which not only allows diversity, but it is built on diversity while retaining the key value of individuality. In this view, communities are not the products of individuals seeking advantages, and thus are contingent on their whim; rather, communities are systems, which are built out of interdependent structures in which fairness and reciprocity for all members are prime values. This approach assumes that we are diverse and that each of us can and should express our individuality. It rejects traditional individualism, which is based on atomism, and accepts a relational view of self-identity in which people are seen as complex sets of overlapping relationships, which are dynamic and change over time. While it may appear that the loss of individualism is a drastic one, since our culture seems to have such a commitment to it, I believe that what is more important for most of us is the recognition of our distinctiveness, our uniqueness, our individuality, and the appropriateness to act out of that uniqueness. The irony is that our individuality is respected to a far greater degree in a relational view of self than it is in traditional atomistic individualism.

However, there is one function that atomistic individualism, with its attendant notion of a common human nature, performed which is as important. It guaranteed the inalienability of liberty, and it argued, at its best, that all humans form the human community and deserved respect. It is not clear that a relational view of community can perform this task. After all, traditionally non-technological communities like those in Aboriginal societies make a distinction between the in-group and the out-group, between those with whom one was related and those with whom one was not.

I think that there are two approaches one can take in response. The first is to see that systems can be nested within larger systems, such that there is a mutual interdependence. One can talk about a local ecosystem in South Florida as if it were totally self-contained, and in some contexts this may be necessary. However, it is equally obvious that each local ecosystem is part of larger ecosystems; after all, we are now concerned with global ecological issues, and it is conceivable that we might in the future have concerns for the ecology of our solar system. The point here is that any system can be viewed as part of a larger system in which there is interdependence. We can view community in the same way. While there may be reasons to talk about local communities--after all only county residents should vote for county commissioners--there may be times when our vision of community is enlarged to the state or the country as a whole, or to the world. The important point is that we see the interdependence of the parts of the system, however far away they are spatially or culturally, and have a sense of fairness and reciprocity toward them.

A second approach can be taken, which Deborah Bird Rose suggested in her dissertation.⁴ She says that the Yarralin people make a distinction between milk and blood. For them, a person's totem is derived from the mother's milk. Thus, it provides the person with distinctiveness based on this particular totem relationship. On the other hand, blood is derived from the father and it is shared by all people, making all people one. Since blood is held in common, it provides a commonness while still emphasizing the individuality of relationship.

The concept of blood seems to serve the same function in Modern Western thought as the idea of a common human nature does, but there is an important

⁴ Myers (personal communication), who has studied the Pintupi, a similar group to the Yarralin whom Rose studied, has told me that he has reservations about this distinction. Plus, the fact that Rose discusses this point in her dissertation but does not include it in her book based on her dissertation also makes one wonder about this distinction. However, whether this distinction is actually found among any Aboriginal group is secondary to the fact that it points out an interesting conceptual approach.

difference which makes this idea superior. I mentioned earlier the philosophical tradition giving human nature a specific content, describing it as rational, and that certain people used this definition to exclude others and enslave them. The concept of blood in Yarralin thought does not specify a specific common essence shared by everyone. The Yarralin do not characterize the notion of blood in any specific way; it has no specific content, so it cannot be used to set up a hierarchy among people, which would be contrary to their egalitarian and mutually interdependent society. Hence, the idea of blood serves as a bare assertion of the humanity of all people, and even in their diversity, they are a part of a system of reciprocity.

Conclusion

I have analyzed the Modernist notion of self and community, and I have suggested that these conceptions are no longer adequate in our increasingly multicultural world. Conceptually, these ideas do not seem able to take us into the next century in which we must learn to build robust multicultural communities.

I have suggested another model, a relational or ecological model, which not only accepts diversity, but it is based on diversity. It recognizes the richness of the ecosystem, and that it is diversity that actually gives strength to the system in its attempt to survive and grow. Plus, the ecological model respects individuality and thus it retains a traditional Western value. I have argued that to implement this view we need to develop mutually interdependent systems, with the values of fairness and reciprocity as core.

We fall short, I think, in instituting this approach in two ways. First, since we do not focus on a relational worldview, we have not noticed and valued and emphasized those ways in which our communities and systems are already mutually interdependent; this needs to be done and these connections celebrated. For instance, I think it can be argued that a great deal of social and political strength has developed in American out of our two party systems (and even out of splinter parties). While competition for voters sharpens political ideas and is a part of our system, the ruthlessness in which this competition is sometimes carried out--with one party attempting to give the other a fatal blow--undercuts community. Such competition is supported by atomistic individualism in which defeat and even elimination of the opposing side and its ideas is made the object of the exercise. Since there is one right view, one common and essential nature of things, difference is not tolerated. Diversity is the hallmark of a failure to find the correct position. Contrast this view to one in which diversity is conceived as natural, legitimate, and even as strengthening the whole. Imagine each political party recognizing the others as expressing perspectives that must be valued parts of the system rather than as wrong-headed and destructive.

Second, we need to further implement mutual interdependencies. Too often laissez-faire capitalism stresses atomistic competition and the attendant hierarchies. Trickle down economics, for instance, values the entrepreneurs and the rich to the virtual exclusion of the workers and the poor, arguing not that these are mutually interdependent parts of the system, but that the workers and poor are better off in their dependency on the entrepreneurs and the rich. Certainly reciprocity is not a prime value in this view, and probably fairness is not fundamental to this approach. At the very least, capitalism as it is presently conceived does not readily recognize mutual interdependence. For instance, it does not look like the rich depend on the poor in any meaningful way. Political and economic power is not equally distributed. Hence, I

am suggesting that in order to achieve community, we not only have to change our concepts, but that we need to change social and economic structures which will support community.

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EXERCISES FOR THIS PROJECT

Exercise One: Questions Based on the Paper

1. What is the difference between the Modernist and the ecological view of community?
2. Which is important to you, individualism or individuality?
3. Do you feel that your self-identity is built dynamic and built out of the relationships that are important in your life, or do you feel that what is most central about your identity is a shared human nature?
4. What are some of the ways economic specialization mask our interdependence (think about how close you feel to the people who grow the food you eat)?
5. Are there other ways that our economic or political systems assume the paradigm of individuals competing against one another rather than being in mutual interdependence?
6. What recommendations would you make in order not only to make us more mutually interdependent, but also for us to recognize and celebrate this interdependence?
7. What do the values of fairness and reciprocity mean to you? Do you think they can support community?
8. Can we celebrate and identify with our racial and ethnic backgrounds and remain a community?
9. What steps would you suggest to get people to see diversity as the foundation of community rather than a hindrance to it?
10. Why do you think that prejudice exists?

Exercise Two: "Fringe Dwellers"

This is a movie about an Aboriginal family who lived on the fringe of a country town and the struggle not only between Aboriginal culture and Australian culture, but within the family between the older generation and the young. What I like about the movie is that, although you feel sorry for the Aboriginal people and you are horrified by discrimination, the movie does not degenerate into moralisms. It presents the complexity of cultural clash. Although whites sometimes are discriminatory, others go out of their way to help, although, because of cultural differences, these attempts either don't work or are sometimes resented by Aboriginals. And the Aboriginals as persons are human and not without their faults. One comes away from the movie vowing to be more sympathetic for difference but also understanding the difficulties involved in this attempt, even among well meaning people.

The movie also shows other aspects of traditional Aboriginal culture, translated into a fringe setting: reciprocity, extended kinship, close emotional ties, their views of work, and even a connection to past traditions of mobility as hunters and gatherers.

1. What values do you see being displayed by Aboriginals and whites in the film?
2. What prejudice do you see in the film?
3. What changes are necessary, do you think, for an Aborigine to work in a Western environment?
4. How are characteristics such as reciprocity and extended kinship shown in the film?
5. What do you think about the reaction of the young daughter burning the clothes?
6. How do you feel at the end of the film, hopeful or not? Does the film lead you to believe that Aboriginals and white Australians can live in community?
7. What structural changes would have to be made to create mutual interdependence among the groups?
8. Can you relate the differences in worldviews between white Australians and Aboriginals to the same differences between Native Americans and whites in America?
9. What are the similarities and differences in the discrimination against African Americans?

Exercise Three: Ethnic Differences in America

Two very good and accessible books, from which one could choose chapters to read, are *American Indian Stories*, by Zitkala-Sa, and *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, by Maxine Hong Kingston.

American Indian Stories is a collection of stories written about the life of the author growing up in a Native American community, and then going off to a school run by whites for Indians. Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin) does an excellent job in bringing to life the cultural clash faced by her and the differences in values of the two cultures. Gertrude Simmons Bonnin was certainly successful in her life, so this is not a bitter account of what happened to her, but a sensitively told one about how it felt as a child and adolescent to be taken from her culture into a radically different one.

1. Look at the major episodes of Zitkala-Sa's early life with her mother and with the Dakota people; what are the values and what is the worldview that she learned during this period?
2. Talk about her experience going off to the eastern school. What values and worldview did she find there? After staying at the school, how did this affect her relationship with her mother?
3. One of the cherished values of American families has long been the education of the young, and one of the driving goals for many American families has been to see that the new generation is better educated than the older one. Talk about the role that education plays in the lives of people caught between two cultures.

Maxine Hong Kingston talks about the cultural conflict in her Chinese-American family in terms of a mother-daughter clash, with the mother still deeply immersed in traditional Chinese values, and the daughter trying to navigate her way in the larger American society.

1. Many families give their children double (that is, contradictory) messages. For Maxine Kingston this seems an agonizing consequence of being a first-generation Chinese-American. "Even now" Kingston writes in the "White Tigers" chapter (pp. 19-53), "China wraps double binds around my feet." Discuss how Kingston develops, in this chapter, the idea of the "double bind" imposed on her by her family.
2. Focusing on "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe" (pp. 182-209), discuss how Kingston develops the idea that growing up in a family caught between two cultures created an almost unbearable confusion in the children of that family.
3. Looking at these and other stories (like *No Name Woman*), see what values are in conflict for these people in the clash between traditional Chinese and American cultures.

Exercise Four: African-Americans and Prejudice

There are a host of suitable readings for this topic. Because of her connection with Rollins, I recommend Maya Angelou, perhaps reading her classic, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, or she has a sound recording out, "Wouldn't Take Nothing for my Journey Now."

This is a good point to talk about prejudice and how it comes about. Recent research contradicts the view that some people--thought to be rigid, repressed and authoritarian--are prejudice while others are not. Cognitive psychology has shown that we all use concepts--shorthand categories--in our thinking, and by the age of five, all of us have picked up the stereotypes about race, gender, etc. The difference between those who act out of prejudice and those who do not is not that the one group holds stereotypical views while the other does not, but rather the latter group has a conscious check on unacceptable thoughts. These people quickly note and reject the stereotype and attempt to evaluate independently of these categories. Even minorities have stereotypes, and often the stereotype against another minority is more hostile and flagrant than whites have of that group (See "Racial dynamics tear L.A.'s cultural identity," in *The Orlando Sentinel*, Sunday, June 7, 1998, Section G, pp 1,5).

Good intentions are not enough to overcome prejudice since behavior often follows the lead of the unconscious stereotypes. Most kids grow up learning the ambiguity found in society: the clearly stated ideal of justice and fairness, as well as the prejudicial stereotypes, which lurk on a subterranean level. And so we mouth ideals and too often act out of prejudice. It may be that the only way to overcome these inadequate cognitive categories is through structural change. When a mutual interdependence is created between two parties, the possibility is created in the space of interaction to create new categories of thought.

1. How prejudice do you think that America is? Have you noticed any prejudice in yourself?
2. Do you think that all Americans, no matter whether in the dominant culture or not, are prejudiced?
3. Do you directly depend on a person of another race or ethnic background? Has that interaction in any way changed your attitudes and feelings about that group?
4. Have you seen any community action or programs that seem to improve racial and ethnic relations?
5. How much of American society would have to change until we could gain a sense of community? What are the most necessary changes?

Exercise Five: Fried Green Tomatoes

This is a good movie to discuss all kinds of prejudice, from racial to homophobic (as there is at least an implied lesbian relationship), and the possibilities of community in spite of difference.

1. Do you think a community was formed, perhaps even a kind of extended family? Describe it and say whether you think it was a healthy community.
2. How did it become a community? Were there structural as well as other social elements that supported the community? Was there mutual interdependence?
3. Can community go too far? Are there potential dangers in community? Is an in-group and out-group evident in the film?