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**FREEDOM, COMMUNITY AND TRANSCENDENCE:
A COMPARISON OF SELECT WESTERN AND INDIAN THINKERS**

by

Vasanthi Srinivasan

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Political Science
Carleton University
Ottawa, Canada
October 1997

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ABSTRACT

FREEDOM, COMMUNITY AND TRANSCENDENCE: A COMPARISON OF SELECT WESTERN AND INDIAN THINKERS

The dream of community has come to haunt contemporary political discourse across different states and societies. In the name of indigenous traditions, cultural authenticity, religious and moral values, there are recurring demands for the retrieval and recognition of common goods. This thesis probes the spiritual and philosophical sources animating the current summons to community. Among contemporary western writers, I focus on Charles Taylor because he uncovers the potential for community from within liberal modernity. While Taylor's expressivist recasting of modernity deserves serious attention, I argue that the accent on authentic cultural and linguistic identities is problematic. I highlight some problems by focusing on Indian writers such as Ashis Nandy who reject liberal secularism and modernity in favour of authentic indigenous traditions.

In view of these relativistic implications, I return to some key thinkers such as Hegel and Gandhi. Focusing on Hegel's notion of modern ethical life, I clarify the transcultural and 'exemplary validity' of modern civil society and the constitutional state. While recognising the salience of intermediary associations and communal bonds, Hegel foregrounds trust and civility rather than patriotic enthusiasm. Contra Indian communitarians who object to the 'secular' bias of liberal modernity, Hegel's reconstruction of the Protestant roots of modern freedom is both promising and problematic. While Hegel's account of the spiritual bases of modern ethical life is insightful, his analysis of faith as 'mere feeling' towards the 'absolute' obscures the paradox of immanence-transcendence encrusted in spiritual experience. As such, his reconciliation between the spiritual and the secular needs to be rethought.

By way of Radhakrishnan's analysis of spiritual experience and Gandhi's practise of spiritual politics, I highlight the tensional character of faith. Through the *Bhagavad Gita* symbol of disinterested action, Gandhi shows that faith and trust emanate from the human quest for the ground of being. This quest reveals our situatedness in the *metaxy* or 'in-between' immanence and transcendence, ignorance and wisdom, life and death. Hence, for Gandhi, freedom is not only about gaining recognition but also about transcending pairs of opposites rooted in the ego-self. Similarly, community is not only about preserving unique indigenous traditions but also about reenacting the tension of belonging and not-belonging. A similar openness to the human quest for the eternal makes Althusius' design of covenantal federalism instructive for our search for community. Gandhi and Althusius invite us to explore the communal potential within liberalism and modernity not only in terms of historical or cultural situatedness but also in terms of the human quest for the transhistorical (non)ground of existence.

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Needless to say, I am solely responsible for all the gaps and flaws that remain in this thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

The dream of community has come to haunt contemporary political discourse across different states and societies. In the name of indigenous forms of life, authenticity, religious and moral values, social justice, participatory democracy, there are recurring demands for the retrieval and 'recognition' of common goods. The discovery of the common good is nothing new within political philosophy. Aristotle clarifies at the very beginning of the Politics that every city is a partnership aimed at the comprehensive good of justice. What is new is the extraordinary emphasis on history and culture in articulating comprehensive accounts of the human good. While the desire for community is phrased in terms of 'restoring or 'recovering' a larger order, such a larger order of nature or cosmos is seen as a historical and social construct open to 'interpretation' and 'contestation.' Some radical proponents pursue historicity and finitude all the way and declare the 'impossibility' of community.¹

Like every other discourse, the discourse on community is marked by the crises and contradictions of our

¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, The Inoperative Community, ed. Peter Connor, trans. Peter Connor and others (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 27.

time. On the one hand, contemporary communitarians like Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre echo the growing disenchantment with the modern ideal of autonomy and the politics of rights. On the other hand, the above-mentioned communitarians also embrace important facets of modern self-understanding since Hegel; the centrality of recognition in the works of Charles Taylor or the accent on immanent critique in the writings of MacIntyre, to mention a few examples, reflect the continuity between modern thought and communitarian arguments. By uncovering how we are 'always already' situated in specific languages and traditions, we are called upon to recognise and rearticulate some common goods.

The salience of history and culture stems from two sources: one, the disenchantment with Cartesian reason and the growing affirmation of our location in Universal History or several contingent histories; two, the continuing encounter and ambiguous fascination with the spiritual practices of indigenous, non-modern and archaic peoples. The relentless deconstruction of reason's claims to autonomy in modern western thought, alongside the prodigious effort at understanding and preserving non-western and non-modern cultures reverberate in the current summons to community. Curiously, just as we rediscover diverse horizons that

redeem us from 'existential thrownness', we are also exhorted to acknowledge that such horizons and practices are contextual and time-bound. Whether it is animated by liberal or conservative or radical concerns, whether the philosophical source is modern or postmodern, current communitarian discourse avers that the ground of commonality is 'finitude' of being.

In this dissertation, I raise some doubts as to whether cultural and historical specificity is the only way by which we can articulate the meaning of community and recast modern freedom. When an Upanishadic sage declares, "This is my self within the heart, smaller than a grain of rice. . . . This is my self within the heart, greater than the earth, greater than the atmosphere, greater than the sky, greater than all these worlds . . . This is the self of mine within the heart, this is *Brahman*", is he simply recording an experience that is culturally specific? Is he not also expressing an experience of transcendence that nourishes the human search for the ground of existence? Is the desire for the eternal simply lost to us as moderns? Is it merely idle curiosity that motivates modern reason's desire to document and preserve ancient and archaic cultures and traditions? What is the meaning of these returns and

recollections for the present desire to reconcile individual freedom and communal belonging?

These questions are posed not from an abstract standpoint but from within the arguments made in favour of authentic identity or indigenous traditions. To clarify this point, I provide a brief review of the substantive issues emanating from communitarian debates in two different contexts, namely in the west and in India. Following this, I explicate the main sources and general arguments guiding the present inquiry.

The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism

Although the liberal-communitarian debate is not the only terrain upon which the question of community is discussed in the west, it provides a good starting point in setting forth some seminal themes. Following Rawls's recasting of a social contractarian account of justice, Michael Sandel launched an attack on the 'unencumbered self' of liberalism.² It may be recalled that Rawls advocated the priority of rights on the ground that the principles of justice are to be settled prior to and independent of

² Michael Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self," in Communitarianism and Individualism, ed. Shlomo Avineri and Avner De-Shalit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 12-28.

particular notions of the good like the satisfaction of desire or human excellence.³ This is so because notions of the good vary between persons and are valid only in particular circumstances.

Contra Rawls, Sandel argued that the privileging of right over the good assumes an autonomous, willing subject as the author of moral and political principles. The priority thesis drives a wedge between the 'person' that an individual is and the values and ends that constitute her being. By positing a voluntaristic, impartial and disinterested standpoint from which moral agents formulate universal principles, liberalism obscures the communal contexts which constitute individual choice. In this sense, liberal neutrality regarding ends conceals the historical specificity of its own preference for rights over the good.⁴ Alongside liberal neutrality, communitarians also targeted the

³ Rawls specifies two principles of justice: one, each person has an equal right to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic rights and liberties, which scheme is compatible with a similar scheme for all. Two, social and economic equalities are to satisfy two conditions: first, they must be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and, second, they must be to the greatest benefit of the least disadvantaged members of a society. See John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical" in Communitarianism and Individualism, 191.

⁴ Michael Sandel, "The Procedural Republic," 15-20. A similar critique emerges in Alasdair MacIntyre. See Alasdair MacIntyre, Whose Justice? Which Rationality? (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1988), 335 & 345.

procedural basis of liberal democracy. In Sandel's view, proceduralism undermines the democratic and republican promise of liberalism and is thus incapable of securing liberty.⁵

This critique elicited some powerful rebuttals and restatements from both sides. Rawls was quick to point out that his theory of liberal justice was 'political, not metaphysical'.⁶ He clarified that his theory draws upon intuitions implicit within the public culture and institutions of modern constitutional democracy. Given the plurality of comprehensive moral doctrines, the primacy of rights and the 'difference' principle underwrite an 'overlapping consensus.'⁷

Although the communitarian critique did not succeed in undermining Rawls's defense of rights, it propelled a recasting of liberal autonomy, neutrality and proceduralism in terms of shared understandings. Liberal writers now affirm the influence of society and culture in choosing and pursuing life plans even while questioning the 'consti-

⁵ Michael Sandel, "The Procedural Republic," 27. See also Michael Sandel, Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996).

⁶ Rawls, "Justice as Fairness," 187-189.

⁷ Rawls, "Justice as Fairness," 189.

tutive' status of specific cultures. For instance, Will Kymlicka concedes that intermediary associations and special cultural rights are crucial in fostering individual autonomy without compromising the principle of state neutrality with respect to the good life.⁸ In other words, the relative priority of rights over the collective pursuit of common ends does not presuppose subjectivism or scepticism regarding goods but only the complexity and plurality of moral sources.⁹ Liberals such as Dworkin affirm the ethical importance of enhanced identification with a political community without jettisoning liberal rights and neutrality regarding substantive goods.¹⁰ In a similar vein, Habermas has reconstructed procedural liberalism in terms of the immanent potential for discursive justification of norms.

On the communitarian side, there has been renewed attention to the potential for solidarity within liberalism. Michael Walzer and Charles Taylor explicitly recognise that the right to associations, federalism and constitutionalism

⁸ William Kymlicka, "The Rights of Minority Cultures: Reply to Kukathos," Political Theory 20, no.1 (February 1992): 140-146.

⁹ Stephen Macedo, "Freedom, Autonomy and Community," in Liberal Virtues: Citizenship, Virtue and Community in Liberal Constitutionalism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 208-210.

¹⁰ Ronald Dworkin, "Liberal Community," in Communitarianism and Individualism, 217.

are crucial in reconciling freedom and community.¹¹ Further, there is a nuanced understanding of the tension between our location in 'thick' moral communities and our search for 'thin' or minimal moral standards.¹²

As a result of the more differentiated understanding of both liberal autonomy and community, there has been considerable blurring of the boundaries between liberals and communitarians. What persists is the profound suspicion among liberals of any robust notion of community and the Rousseauian enthusiasm among communitarians for participatory democracy and cultural identity.¹³ What unites both sides is the immanentisation of moral and spiritual sources underlying both the liberal aspiration to autonomy and the

¹¹ Michael Walzer, "The Concept of Civil Society," in Towards a Global Civil Society (Providence, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1995), 7-27; Michael Sandel, Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy; Charles Taylor, "Invoking Civil Society," in Philosophical Arguments (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 204-224.

¹² Michael Walzer, Thick and Thin: Moral Arguments at Home and Abroad (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press: 1994), 4-7.

¹³ Many liberal writers are wary of the intolerance unleashed by moral communities against women and minorities. See Amy Gutman, "The Communitarian Critics of Liberalism," and Marilyn Friedman "Feminism and Modern Friendship," in Communitarianism and Individualism, 132-133 and 109-110. George Kateb contends that communitarianism attempts to 'enlist people into projects and make them docile.' See George Kateb, The Inner Ocean: Individualism and Democratic Culture (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), 229-230.

communitarian attempt to recover constitutive bonds. If liberals appeal to a reflexive justification of norms and institutions, communitarians highlight the centrality of historically acquired understandings in shaping norms. The distrust of Kantian transcendentalism and the accent on immanent reason threatens to eclipse one issue that emerges, if only faintly, in the call for community--that is, the status of the human quest for transcendence in renegotiating freedom and belonging.¹⁴

¹⁴ At one level, the search for transcendence has been expressed in terms of the need for recovering religion. Writers like Richard Neuhaus bemoan the 'naked public square' and the erosion of spiritual meanings in the American context. At the same time, Neuhaus is clear that the 'naked public square' cannot be rectified through 'naked religion' or even 'civil religion.' The question is one of infusing public discourse with the meanings explored in churches or spiritual settings. See Richard Neuhaus, "From Providence to Privacy: Religion and the Redefinition of America," in Unsecular America (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1986), 60-64. See also Robert Bellah and others, eds., Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 219-249. At another level, the notion of transcendence itself has to be clarified given the pervasive scepticism and distrust regarding 'foundationalism' in general and metaphysics and religion in particular. In this context, I have followed Voegelin's usage of transcendence as a 'directional index' of the experience of divine reality expressed in religious symbols and myths. As such, transcendence cannot be hypostatized into an immanent entity. It can only be accessed by way of reflective inquiry which to some extent, participates in the divine reality that gave rise to symbols in the first place. See Eric Voegelin, "The Beginning and the Beyond," in What is History and other Late Unpublished Writings (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1990), 173, 179 & 118-190. Hence, I try to steer clear of religious doctrine or dogma while analysing some Hindu symbols in my analysis of Gandhi. This point is clarified below and also in each chapter.

The Spiritual Sources of Communitarianism

This rapprochement occludes the substantive issues that lend the communitarian case its persuasive appeal: firstly, the argument for historical situatedness and traditions arises from a larger questioning about the claims of freedom within modern western thought. The communitarian attack on Kant takes us back to a rich tradition stemming from Hegel and Rousseau. What is involved is not simply a pragmatic defense of liberal freedom but a recovery of the moral and spiritual sources underpinning this ideal and its attendant institutions.

Hegel accomplishes this task by uncovering the Protestant Christian spirit informing modern ethical life. Confronted with other cultures, Hegel argues for modern ethical life and subjective freedom in terms of its relationship to the 'absolute' religion of Christianity. Even when this claim to 'absoluteness' is suspended within contemporary thinkers, the appeal to unique identities (as in Taylor) or the glory of new beginnings (as in Arendt) hark back to Christian sources. In my view, the meaning of situatedness or traditions cannot be clarified independently of these explorations into spiritual sources.

Second, communitarian arguments also signal the possibility of a renewed dialogue with non-western and non-

Christian thinkers. At one level, communitarian themes like authenticity and indigenous traditions have rendered liberal autonomy and tolerance problematic even outside the west. In India, this has spawned intense debates around liberal secularism and the need to recover 'religious tolerance.'¹⁵ Despite the anti-west polemic that runs through current espousals of religious tolerance or indigenous community in India, there is a common agenda oriented to combating atomism and revitalising civil society.

At another level, some thinkers like Gandhi and Radhakrishnan engage with individual freedom and community from within Hindu notions of spirituality. On the face of it, this might appear to be an exercise strictly relevant to the Indian context. But a careful exegesis of the symbols deployed shows that they are trying to resymbolise the experience of the human search for the cosmic whole. For instance, Gandhi's *swadeshi* or appeal to indigenous traditions is not so much about preserving a unique Hindu identity but about forging communities that reflect man's

¹⁵ See Ashis Nandy, "The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance," Alternatives XIII, no. 2 (April 1988): 177-194; T.N. Madan, "Religion in India," Daedalus, 118, no.4 (Fall 1989): 115-146; T.N.Madan, "Whither Indian Secularism?" in Modern Asian Studies 27, no. 3 (1993): 667-697. The debate over secularism is not peculiar to India. Eric Voegelin, George Grant, Richard Neuhaus, Daniel Bell, Robert Bellah, Glenn Tinder, to mention a few western thinkers, also highlight the problematic character of the notion of secularism.

participation in a divine reality. In other words, the question is not one of defending Hindu 'culture' against western and/or Christian incursions; rather it is about illuminating modern freedom and community in terms of man's search for transcendence.

In a nutshell, the current summons for community and authenticity both within the west and India signifies more than a contingent accommodation of cultures within a liberal scheme of rights. When we turn our attention to the philosophical and religious voices which resonate in communitarian writings like Hegel, Rousseau or Gandhi, it is clear that the meaning of a larger order of nature or history or cosmos itself needs to be reconstructed.

In this inquiry, I have attempted such a reconstruction by way of the writings of Charles Taylor, Radhakrishnan, Hegel, Gandhi and Althusius. All these thinkers explore both individual freedom and community from within modernity in different ways.¹⁶ Although Gandhi and Althusius

¹⁶ Although there is much controversy over defining modernity, it is clear that this enterprise involves the authority of reason over tradition, the rise of the nation-state, the scientific investigation of nature, the emphasis on natural rights and universal dignity, the role of free market economy, a belief in the perfectibility of mankind, a commitment to Christian humanist virtues like sympathy, tolerance, charity, prudence and so forth. Following Robert Pippin, I have focused on modernity mostly as a philosophical problem. As such, the social and cultural concerns expressed by some communitarian writers are situated within the larger presuppositions about the self, freedom and human sociality.

do not explicitly endorse modernity (in fact, Gandhi denounces modern civilisation as 'satanic' and Althusius writes against Bodin's notion of sovereignty at the very dawn of modernity), I think their insights on community are highly instructive precisely because of this ambivalence.

Traditions, Tensions and Dialogue

Given that western thinkers like Hegel often return to Christianity and Indian thinkers to Hinduism, this analysis is pervaded by the tension intrinsic to divergent traditions and symbolisations.¹⁷ For instance, Hegel tries

As Pippin clarifies, this philosophical bias is not rooted in a large scale claim about philosophy but because social and cultural problems are often mirrored economically and dramatically in philosophical works. See Robert Pippin, Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 4-9.

¹⁷ In this disseration, I am not concerned with the commensurability or incommensurability between Christianity and Hinduism per se but with the tensions that arise in the way some modern western and Indian thinkers tap into their spiritual sources in defining freedom and community. It may be objected that the tensions that arise between Hegel (and modern west) and Gandhi, for instance, are suggestive of an incommensurability between Christianity and Hinduism in general. Given that some Christian motifs like creation ex nihilo or divine revelation in history get secularised in modern western thought, the tensions arising between Gandhi and Hegel may be suggestive of a deep hiatus between Christianity and Hinduism. This should not obscure the fact that modern thought draws from Protestant Christianity and eventually supersedes it. In addressing these tensions, I have focused on the philosophical sources rather than doctrinal or theological arguments. Here, I have relied upon two scholars who approach religious symbols in terms of the experiential structures, namely Mircea Eliade and Eric Voegelin. For Voegelin, the decisive advance

to reconcile freedom and community in terms of a phenomenological account of the will. He often invokes the Christian principle of subjectivity, the Protestant notion of calling and the progressive unfolding of Universal Spirit in History to defend modern freedom and constitutional state. In contrast, Gandhi alludes to freedom in terms of self-renunciation and disinterested action. In comparison to Hegel, Gandhi's route appears both other-worldly and pre-modern.

However, Radhakrishnan and Gandhi approach Hindu symbols not as doctrines but as expressions of the experience of participation in a divine reality. Clarifying the experience encrusted in the symbols calls for a meditative reflection upon their meaning. For instance, disinterested action is not a divine command to be obeyed

of Judaeo-Christian tradition consists in the fact that it achieves a more differentiated symbolisation of the experience of man's search for the extra-cosmic ground of being. In contrast, Hindu symbols either remain at the level of compact cosmological myths or breakthrough to a questioning ascent towards the extra-cosmic ground (as in the Upanishads) but do not quite arrive. At the same time, Voegelin realises that the experience of divine reality symbolised in the latter do not become obsolete with the advent of Christianity. See Eric Voegelin, "Anxiety and Reason" in Late Unpublished Writings, 78-79 & 98. Eliade too highlights the paradoxical experience of the divine suggested in some Hindu symbols. He is more attracted to the Hindu search for a trans-historical freedom while living and acting in the world. Eliade's experiential analysis also bypasses the debilitating dichotomy of Hinduism versus Christianity or modernity without denying the differences.

nor a categorical imperative of a transcendental subject. It is the experience of one who is attuned to the eternal or the *brahman* for only then can one act as if one were a spectator or witness of one's own actions. In the Hindu vision, one who acts disinterestedly enjoys absolute freedom even while engaged in action. Here, freedom is not about determining the will but about being attuned to that which is eternal.

Like many religious symbols, disinterested action reflects the paradoxical nature of the human search for divine perfection. Gandhi's 'spiritual' politics attempts to reenact this paradoxical experience. Through non-violence or non-possession, he recalls the 'in-between' character of human existence. Such labels like 'other-worldly' or 'self-negating' obscure the structure of this experience. Gandhi's politics recollects man's situatedness in-between ignorance and wisdom, life and death, suffering and bliss, immanence and transcendence.

From this standpoint, Gandhi neither rejects modern freedom nor the institutions of constitutionalism that flow from the latter. He relentlessly explores ways of deepening freedom and self-determination in terms of man's search for the ground of being. Similarly, he does not cling to indigenous traditions like the caste system at the cost of

universal freedom and dignity. Rather, he assesses traditional norms and communities in terms of their openness to the pursuit of the eternal. In other words, Gandhi is neither trying to elevate the uniqueness of Hindu institutions against modern norms nor is he pursuing a pragmatic reconciliation between the two. His notion of spiritual politics emphasises man's search for transcendence as the test of extant norms and institutions.

How far does this search for transcendence resonate within the western thinkers who figure in my analysis? Even if we concede that what Gandhi and Radhakrishnan have to say on freedom and community is relevant across cultures, we are left with the question of whether there is a possibility of their being heard elsewhere. In many ways, Hegel is our guide and obstacle in reopening the dialogue with Indian thinkers.

Hegel is our guide because he attempts to defend modern ethical life in the family, civil society and constitutional state as anchored in Protestant spirituality. This does not mean a theocratic state nor a civil religion in Hegel. The inner reason of modern ethical life builds upon the principle of subjective freedom and universal equality which, for Hegel, constitute the core of Christianity. Modern ethical life, in Hegel's view, not only

makes room for faith but also elevates the basic principle of Christianity, i.e., the infinite worth of the individual, to a higher level. The irrevocable nature of subjective freedom and rights has had to be endorsed by Indian thinkers in the hermeneutic encounter with Christianity.

What about the search for the cosmic and extra-cosmic ground of being suggested in Gandhi's spiritual politics? Is modern reason in general and Hegel's ethical life in particular receptive to this quest? On the surface, the answer appears to be negative given the systematic disenchantment of the world in modern science and philosophy. Hegel's notion of the Universal Spirit comes to fruition in History rather than the cosmos or nature. After Hegel, the reliance on Universal History has been radicalised giving way to many contingent histories whether it is in hermeneutics or deconstruction. One of the persistent problems with the focus on historical or cultural situatedness is that it bypasses the human search for transcendence. The search for the cosmic or extra-cosmic ground of being is now said to be constituted by specific languages and horizons. Does this mean that there can be no dialogue with thinkers like Gandhi?

I think there are some indications both within modern reason and Hegel's thought that provide glimmers of hope. To

begin with Hegel first, it is instructive to probe the role of trust in his political thought. Hegel refers to trust in the context of his argument for intermediary associations or corporations. Although he rarely elaborates the link between trust and the Protestant notion of calling, he recognises the spiritual sources of trust. Hegel sees that trust exudes an openness to the unknown and is analogous to faith. Despite his understanding of trust and faith as mere feelings to be superseded in absolute knowledge, Hegel makes room for both. By focusing on the larger context of the civil society and the constitutional state, I argue that Hegel's analysis of trust and rectitude provides a starting point in initiating a dialogue with Gandhi's spiritual politics. For Gandhi too, trust plays a pivotal role in man's search for freedom and community.

Similarly, modern reason too shows some signs that the experience of transcendence embedded in some religious symbols is not completely irrelevant to the contemporary search for community. Notwithstanding the claim to autonomy, modern reason has unleashed a return to the 'preconceptual,' 'prelinguistic' or 'primordial' 'something' that reveals itself, if only darkly and sporadically (specially in phenomenology, hermeneutics and deconstruction). The anxiety with respect to the 'primordial' is best reflected in the

prodigious effort at possessing and documenting the symbols and experiences of different civilisations. Such excursions into exotic cultures is one way of resisting the burden of historicity and recovering the quest for the eternal.¹⁸

Freedom, Community and The Tension of Existence

At a general level, the arguments in this thesis are inspired by the thought of Eric Voegelin and Mircea Eliade. Both thinkers pay attention to the spiritual experiences embedded in cultural and language symbols. Voegelin demonstrates that the quest for a meaningful order cannot be defined in an abstract theoretical manner. In this respect, he would endorse the views of Taylor and other communitarians influenced by hermeneutics. At the same time, Voegelin resists the valorising cultural and historical situatedness. In his view, 'philosophising is, in essence the interpretation of experiences of transcendence.'¹⁹ This does not mean restoring doctrinal truths or salvational techniques. It means understanding mythical and religious symbols in terms of their openness to the ground of being.

¹⁸ This insight comes from Mircea Eliade. See Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper, 1959), 136-137.

¹⁹ Eric Voegelin, Anamnesis (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 36.

The ground of being is not an entity or truth apart from the consciousness and language symbols that express it. However, it is not solely constituted by human consciousness, subjective or intersubjective. Voegelin explicates the peculiar structure of this experience of the ground in terms of Metaxy or the in-betweenness of human existence; man is in-between ignorance and wisdom, perfection and imperfection, life and death, immanence and transcendence. As such, human consciousness and language 'participate in the paradox of a quest' where reality becomes visible both as an object intended but also as the larger mystery within which consciousness occurs.²⁰

Eliade too highlights the paradoxical character of the human search for meaningful order. Undaunted by the diffuseness or alienness of Hindu symbols or myths, Eliade analyses them as expressions of the human search for meaning. Unlike those who argue that such symbols are culture-specific, Eliade argues that they express 'typical human situations and form an integral part of the history of the spirit.'²¹ Apart from his insightful exegesis of some

²⁰ Voegelin, "The Beginning of the Beginning," in Order and History, vol. v, In Search of Order (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 15-16.

²¹ Mircea Eliade, The Two and the One, trans. J.M Cohen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 12.

Hindu symbols, Eliade's attention to the persistence of some mythical and archaic motifs within modern reason has inspired the present inquiry.

In the light of the writings of these two thinkers, I have attempted to explicate the communitarian longing as a quest for meaningful order. As it is currently articulated, the communitarian case both in the west and India emphasises cultural and historical specificity and authentic identity. While this recognition of situatedness is an advance over archimedian accounts of modern freedom, it is also highly problematic.

The main precursor to the current communitarian discourse is Hegel who, nevertheless, resists cultural specificity. Hegel proceeds to reconstruct modern freedom in terms of its spiritual and metaphysical roots. His notion of ethical life uncovers the potential for solidarity from within modern freedom. Anchoring community in the corporations and constitutional state, Hegel uncovers how the modern ideal of freedom as self-determination and recognition can foster civility, trust and rectitude. These latter are not simply formal attitudes but require us to grasp the inner reason and spirituality embedded in modern norms and institutions. In the context of the relativism and fragmentation engendered by cultural identity, I think

Hegel's reconstruction of the spiritual side of modern freedom deserves to be reappropriated and enriched.

As already clarified, this does not mean resurrecting doctrinal religion. It means probing the possibilities of recovering and resymbolising the experiences embedded in both Christian and non-Christian symbols. I investigate the writings of Gandhi as well as Althusius in elaborating the political contours of such resymbolisation. I argue that Gandhi's notion of *swaraj* or self-rule and *swadeshi* or indigenous community as well as Althusius design of societal federalism provide some clues in carving out a 'theocentric liberalism' or liberalism open to the human search for meaningful order.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter two examines the notion of community and common good in the writings of Charles Taylor. While being critical of Cartesian modernity, Taylor wants to retrieve the moral and spiritual sources animating modern ideals like the affirmation of ordinary life over a higher life, of freedom over hierarchical status and efficient and responsible control of nature. Returning to the Romantic tradition exemplified in Rousseau and Herder, Taylor attempts to recast these ideals in terms of authentic

identity. In his view, freedom implies discovering and articulating 'one's original way of being.' Since this ideal entails dialogue within a common horizon of meanings embedded in one's own language and culture, he contends that modern freedom has to recognise some constitutive goods like cultural identity. Against the postmodern rejection of modern ideals, Taylor's effort to recover the spiritual bases of modernity is important. At the same time, I argue that Taylor's recasting of modern ideals neglects the tensions intrinsic to affirming ordinary life or making the inner self or culture the locus of spiritual experience. Anticipating the succeeding chapters, I trace the problems with Taylor's case for unique identities to the emphasis on immanence and the eclipse of transcendence in man's search for a meaningful order.

In the third chapter, I examine the Indian variants of communitarianism which invariably revolve around the themes of 'spiritual politics' and indigenous traditions. Stepping beyond the current anti-west and anti-modern polemic, I probe the writings of Radhakrishnan who explores Hindu spirituality in terms of an intuitive experience of the whole. Attuned to the openness to the cosmic and trans-cosmic ground of being that animates Hindu symbols, Radhakrishnan neither exalts indigenous traditions nor modern

institutions uncritically. He realises that Hindu spirituality implies recasting both freedom and community in terms of man's openness to the pursuit of the eternal. However, I argue that his recasting of the Hindu vision of absolute freedom and a spiritual community in terms of a 'cosmic evolution' towards 'universal salvation' remains at the prophetic level. Besides, Hindu symbols do not easily lend themselves to such an eschatological transformation. Moreover, Radhakrishnan does not engage with the complex issues thrown up by modern rights and constitutionalism in integrating spiritual experience embodied in Hindu symbols.

One of the sources of both Taylor's vision and somewhat obliquely, Radhakrishnan's, is Hegel. The fourth chapter is devoted to a detailed analysis of Hegel's political thought. While anticipating several concerns voiced by current communitarians like the threat of atomistic fragmentation and erosion of solidary bonds in modern civil society, Hegel does not endorse a Rousseauian republican antidote to modern individualism. Hegel is wary of participatory enthusiasms generated by unique identities and moral communities. He wants to recover the potential for community from within modern freedom rather than by compromising it. I argue that Hegel's corporations and constitutional order suggest what it means to forge solidarity

within modernity. Hegel demonstrates that the distortions engendered by the modern pursuit of recognition can be mitigated by understanding that recognition is meaningful only because it is tied up with rectitude and trust. Restoring community then implies recovering civility and trust rather than strong cultural bonds.

Neither civility nor trust is a purely formal virtue in Hegel: at one level, corporations and constitutionalism evoke trust because they guarantee recognition of particular interests; at another level, trust and civility emanate from an insight into the ethical and spiritual sources of modern institutions. In this respect, constitutions and corporations are sites where individuals strive to remember and reconstruct the human openness to the divine.

Hegel emphasises the first version of trust when he highlights how modern constitutional state recognises the right to particularity. The second version of trust glimmers in Hegel's larger argument for modern ethical life in the family, civil society and constitutional state as the embodiment of the principles underlying Protestant Christianity. However, Hegel does not fully grasp the structure of the experience underlying faith or trust. In this context, I argue that Hegel's account of the spiritual

bases of modern institutions needs to be deepened in terms of the existential sources of trust and faith.

This concern leads into the analysis of Gandhi's spiritual politics in chapter five. Focusing on the Hindu symbol of disinterested action, Gandhi evolves a notion of trusteeship. Trusteeship, as a mode of being rooted in the human search for the whole, recasts both individual freedom and community. For Gandhi, freedom is not only about recognition but about the longing for transcending space and time. The paradigmatic community is of 'seers and sages' who stand both within and outside traditions. Gandhi does not reject embodied existence or culture but illuminates them in terms of our mysterious participation in both the human and the divine. Gandhi sees disinterested action as one mode of expressing this openness. Attuned to the whole, a disinterested actor acts as if he were only a trustee or spectator. Although this might seem fanciful or cryptic, I argue that one can see faint echoes of this notion of disinterestedness in Arendt's figure of the spectator-judge in her attempt to mitigate the contingencies of modern freedom. After clarifying Gandhi's appeal to detached action and how he would rebut Hegel's critique of the same, I probe the political implications. I think that Gandhi's notions of *swaraj* or self-rule and *swadeshi* or indigenous community

furnish some clues about elevating liberal institutions and norms beyond struggles for recognition of individual or communal uniqueness to a search for the eternal.

In the sixth chapter, I explore the contours of a political order that is attuned to both Hegel's notion of trust as recognition and Gandhi's notion of trust as openness to the divine. Without pretending to evolve an architectonic design, I focus on the writings of Althusius. As the first critic of Bodin's model of sovereignty and as a proponent of associational federalism, Althusius is particularly instructive for our time. Based on the idea of politics as the 'art of pious and just symbiosis', Althusius builds a realm that encompasses a wide range of associations from the family to regional units. At every level, he articulates politics in terms of forging the 'symbiotic right' which strikes a balance between formal rules and substantive good. For Althusius, every association reflects not only the satisfaction of convergent interests but also the human desire for building 'almost' immortal institutions. Althusius here turns to the Judaeo-Christian symbol of the covenant. I argue that the covenant, for Althusius, is not a theological doctrine but an exemplar of the experience of partnership. As an archetypal symbol of the partnership between the human and the divine, it requires to

be continuously reenacted. This is why Althusius espouses a federal politics that is more than an intergovernmental distribution of powers. In my view, Althusius grasps that reviving intermediary associations involves rediscovering the experience of trust as the human openness to the divine. In this light, I argue that Althusius's realm captures the critical role of trust, friendship and civility in articulating a liberal order that mirrors both the desire for recognition (that Hegel emphasises) and our search for the eternal. Only by recovering the existential sources of civility and trust in different associations from the family to universities to constitutional states can we reappropriate the 'exemplary validity' of modern institutions.

The conclusion is devoted to a summary of the main arguments and a brief reiteration of the link between freedom, community and transcendence.

Chapter 2

CHARLES TAYLOR: EXPRESSIVISM AND THE POLITICS OF COMMUNITY

Introduction

Charles Taylor is one of the leading exponents of community autonomy in contemporary political philosophy. His thinking exemplifies an attempt to uncover the immanent potential for the common good within modernity.¹ Returning to the Romantic tradition amplified in Rousseau and Herder, Taylor contends that the modern ideal of freedom celebrates both individual self-fulfilment and community autonomy. In this chapter, I examine Taylor's reconstruction of the expressivist bases of modern identity and his attempt to surmount some of the malaises of liberal politics like atomism and instrumental reason via authenticity.

¹ While the question of modernity has been raised in cultural, social, historical terms, the most comprehensive formulations and assessments of modernity occur in the works of Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche and Heidegger. Following Robert Pippin, I confine myself to modernity as a 'philosophical problem' to focus on the presuppositions about the modern subject, self-consciousness, freedom, human sociality that emerge in the writings of some of these thinkers. As Pippin clarifies, the narrow focus is not based on "any large-scale claim about the centrality of philosophy . . . but because issues in philosophy often simply express most economically and most dramatically a variety of issues that pervade the social and cultural fabric, and philosophical language, if nothing else, can be an economical way of discussing a number of these issues." See Robert Pippin, Modernism as a Philosophical Problem, 8-9. As will be clear from the subsequent discussion, Taylor also reconstructs modernity in terms of the philosophical presuppositions about the subject, freedom, efficiency and so forth.

Taylor's endeavour to retrieve the spiritual and moral core underlying the modern project touches upon some of the key issues which surface in the liberal-communitarian debate. In the first instance, Taylor separates out the ontological issues of identity and community implicit within the communitarian critiques of liberalism from advocacy issues. He rightly points out that the attack on the 'unencumbered self' should not be confused with an espousal of 'family-like community' or with collectivism.² This distinction is useful in disentangling the question of individual freedom and community from rigid oppositions like rights versus the good.

Secondly, by recasting Rousseau, Herder and Hegel in the light of contemporary hermeneutics and philosophies of language, Taylor helps to situate communitarianism within larger debates regarding the nature of the willing subject, the role of traditions, the tension between universal dignity and authentic identity within modernity.³ In my view, Taylor's framing of the community question in terms of authenticity directs us not only to Rousseau and Hegel but

² Taylor, "Cross-Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate," in Philosophical Arguments, 182-183.

³ Although similar issues are germane to MacIntyre's work, I choose Taylor because of his focus on the communitarian potential within modernity.

also to Christianity. While Taylor relates authenticity to Augustinian inwardness and the Christian affirmation of ordinary life, the motif of uniqueness is also tied up with the Christian discovery of the will, as argued by Arendt.⁴ As such, themes like historical and cultural distinctness frequently voiced in communitarian discourse hark back to a spiritual source which is both promising and problematic. In concrete terms, Taylor's thought shows that the community question is not only about reclaiming moral goods but also about restoring the spiritual basis of modern freedom.⁵

This alertness to the spiritual roots of modern freedom provides an entry point in approaching some communitarian themes as they are formulated from within the Indian context. For the critique of modern individualism has triggered a return to indigenous traditions even outside the west. While there is undeniable affinity between the communitarian critiques emerging out of the west and India on issues like authenticity and the constitutive role of traditions, there is also an exploration of freedom in terms

⁴ I treat this issue in my analysis of Hegel's account of will and the problem of contingency of freedom. See Chapter, IV, 138-141.

⁵ In subsequent chapters, I explore this spiritual ground partly through Hegel's synthesis of Protestantism and modern ethical life and partly through Gandhi's experiments in spiritual politics.

of transcending history in thinkers like Gandhi. Such an exploration does not marginalise questions of freedom and community but illuminates them from the standpoint of the paradoxical experience of transcendence embedded in some Hindu symbols. I analyze the contours and implications of the recourse to Hindu notions of spirituality in the next few chapters. At this juncture, I wish to point out that Taylor's intervention paves the path for extending and deepening the issues emerging in the communitarian discourse.

My argumentative strategy in this chapter is two-fold: first, I examine the philosophical and religious sources underlying Taylor's notion of authenticity and his reconstruction of liberal politics; second, I raise some questions with respect to the hermeneutic ontology that guides Taylor's reinterpretation of modernity and liberal politics. While he is instructive in grasping some of the moral and spiritual aspects of the modern ideals of ordinary life and self-fulfilment, his accent on language and culture does not fully overcome the dangers of subjectivism and cultural relativism.

In other words, Taylor's attentiveness to the spiritual roots of modern freedom and self-fulfilment expands the communitarian controversy to something more than

an American angst over moral values. However, his preoccupation with 'how' we discover and articulate our identities in language and history eclipses the desire for transcendence animating the quest for a larger order. Although Taylor alludes to the 'extra-linguistic' or the 'transpersonal', this moment of spiritual experience is rarely explored in depth. As a result, there is the danger of an immanentisation of spiritual sources.

Taylor is aware of this problem even while he affirms the modern exploration of a larger order through personal resonance.⁶ At the same time, he is reconciled to the fact that a cosmic order of meanings is no more publicly available making it necessary for artist-seers to articulate 'original' visions of the cosmos through one's own creative imagination. But the question is whether the divine reality experienced and symbolised in cosmological myths becomes obsolete with the emergence of 'languages of personal resonance.' Here, the extra-ordinary adventures of modern reason in foraging archaic and non-western cultures can be seen as attempts to recollect a 'cosmos full of gods.'⁷

⁶ Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 510. This text is henceforth abbreviated as Sources.

⁷ Voegelin, "Anxiety and Reason", in Late Unpublished Writings, 84.

Taylor would probably concur with this observation. But this would also call for rethinking modern freedom not simply in terms of authentic historical or cultural situatedness but in terms of what it means to be situated in a cosmic whole and to seek the extra-cosmic ground of being.

I begin with a brief recapitulation of Taylor's narrative of modernity. Here I focus on the three facets of modern self-understanding that he isolates namely, the affirmation of ordinary life, universal freedom and efficiency. Taylor's main objective is to highlight the spiritual and moral sources of modern 'worldliness' and to show that it is not only about 'libido dominandi' but about 'stewardship' and an 'ethic of universal benevolence.'⁸ Taylor here alludes to Protestant notion of "detached affirmation." What are the implications of this paradoxical affirmation for Taylor's argument?

In the next two sections, I examine Taylor's notion of expressivism. Taylor praises Rousseau for the rediscovery of 'the inner voice of nature.' After Rousseau, freedom implies 'realising contact' with the inner world of feelings and sentiments. Taylor clarifies that this exercise is not monological but is constituted in terms of distinct

⁸ Charles Taylor, "An Iron Cage?" in The Malaise of Modernity (Ontario: Anansi, 1991), 104-105.

languages and cultures. But does he succeed in warding off the danger of subjectivism? Does expressivism equip us to grasp the moment of self-transcendence preserved in non-modern myths and symbols?

Whether it is the affirmation of ordinary life or inwardness, Taylor's main purpose is to disclose the potential for community within modernity. He pursues this task through a hermeneutic recasting of modern self-understandings. The spiritual sources underlying inwardness and worldliness can only be recollected from within distinct horizons delimited by culture and history. Neither authenticity nor ordinary life can be articulated monologically but only through dialogue. Dialogue reveals not only that individuals discover and express their identities within a communal context but also according to specific forms of life. Here I examine how Taylor addresses the problems of nationalist chauvinism and cultural relativism.

In the final section, I probe the political implications of Taylor's work. While admitting that modern liberalism presupposes some common goods like rule of law and rights, Taylor also espouses stronger patriotic attachments anchored in language and history. Given the problems with grounding liberal institutions in authentic identity, I

pursue Taylor's 'weak' version of the common good in terms of rule of law and rights. Here, I outline some themes (developed in subsequent chapters on Hegel and Althusius) that clarify the direction in which such a 'weak' version of community might proceed.

Taylor's Discourse of Modernity

Charles Taylor's preoccupation with individual freedom and community is shaped by a specific story about modernity. Tracing a middle path between the 'boosters' of modernity who uncritically affirm certain principles like universal dignity and individual freedom and the 'knockers' of modernity who lament the rupture with the ancients, Taylor evolves a nuanced account of three modern motifs, namely the affirmation of ordinary life, freedom and efficiency.⁹ Through an 'expressivist' reconstruction of these ideals, Taylor argues that modernity presupposes some common goods.

Taylor weaves his discourse around two notions, namely identity and recognition. The devaluation of status and rank within the modern world leads to a shift toward the individual and his or her dignity as the source of identity

⁹ Taylor, Malaise, 22-23.

and recognition.¹⁰ According to the notion of dignity, every individual is entitled to recognition in lieu of being a human being endowed with a capacity for freedom. But dignity is, in principle, applicable to all and does not take into account the differences between individuals.

Taylor contends that recognition based on dignity overlooks claims to uniqueness. Following Rousseau, Taylor claims that 'to be a self or to possess an identity is to be true to oneself, to one's own particular way of being.'¹¹ But this does not imply subjectivism because unique identities are formed and expressed in communal contexts. Hence the search for an authentic identity involves recognising and preserving distinct cultures. For Taylor, authenticity provides a way of reconciling both individual freedom and community.

The modern self affirms ordinary life, autonomy and efficacy. The 'affirmation of ordinary life' is a 'term of art' to denote life in family and production.¹² A positive valuation of ordinary life distinguishes the moderns from the ancients who elevated the life of contemplation or

¹⁰ Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in MultiCulturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition, ed. Amy Gutman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 27.

¹¹ Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 28.

¹² Taylor, Sources, 13.

heroic action over ordinary life. For Taylor, this break is initiated by the Reformation idea of 'calling.'¹³ The second theme of autonomy is evident in modern 'inwardness.' By inwardness, he implies the tendency to anchor and define purposes from within oneself. To quote him, "In this view, the free subject is someone who follows an internal purpose and one who owes no a priori allegiance to a pre-existing order but gives it only to structures that were created by his or her own consent."¹⁴ Taylor contrasts this with the ancient view of freedom which was linked to citizenship in a polis or republic. In modernity, freedom is formulated in terms of the natural liberty of all human beings. The third theme of modernity is what Taylor calls 'efficiency' which implies that "the free individual must aspire to a higher degree of control over himself and nature."¹⁵ The shift from contemplation to productive efficiency in modern science and technology is, according to Taylor, tied up with the affirmation of ordinary life and the desire to relieve suffering.

¹³ Taylor, Sources, 13.

¹⁴ Charles Taylor, "Alternative Futures: Legitimacy, Identity and Alienation in Late-Twentieth Century Canada," in Reconciling the Solitudes: Essays in Canadian Federalism and Nationalism, ed. Guy Laforest (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 69.

¹⁵ Taylor, "Alternative Futures" in Reconciling the Solitudes, 70.

These strands constitute modern identity for Taylor. They are enmeshed in several features of modern society like the idea of an individual as a bearer of rights, the equality of all persons, citizenship and self-rule, the emphasis on efficient production and technological control. The legal system, the political system of voting and elections, the system of negotiation and collective bargaining are all rooted in a conception of the self as free, efficient and engaged in ordinary life.¹⁶

Taylor frames the narrative of modern identity and its attendant institutions in terms of two phases.¹⁷ In the first phase, affirmation of ordinary life, freedom and efficiency are articulated primarily in terms of what he calls 'disengaged reason.' In the second phase, there is an 'expressivist' recasting of ordinary life and freedom in terms of an 'inner voice' and our location in language and culture.¹⁸ The latter draws out the moral and spiritual sources already implicit in the first phase.

¹⁶ Taylor, "Alternative Futures," 70.

¹⁷ Taylor, "Alternative Futures," 70-72.

¹⁸ Although the language of 'phases' suggests an evolutionary account of modern identity, Taylor is more sympathetic to a 'spiral' vision of history. While denying 'an ineluctable progress' story, Taylor contends that some notion of potentiality is necessary to make sense of history. Charles Taylor, "Comparison, History and Truth," in Philosophical Arguments, 161.

In Taylor's opinion, disengaged reason substitutes methodical reasoning in place of substantive thinking about the cosmic or providential order. He refers to a cluster of views which get played out in modern epistemology, ethics and politics beginning with Descartes; the view that reason re-constructs reality out of some clear and distinct ideas; the view that the will is an instrument for controlling and directing the passions according to freely chosen ends; the view that political order is to be built upon certain basic axioms or natural laws like the drive for self-preservation and rational consent.¹⁹

Although Taylor is critical of the 'mechanistic' picture of the world, the neglect of 'embodied experience' and the will-driven account of society and politics, he argues that disengaged reason is not entirely about libido dominandi.²⁰ The 'instrumental stance' draws upon the biblical understanding of humans as stewards in God's creation.²¹ It is moved by an 'ethic of universal benevolence' in its aspiration for relief from suffering.²² But these moral roots are not immediately transparent in

¹⁹ Taylor, Sources, 143-176.

²⁰ Taylor, Sources, 144 & 194.

²¹ Taylor, Sources, 231.

²² Taylor, Malaise, 104-105.

extant social and political institutions. Before elaborating upon the expressivist resuscitation of the moral ideals animating modernity, I wish to explore briefly the spiritual sources of what Taylor calls the affirmation of ordinary life.

Ordinary Life and the Tension of Existence

Taylor points out that the Christian elevation of ordinary life flows into modernity via Protestantism.²³ Unlike the Aristotelian conception which elevates contemplation and civic virtue over 'mere life' or the Stoic ideal of renunciation, the Judaeo-Christian tradition accords sanctity to the life of production, reproduction and marriage.²⁴ By repudiating monasticism and affirming the idea of calling, Protestant spirituality elevates worldly life. This does not mean indulging in mundane pleasures but

²³ Taylor, Sources, 218.

²⁴ Sources, 218-219. Taylor's contrast between the 'serene and untroubled' Socrates of the Phaedo and the 'agony of Jesus' to highlight the positive valuation of life in Christianity is not very convincing. After all, Socrates admits that he does not know much about death in the Apology and so his allusion to life as an illness in the Phaedo is open to interpretation. Besides, the persistent inquiry into justice, piety, love and moderation is hardly life-negating. I think the contrast between ordinary life and contemplative life does not do full justice to the 'tension of existence' that pervades the Socratic quest.

'enjoying things while remaining detached from them.'²⁵

Taylor's thesis about the spiritual source of the modern valuation of ordinary life has a parallel in Hegel. Hegel too celebrates Protestant spirituality to defend modern ethical life in the family, civil society and the constitutional state.

However, the Christian elevation of ordinary life is not unambiguous. It has been held that the doctrine of Creation ex nihilo makes the world contingent upon the will of an omnipotent God.²⁶ This appears to imply a 'demotion of the world compared to pagan nature worship.'²⁷ Further, the distrust of sexuality and magical folk practices from the eighth century onward in western and central Europe discloses the tension-ridden relationship between official Christianity and ordinary life.

Even if we do not dispute the affirmation of ordinary life by focusing on specific doctrines or contexts, the tension inherent in the search for the spiritual within profane life needs to be foregrounded. Taylor himself refers

²⁵ Taylor, Sources, 222.

²⁶ Hans Jonas, "Jewish and Christian Elements in Philosophy," in Philosophical Essays (Englewood cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 28-29.

²⁷ Hans Jonas, "Jewish and Christian Elements in Philosophy," 29.

to the paradoxical nature of the Puritan notion of loving the world and yet being detached.²⁸ How can we grasp this tonality of tension that marks Puritan revaluation of ordinary life? Taylor here alludes to Weber's notion of 'inner worldly asceticism.'²⁹ The idea that one should pursue one's calling not as an end in itself but as a way of fulfilling God's purposes provides fertile ground for the work ethic of capitalism and the new science.

At the same time, the Puritanical idea of detached action suggests a longing for transcendence even while living and acting in the world.³⁰ It captures the spirit of 'being in the world and not of it.' This is perhaps why marriage is sanctified and yet, we are exhorted to remember that marriage ceases at death.³¹ The Puritanical affirmation

²⁸ Taylor, Sources, 221-227.

²⁹ Taylor, Sources, 222.

³⁰ Interestingly, Puritanical ideas of inner voice, detached action and stewardship resonate in Gandhi's appeal to disinterested action. Gandhi's main source, however, is the Bhagavad Gita. In the *Gita*, detached action implies renouncing the rewards of action. What is involved is not simply a mental attitude or a decision-based eschewing of rewards or a technique. Detached action is about tuning in to the higher Self or *atman* which, incidentally, is not a principle of individuation. There is no such thing as my *atman* or your *atman*. *Atman* is not a thingly entity but the site of the experience of transcendence. One who is attuned to the *atman* acts perfectly and yet disinterestedly as if one were only a spectator of one's actions.

³¹ Taylor, Sources, 226-227.

of ordinary life thus harks back to an experience of restless questioning rather than an experience of reconciliation. As Voegelin puts it:

Existence is not a fact. If anything, existence is the nonfact of a disturbing movement in the In-Between of ignorance and knowledge, of time and timelessness, of imperfection and perfection, of hope and fulfilment and ultimately of life and death.³²

This movement in the 'Metaxy' or the In-Between of existence lends a double meaning to life and death so that Gandhi can say that he is seeking everlasting life even while he is exhorting us to renounce or a Euripides can ask 'who knows if to live is to be dead and to be dead to live?'³³ This double meaning is eclipsed in Taylor's reading of the Christian affirmation of ordinary life. After all, the Johannine Jesus also warns 'who loves his life loses it but who hates life in this world keeps it for life eternal.'³⁴

In short, the modern elevation of ordinary life has to be assessed in terms of its openness to the paradox of being rather than simply its rejection of a higher life. The Protestant exhortation to labour diligently and yet be 'dead-hearted' to the world captures this tension of existence to some extent. And yet, the split between spirit

³² Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture," in The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol.12, Published Essays, 1966-1985, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 176.

³³ Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture," 179.

³⁴ Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture," 181.

and matter and the accent on the will in some versions can lead to a narrow account of ordinary life as mastery over nature and passions. Ironically, this willful assertion gives rise to a drive to negate or transcend ordinary life as in technological adventures like genetic engineering.

According to Taylor, this slide occurs because the instrumental bias of modern science stifles the moral and theological roots of the enterprise. He attempts to recover the 'ethic of benevolence' underlying the modern project through an expressivist reading of some Romantic thinkers like Rousseau and Herder. Taylor is probably right in arguing that a critique of modernity cast solely in terms of instrumental reason is one-sided. But the question is whether the Romantic thinkers succeed in recovering the moral and spiritual sources.

Expressivism: Authenticity and Freedom

Expressivism is Taylor's term for the constitutive and constituted nature of any activity. In his words:

Something is expressed when it is embodied in such a way as to be made manifest. . . . Something is manifest when it is directly available for all to see.³⁵

³⁵ Charles Taylor, "Language and Human Nature," in Human Agency and Language (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 219.

Every act of expression 'manifests' something that is already there; at the same time what is already there becomes visible only when it is articulated. Taylor often refers to the twin moments of manifesting and making to clarify expressivism. For instance, in writing a novel or play, one simultaneously reveals something already there even while giving shape to what was only vaguely visible.³⁶

Returning to Romantic thinkers like Rousseau and Herder, Taylor argues that an expressivist understanding of the self and the world is implicit within modernity. He claims that the modern self is both a manifestation and an invention: it discloses a horizon of meanings already embodied in our language and culture; simultaneously, it redefines and reinvents extant common horizons in unique ways. The expressivist notion of identity not only calls attention to the common contexts which shape our identities. It also upholds the uniqueness of both identity and community.

According to Taylor, the origins of expressivism are to be found in Rousseau. He argues that Rousseau's turn to 'inner nature' reverses the earlier mechanical understanding of nature. For, the 'inner voice of nature' cannot be accessed from an objective neutral standpoint but has to be

³⁶ Taylor, Sources, 374.

personally experienced.³⁷ Further, the 'inner voice' needs to be discovered and articulated and thus entails a dialogue with other human beings.

The elements of personal experience, commonality and expression constitute an authentic or expressivist way of life. Unlike the disengaged or 'punctual self' which neglects feelings and passions, the expressive self recognises our embodied experience. Moreover, the 'inner nature' is not particular to the person but links us to a larger order of nature. It is not an irrational or mysterious instinct but the voice of 'conscience.' Since the gentle murmur of this 'inner nature' gets drowned in the noise of opinion and conformity, it has to be periodically restored.

But Rousseau does not return to a robust account of nature as providing final ends. Taylor notes that the Romantic appeal to inner feelings and sentiments differs from the Aristotelian emphasis on motivations. Whereas the latter ethic 'defines motivations as virtuous in terms of the mode of life or actions they move us to, the former sees the way of life or actions as defined by sentiments.'³⁸ Defining nature in terms of sentiments and feelings continues the

³⁷ Taylor, Sources, 370

³⁸ Taylor, Sources, 372.

reductionist trend initiated by Hobbes even though Rousseau highlights the benign side of nature.³⁹ Alongside this dilution of nature is the inflation of culture/ society in that language, understanding, foresight, art and industry, property and rights, family and government are all man-made and hence malleable.

As Taylor notes, Rousseau does not return to a primitive state but calls for a new alignment between the true elan of nature and culture\society.⁴⁰ Since Rousseau regards the will as the 'purely spiritual' element in man, he elevates the 'general will' as the vehicle of a new order. In the general will (which is not the sum of all wills but the common will), Rousseau finds the guarantee of both individual freedom and the common good.

Rousseau's reconciliation between individual and community, his desire for new beginnings, his accent on morality and his civic republicanism reverberate in one form or the other from Kant through Taylor. The argument for participatory republic anchored in commonly shared moral

³⁹ Rousseau is critical of Hobbes for not being thorough in separating art and nature. Jean Jacques Rousseau, A Discourse on Inequality, trans. Maurice Cranston (London, Eng.: Penguin 1984), 67.

⁴⁰ Taylor, Sources, 359.

understandings in communitarians like Sandel has a distinct Rousseauian flavour.

But the appeal to Rousseau is not unproblematic. While praising Rousseau's general will for capturing the essence of modern freedom as self-determining, Hegel objected to its subjective bias. The general will fails to specify the content of laws and institutions. Because it fails to grasp the inner reason of extant social and political institutions, it can unleash destruction. Taylor is well aware of this side of Rousseau's politics. Like Hegel, Taylor objects to the 'tight unity of purpose' between individual and community and the lack of intermediate institutions in Rousseau.⁴¹

And yet, Taylor cherishes Rousseau's insistence on inner nature as the source of authentic being. After Rousseau, self-exploration and authenticity become critical components of freedom. To be free implies "being true to my own originality and that is something only I can articulate and discover."⁴² Since originality is not pre-given but has to be continuously articulated and recognised, Taylor contends that it entails a tacit commitment to a community.

⁴¹ Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 50-51.

⁴² Taylor, Malaise, 29.

Inner Self and Unique Access: The Spectre of Subjectivism

The main thrust of Taylor's authenticity is that the access to a larger order, be it God or cosmos or nature is through personal experience or a first person standpoint. Since there is no cosmic order of meanings readily available to moderns, it is necessary to appeal to inner experience.⁴³ Hence, he contends that the modern accent on self-exploration is not merely about self-indulgence but about 'realising contact' with the 'inner self.'

In a sense, the appeal to discover and know oneself is not entirely new or modern. Taylor himself traces inwardness to Augustine's meditations.⁴⁴ However, what is new is that the inner domain is no more conceptualised in terms of the psyche or the soul but in terms of a self that is unique to *this particular* individual. One of the implications of this radical individuation is the exaltation of the affirming power of the self. It is my 'seeing good (that) makes good.'⁴⁵ A poet may point to God or cosmos but her vision is refracted through her personal experience; the transcendent truth cannot be detached from the expression.⁴⁶

⁴³ Taylor, Sources, 369, 370 & 374.

⁴⁴ Taylor, Sources, 129-130.

⁴⁵ Taylor, Sources, 454.

⁴⁶ Taylor, Sources, 492.

In other words, modernist and Romantic 'epiphanies' articulate 'original visions' of the cosmos; they are 'constituted' by the creative imagination of the artist.⁴⁷

The danger in emphasising personal sensibility and creative imagination is that it obscures the moment of self-transcendence preserved in cosmological myths and symbols. Here too, the experience of the 'beyond' or the 'beginning' of the cosmos occurs within someone's consciousness. But then they are also experienced as surpassing the self, as events in a luminous zone that transcends human reason and consciousness. This is why an Upanishadic seer can say "it is far different from what's known and it is farther than the unknown."⁴⁸ Or Anselm can say, "O Lord, you are not only that than which a greater cannot be thought, but you are also greater than what can be thought."⁴⁹ The awareness of participating in an inexhaustible reality gives rise to symbols which are explicitly seen as partial and provi-

⁴⁷ Taylor, Sources, 378 & 381.

⁴⁸ Kena Upanishad, chap.1, verse 5, in Upanisads, trans. Patrick Olivelle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 227.

⁴⁹ Voegelin, "The Beginning and the Beyond," in Late Unpublished Writings, 195.

sional.⁵⁰ Further, the participating consciousness sees itself as 'being pulled' by a divine source and as a 'witness' to an event of revelation or vision thereby rendering any first-person standpoint problematic.⁵¹

Without denying the role of creative imagination, it is necessary to recover the paradoxical sources of symbolisation. In Voegelin's words, "imagination, as a structure in the process of reality that moves towards its truth, belongs both to man in his bodily location and to the reality that comprehends bodily located man as a partner in the community of being."⁵² This ambiguity gets submerged in Taylor's reconstruction of Romantic and modernist epiphanies of being as 'indexed' to personal visions of the artist.⁵³

⁵⁰ This is clearly spelt out in the Buddhist and Hindu traditions where scriptures and teachings are compared to a raft to be relinquished on reaching the opposite shore.

⁵¹ This notion of consciousness as 'witness' is central to Gandhi's politics. As I point out in the Gandhi chapter, Arendt revives the model of spectator-judge in her attempts to circumvent the radical individuation and contingency intrinsic to modern freedom. For details, see Chapter V, 244-247.

⁵² Voegelin, "The Beginning of the Beginning," in Order and History, Vol. V, 38.

⁵³ As in the case of the Puritan affirmation of ordinary

While it is true that there is no 'cosmic order of meanings that is publicly available' for moderns, it is also true that the experiences evoked by some modern 'epiphanies' resonate with motifs dominant in cosmological symbolisms. The obsession with 'origins' since the Reformation and Renaissance, the desire for new artistic languages, the popularity of the novel and science fiction reflect the survival of mythic themes like wandering and exile, destruction and renewal of the world, escape into a fabulous world beyond profane time and so forth.⁵⁴

life, Taylor is aware of the 'inexhaustible' character of the 'inner depths' plumbed by Romantic poets. And yet, this excess that resists our articulative powers is said to be 'constituted' through our creative imagination. Taylor, Sources, 390 & 492.

⁵⁴ For instance, it has been noted that the wanderings of Leopold Bloom's in James Joyce's *Ulysses* bears some similarities to the wanderings of Australian myths of the totemic hero types. Similarly, the incomprehensibility of some modern art works has been compared to the initiatory gnosis of esoteric rituals. See Mircea Eliade, "Survivals and Camouflages," in Symbolism, the Sacred and the Arts, ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 46-50.

Only by exploring such survivals of the human search for transcendence within modernist 'epiphanies' can we transmute the quest for a larger order or 'rootedness' to something more than an exercise in 'unique style.' My point is that the moral and spiritual force of authenticity lies not only in the discovery of an inner nature richer than the Cartesian self but also in the camouflaged search for a transpersonal realm. Taylor's emphasis on 'how' we realize contact with our deeper selves exalts the constitutive dimension of creative imagination over the 'mystery of existential unrest' that moves the search for the beyond. This is one reason why Taylor's response to the problem of subjectivism in terms of a unique cultural context within which authenticity is forged remains unsatisfactory. Here, it is instructive to turn to his views on language and nation.

Language, Culture and Nation: The Spectres of Ethnocentrism and Relativism

In his reconstruction of Herder, Taylor transposes Rousseau's authenticity--the idea that the inner voice needs to be discovered and defined--to language. The manifesting and making are now staged within language rather than one's own conscience. In language, Taylor finds the mystery of a larger order that provides the basis for community. In this

way, he hopes to stall the slide towards subjectivism. I examine this turn to language and culture in the light of two serious criticisms, namely nationalist chauvinism and cultural relativism.

For Taylor, Herder offers an expressive theory of language and reason. Language is seen not as an instrument through which we come to know things but as a medium that manifests and constitutes the world. By virtue of language, human beings actualise their capacity for reflection.⁵⁵ As linguistic beings, we do not simply match signs to things but use and respond to signs in terms of their truth, descriptive rightness, power to evoke a mood or express a feeling and so forth.⁵⁶ Language discloses that our activities of thinking, understanding and expression are constituted in terms of 'irreducible rightness.' In other words, we do not think first and then express it but our expression constitutes and clarifies our thoughts.

Another redeeming feature of Herder's theory is that language is primarily created and recreated in speech.⁵⁷ It is shaped in conversations and presupposes a community of

⁵⁵ Taylor, "Language and Human Nature," 228-229

⁵⁶ Taylor, "The Importance of Herder," in Philosophical Arguments, 84.

⁵⁷ Taylor, "Language and Human Nature," 234.

speakers and linguistic practices. Thus, language reveals an ongoing exploration of the self-understandings of a community. As such, we can never claim complete transparency with respect to all the self-understandings that constitute our identities. At the same time, Taylor writes, "to speak is to touch a bit of the web, and this is to make the whole resonate."⁵⁸ For instance, the word *atman* has a meaning within a particular form of life and one may not be aware of all the pre-understandings embodied in that word. Yet, by invoking it, one summons forth some prior understandings about the human and the divine. In this sense, we shape and are shaped by prior meanings.

In Taylor's view, the expressivist account of language anchors our reason and humanity in a larger order and thus, clears the way for a communitarian politics. This intervention from within a philosophy of language attempts to undermine the 'unencumbered self' or 'disengaged subject' of Cartesian metaphysics. Stemming from sources as diverse as Aristotle, Hegel, Heidegger and Wittgenstein, current arguments for community via language take at least two different routes. In one version best exemplified in Habermas, it is argued that by virtue of being linguistic subjects, we are 'always already' situated within a

⁵⁸ Taylor, "Language and Human Nature," 231.

normative order. The binding norms are then explored in terms of some paradigmatic speech-acts like making a promise and the obligations ensuing therefrom. In the second version represented by Taylor among others, the accent is on our being located in specific languages and unique communities.

This difference touches upon an issue that is often abbreviated in terms of universalism versus particularism or between the constitutional state and nation within modern political thought. Starting from some universal norms that constitute us as linguistic beings, Habermas (to use the best known thinker on these issues) defends the relevance of modern constitutional regime as an instantiation of a discursive community. Starting from the uniqueness of language and traditions, Taylor argues that constitutions have to be expressive of distinct identities without jeopardising some fundamental rights. Since Taylor's concern for traditions and cultures resonates in many strands of identity politics both in the West and in India and since it goes to the heart of the communitarian question in terms of freedom and belonging, it is useful to probe his approach in some detail.

The paradigmatic community for Taylor is the nation.
In his words:

Language is the obvious basis for a theory of nationalism
founded on the expressivist notion of the special character

of each people, language conceived in Herderian fashion, that is, in terms of an 'expressive' theory. It is a concept which roots the plurality of states in the nature of things, but not in a natural order conceived in the old hierarchical mode. It claims to find the principle of a people's identity--what makes it more than an aggregation--as something already given, not arbitrarily determined, but rooted in its being and past; while at the same time this principle is no external allegiance but something constitutive of the people's autonomous humanity, something essential to being human.⁵⁹

Here, Taylor is arguing for language as the 'most obvious' basis of nationhood because it reflects the uniqueness of a specific people. In shared stories and songs, language preserves the history of a people. A nation is not just a collection of individuals nor a fictitious identity forged by vested interests. Rather, it embodies a unique interpretation of the common human condition of 'birth, copulation and death.'⁶⁰

The claim to uniqueness carries the imminent danger of nationalist chauvinism as well as the erosion of individual freedom. Given that nationalist movements tend to marginalise internal diversity and individual dissent, given that the content of nationhood is seldom free from power politics, given that the universalist aspirations of

⁵⁹ Taylor, Sources, 415.

⁶⁰ Taylor, "Reply and Rearticulation," in Philosophy in An Age of Pluralism, ed. James Tully (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 240.

the constitutional state have both been advanced and thwarted by nationhood, the idea of a nation has evoked suspicion not only among liberals but also thinkers like Hegel and Arendt who acknowledge its significance.

Addressing this fear of chauvinism, Taylor argues that unique identity is not given once-for-all but is contested and negotiated in history and politics. In the course of the dialogue about uniqueness, individuals and communities discover and re-form their pre-judgements. Based on the Quebec experience, Taylor argues that the struggle for recognition by ethnic groups need not always degenerate into bloody war but can be conducted within the bounds of a constitutional state.

Assuming this culture of dialogue prevails, there arises the question of the scope of dialogue in shaping identities. It is not inconceivable that a specific community might regard some core principles as too sacred for dialogue. What if a specific people define their uniqueness in terms of a hierarchical order and reject the principle of universal equality underlying constitutional order? Taylor writes:

The rights doctrine presents human importance in a radical form, one that is hard to gainsay. This affirmation can be taken on several levels. Just empirically there seems to be something to it, although establishing this . . . is . . . a matter of . . . making a plausible interpretation of human history. One that seems plausible to me goes something like this: recurrently in history,

new doctrines have been propounded which called on their adherents to move toward a relatively greater respect for human beings . . . at the expense of previously recognised forms of social encapsulation.⁶¹

This response presupposes that all communities elevate "plausible interpretations of human history" over what they regard as eternal verities. In other words, uniqueness claims are tied up with a notion of identity as unfolding in history. Is this not a Judaeo-Christian derivation and more specifically a modern hermeneutic perspective?

Confronted with the twin problems of ethnocentrism and relativism unleashed by an emphasis on uniqueness, Taylor tries to defend some 'standards.'⁶² He agrees that a linear universal history on which different cultures are ranked as superior or inferior is biased and misleading. But this does not imply a 'relativisation of goods' or a rejection of the 'universal relevance of our own goods'.⁶³ Instead of seeing other ages and cultures as lacking, he favours a mode of practical reasoning which proceeds either by challenging the cosmology (as with pre Galilean science) or by marshalling the plurality of goods within and among

⁶¹ Taylor, "Explanation and Practical Reason," in Philosophical Arguments, 56.

⁶² Taylor, "Comparison, History and Truth," in Philosophical Arguments, 156.

⁶³ Taylor, "Comparison, History and Truth," 164.

different cultures or by seizing upon 'marginal' insights common to all cultures.⁶⁴ This strategy can work only when a different culture sees itself as 'one possibility' among others.⁶⁵

Against the claims made on behalf of *sati* or some forms of human sacrifice in the name of traditions, Taylor's path is a viable option. However, we should not reduce the challenge posed by pre-modern and/or non-Christian cosmological myths to modern reason to a problem of 'myth versus reason.'⁶⁶ It is about different 'styles of

⁶⁴ Taylor, "Explanation and Practical Reason," in Philosophical Arguments, 56-58.

⁶⁵ Taylor, "Explanation and Practical Reason," 57.

⁶⁶ Even though Taylor accepts that not all pre-modern practices are superstitious but may express important 'human purposes,' he cannot avoid an 'externalist' position. For instance, alluding to myths of origin of the world at the hands of giants, Taylor writes, "we try to interpret this myth, to explain the power it had in this culture, why it became their origin myth. But we never consider that there might have been giants. . . . In this way, our sense of reality is decisive for our understanding of these people." Taylor, "Comparison, History and Truth," 153. The possibility that such cosmogonic myths may be expressing the experience of

reasoning' about the ground of human existence.⁶⁷ Both myth and philosophic reasoning are anchored in experiences of the human search for meaning. This is why Plato does not dispense with myth even though he grasps the ground as extra-cosmic or the Good beyond Being. He recognises the cosmos as participating in the divine beyond even while acknowledging that the 'beyond' transcends the cosmos. This 'restraint' vis-a-vis the reality revealed in earlier symbolisations gets eclipsed in modern reason's relentless demystification of the sacred. As such, when questions are raised with respect to the claims of modern reason, it is not reason that is being resisted but the immanentisation of

man's quest for the ground rather than to world-immanent events or entities and that 'our' conception of reason (which consists in 'articulacy' or giving a rational account--- although it is questionable whether this notion can be called the 'core' of western tradition stemming from Socrates, as Taylor does) may be missing the point of cosmogonic myths is rarely entertained by Taylor.

⁶⁷ I think Eliade and Voegelin are more insightful in this context mainly because they are attuned to the 'non-existent' reality of the ground symbolised in myths. Voegelin, 'Anxiety and Reason,' in Late Published Writings, 92.

the sources in man and history. At this level, the problem of relativism can be rebutted not only by defending 'modern reason as a good' but also by retrieving and resymbolising the experience of the cosmic whole suggested in some pre-modern cultures.

In this task, Taylor's approach to community in terms of unique historical or cultural identity is problematic both from the standpoint of modern constitutional state and from the standpoint of some non-western traditions. Firstly, it is necessary to recall the tension between the constitutional state and the principle of nationhood. Hegel's thought remains our guide and an obstacle in this respect. Hegel approaches the *volksgeist* or 'spirit of a people' in terms of their conceptions of the 'absolute' rather than their unique identity.⁶⁸ Contra Herder's appeal

⁶⁸ Taylor himself mentions the need to engage with conceptions of the sacred and the holy in other cultures although he seldom pursues this suggestion in his desire to find a middle ground between the deconstructionists and ethnocentric 'canonists' in the 'multiculturalist' battles. He further writes of this need as a 'moral issue'; I think that the challenge posed by archaic notions of the sacred push us beyond morality to the spiritual, a point which remains on the margins of Taylor's thought. See Taylor, "The Politics of

to the *Ur-Mythos* or a distinct German identity, Hegel argues that the constitutional order is attuned to the 'Germanic Spirit' by which he means the Christian Spirit. The constitutional order is attuned to Christian Spirit by virtue of the recognition accorded to subjective freedom.

Although mindful of the Christian and western origins of constitutionalism and rights, Gandhi does not dismiss them as alien. For he is not concerned with the distinct identity of Hinduism but with the experience of the real underlying some Hindu symbols like *atman* or *moksha* (liberation). Gandhi's *swadeshi* or indigenous community is about recollecting man's existence in a cosmos and his search for the ground of being. To this end, clinging to received tradition is as much an impediment as clinging to the individual ego-self. Whether it is with respect to orthodox Hinduism or modern constitutional order, Gandhi summons us to reopen the human search for the ground of being rather than simply preserve identities. The extent to which modern reason in general and constitutionalism in particular are open to the human quest for the ground of being is considered in my analysis of Hegel and Gandhi. At this juncture, I only want to highlight the fact that we can approach traditions which are 'constitutive of a people's

Recognition," 72-73.

humanity' as Taylor phrases it, in terms of their openness to transcendence rather than their unique identity.

Liberalism as Identity Politics

The tensions within an expressivist reconstruction of modernity emerge clearly in Taylor's remapping of liberalism. He recasts the liberal ideal of freedom in terms of authentic identity. Since freedom implies 'being true to myself' and this implies finding one's 'original' way of being, Taylor claims that it is necessary to go beyond freedom as universal dignity. Liberalism should move away from an emphasis on rights to a focus on the common good. At one level, Taylor argues that liberal principles like the rule of law and rights have to be reappropriated as 'common' goods. In concrete terms, this means reactivating civil society and participatory politics. At another level, Taylor claims that recognising common goods involves strong patriotic attachments. One main reason for this second reading of the common good is the desire for 'heterogeneity.' But are there alternative ways of conceiving heterogeneity other than as cultural distinctness?

The first version of the common good in terms of civil society and intermediary associations is endorsed not only by communitarians but also by liberals. A range of

phenomena like the bureaucratization of state and society, rise of multinational corporations, explosion of information media, erosion of family and church, intensifying social and economic inequality have triggered rethinking about liberal institutions. Among a growing number of thinkers like Taylor, Elshtain, Habermas, Michael Walzer and Benjamin Barber, there is an attempt to reappropriate representative government, rule of law and rights by uncovering the moral and spiritual bases of these institutions. In doing so, Taylor explicitly invokes Hegel's notion of *sittlichkeit* or modern ethical life to argue for the constitutive role of intermediary associations in forging trust and solidarity.

Beyond reviving intermediary institutions, Taylor also argues for substantive conceptions of the good and strong patriotic affiliations. This proposal is far reaching because it is not simply about adding authentic identity as one more good besides universal dignity. For Taylor, liberal institutions like rule of law can be meaningful only if they are 'expressive' of the distinct identity of individuals and groups. This implies that liberal neutrality with respect to strong moral goods has to be jettisoned. To cite him:

A society like Quebec can't but be dedicated to the defense and promotion of French culture and language, even if this involves some restriction on individual freedoms. . . . A government that could ignore this requirement would either not be responding to the majority will or would reflect a

society so deeply demoralised as to be close to dissolution.⁶⁹

But is it not possible to secure languages and cultures through minority rights? Taylor counters that these rights merely facilitate some groups to survive within a dominant culture but do not "ensure survival through indefinite future generations."⁷⁰ Besides, minority rights do not challenge liberal neutrality regarding goods.

Given the constitutive role of language and culture in shaping identities, how far can we go in the direction of promoting common goods without jeopardising individual rights? Taylor is clear that some fundamental rights like *habeas corpus* are inviolable.⁷¹ Others like the right to choose a medium of instruction for one's children may be restricted. At a pragmatic level, this restriction may not have a significant impact upon individual freedom. To be educated in one's own language may enhance self-understanding about one's identity and thus contribute to a meaningful exercise of freedom.

⁶⁹ Taylor, "Cross-Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate," in Philosophical Arguments, 203.

⁷⁰ Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 41.

⁷¹ Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 61.

But if we concede Taylor's view that language transmits specific conceptions of the good, then problems arise. Is it not possible that certain accounts of the common good may smother freedom rather than enhance it? Is it unlikely that preserving cultural differences may be extended to preserving hierarchical roles in some communities?

Taylor's own confidence flows from the hope that there will be dialogue and contestation within every community. But the asymmetry of power poses difficult dilemmas. For instance, the *taliban's* position on confining women to the home in Afghanistan is also a push for authenticity. In a nation of widows, this move affects the basic right to survival. Taylor might respond that authenticity presupposes a liberal democratic culture. But once we centrestage expressive identity over freedom, then where do we ground our objections to *taliban's* claim to authenticity?

Addressing this problem, Taylor argues that the right to difference cannot be extended to communities which challenge liberal distinctions like the private and the public or the sacred and the secular. Liberalism, even when it is hospitable to diverse cultures is not neutral; it is a 'fighting creed.'⁷² If some group does not draw the Protes-

⁷² Taylor, *The Politics of Recognition*, " 62.

tant Christian distinction between religion and politics, then it cannot claim recognition.⁷³ Once we concede the salience of unique identity, then restricting recognition to some groups appears arbitrary. At the same time, Taylor's acknowledgement of the Protestant roots of liberal secularism impels us to probe the work of Hegel where this link is comprehensively discussed.

Reviving Liberalism: Associations and Trust

In the light of these quandaries, Taylor's 'weak' version of the common good that focuses on civil society, federalism and decentralisation is more promising. Alluding to the American context, Taylor admits that liberal institutions like the rule of law and rights can be the focus of common attachments.⁷⁴ This requires strengthening participatory institutions not simply as guarantors of rights but of common goods. Alongside participation, Taylor argues that liberal distinctions like the private and the public and the sacred and secular have to be rethought so as to make room both for equality and difference.⁷⁵ What are the possible

⁷³ Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 62.

⁷⁴ Taylor, "Liberal-Communitarian Debate," 197.

⁷⁵ Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 61-62.

directions this 'weak' version of the common good might take?

The case for participatory politics as the remedy against atomism and apathy afflicting liberal democracy rests upon two strands of thought which are in tension. On the one hand, there is the Rousseauian emphasis on popular will as the basis of politics. On the other hand, there is the Hegelian accent on mediating participation through concrete institutions. Although these strands are not opposed to one another, they need to be balanced cautiously. While it is necessary to explore ways of rekindling participation, the perils of sophistry and manipulation also have to be addressed.

Following Taylor, I will return in a subsequent chapter to Hegel's notion of ethical life in the modern family, civil society and the constitutional state. Rather than appeal to patriotic sentiments or republican ideals, Hegel appeals to the inner reason underlying modern freedom to argue for solidarity. Civic virtue is conceived in terms of trust, civility and rectitude rather than thick attachments. Even though Hegel's appeal to the universal validity of modern institutions is suspect in our time, his attempt to anchor community and solidarity in a transcultural normative order is worth reappropriation.

Although constitutionalism and federalism sound less glamorous than authentic identity, I argue that they possess an 'exemplary validity.' In explicating this exemplary validity, Hegel's insights on modern freedom and trust provide a starting point for a dialogue with thinkers such as Gandhi or Althusius who too endeavour to balance freedom and solidarity.

Conclusion

Taylor's case for authenticity is instructive because it probes the philosophical and spiritual sources underpinning the current summons to community. His return to Rousseau and Herder shows that the current search for community is intertwined with the longing for a larger order of nature or cosmos. For Taylor, this does not imply a retrieval of premodern worldviews. Instead, he emphasises the need to discover and articulate visions of a larger order that resonate with our historical and cultural uniqueness. In this chapter, I have raised some doubts regarding this accent on cultural identity in uncovering the spiritual bases of modern ideals. While Taylor is partly right in arguing that we have no access to a larger order independent of our culture and history, he does not pay adequate attention to the paradoxical experience of

immanence and transcendence encrusted in cultural and religious symbols. A symbol such as *atman-brahman* in Hinduism, for instance, points not only to our situatedness in history and traditions but to our proximity or even oneness with that which transcends time and space. In the absence of an experiential analysis of symbols, the case for traditions is likely to lapse into arbitrary and dogmatic assertions of uniqueness. But what does it mean to explicate the structure of experience underlying some cultural and religious symbols? Does it mean resurrecting doctrinal religion? What are the insights emerging from this analysis for our attempts to reconcile freedom and community? How far can we illuminate modern reason and the institutions that flow from it in terms of such an experiential account of symbols? These questions will move into the foreground in the next few chapters on Radhakrishnan, Hegel and Gandhi.

Chapter 3

RECOVERING THE SPIRITUAL: INDIAN DEBATES ON COMMUNITY

Introduction

The desire to reformulate liberal principles in the light of cultural conceptions of the good is not confined to the West. In contemporary Indian thought and politics, there is a powerful trend, not always benign, that seeks to anchor liberal politics in a Hindu identity. Given that liberal principles are a colonial legacy, an earnest attempt is made to recast liberalism in terms of an 'indigenous' tradition. If the Western debate is largely about 'recognising' historical and cultural situatedness, the Indian debate is suffused with demands for a 'spiritual' politics.

In spite of the claims to radical otherness often made by different voices in the Indian context, the arguments for 'spiritual' politics share the premises implicit both within the mainstream of modern Western political thought and the counter critical strand exemplified in Critical Theory and hermeneutics. For instance, the version of Hindu nationalism espoused by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is inconceivable without the

idea of the nation-state as a symbol of order.¹ Similarly, the case for 'indigenous' religious traditions upheld by writers such as Ashis Nandy is parasitic upon the counter discourse of modernity stemming from Rousseau. In the loud denunciations of liberal secularism made by both the BJP as well as the more sophisticated votaries of 'lived traditions,' this reliance upon what they reject is not always spelt out.

I mention this dependence on the philosophical discourses of modernity not to deflate the claims to Indian uniqueness but to clarify that any grand narrative based on East versus West or modern versus traditional, (whether it is merely rhetorical, as with the BJP or subversive of the modern project, as in Nandy) is deeply problematic. The fact that demands for 'spiritual' politics are cast in terms of the 'religious' or 'indigenous' or 'authentic' traditions is

¹ The complicity between the BJP politics and modern nationalism has been noted by several Indian scholars. See Ashis Nandy, ed. Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and the Fear of the Self (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), vi-ix. Based on the facts that the BJP mobilises some Hindu symbols for gaining political mileage, relies heavily upon an urban support base, espouses economic liberalisation and so forth, Nandy suggests that the BJP phenomenon flows from 'post-Enlightenment' rationality and modernity, in general. As I elaborate below, both the BJP and Ashis Nandy (who claims to counter the BJP politics) neglect certain constitutive aspects of modernity like the commitment to constitutionalism.

itself indicative of the limits imposed by the conceptual matrix of modernity in articulating common goods.

If the case for 'spiritual' politics cannot be purified of the connections to modern thought and politics, it is also true that the two cannot be easily reconciled. In this context, we have to unpack the meaning of 'spiritual' politics. When some Indian thinkers appeal to the non-dogmatic character of Hinduism to explicate the meaning of spiritual politics, are they merely trying to protect distinct cultural and religious traditions? Or are they also articulating a deeper longing for wholeness that includes but is not exhausted in cultural demands? What are the religious symbols commonly deployed? Do symbols like *atman* or *disinterested action* (invoked by Gandhi, for instance) provide us with concrete guidelines for worldly action? Is spiritual politics subversive of modern rights? Are we called upon to embrace a theocratic state? Indian thinkers like Gandhi and Radhakrishnan reiterate that they wish to recover the 'spiritual experience' sedimented in Hindu symbols rather than doctrinal faith. How can we understand this spiritual experience? Further, how can we illuminate modern politics in terms of such an experience? These are the questions which guide my analysis in the next few chapters.

Simultaneously as we probe the meaning of spiritual experience in general and spiritual politics in particular, it is also crucial to explore what modern western thinkers like Hegel have to say on the subject. We have to ask whether the modern principles of autonomous reason, subjective freedom and constitutional state are merely about instrumental reason, unbridled individualism and materialism or whether they contain a spiritual and ethical core that cannot be dismissed. Although many Indian thinkers write of 'Western materialism or rationalism' in contrast to 'Eastern spirituality', it is impossible to ignore Hegel's argument regarding the spirituality of modern ethical life.² Only through a rigorous analysis of the philosophical presuppositions underlying both 'spiritual' politics and modernity that the question of a mutual dialogue can be meaningfully posed.³

² It is true that Hegel did not recognize the significance of non-Christian religions. But he gives a serious account of the spirituality of modern ethical life that cannot be ignored. Considering that the move towards a hermeneutic situatedness in history or language or cultural practices would be inconceivable without Hegel's phenomenology, it is crucial for Indian and Hindu thinkers to engage with his thinking seriously. In the next two chapters, I treat this issue in greater detail.

³ In the absence of a sustained engagement with the rich tradition of Western thought, arguments for Hindu spirituality often carry an apologetic tone. For instance, the appeal to Hindu religiosity against 'Western materialism' or faith against rationalism is the staple not only of 'orientalist' works but also of post-modern writings with the only difference that the latter

In this chapter, I begin to address some of the questions raised above with respect to the Indian appeal to Hinduism and spiritual politics.⁴ Focusing on the experience embodied in Hindu symbols rather than doctrine or dogma, I argue that the Indian call for spirituality articulates the search for the ground of being and not simply the preservation of unique indigenous traditions. From this standpoint, the archetypal community is not based on territory or religious identity or moral values but on the openness to the ground of being. The symbol of a 'divine community' or 'brahmaloka' where the individual is perfectly integrated with the cosmic whole and sometimes, with the state of oneness even prior to the emergence of the cosmos, exercises the imagination of several prominent modern Hindu thinkers including Vivekananda, Radhakrishnan, Tagore, Aurobindo and

invoke faith and culture in the plural. In my view, to construe 'spiritual' politics in terms of cultural specificity and lived traditions as opposed to a 'masculist' or rationalist modernity is a weak response to the challenge posed by modernity to comprehensive world views. Instead, Hindu notions of the spiritual are rooted in the desire for perfect freedom that can be usefully compared with claims to 'absolute freedom' made by modern thinkers like Hegel. I develop this theme in detail in a subsequent chapter on Gandhi's thought and practice.

⁴ By focusing on Hinduism, I do not suggest that it is representative or inclusive of all the religions of India. Because I focus on Radhakrishnan and Gandhi who employ some prominent Hindu symbols in the course of explicating spirituality and politics, I have to restrict myself to Hinduism. In my analysis of Hegel, I engage with his notion of Protestant spirituality to highlight the ethical kernel of modern freedom.

Gandhi. While celebrating the spiritual experience embedded in religious symbols, some of these thinkers exude an extraordinary confidence that Hinduism can not only absorb but transfigure modern freedom. In turn, only by recollecting the meaning of some of these symbols again can we begin to uncover the implications of spiritual politics.

At one level, the notion of 'spiritual politics' appears to be deeply hostile to modern norms and institutions. In the Indian context, 'spiritual politics' and 'indigenous traditions' have been invoked against liberal secularism and Enlightenment modernity. The first section focuses upon one prominent proponent of this view, namely, Ashis Nandy. Apart from the strong affinity with Taylor's critique of Cartesian modernity, Nandy's writings also reveal the radical longing for authentic freedom. One of the serious lacunae in Nandy's account is the undifferentiated approach to modernity as simply instrumental reason. I point out that Ashis Nandy's exaltation of traditions against both modern reason and 'modern Hinduism' (which is dismissed as 'brahmanical,' 'Vedantic,' 'high' culture) is one-sided. By the same token, the retreat into 'non-canonical' folk cultures makes it appear as if spirituality is the privilege of the 'subaltern.'

To gain clarity on the notion of spiritual politics, I examine the work of one of the pioneering figures in modern Indian thought, namely Radhakrishnan. Unlike the current Indian critics of modernity who see the whole package of modern science and technology, statecraft and rights as oppressive, Radhakrishnan is optimistic about both modernity and Hindu notions of spirituality. A detailed analysis of Radhakrishnan will show that the so-called 'modern' Hinduism is neither rationalistic in a narrow sense nor uncritical of modernity itself.

Focusing on Radhakrishnan's account of spiritual experience as intuitive insight in the second section, I explore the structure of experience embodied in some Hindu symbols. I argue that his separation of intuitive experience of the divine from religious symbolisation makes it possible to address the spiritual without valorising indigenous traditions. Since he is attentive to the paradoxical character of the experience embedded in religious symbols, he realises that symbols and traditions contribute to but do not wholly constitute our search for the spiritual.

From this perspective, Radhakrishnan displays openness towards modern science and modern liberal institutions. He thinks that modern science shares the

spiritual longing for perfection and truth. Based on this assessment, he posits a cosmic evolution towards a 'world community' open to the human longing for the eternal.

But the big question is whether modern institutions are open to the spiritual experience that is transhistorical and even transcosmic suggested by some Hindu symbols. Given the self-determining nature of modern reason, its openness to a 'pre-given' cosmic order would be considered dogmatic or illusory. Hegel had already made this charge against the Hindu Spirit which, in his view, was other-worldly. Radhakrishnan's narrative of a cosmic evolution climaxing in the 'divine community' as the 'end of history' is partly a response to this critique. But then the symbol of *brahman* is not about a universal salvation that comes in time. In my view, Gandhi's 'remembering' the meaning of *brahman* by way of 'detached action' is more effective in addressing the charge of 'other worldliness'. Further, Gandhi's practise provides better clues as to how the pull of the divine can be 'resymbolised' within modern politics.⁵

⁵ Voegelin uses the term resymbolisation in connection with the need to reintegrate the 'pull of the whole' and the non-existent reality expressed in cosmological myths. He argues that 'even though we have to reject all traditional symbolisations of cosmic reality as incompatible with our present mode of experience, we still are living in a reality of the cosmos and not in the universe of physics.' See Voegelin, "Immortality," Published Essays, 93.

Modernity versus 'Indigenous Traditions'

Strictly speaking, there is no exact analogue to the 'communitarian critique of liberalism' within India. However, the themes foregrounded in the Western debate i.e., lived experience, authenticity, heterogeneity, local traditions and indigenous community, have found their way into at least two strands of thinking; one is the critical discourse on development and the other is the discussion around secularism. In this section, I focus on the current attack on secularism and liberal modernity in favour of 'religious tolerance' and indigenous traditions. My main purpose is to show that this approach does justice neither to modernity nor to the authentic traditions it seeks to defend.

It is no accident that the debate around community has congealed around the question of secularism. In the Indian context, any case for community has to contend with what has come to be pejoratively termed as the 'communal' in opposition to the secular.⁶ Because 'communal' politics has capitalised upon extant religious and caste affiliations, it

⁶ In the Indian context, 'communalism' refers to a politics based on one's religious or caste identity. In this form, it has often been a challenge to liberal principles. In this chapter and the dissertation as a whole, I use quotation marks around communalism whenever I refer to this Indian usage of the term. Incidentally, some scholars trace this pejorative usage to the Orientalist equation of 'communal' with religious and caste based communities. See Gyan Pandey, The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).

has been regarded as premodern or antimodern.

Given that the analytical separation between community in its benign sense and 'communal' in its fanatical form does not always obtain empirically, there was great suspicion towards most forms of community. The general consensus for a long time was that 'communalism' is an atavistic residue traceable to a distorted tradition or the colonial policy of 'divide and rule' or political manipulation by vested interests or the ideology and politics of a particular kind of capitalist state.⁷ Although the diagnosis differed between the marxist and liberal approaches to the issue, there was general agreement that 'communalism' had to be rooted out and that secular values had to be institutionalised.

More recently, this oppositional positing of secularism and 'communalism' has been challenged by scholars like Ashis Nandy and T.N Madan, among others.⁸ It is now

⁷ See Rajni Kothari, Caste in India (Delhi: Orient Longman, 1970); Suzanne and Lloyd Rudolph, The Modernity of Tradition (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1967); Randhir Singh, "Theorising Communalism: A Fragmentary Note in the Marxist Mode," Economic and Political Weekly (23 July 1988): 1541-1548.

⁸ Ashis Nandy refers to himself as an 'anti-secularist.' See Ashis Nandy, "The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance," in Alternatives 13, no 2 (April 1988): 177-194. See also T.N. Madan, "Whither Indian Secularism?" in Modern Asian Studies 27, no.3 (1993): 667-697. Other writers like Bhikhu Parekh and Thomas Pantham articulate their case for a 'spiritual politics' primarily through their writings on Gandhi. See Thomas

held that 'communalism' is the effect of the 'post-Enlightenment ideology' of nationalism and secularism. Instead of the Christian distinction between the sacred and the secular, the above mentioned writers propose another vision of secularism as 'inter-religious understanding' or 'religious tolerance.'⁹ Nandy and Madan argue that the religions of the sub-continent emphasise 'lived experience' over dogma and hence give rise to 'genuine tolerance.' Unlike liberal tolerance, 'religious tolerance' is not based on a distinction between the private and the public or the secular and the sacred. In the context of the politicisation of Hindu symbols by the Bharatiya Janata Party and the attendant conflict over sacred sites and attacks on minority rights, the revisionists call for the restoration of 'religion as faith rather than as ideology.'

Alongside restoring faith, Nandy and others also seek to resurrect 'indigenous' traditions. Instead of the 'idolatry of the nation-state', he glorifies the 'civilisational identity encoded in traditional ways of

Pantham, "Beyond Liberal Democracy: Thinking with Mahatma Gandhi," in Political Thought in Modern India, ed. T.Pantham and K.Deustch (Delhi: Sage, 1986), 325-346 and Bhikhu Parekh, Gandhi's Political Thought: A Philosophical Examination (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1989).

⁹ T.N.Madan, "Whither Indian Secularism," 696-697. See also Ashis Nandy, "The Politics of Secularism," 188.

life.'¹⁰ In concrete terms, this implies preservation of 'indigenous ways of life' and enhanced local autonomy.

Neither the concern with religious tolerance nor indigenous traditions is entirely new within Indian thought. An earlier generation of Indian thinkers like Radhakrishnan also exalt Hinduism as an epitome of a non-dogmatic, tolerant way of life. What is new in the current revisionist arguments is the hostility to modern institutions like the nation-state and science in the name of 'indigenous knowledges' and traditions. When we consider the grounds upon which this radical reassessment of modernity and tradition rests, then its weaknesses become apparent.

In revisionist writers like Ashis Nandy, modernity is virtually equated with scientism, positivism, technocratic politics, bureaucratization, cultural homogeneity and other pathologies well rehearsed in Critical Theory and hermeneutics.¹¹ It cannot be denied that some of these factors

¹⁰ Ashis Nandy, The Illegitimacy of Nationalism (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994) xi.

¹¹ Ashis Nandy's work is an excellent example of this tendency to lump together all these phenomena under the rubric of 'Western Enlightenment rationality.' See Ashis Nandy, "The Political Culture of the Indian State," Daedalus 118, no. 4 (1989): 23-24. A similar tendency weakens Vandana Shiva's critique of the patriarchal bias of modern science. The reflexive aspects of modern thought exemplified in Kant, Hegel or Rousseau seldom surface in these accounts. See Vandana Shiva, Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development (London: Zed, 1989), 15. In the process, the modern roots of a 'right' to indigenous knowledge and the

contribute to the devaluation of traditions and faith. However, is modernity only a series of pathologies? After all, is it not the principle of self-determination that makes it possible even to raise the question of marginalised cultures in terms of democratic rights? Curiously, Nandy notes that the 'democratic process' in India and the entry of marginalised classes and castes precipitates the challenge to 'old style secularism.'¹²

If 'democratic rights' are crucial in subverting the 'hegemony' of a 'westernised elite,' then it would appear that the principle of subjective freedom and liberal politics are not so impoverished after all. Undoubtedly, questions would remain as to how to provide for meaningful democratic participation so that the politics of rights does not degenerate into a politics of 'vote banks.' In addressing such questions, Hegel's account of corporations and constitutional order would be an indispensable starting point. But Nandy and others do not explore this possibility within modern freedom.

Instead, the revisionists castigate modernity for the arbitrary privileging of 'reason over feelings, individual over community, work over play, masculinity over

'recognition' of the 'feminine principle' is obscured.

¹² Ashis Nandy, "The Politics of Secularism," 184.

femininity.' This portrayal is valid only if we confine ourselves to Descartes and ignore the long line of questioning that crystallises in Rousseau, Kant and Hegel. Although Nandy is vocal about the heterogeneity of cultures, he does not extend such a privilege to what he calls the 'modern West' and not infrequently, the 'West.' Commenting on Gandhi's admiration for the pre-modern or non-modern West, Nandy writes that the 'West should own up its oppressive self and the cultural continuity of that self with the West's classical and medieval selves.'¹³

Leaving aside this highly simplified approach to the West, let us see if such a continuity is ascribed to Hindu 'traditions.' One of the problems with rehabilitating 'traditions' in general has been that of oppressive customs. For instance, is *sati* (widow-burning, to continue the 'orientalist' translation) an integral part of Hindu tradition? Analyzing the uproar over the *sati* in 1987, Nandy writes:

It is remarkable how since the Deorala event there has been a revival of efforts by Anglophile, psychologically uprooted Indians . . . to end *sati* as a stigma primarily of Hinduism, and not as one of the byproducts of the entry of modern values--especially the absolutisation of impersonal human relationships,

¹³ Ashis Nandy, "From Outside the Imperium: Gandhi's Cultural Critique of the West," in Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 152.

the productivity principle, and market morality--into the interstices of Indian society.¹⁴

Nandy attempts to argue that the recent revival of sati has little or no connection with the traditional practice but is a 'byproduct' of 'modern values.'

According to him, the mythological significance of sati as the 'superiority of the feminine cosmic principle' is lost upon 'modern urban' Indians.¹⁵ But what about the 'authentic rural' guardians of traditions? They have been 'misled' by 'market morality' or some other modern principle and make an 'instrumental' use of customs. Then, where exactly does one go to find traditions in a pristine state? Besides, by what criteria does one distinguish between authentic customs and inauthentic distortions? Nandy traces the perversion of sati to 'modern values' like the productivity principle. However, we must ask if modernity provides no protection against the distortions engendered by market values? What about the commitment to individual

¹⁴ Ashis Nandy, "Sati in KaliYuga," in The Savage Freud (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 47. Nandy's reading of the protests against sati as yet another attempt to devalue traditions by the 'rootless, urban' Indians is, to say the least, one-sided.

¹⁵ This valorisation of the 'feminine cosmic principle' is misleading given the fact that Hindu symbols and myths also articulate the notion of *moksha* or perfect freedom that transcends all dualities of masculine and feminine, reason and feeling, finite and infinite.

rights in the modern Indian Constitution? When the so-called 'modern urban' Indians protest against sati, are they not voicing a commitment to human rights rather than simply devaluing traditions?

One major problem with Nandy's attack on modernity as well as his defense of traditions is that even while denouncing binary oppositions, his own work is replete with dichotomies like classical and folk, high culture and low culture and the west and non-west, and so forth. Further, some of these distinctions sound arbitrary. If the Gita notion of detached action is deployed in the name of nation-building, it is 'brahmanical and modern'; if it is used to defy the modern work ethic, it is subversive and folkish.¹⁶

This functional approach considerably weakens Nandy's insights on the question of religious faith and the lived experience of traditions. While he grasps that religious faith is rooted in an 'overall theory of transcendence,' he does not draw out all the implications of the experience of faith. By consistently anchoring religious experience in 'traditional practices,' Nandy overlooks the moment of transcendence implicit in some Hindu symbols and practices. Similarly, he grasps that 'indigenous practices' are 'non-

¹⁶ Ashis Nandy, "Towards a Third World Utopia," in Traditions, 43.

dualistic' and yet, fails to circumvent dualist oppositions in his own argument for subaltern traditions.¹⁷ As a result, it appears as if the experience of faith or non-dualistic oneness is wholly constituted by a set of 'authentic' practices and institutions.

This immanentisation loses sight of the transcendental moment of religious experience, the flight from all conditions symbolised in *moksha* or perfect freedom. The desire for liberation from the conditioned nature of human life and action (*maya*) suggests that the spiritual goes beyond 'lived' customs or traditions. Because he recognises that religious symbols and practices enable us to remember 'that' which is both 'in' the practice and 'beyond,' Gandhi does not hesitate to sidestep rituals or scriptural exegesis.¹⁸ A similar openness to transcendence enables

¹⁷ Nandy fails to see that one cannot embrace non-dualism and still reject modernity. If non-dualism is rooted in an experience that transcends opposites, then it would engender an exploration of the intimations of the immortal within both the indigenous and the modern. I think a similar dualism mars Vandana Shiva's polemic against 'western masculism' and her advocacy of the feminine principle. Nandy and Shiva might ask whether there are any modern institutions that can disclose the search for the divine. The principle of self-legislation that underlies modern constitutional order is no small reminder of the fact that man is neither beast nor God but is in-between the two.

¹⁸ Nandy too returns to Gandhi in his attempt to resurrect 'lived traditions.' But he seldom goes beyond cataloguing the subversive elements. In other words, Gandhi is presented as non-canonical, unorthodox, post-colonial or even post-modern. However, when we consider Gandhi's experiments in renunciation, his appeals

Vivekananda to carry the 'gospel' of Ramakrishna to the West.¹⁹ But how can we understand this search for transcendence in the first place? Does it mean fleeing the world? Does it require negating cultures and traditions?

Spiritual Experience: Symbols and Intuition

Radhakrishnan attempts to clarify the structure of spiritual experience in terms of intuitive insight into the 'Real' or the ground of being. He recognises that religious

to an 'inner voice,' his willingness to sacrifice the family for the nation and the nation for the world, he appears to be involved in something more than a defense of traditions. Being attuned to 'that' which transcends traditions and customs, Gandhi resists valorising the indigenous. Only by recovering the meaning of the search for transcendence can we begin to overcome the dichotomy of tradition and modernity. We will begin to see that the search for the whole is not only confined to 'traditional practices' but also pervades modern reason. Hegel's claim to absolute knowledge and freedom is one example of modern reason's drive to be all-encompassing; the relentless attempt to recollect and document the myths and 'revisionist histories' of different peoples is another example of the persistence of the desire for wholeness within modern reason. True, both these tendencies search for the meaning of the whole within history or historiography. However, we should not forget that modernity is also obsessed with the 'end of history.' In a nutshell, we have to move beyond reading Gandhi as anti-modern or post-colonial to grasp the significance of his thought and practice in recasting modern freedom. I treat these issues in greater detail in a subsequent chapter.

¹⁹ Nandy's description of Vivekananda and Vedanta as 'pasteurised, simplified, brahmanism' is hardly an example of hermeneutic charity. See Ashis Nandy, Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanma-bhoomi Movement and Fear of the Self, 63. While being critical of the missionary zeal in some strands of modern Hinduism, it is important to remember that the openness to the modern West is its strength.

symbols are crucial in 'preparing the soul' but the 'Real' exceeds the symbols. While the emphasis on intuition over symbols loosens the link between the spiritual and indigenous traditions, it is open to the charge of abstraction and ahistoricity. Radhakrishnan is well aware of this problem and tries to show that the intuitive apprehension of the whole is not 'other-worldly' but reveals the spiritual in the cosmos. In contrast to Ashis Nandy who, even while deriding 'modern values' succumbs to historical situatedness, Radhakrishnan responds to the challenge of history by way of a 'cosmic evolution' towards perfection. In this regard, Radhakrishnan echoes a universalism that at once derives from philosophers like Hegel but also goes beyond the latter. By way of his views on intuitive experience and history, I examine the prospects opened up by this account of the spiritual for the question of political community.

Radhakrishnan, like many Hindu thinkers, celebrates the non-dogmatic and non-organised character of Hinduism. He claims that Hinduism emphasises 'spiritual experience' rather than doctrine. Because of this experiential basis, Hinduism is said to be an 'eternal religion' in that it encompasses all other religions in itself. Radhakrishnan asserts that Hinduism is the most appropriate religion for

the modern man because it exudes a 'scientific spirit.' Is this just an attempt at self-assertion by Hindus? Is Radhakrishnan simply 'Christianising' and/or 'modernising' Hinduism? To make two initial points; it is impossible in the case of most modern Indian thinkers to isolate the Christian elements from the Hindu elements and in fact, their claim that Hinduism is an 'inclusive' religion would be vacuous without the fertilising impact of Christianity. For instance, Hindu thinkers have had to respond to the Christian challenge of universal equality and freedom to redeem their claim that Hinduism is an 'inclusive' way of life. Secondly, Radhakrishnan takes modernity and science seriously not because he is 'westernised' or 'inauthentic' but because he recognises that any religion which lays claim to 'universal spiritual truths' cannot retreat in the face of the modern challenge.

Keeping in mind the facts that Hinduism is not the only way of life in India and that it displays an empirical diversity that defies generalisation, it is useful to focus on what Radhakrishnan has to say about the Hindu notion of spiritual experience. In his words:

It is a type of experience which is not clearly differentiated into a subject-object state, an integral, undivided consciousness in which not merely this or that side of man's nature but his whole being seems to find itself. It is a condition of consciousness in which feelings are fused, ideas melt into one

another, boundaries are broken and ordinary distinctions are transcended. . . . All being is consciousness and all consciousness, being. . . . It is self-established, self-evidencing and self-luminous.²⁰

Radhakrishnan is explicating spiritual experience in terms of the Hindu (Upanisadic) symbol of *atman-brahman*. The spiritual experience discloses the identity of the cosmic principle (*brahman*) and the innermost essence of human beings (*atman*).²¹ In his view, this experience is 'immediate' and discloses the "I" or Self (*atman*) as a 'that' rather than as a 'what.'²²

The "I" referred to here is not the empirical historical self with a name and form but the immortal "I-I" that subsists when all attributes and conditions have been transcended. As he puts it, "this 'I' is not the body . . . for we do not say 'I am the body' but only 'I have a body.'²³ Radhakrishnan points to the primordial 'I' that

²⁰ Radhakrishnan, "Religious Experience and its Affirmations," in An Idealist View of Life (London: Unwin 1932), 72-73.

²¹ *Brahman* originally meant the magical force which is derived from the orderly cooperation of hymns, chants and sacrificial gifts. In the Upanishads which is the concluding part of the Vedas (*Vedanta in Sanskrit*), *brahman* is identified with the essence of the universe. *Atman* originally meant vital breath and comes to be associated with the innermost essence of man. See Surendranath Dasgupta, A History of Indian Philosophy, vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 36-37 & 45-48.

²² Radhakrishnan, Idealist View, 110.

²³ Radhakrishnan, Idealist View, 110.

accompanies all bodily and mental experience as the paradigm of self-knowledge.²⁴ Spiritual experience is, at once, the realisation and revelation of the Self as "perfect being, awareness and freedom (*sat, chit and ananda*)".²⁵

Is this 'I' the empty, abstract, disembodied 'I' generally attributed to Cartesian philosophy? Unlike the Cartesian subject who stands 'before' the world, the "I am *brahman*" experience is all-encompassing and absolute. In the latter, there is a transcendence of the body and the thinking ego in the intuitive awareness of oneness with all that "is."²⁶

Radhakrishnan points out that intuitive awareness of the divine Self is not an irrational or infra-rational process but one that completes the search for perfect knowledge. Intuition is not opposed to 'intellect' or discursive reason.²⁷ Whereas intellectual knowledge is

²⁴ Radhakrishnan, Idealist View, 109-110.

²⁵ Radhakrishnan, Idealist View, 80.

²⁶ Although we should note that Descartes' method of doubt is not entirely different from that of some Hindu thinkers. Whereas Descartes begins with the 'supposition' that the world might be a dream or a trick, thinkers like Sankara affirm that the lived world and the ego-self are the effects of delusion and ignorance. This similarity should not obscure the fact that Descartes appears to be searching for the ground of human knowledge and anchors it in the thinking subject while for Sankara, the ground of being is not the thinking self but the attributeless Self or *nirguna brahman*.

²⁷ Radhakrishnan, Idealist View, 114.

dependent upon concepts, intuition is a direct vision of the whole.²⁸ Radhakrishnan notes that this moment of spiritual experience is analogous to the last step of Diotima's ladder in the Symposium.²⁹

This intuitive apprehension distinguishes the *atman*-experience also from the hermeneutic account of experience advanced by Gadamer and others. In Gadamer's view, "experience is experience of human finitude."³⁰ Experience discloses our situatedness in language and traditions, both of which are historically constituted. In contrast, the *atman*-experience transcends language, context or history; it is self-illuminating, self-established and self-evidencing.³¹

But it may be objected that the very notion of *atman* as transcending time and space is constituted via history. At this point, we must recall that history is the privileged site of divine revelation only in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Further, the view that human consciousness is

²⁸ Radhakrishnan's distinction between intellect and intuition closely parallels that of Henri Bergson. See Idealist View, 107-108 & 116-117.

²⁹ Radhakrishnan, Idealist View, 116.

³⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 320.

³¹ Radhakrishnan, Idealist View, 73.

inextricably entwined with and constituted by our historical situatedness is even more recent.

The *atman-brahman* symbol intimates absolute freedom from all conditions of space and time.³² One who realises the *atman-brahman* or the state of perfect freedom does not realize anything new; having rended the veil of ignorance, he sees that there is nothing to be realised (except from the point of view of the ego-self), that 'One is without a second'. It is not as if there are two selves, one here below and another somewhere beyond and the two are reconciled but there is only one Self, the immortal atman.

A second reason why history is not so important is the notion of cyclical time.³³ The world of becoming is caught up in the opposites of life and death, happiness and misery, good and evil. In cosmological and religious myths, the monotony of becoming is addressed either in terms of the 'periodic regeneration of time (reenacted in festivals of

³² This is not to deny the extensive speculation on time within different strands of Hinduism nor the richness of critical thinking on methodological and epistemological issues. As J.N Mohanty notes, "history as the series of events or as the record of events in their uniqueness, is assured. History as a significant process of achieving new values which were not achieved before is denied." See J.N Mohanty, "Philosophy of History and its Presuppositions," in Essays on Indian Philosophy (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 306.

³³ J.N Mohanty, "Philosophy of History and its Presuppositions," in Essays on Indian Philosophy, 305.

spring, for instance) or by abolishing time through repetition of cosmogonic acts of Creation or by assimilating historical events into an archetypal, sacred History.'³⁴ The symbol of *atman* represents a rupture with myth in that the experience of perfect freedom implies an 'ontological break' so that the individual does not merely pass from the human to the superhuman condition but annihilates the Cosmos.³⁵ However, this abolition is not merely negative because it too signifies an attempt to remember the "absolute beginning" symbolised in myths, albeit through an effort of philosophic speculation.³⁶

By focusing on the immediate, intuitive and ineffable character of the 'that' (*atman-brahman*), Radhakrishnan highlights the transcendental pole of spiritual experience. He grasps that spiritual experience discloses a reality which exceeds the symbols and practices. Citing the Kena Upanishad, he writes, "it (*atman-brahman*) is other than the

³⁴ Eliade, "The Myth of Eternal Return," in Cosmos and History (New York: Harper and Row Torchbooks, 1959), 142.

³⁵ Mircea Eliade, "Sacred Architecture and Symbolism," in Symbolism, 124.

³⁶ Eliade notes how the search for the *atman* involves a 'going back to origins' though the 'regressus obtained not through ritual means but through philosophic thought.' See Eliade, "Mythology, Ontology and History," in Myth and Reality, 112.

known and above the unknown."³⁷ Unlike the historicist who would contend that all experience is constituted by language and culture, Radhakrishnan suggests that the reality that is experienced transcends what are called traditions.³⁸ As Voegelin has pointed out, this excess of the experience of reality poses a problem only if we assume that the 'symbols must have a world-immanent cause.'³⁹ The experience provokes symbolisation but also transcends it.⁴⁰ The meaning of such symbols can be apprehended only through an intuitive remembering and reenacting of the experience that gave rise to them.

Vedanta⁴¹ and Modernity: The Eschatological Turn

Because he grasps that symbols and traditional practices point beyond themselves to the immortal, Radhakrishnan is more open to modernity than some contemporary Indian writers who locate the spiritual mainly in indigenous

³⁷ Radhakrishnan, Idealist View, 75.

³⁸ Radhakrishnan, Idealist View, 76-77.

³⁹ Voegelin, "Immortality," in Published Essays, 68.

⁴⁰ Radhakrishnan, Idealist View, 75.

⁴¹ Vedanta literally means the 'end of the Veda' and refers to the Upanishads. As the "end of Veda," the Upanishads signify both a terminus and consummation of Vedic wisdom. In this context, it may be noted that Radhakrishnan's experiential approach to the notion of *Brahman-atman* draws mainly upon the Upanishads.

traditions.⁴² The non-dogmatic openness of Hinduism not only makes Radhakrishnan less hostile to modern science but also alerts him to the vestiges of religion and myth in the latter.⁴³ Radhakrishnan sees modern science as expressive of the desire for truth and the 'spirit of inquiry' rather than simply will to power.⁴⁴ Although his analysis regarding the spiritual potential within modernity is limited to modern science and does not probe modern political institutions, it serves to clarify one point--that an attunement to the experience underlying religious symbols and myths compels us to reenact the openness of such symbols in our search for the spiritual.

⁴² I argue in a subsequent chapter that a similar openness to the non-indigenous is intrinsic to Gandhi's thought and practise.

⁴³ Modern Vedanta exponents like Ranganathananda insist on the parallels between post-relativity science and mystical spirituality. Although there is a strong tendency to make Vedanta relevant to the modern world, it is also important to note the demystification of science in such writings. See Swami Ranganathananda, Eternal Values for a Changing Society (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1958), 615-624.

⁴⁴ Gandhi's revision of "God is Truth" to "Truth is God" is based on a similar alertness to the inner longings of science and scientists. Gandhi claims that even atheists do not doubt the existence of truth and are hence religious. Similarly, he describes his experiments with truth as 'scientific.' Gandhi recognises the scientific 'spirit' that pushes beyond pre-given limits of the body and the mind rather than modern science's mechanical or material conceptions of nature.

To begin with, Radhakrishnan's optimism sounds naive given the growing disenchantment with modern science and scientism. However, he is no uncritical exponent of science. Echoing Bergson, Radhakrishnan argues that science is a system of notations and symbols that interpret some aspects of experience.⁴⁵ Such interpretations are useful for specific purposes but cannot explain the structure of the universe as a whole.⁴⁶ Commenting on modern evolutionary theories, he warns that the 'creative impulse' should not be reduced to simply life-preservation or physico-chemical causes.⁴⁷ In his view, 'science cannot explain why matter should exist or life should occur at all.'⁴⁸ At the threshold of what cannot be explained by means of concepts, science has to acknowledge its own limits.

Despite these reservations, Radhakrishnan discerns certain 'spiritual longings' in modern science like the desire for perfection, the search for origins and perpetual

⁴⁵ Radhakrishnan, Idealist View, 177.

⁴⁶ Whereas someone like Nandy finds nothing but 'authoritarianism and violence' in modern science and dismisses the crises as 'marginal' to 'normal' science, Radhakrishnan is attuned to the spiritual longings expressed therein, if only faintly.

⁴⁷ Radhakrishnan, Idealist View, 197-204.

⁴⁸ Radhakrishnan, Idealist View, 196 & 203.

creativity best exemplified in evolutionary theories.⁴⁹ But is science not opposed to religion? For Radhakrishnan, modern science only opposes dogmatic religion and 'superstitious and barbaric practices.'⁵⁰ He contends that the 'scientific spirit of inquiry' will eventually overcome the limits of 'conceptual thinking' and affirm a 'rational faith.' He is careful enough to distinguish this 'rational faith' from humanistic religion or naturalism. Nor is 'rational faith' simply about elevating some 'respectable values' like universal welfare. In his view, 'the mystical cannot be reduced to the moral' because the former is attuned to a reality that is more comprehensive. 'Rational faith' implies an openness to the unseen and the eternal core that nourishes human reason and speech and yet, transcends both.

⁴⁹ Radhakrishnan is attracted to evolutionary theories probably because of the attempt to return to 'origins.' Of course, the return to origins in evolutionary theories is not the same as the return to origins in Hindu myth, ritual or speculative thought; whereas the former only finds the subhuman, the latter finds the divine in returning to origins.

⁵⁰ Radhakrishnan, Idealist View, 172. Radhakrishnan's reference to 'superstitious and barbaric practices' in favour of a 'rational faith' would be vehemently attacked as 'orientalist' or 'Eurocentric.' To some extent, Radhakrishnan's antipathy to rituals and idolatry can be seen as a product of the Enlightenment. However, we should note that he also inherits this resistance to rituals and cults from the Upanisads.

Based on this confidence regarding modern science, Radhakrishnan posits a 'cosmic evolution' toward perfection culminating in the 'world community' which is not simply an aggregate of different nations but a community attuned to *brahman* or the eternal.⁵⁰ In his words, "there must come a time when all individuals will become sons of God and be received into immortality."⁵¹

For Radhakrishnan, the 'end of history' is not simply a regulative ideal that inspires perpetual striving toward perfection as in Kant. To quote him: "But this view (of perpetual striving) ignores the solidarity between man and nature, values and reality. It cannot be a question of perpetual travelling. We should also arrive."⁵²

Given his belief in the ultimate consummation of the 'universal spirit,' Radhakrishnan interprets the crisis of our time as the birth pangs of a new world. Since this tone is strongly reminiscent of Hegel, it is useful to see how Radhakrishnan's spirituality derives and departs from that of Hegel.

⁵⁰ Radhakrishnan, Idealist View, 244.

⁵¹ Radhakrishnan, Idealist View, 245.

⁵² Radhakrishnan, Idealist View, 245.

The End of History: Hegel and Radhakrishnan

Radhakrishnan's views about Hinduism, that it is an 'eternal religion' that encompasses the spirit of all religions, that it is not other-worldly but this-worldly are, in a sense, responses to the charge made by Hegel that Hinduism represents 'Spirit in a dream state.'⁵⁴ Hegel had argued that the notion of the One or *brahman* was an undifferentiated, abstract, 'perennial solitude of self-consciousness, an intuition intuiting nothing' and that the lived world of the Hindu is a plethora of superstitions and immoral cult practices.⁵⁵ For Hegel, the Cosmic Spirit manifests itself progressively in world history beginning with the oriental realm where it is 'submerged' in its essence and culminating in the Germanic realm when 'Spirit casts off its other-worldliness' and gains complete self-consciousness. The 'end of history' whether it is interpreted as a terminus or inner purpose is freedom, which is not only freedom from necessity but also a freedom that recognises rational necessity in the shape of laws and institutions.

⁵⁴ Hegel, "The Oriental World," in The Philosophy of History, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Willey Book Co., 1944), 140 & 156.

⁵⁵ Hegel, On the Episode of the Mahabharata Known by the name Bhagavad-Gita by Wilhelm von Humboldt, ed. & trans. Hubert Herring, (Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1995), 57, 59 & 65.

Because Radhakrishnan grasps the Hindu-Vedantic symbol of *brahman* in terms of absolute freedom or as a stepping out of space and time, he does not agree with Hegel's dialectical account.⁵⁶ In other words, *brahman* is not simply human reason coming to self-consciousness. *Brahman* discloses our participation in a reality that moves human reason but also transcends it. Being highly attuned to the reality that exceeds the concept, Radhakrishnan's intuitive approach to the spiritual does not rest with freedom as the self-determination of reason but talks of freedom as openness to the realm of *brahman* (*brahmaloka*).

But Hegel might ask, "how does this vision of the whole actualise itself in the world"? Does Spirit simply hover in the beyond, too beautiful to be sullied by the world? Radhakrishnan too asks this question with respect to the Hindu symbol of *maya* or the world of becoming. Departing from the standard view that *maya* means 'illusion,' he writes that "the doctrine of *maya* tells us that we fall away from our authentic being if we are lost in the world of empirical objects and earthly desires, turning our back on the reality

⁵⁶ Radhakrishnan argues that Hegel's dialectical account of concrete unity presupposes an intuitive insight that remains outside the System. See Idealist View, 135.

which gives them value."⁵⁷ To regard the world of 'appearance' as the ultimate is 'delusion'; the world that appears is an 'expression' of the ultimate, conceived here as a personal God.⁵⁸

Further, Radhakrishnan recasts the notion of *maya* from an interminable becoming or oscillation between opposites to a 'process' that culminates in universal salvation. To quote him:

Cosmic history is working towards its highest moment when the universal tendency towards spiritual life becomes realised in one and all, when the ethical experience of non-attainment yields to participation by the creatures in life eternal, when the powerful will of the individual yields in love to the spirit of the universe. As matter was delivered of life and life of mind, so is man to be delivered of the spirit. That is his destiny. . . . Human life is being prepared for this end.⁵⁹

Radhakrishnan sees nature as well as history as preparing for the ultimate triumph of the 'Universal Spirit.' The 'secret desire' of man to be 'superman' is likely to become a historical achievement. According to him, 'scientific

⁵⁷ Radhakrishnan, "The World's Unborn Soul," in Eastern Religions and Western Thought (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), 32.

⁵⁸ Hindu thought distinguishes between the attributeless *brahman* which transcends the cosmic order and the personal God who is worshipped as the Creator and ruler. At the level of God, there persists a distinction between the individual and the absolute, a distinction that vanishes or gets muted in the *atman-brahman* symbol.

⁵⁹ Radhakrishnan, Idealist View, 242.

theories suggest that man, as he is, need not be regarded as the crowning glory of evolution.'⁶⁰

But what kind of evolution does he envisage? For him, evolution opens the individual to the 'mystery of being,' the coming into being of something 'new' rather than an unfolding of what was already there. The cosmos is not simply moving toward a predetermined end because 'God works like a creative genius' and the 'end is not contained in the beginning but assumes definite shape through the characteristics of the parts of the process.'⁶¹

The question is whether modern reason is compatible with such a prophetic vision. Because Radhakrishnan looks toward different scientific theories of nature, he underestimates the challenge posed by modernity to recovering the spiritual. Here, we cannot ignore Kant's point about self-determination as the core principle of modern reason. In other words, even if modern science were to arrive at an impasse which calls for some new myth or God, Radhakrishnan still has to show that such a reenchantment is feasible and desirable within the conception of reason as autonomous self-legislation.

⁶⁰ S. Radhakrishnan, "The Need for Religion," in Religion and Society (Great Britain, 1947; reprint, Delhi: Indus, 1995), 18 & 166.

⁶¹ Radhakrishnan, Idealist View, 269.

For the modern man's 'courage' to 'think for oneself' encounters immense hurdles in restoring the openness to the whole that Radhakrishnan analyses in spiritual experience. The appeal to a pre-given cosmic order is difficult given the Kantian critique of dogmatic metaphysics. True, the archimedean standpoint of Kantian reason gets modified in subsequent philosophy in terms of history and intersubjectivity but even then, the principle of autonomy remains unquestioned.

If human history is 'destined' to realize the realm of *brahman*, then we have to ask where and how such modern achievements like individual rights and constitutional government fit in this design. How does history move from freedom as self-determination of the will and affirmation of 'ordinary life' (as Taylor puts it) to the transhistorical, transcosmic freedom suggested by *brahman-atman*?

In addressing these questions, we must remember the dangers inherent in eschatological responses. One danger with an evolutionary vision of the 'realm of *brahman*' is that it unleashes millennial expectations and destructive projects. Radhakrishnan may counter that he acknowledges the role of the unknown and an openness to mystery in the cosmic evolutionary process. But the destructive and totalitarian potential of his evolutionary thesis arises from rendering

brahman as universal redemption that is progressively realised in history.

In my view, the 'realm of *brahman*' or *brahmaloka* is not about historical becoming at all. As one Upanishadic seer puts it:

It is not so there. The sun has not set; nor has he ever risen. O ye gods, by this truth, may I not fall from Brahma."⁶¹

The perfect freedom of one who abides in the Real is expressed by the seers as that which always already is and not as something that comes to be. As such, an evolutionary account of *brahman* compromises the transcendent, acosmic pole of the experience of freedom.

Does this mean that the world of becoming is left unchanged by the experience of 'absolute freedom' symbolised in *brahman*? Does this mean that the quest for transcendence implies renouncing worldly activity? If so, is not Hegel right in arguing that Hindu Spirit is other worldly or life-negating? It is best to address these questions by way of a brief contrast between Radhakrishnan and Gandhi.

The Spiritual and the Life of Action

Radhakrishnan and Gandhi share a lot in common. Both allude to the spiritual in terms of the experience of the

⁶¹ See Chandogya Upanishad chap.III, section 11, verse 2 in The Principal Upanishads, ed. Radhakrishnan (Great Britain, 1953; reprint, Delhi: Indus, 1995) 386.

whole. Radhakrishnan's distinction between the intellect and intuition parallels Gandhi's own distinction between the mind and heart where the latter terms do not simply stand for feelings as opposed to reason but for that region (psyche or soul) from which a human being responds to the whole.⁶² Both reject a doctrinaire appeal to the Vedas or the authority of scriptural exegetes. As such, it is crucial to avoid the line of thought that Gandhi is more 'rooted' in traditions or 'folk culture' whereas Radhakrishnan is 'westernised.' The critical difference between Gandhi and Radhakrishnan is that the former captures the meaning of man's search for the eternal more convincingly and concretely.

Gandhi attempts to apprehend the experience - underlying *atman-brahman* in terms of the *Bhagavad Gita* ideal of disinterested action. In simple words, the Gita upholds detached action or acting without attachment to the rewards of action. What is involved here is not simply an attitude or a pure motive but a way of life. Only through a rigorous inquiry into the question of 'who am I' that the individual remembers that he or she is not the body or the mind but the

⁶² Gandhi, "Human Nature, Perfectibility and History," in The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol II, Truth and Violence, ed. Raghavan Iyer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 34. This text is henceforth abbreviated as MPMG.

self-luminous, self-evident, *atman*-Self. When one abides in the Self, then one acts as if one were a spectator or as Gandhi calls it, a trustee. Just as a magician is unmoved by his own feats, just as an actor plays her part, the wise person acts perfectly and disinterestedly.⁶³

Gandhi's ingenuity consists in turning every action into a meditation upon the meaning of the *atman*-Self. Hence neither cleaning toilets nor spinning nor going to jails can be purely secular or mundane acts. Every act is an opportunity to examine the empirical self, to renounce the sense of 'I am the doer' and simultaneously to remember the *atman*-Self. He discourages abandoning one's worldly life in the name of renunciation. Rather, he sees that disinterested action is about transfiguring worldly life in the light of the human search for the eternal. By being attuned to the divine pull within the heart or soul or *atman*, one renounces the clamour for recognition and rewards rather than action per se.

For this reason, the question of the worldly relevance of Hindu symbols like *maya* or *brahman* never

⁶³ Ramana Maharshi captures the paradox of disinterested action thus: "when women carrying jars of water on their heads, stop to talk, they are very careful, keeping their mind on the water jars. Similarly, when a sage engages in activity, his mind remains fixed in the Self and his activity does not distract him." See Ramana Maharshi, The Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, ed. Arthur Osborne, (Tiruvannamalai: Ramanasramam, 1971), 95.

becomes a major source of anxiety for Gandhi. He does not envision a universal redemption or salvation which will end history. In fact, he affirms that "it is impossible to do away with the law of suffering which is the one indispensable condition of our being."⁶⁴ He is not a pessimist or a fatalist but realises that suffering is unavoidable so long as one clings to the sense of me and mine.⁶⁵ Suffering has its roots in the human condition mired in 'pairs of opposites' like life and death, ignorance and wisdom, misery and bliss and so forth.

The *atman* symbol points to an experience that transcends such opposites. For this reason, some 'seers' declare that neither attachments nor suffering is 'real.' This appears to be a magical conjuring trick, wishful at best and foolish and dangerous at its worst. But we must remember that such statements are also intended to provoke an inquiry into the experience of suffering or attachments. Hence, Ramana Maharshi, when asked about the relevance of seeking wisdom for worldly suffering, exhorts the

⁶⁴ Gandhi, "History," in MPMG, Vol.II, 41.

⁶⁵ Although Gandhi's periodic fasts appear life-negating and ascetic, he appeals to an 'inner voice' rather than his feelings. Although after Nietzsche, Freud and Foucault, it is blasphemous to talk of disciplining the self or purifying the ego, Gandhi's experiments become intelligible only when we go beyond demystifying the religious. After all, the same Gandhi insists on goat's milk and green vegetables.

questioner, "but find out who you are who is asking this question". From the point of view of one immersed in the embodied ego-self, liberation appears to be freedom from attachments and suffering. But for one who sees the *atman*-self in everything, attachments or suffering stem from metaphysical 'ignorance.' As Ramana Maharshi puts it, "just as a goldsmith, estimating gold in various jewels, sees only the gold, so also a Realised Being sees only the Self."⁶⁶ Neither the Realised being nor the spiritual aspirant claim to liberate others or ameliorate suffering simply because in the final analysis, there is no one to be liberated.⁶⁷

The perfect 'sage' acts in the world not so much to eliminate the *maya* world but to instruct humans in gaining perfect freedom from the opposites intrinsic to this world. The historical world of becoming is not left as it is but is transfigured to the extent individuals recognise what it means to order the self in the light of the eternal. Because Gandhi is attentive to the paradoxical character of the quest for perfect freedom, he resists an eschatological

⁶⁶ Ramana Maharshi, Teachings, 112.

⁶⁷ As Ramana Maharshi says, "if you see a number of people in a dream and then wake up and recall your dream, do you try to find out whether the persons in your dream are also awake?" See Ramana Maharshi, Teachings, 115.

translation of *brahman* without compromising its significance for living and acting in the world.

In other words, it is not necessary to counter Hegel's charge of 'other worldliness' by erecting a theory of cosmic evolution (as in Radhakrishnan). For the pursuit and attainment of absolute freedom is other-worldly only if we accept Hegel's view that human freedom is about seeking recognition or that the eternal has to be reconciled with the temporal.

At the same time, Hegel will be the preeminent modern thinker to engage with in thinking through the significance of Hindu ideas of perfect freedom or the realm of *brahman* for our search for freedom and community. For he was the first to recognise that modern ethical life has a spiritual dimension as well as a transhistorical significance. Hegel affirms that the modern principles of universal equality and freedom have roots in Protestant Christianity. He acknowledges the 'foundational' significance of religion and faith without jettisoning the autonomy of modern constitutionalism. Similarly, he admits that ethical life embodied in laws and institutions has to reflect the 'spirit of a people' and yet, he does not abandon the search for the universal core animating both the spiritual and the ethical.

If Hindu symbols such as *atman-brahman* or disinter-

ested action have something to say about spiritual experience and spiritual politics in general, and not simply about a specific culture, then it is important to clarify how they can enrich Hegel's understanding of the 'spirit' of modern constitutionalism. By way of Gandhi's practice of trusteeship, I will explore this question in greater depth subsequently.

Conclusion

Focusing on the Indian context where arguments for community often entail the question of religious faith and spiritual politics, I have argued that a retreat into 'indigenous traditions' is inadequate. The valorisation of indigenous or authentic traditions in the name the 'lived experience' of religion elevates one pole of such an experience, its immanent aspect over the transcendental pole. If we examine some of the Hindu symbols which intimate the experience of the divine like *atman-brahman*, it is clear that the reference is not so much to a situatedness in 'traditions' as much as to a situatedness in a cosmic whole and sometimes, to an extra-cosmic 'beyond.'

The attention to the transcendental aspect makes Radhakrishnan more open to modernity than some recent writers like Ashis Nandy. Because he realises that the

experience of the spiritual surpasses symbols and rituals, Radhakrishnan grasps that the task of reclaiming community is not about conserving traditions but about forging a 'world community.' However, Radhakrishnan's hope of a 'cosmic evolution' towards such a world community does not clarify the status of modern achievements like individual rights and constitutionalism. More importantly, the symbol of *brahman* does not easily lend itself to an eschatological transmutation because it points to a reality that transcends history.

While Radhakrishnan grasps the tension between the immanent and transcendental poles of the experience of the spiritual, he proceeds to erase this tension in his theory of cosmic evolution. In contrast, Gandhi's thought and politics highlight the 'worldly' significance of spiritual quest in terms of disinterested action. From this standpoint, the community question is neither about cultural difference nor about indigenous forms of life but about remembering what it means to be in-between the human and the divine, the many and the One. But before exploring Gandhi further, we have to examine Hegel's political thought because he was the first to announce the spirituality of modern ethical life.

Chapter 4

HEGEL: FREEDOM, COMMUNITY AND MODERN ETHICAL LIFE

Introduction

In the preceding chapters, I explored Taylor's argument for expressivist politics and some Indian arguments for 'spiritual politics' to set forth some dominant themes played out in the debates on freedom and community. While Taylor attempts to combat the atomism of modern liberalism in terms of our longing for authentic identity, Radha-krishnan tries to recast modern freedom in terms of the human longing for the eternal. Both these visions are, to some extent, prefigured in the writings of one towering thinker of modernity, namely, Hegel.

Hegel's critique of Kant's 'formal' autonomy and his explication of subjective freedom in terms of ethical life or *sittlichkeit* reverberate in the communitarian critique of liberalism.¹ While exploring Hegel's contribution to the question of individual and community, I will frequently

¹ Hegel's critique of Kant forms the backdrop of many communitarian critiques of liberalism. Following Hegel, communitarians attack the Kantian notion of autonomy as abstract and formal. However, Hegel's equally trenchant critiques of Rousseau do not receive the same attention in communitarian discourse. Since Hegel's arguments about the concrete nature of universals is appropriated through hermeneutics, Hegel's confidence in a trans-cultural and transhistorical realm of spirit is lost within contemporary demands for community.

return to Taylor's proposal for expressivist community. Taylor's critique of instrumental reason, his case for 'situated' subjectivity, his sensitivity to issues arising from ecology, gender and ethnicity and his recasting of liberal freedom and equality in terms of authentic identity make him a paradigmatic thinker of our time. Further, Taylor's notion of authenticity echoes in the call for 'indigenous traditions' by Nandy and others in the Indian context. Even the revivalist politics of the BJP rides on the persuasive force of 'authentic' Hindu identity. It is crucial to engage with Taylor not so much because he is responsible for such extensions or distortions but because he articulates the philosophical presuppositions of authenticity with greater self-consciousness than others.

Admittedly, there are good reasons for Taylor's turn to authentic identity--- the triumph of an individualist variant of liberalism and the tremendous force of homogeneous nationalism in our century, to name a few. But the question is whether the turn to identity is inevitable in our attempt to reclaim the moral and spiritual kernel of liberalism.

Both Taylor and Hegel are concerned with the atomism intrinsic to modern freedom and the need to anchor rights in communal belonging. The key difference is that Hegel's

ethical life is not geared to preserving cultural identities but to enhancing freedom. In reconciling freedom and community, Hegel focuses on the bourgeois family, civil society, corporations and constitutional state rather than specific cultures or traditions. Given the present accent on the 'constitutive' role of traditions and languages, is Hegel's portrayal of *sittlichkeit* or ethical life still valid?

Is there a middle ground between liberal atomism and authentic identity? Hegel's analysis of recognition and right reveals the potential for community within modern freedom without recourse to authentic identity. In his notion of ethical life (*sittlichkeit*), Hegel shows that modern freedom is not simply about abstract rights but about forging solidarity in and through concrete norms and institutions. In his account of the corporations and constitutional state, Hegel provides a powerful argument for universal equality and rule of law as the focus of community. While conceding the relevance of socio-cultural and religious existence for ethical life, he desists from grounding politics in either religion or culture.

How would Hegel respond to Indian thinkers who call for a spiritual politics? Hegel repudiates an 'artificial' separation between religion and politics even while he

preserves the distinction between the two realms. His philosophical reconstruction of the inner bond between Protestantism and modern ethical life clarifies the irrevocable nature of subjective freedom in any attempt to reconcile religion and modern politics. Modern constitutionalism is spiritual not because it elevates one religion above others but because it realises the principles of universal freedom and human dignity.

Because Hegel anticipates many of the charges levelled against liberal politics by communitarians as well as the proponents of spiritual politics and reconstructs modern freedom and constitutionalism both from the standpoint of community and spirituality, his political thought remains paradigmatic. While Hegel has become the target both for critics who lament modernity's rupture with the ancients as well as those who denounce its 'metaphysics of subjectivity,' his sophisticated account of right and his confidence in constitutionalism make him equally attractive for those who embrace important facets of modernity.

In this chapter, I explore Hegel's insights on the question of individual and community. By way of a phenomenological analysis of the will, Hegel uncovers modern freedom in terms of both individual rights and the common good. In his account of ethical life, he alludes to two models of

community which are both important: firstly, that of the corporation wherein individuals seek to transcend the vagaries of civil society through rectitude and honour in vocational associations; secondly, the constitutional order which constitutes the political community in terms of liberty and the rule of law. Since neither vocational interests nor constitutional norms are given for ever, the task of forging commonality implies continuous reappropriation of the reason embedded in these institutions.

I begin by highlighting the selective appropriation of Hegel in current communitarian discourse. While Hegel's critique of Kant's formalism resonates in the communitarian attack on the 'unencumbered self,' his equally trenchant critique of Rousseau is somewhat muted. Focusing on some Rousseauian motifs in thinkers like Sandel and Taylor, I argue that Hegel's warnings about republican patriotism provide a corrective to the current tide in favour of strong attachments.

In steering a middle ground between Kant's formalism and Rousseau's republicanism, Hegel remains on the side of the modern will to freedom. Through a phenomenological account, Hegel shows that the arbitrariness and emptiness haunting modern freedom flow from a one-sided accent on the subjective moment of willing. The remedy is to illuminate

the objective moment of freedom so that the will's embodiment in concrete laws and institutions becomes transparent to modern self-consciousness.

In contrast, the current appeal to a politics of the common good is silent, if not hostile, to the will. After Nietzsche and Heidegger, it has become customary to repudiate both the will and the desire for autonomy as 'will to power.' Communitarians like Taylor and Sandel foreground our historical situatedness precisely to counter the contingencies intrinsic to willing. But if we consider the desire for historical or cultural authenticity and the demand for 'recognition' of identities, then the will resurfaces even within arguments for community.

Once we see this link, then we are forced to clarify the problem of the will and the contingency associated with it even when we proclaim historical or cultural situatedness. Besides Hegel, there is one other thinker who addresses this problem, namely, Arendt. Arendt traces the longing for particularity or uniqueness to the Christian discovery of the inner self and the will's capacity for 'new beginnings.' Contrary to Hegel who subsumes particularity as one moment of the will's journey to freedom, Arendt argues that particularity and contingency are constitutive of willing. She leaps over the 'abyss of freedom' that results from

this revaluation of willing by recourse to judgement and trust in 'exemplary' founding acts. Thus, she redeems the significance of modern covenants and constitutions without resorting to universal history like Hegel or cultural specificity like the communitarians.

While Arendt's approach is promising, she does not sufficiently recognize limits to the diversity of contingent wills. Portraying the excesses of civil society, Hegel sees that contingency can negate freedom. Civil society narrates both the achievement and loss of modernity: it affirms the right to individual freedom from pre-given hierarchies and inherited status; at the same time, it is torn asunder by a proliferation of particular rights. Given this dance of the particular, Hegel realises that strong communal attachments are not possible for us moderns. Instead, he writes of 'trust' as the basis of both the civil society and the constitutional state. Although Hegel's dialectical analysis is suspect in the current trend toward *differance*, I think it is a useful reminder that modern civil society and constitutionalism embody the human capacity for trust rather than merely suspicion.

To clarify the link between trust and modern freedom, I examine Hegel's views on corporations. I argue that the corporation is not simply an aggregator of interests nor an

administrative arrangement. As a microcosm of *sittlichkeit* or ethical life, the corporation relates the three moments of ethical life--- the family, civil society and the state. It secures modern freedom from degenerating into a perpetual contest for power by anchoring recognition in rectitude and honour in one's vocation, civility and trust. Thus, Hegel points not so much to an 'expressivist' community (as Taylor contends) but to a 'symbiotic' politics. Although Hegel does not draw out all the political implications of trust, his insights are helpful in reappropriating Althusius's notion of a 'symbiotic realm' or a political order attuned to associational virtues.

Besides the corporation, Hegel's notion of the constitutional order as an articulated unity also clarifies the link between freedom and community. The constitutional regime reflects our situatedness in what has been called the 'civil condition.'² The modern constitution is neither an arbitrary division of powers nor a charter of rights but a weaving together of the principles of belonging and freedom prefigured in the family and civil society. It draws upon pre-existing customs and practices even while it transforms them in the light of freedom and solidarity. While there is

² Michael Oakeshott, "On the Civil Condition," in On Human Conduct (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 108.

much to be said against the concentration of power in the hands of the civil service and the accent on territorial sovereignty, Hegel's insights on the constitutional order still remain relevant. For he sees the constitution as an attempt at elevating politics beyond force and contract to an exercise in ethical and spiritual order. Here, I contend that the two dominant charges made against Hegel, that his notion of sovereignty excludes genuine otherness and that his constitutional order presupposes a homogeneous nation are both one-sided. The constitution cannot fully contain the excess of civil society and has to be content with trust. Similarly, the constitution cannot become the tool of a nation without destroying its own roots in subjective freedom.

Finally, I probe his case for the 'spirituality' of the modern constitutional state in order to highlight his contribution to the call for 'spiritual politics' among Indian thinkers. Hegel is right in arguing that religion or the spiritual is not simply about 'other worldly' freedom but about securing freedom in this world. At the same time, Hegel's case rests upon a notion of freedom as recognition and Protestantism as the 'absolute religion.' However, the kind of spiritual freedom sought by someone like Gandhi is not exhausted by freedom as recognition. For Gandhi, freedom

is tied up with recovering our openness to the eternal. Trust and faith articulate this open ended search and our situatedness in-between ignorance and perfection. Hegel is both a guide and an obstacle in reinstating this quest for the eternal within modern politics. This section will set the stage for the inquiry into Gandhi in the next chapter.

Right, the Will and Communitarianism

Hegel writes that a philosophical science of right is concerned with 'the concept of right and its actualisation.'³ His 'concept' of right is not an abstract universal imposed upon existing reality.⁴ It illuminates the inner reason in existing institutions. In this section, I review some aspects of his account of right to show how it antici-

³ Hegel, Elements of the Philosophy of Right, trans. H.B Nisbet, ed., Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), par.1, p.25. References to this text are abbreviated as PR in the rest of the chapter. Since some of the citations are drawn from Hegel's Remarks or Additions to the paragraphs, where applicable, the paragraph number is followed by R or A. To set apart the page number from paragraph number, I have used 'p' to designate the former.

⁴ In Hegel's Logic, the doctrine of the Concept is the third stage of thought thinking itself; Hegel argues that the concept is not only the form of subjective thinking but implies specific content. Among other examples, he points to how we deduce legal determinations from the concept of property. In this sense, the concept is not something imposed upon the world but captures the inner essence of what is 'out there.' See Hegel, The Encyclopedia Logic, trans. T.F Garaets and others (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), par. 1 0 A, p.237.

pates and addresses some of the charges mounted by communitarians against the 'unencumbered self.' Focusing upon his critique of Rousseau's republicanism, I problematise the residual Rousseauian strand in the communitarian case for the common good and authentic identity.

The communitarian critique of liberalism builds upon Hegel's critique of Kant's notion of autonomy as abstract and formal.⁵ While appreciating Kant's linking of right and duty in the Categorical Imperative, Hegel had argued that Kant's notion of autonomy lacks concrete content and obscures its grounding in extant institutions. For instance, the maxim that one ought not to commit theft because if everyone were to do so, there would be no property makes sense only against the acceptance of property as an institution.⁶ In a similar vein, Sandel argues against Rawls that the primacy of liberty is itself a moral conception traceable to a specific historical and cultural context.⁷

At the same time, while Hegel's *sittlichkeit* or ethical life underwrites principles like the rule of law and constitutional state as the focus of community, Sandel and Taylor turn to shared moral understandings and inherited

⁵ Michael Sandel, "The Procedural Republic," 16.

⁶ *PR*, par.135 R, p.162-163.

⁷ Michael Sandel, "The Procedural Republic," 22-24.

common memories. They think that liberal political institutions have to be recast so as to be expressive of our historical and communal uniqueness. Hegel's confidence in the transhistorical and transcultural reconstruction of ethical life is jettisoned in this case for a politics of the common good. How would Hegel respond to this radicalisation of his own insights?

Hegel's response to the present day communitarians who emphasize civic republicanism like Sandel would proceed from his critique of Rousseau. He praises Rousseau's general will as an example of the concept of right because it has "thought not only as its form but also as its content."⁸ However, Rousseau neglects the objective side of right. Rousseau's state is still founded upon contract and hence on a contingent and arbitrary will. Since the general will does not grasp the immanent reason in extant laws and institutions, it can unleash destruction. Hegel traces the terrible aftermath of the French revolution to a subjective will that affirms itself blindly.⁹

A similar argument can be made against Sandel's

⁸ Hegel, The Encyclopedia Logic, par.1 3 A, p.241; see also PR, par.258, p.277. As a concept, the general will is different from the sum of individual wills; it discloses that the essence of willing is freedom.

⁹ PR, par.258, p.277.

appeal to commonly shared moral understandings. On the surface, there is little in common between Rousseau and Sandel; Rousseau would be very suspicious of inherited customs and would prefer to unmask the hypocrisy and corruption; Rousseau affirms the modern desire for new beginnings and the will to freedom whereas Sandel aspires to subvert the primacy of freedom.

And yet, Sandel's call for civic republicanism echoes Rousseau's appeal to the general will.¹⁰ Although Sandel does not invoke new beginnings but only highlights our communal attachments, he aspires to forge an immediate belonging between individual and community. Hegel would object to the immediacy implicit in this thesis and warn us that customs and conventions do not always generate reflective participation.¹¹ Further he would ask whether our moral understandings have been untouched by two centuries of a politics of rights. Is the call for civic republicanism not about a will to community? Like Rousseau, is Sandel not

¹⁰ Rousseau's influence is much more explicit in Taylor.

¹¹ Hegel himself tries to restore some form of immediacy in the constitutional state but he steers clear of anchoring it in a substantive account of the good and mediates it through subjective freedom. The immediacy based on substantive good is characteristic of an earlier form of ethical life embodied in Greek society for which the universals were given. But Hegel argues that this immediacy is broken with the right of subjectivity already intimated in Socrates and explicitly affirmed in Christianity.

pointing to the alienating effects of extant institutions and summoning us to forge a new beginning? Do we not then replay Rousseau's emphasis on the subjective side of the will, albeit at a communal level?

Here, Taylor might object that the shift to a common good is not about immediacy but about a different kind of mediation.¹² After all, hermeneutic insights about the horizons of significance flow into the communitarian accent on the constitutive role of language and cultural practices.¹³ There is an unmistakable affinity between

¹² Taylor redeploys Hegel's *sittlichkeit* so broadly that not only constitution and laws but virtually all cultural practices and customs become relevant for politics. Hegel argues that our embeddedness in customs does not always disclose the inner reason making it necessary to codify the taken-for-granted. Positing a custom into law or right is a distinct form of mediation for Hegel and not simply an affirmation of extant practices. Taylor accepts the point about mediation but then subsumes all forms of mediation under expressivism. If constitutions and laws are understood as 'languages' which express a horizon in which we are 'always already' situated, then the superiority of posited right over lived customs becomes questionable. See, Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 569. But is there no difference between the way we are formed by political institutions on the one hand and temples or churches or carnivals on the other? Here, Arendt is more helpful because she retains the autonomy of political action and the possibility of a non-subjectivistic disinterestedness in what she calls spectatorship. I develop this point more fully in a subsequent section as well as in the chapter on Gandhi.

¹³ Taylor's turn to language in defining authenticity builds upon Gadamer's claim that dialectics is to be retrieved in hermeneutics. Gadamer anchors Hegel's notion 'objective spirit' (which is the heading under which Hegel discusses ethical life in *The Philosophy of Mind*) in common self-understandings. For Gadamer, these common understandings are historically and cultural-

Hegel's view that freedom is not only about abstract rights but about ethical life embodied in family, civil society and the state and Taylor's thesis that we are always already embedded in specific cultures. But Hegel foregrounds freedom whereas Taylor emphasises authentic identity.

The shift from freedom to identity is part of a narrative where self-determination is seen as occluding our social situatedness.¹⁴ Hegel would concur with Taylor on the contemporary crisis of an individualistic reading of rights and the need to acknowledge some form of situatedness. But he would also point out that the task is to reconstruct the politics of rights around a more meaningful account of self-determination. In that task, it is the constitutional polity with its emphasis on rule of law and intermediary associations that would be the focus rather than shared conceptions of the good life or authentic identity. The unencumbered self is countered not by replacing a politics of rights with

ly specific and manifest certain traditions or horizons of meaning. This implies that the immanent reason of institutions cannot be delinked from the traditions within which they come into being. Gadamer regards language as the storehouse of traditional understandings. Since understanding 'happens' in language and conversation, it is open to dialogue and revision. See Gadamer, "Hegel's Philosophy and its Aftereffects", in Reason in the Age of Science, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), 32-33.

¹⁴ Taylor, Malaise, 68.

a politics of the common good but by restoring the immanent reason within the institutions that secure rights.¹⁵

Why does Hegel resist cultural or linguistic situatedness? This is because he is attentive to the metaphysical roots of modern freedom in the will. From this standpoint, the will to freedom is embodied both in a set of rights and a set of institutions. As a rights-bearing subject, one is situated within a set of institutions which can be shown to be 'right' in the sense of embodying the principle of self-determination. A culture or language, unlike a constitution, does not always or solely embody the principle of recognition-seeking subjectivity. Hence, Hegel points to our situatedness in a series of modern institutions rather than diffuse cultures to combat atomism. Contra Taylor who demands recognition for distinct cultures, Hegel would ask, 'can we argue that the entire range of practices subsumed under culture are rooted in the will?' Taylor's own view

¹⁵ Habermas develops this strand of Hegel by way of an inquiry into language as the site of communicative action. While he succeeds to some extent in redeeming ethical life from cultural relativism, his work is pitched at a level so as to lose any concrete content. For instance, we can illuminate Gandhi's satyagraha in terms of a theory of communicative action but then we have to bracket out the spiritual core of pursuing truth as self-suffering. Here the appeal to another human being is not simply as a participant in a language community but as one who seeks the eternal, that which exceeds symbols. See Thomas Pantham, "Habermas's Practical Discourse and Gandhi's Satyagraha," in Political Discourse: Explorations in Indian and Western Political Thought, 303 & 308.

that we are 'always already' situated in cultures and languages contains an implicit negative answer to this question.¹⁶

Does this imply that Hegel's ethical life is accessed without language and culture? Given Hegel's sensitivity to mediations, it would be difficult to charge him with oversight on this issue. But then he distinguishes between different kinds of mediations and realises that to be situated in a language or culture is different from being situated in a constitutional order. The principle underlying the latter is freedom as self-determination. Simply because we cannot talk to a bureaucrat without a common language does not mean that we share a substantive conception of the common good. What one shares is a moral language that promotes civility and trust. As Oakeshott has noted, such a language draws from existing 'vocabularies of conduct,' relates individuals as civil beings, and steers clear of enjoining substantive actions.¹⁷

¹⁶ Taylor is probably aware of the problem because he argues that authenticity has to be separated from self-determination lest it slide into 'anthropocentrism.' Taylor, *Malaise*, 67-68. But Taylor is ambivalent about the exact relationship between modern freedom and authenticity. It is not clear if he proposes to recast freedom in terms of authenticity or if he wants to add the two. In either case, the tension between modern freedom rooted in the will and our location in cultures has to be addressed.

¹⁷ Michael Oakeshott, "On the Civil Condition," 108.

Hegel is not unique in emphasising laws and constitutions in forging community. Hannah Arendt also resorts to civic institutions rather than a substantive moral community in trying to link freedom and community.¹⁸ Like Hegel, she realises the centrality of willing although she analyses the will from a more radical standpoint.¹⁹ Since the communitarian turn to identity stems from the contingency and arbitrariness that haunt modern will to freedom and since this is a problem both Hegel and Arendt address without falling back upon a politics of the common good, it is useful to elaborate this issue further.

The Itinerary of the Will

Hegel's critique of both Rousseau and Kant focuses on the contingency that mars the will to freedom. Through a phenomenological account of the will, he tries to show that arbitrariness is only one moment in the voyage of the will. To describe the itinerary of the will briefly: the will is initially free *in-itself*.²⁰ At this stage, the will lacks a

¹⁸ One reason is that Nietzsche's 'genealogy' of morals plays a prominent role both in Heidegger and Arendt and is somewhat muffled in hermeneutics.

¹⁹ See Hannah Arendt, The Life of the Mind: Willing, vol.II (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 28-34.

²⁰ Hegel often employs the terms *in-itself* and *for-itself*. In simple terms, '*in-itself*' indicates a potential whereas *for-*

determinate content and experiences the thrill of infinite freedom, a freedom to do anything which is also the freedom to do nothing. This pure will can either lead to total inertia as in the "Hindu notion pure contemplation" or total destruction as in the reign of terror after the French revolution.²¹

To act freely implies acting in the world where other wills exist. Here, Hegel distinguishes between Kant's moral will and ethical life. The moral will demarcates the 'inner realm' of intentions and purposes from mere passions and interests. Hegel credits Kant's moral will with grasping the 'infinite subjectivity' of modern freedom--its ability to generate principles out of itself.²² But the moral will insists on our duty to will the universal good or welfare of all without focusing on the particular duties that make up this universal good.

itself' implies that the potential has been or is being explicitly realised. To give his own example, 'a child is *in-itself* a human being; it has reason only *in itself*, it is only the potentiality of reason and freedom and is therefore free only in accordance with its concept. . . . The human being who is rational in himself must work through the process of self-production both by going out of himself and by educating himself inwardly, in order that he may also become rational *for-himself*.' PR, par.10 A, p.45.

²¹ PR, par.5 R, p.38-39. Needless to say, Hegel's understanding of Hindu contemplation is misleading and based on secondary sources. See chapter V, 230.

²² PR, par.105, p.135 & PR, par.134 A, p.161.

Because of its formal character, the link between the moral will and the good remains contingent. In times of doubt as to whether one's action is objectively good, there is nothing except one's own intentions to examine. Its formal character renders the moral will vulnerable to two extremes. In Hegel's words, 'conscience, as formal subjectivity, consists simply in the possibility of turning at any moment to evil.'²³ The second extreme is that the moral will might be completely paralysed because it regards all outward action as tainting its inward purity and becomes a 'beautiful soul.'

Both these criticisms may be defused by the fact that the moral will relates to other wills and to that extent, it has to conform to what is regarded as valid in the external world. In principle, the moral will is constituted by certain common understandings to the extent it has to express its intentions and purposes.

Hegel does not regard consensus as sufficient for ethical life and right. Such a community rests upon 'mutual assurances of conscientiousness, good intentions and the

²³ PR, par.139 R, p.1 7. It has been noted that Hegel's critique that Kant's moral will is formal and empty is only a half-truth. Hegel ignores Kant's second formulation of the Categorical Imperative that one ought to respect others and treat them as ends-in-themselves. Steven Smith, Hegel's Critique of Liberalism: Rights in Context (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 73-74.

enjoyment of reciprocal purity.'²⁴ Here, a moral subject claims validity for the form of the act, not the content of the act. Such a community of conscience is contingent because the universality and equality dissolves as soon as the content of individual actions come to light.

The will can be truly free only when it determines itself in such a way that its actions are neither abstract nor simply moral but objectively good. This is what Hegel calls *sittlichkeit* or ethical life embodied in legal and political institutions. The majesty of ethical life consists in the fact that it represents 'the realm of spirit.' The 'spirit' (Geist) has a double connotation here; on the one hand, spirit is individual consciousness which recognises that its freedom implies concrete institutions. The individual will relates to ethical life as to one's own essence.²⁵ For an ethical consciousness, the duties arising from the family or membership in a corporation or culture are not external impediments but are constitutive of freedom.

On the other hand, spirit is a 'living ethical world'. In this sense, it refers to the objectivity of norms, laws and institutions which 'have being in and for

²⁴ PR, par.140 R, p.182.

²⁵ PR, par. 147, p.191.

themselves.'²⁶ At one level, this means laws and institutions simply are comparable to the way in which the 'sun, moon, mountains, rivers and all natural objects around us are.'²⁷ This is why he calls ethical life 'second nature.'

At the same time, Hegel also points to the 'higher objectivity' of ethical life as compared to nature. In ethical life, rationality is displayed not in an 'external, fragmented or contingent manner.'²⁸ The rational necessity immanent within laws, customs and constitutions reflects the self-consciousness of reason.

Hegel differentiates three moments of ethical life, the family, the civil society and the state. In the family, the individual relates to the ethical world through love.²⁹ The immediate unity of the subjective and objective dimen-

²⁶ PR, par. 144, p.189.

²⁷ PR, par. 146 R, p.190.

²⁸ PR, par. 146, p.191.

²⁹ Hegel's account of the family is the modern family with the husband, wife and the children. He advances a dialectical account of the family in terms of marriage, of property and upbringing of the children and the dissolution of the family. Hegel's views regarding the role of the woman in ethical life are vulnerable to feminist criticism. For 'the woman, however, has her substantial vocation in the family, and her ethical disposition consists in this piety.' Piety, as an ethical disposition is mere feeling and inferior to the rational self-consciousness which only man attains. As the law of woman is sensual-subjective immediacy, they are barred from the realm of freedom. PR, par.166, p.206-207. For feminist critiques, see Carole Pateman, The Sexual Contract (Cambridge, Eng.: Polity, 1988), 176-177.

sions is sundered within civil society where the individual exists as a private person. Here, Hegel assigns a significant role to abstract right. Only at the level of the constitutional state does the self-consciousness proper to ethical life become fully embodied. Thus, freedom is articulated not as abstract right nor as subjective conscience but in terms of concrete laws and institutions which are reflexive. Ethical life does not impose any substantive notion of the common good but provides the moral context within which freedom is possible.'³⁰

The Time of Willing: Arendt contra Hegel

Hegel's phenomenological account of the will is contested on the ground that it occludes the 'lived experience' of willing. Since Nietzsche, the commanding element in the will has come to the forefront. Whereas Hegel regarded arbitrariness as one moment of the will's voyage, it is now claimed that mastery is constitutive of the will.³¹ As such, constitutionalism itself can be seen as an

³⁰ Steven Smith, Hegel's Critique of Liberalism, 122.

³¹ Since Nietzsche, the inner struggle of the will and its impotence in the face of the past has led in two directions; for some, the will to power is creative and inescapable and is a clue to life's vitality. For others, the will is destructive and has to be weakened through a thinking that 'lets-be.' See Hannah Arendt, Willing, 161-165 & 176-178.

embodiment of the will to power.³² Although Sandel and Taylor do not affirm Nietzsche, their shift from freedom to common good gathers strength in the context of the larger attack on the contingency of willing.

Once we become alert to the contingent element in freedom, is there no option but to anchor constitutions and laws in cultures (although sooner or later we have to ask if cultures are any less contingent) or simply affirm freedom as nothing but contingency? Here, Arendt traces a path to modern institutions without sidetracking the contingency of freedom or resorting to cultural specificity. She attempts to restore the 'lived experience' of willing, its unique 'tonality' of 'tenseness.'³³ Starting out from a more radical phenomenology of the will than Hegel's, she leaps over the abyss of freedom via our capacity to judge and trust. In the process, she evolves a vision of community without devaluing freedom and the autonomy of political institutions.

Her main thesis is that willing cannot be subsumed under thinking (as it is when Hegel, for instance, defines willing as "a particular way of thinking--thinking trans-

³² Foucault's notion of governmentality develops this possibility.

³³ Arendt, Willing, 38.

lating itself into existence [dasein] . . ." ³⁴) but is an autonomous faculty of action. Whereas thinking withdraws from the 'world of appearances' and happens in an 'enduring present,' willing relates to the world through action and looks forward to the future.

In her view, willing as the faculty of freedom has its roots in the Judaeo-Christian ideas of Creation ex nihilo and man as God's own image.³⁵ The Christian "Thou shalt will" triggers the freedom of saying "Yes" or "No" regardless of necessity or compulsion.³⁶ Arendt wants to retrieve two related features of the will: that every I-will implies an I-nill, an inner struggle that shapes man as a 'unique' being, who by virtue of his birth or 'natality' is something entirely new; this natality manifests in the will's capacity to 'begin something anew' and have a future.

Although not overtly, this longing for new beginnings echoes in Taylor's return to authenticity although he downplays the will. Like Taylor, Arendt wants to show that individual uniqueness and freedom are played out in the 'plurality' of the 'We' though not by way of cultures but by

³⁴ PR, par.4 A, p.35.

³⁵ The earlier Greek notion of freedom as I-can implies that only means are open to choice but not ends like happiness or health which are given in nature.

³⁶ Arendt, Willing, 68.

way of the mystery of 'founding acts.' For her, it is not our being situated in cultures but our being 'born' or our being 'natal' that endows us with a capacity for new beginnings.

She objects to the eclipse of this capacity for absolute beginnings in Hegel's thought. According to her, Hegel's reconciliation of thinking and willing tries to reconcile two different time concepts--Hegel's owl of Minerva starts its flight at dusk and this means not simply a temporary suspension of time but the 'end of history' and a closure upon the will and future. Hegel 'tacitly' rejects Christian metaphysics in starting the dialectic from Being rather than Not-Being.³⁷ If Hegel's dialectic retains progress and the future, it is in the shape of the 'non-experienced' movement of the World-Spirit for which every new beginning is simultaneously at a 'higher level' because it recollects the past.³⁸ This 'one World Mind ruling over the plurality of wills and directing them is a hypothesis that arises from thinking's need for meaning.'³⁹

But then is it not necessary to make some sense out of the several initiatives that punctuate history? Further,

³⁷ Arendt, Willing, 51.

³⁸ Arendt, Willing, 47-48.

³⁹ Arendt, Willing, 48-49.

does not the willing ego seek guidance from the past or from archetypal acts of founding? Arendt concedes that even 'men of action' who are better guides to grasping willing's 'mood' muffle the novelty of beginnings by portraying them as re-birth of the old.⁴⁰ Besides, to argue that humans are by virtue of birth bound to begin anew itself smacks of necessity and does not tell us much about what is worthy of being willed. If we insist upon the contingency of freedom, then do we not unleash a permanent desire for new beginnings? Is this not why Taylor shies away from the will and recasts Hegel's Universal Spirit in terms of situatedness within traditions and cultures?

Arendt addresses these problems opened by the 'abyss of freedom' by recourse to another faculty, judgement. She argues that in judging, we recall an absent object and reflect upon it. But this does not mean judging is subjective--- it takes its bearing from 'sensus communis'; and he or she who judges seeks acknowledgement from others. Judging proceeds from an enlarged standpoint, 'as if there was an original compact of mankind to sociability', and has its roots in a secret trust in man.⁴¹ The secret trust in

⁴⁰ Arendt, Willing, 210-211.

⁴¹ Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, "Reflections on the Life of the Mind," in Sandra Hinchman ed. Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays (New York: SUNY, 1994), 361.

man also implies that one judges not from any abstract universal rule but proceeds from the experience of the particular to the general. The particular event or object is illuminated as an 'example' that contains a general rule. The judge-spectator, being present in every human actor, ensures that action is not simply arbitrary but proceeds as if there was an 'original compact of mankind.'

By focusing on the newness of founding acts and the need for judging, Arendt saves the world of action from being absorbed into a Universal History. The validity of modern constitutionalism can be defended not so much as a universal model to be reenacted by different peoples but as an example of what a political order based on human dignity and equality might look like. In the face of one dominant strand of Hegelianism which sees the 'end of history' in the French Revolution and the universal and homogeneous state, Arendt's rejection of meta-narratives is an important contribution. Decolonisation or the rise of new states can be seen not simply as a replay of a Western drama but events which affirm the 'exemplary validity' of modern constitutionalism. In the face of the deconstruction of modern institutions in the name of radical contingency, Arendt is instructive both because she clarifies the affinity between radical contingency and Christianity and because she retains

the possibility of acting and judging with an 'idea of mankind.'

Although Arendt is partly justified in arguing that the will's desire for beginning anew and the openness to the future are eclipsed in Hegel's philosophy of History, Hegel does recognize the contingency of freedom in civil society. The realm of appearances comes into the open not only in founding moments but also in the everyday life of need satisfaction and work.⁴² Given that modern freedom, in the shape of abstract right to property or contract, leads in an individualist direction, it would be necessary to examine the possibilities of relating the individual and community within modern civil society. Here, Hegel's insights on modern civil society and constitutional state clarify the conditions under which freedom can give rise to trust and judging.

⁴² Arendt approaches needs and work as administrative problems to be left to experts. However, the question of justice was central to Aristotle from whom she partly draws her view of politics as a distinctly human activity. Arendt's separation of necessity from freedom is highly susceptible to formalism, a danger that Hegel identified in Kant. See Hannah Pitkin, "Justice: On Relating the Public and Private," in Sandra Hinchman ed. Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays, 273 & 277.

Civil Society: The Play of Appearances

Hegel portrays the 'extravagance and misery' of modern freedom in his analysis of civil society. He defends the distinct character of modern civil society as the scene of particularity.⁴³ At the same time, the continuous invention of particularity threatens to render freedom vacuous and self-referential. By elaborating the inner dialectic of civil society, Hegel discloses the ethical basis of what appears to be an uncivil society wedded to self-assertion and accumulation. Focusing on the principles animating civil society, Hegel draws out the 'relation' that prevails between the particular and the universal to reveal the possibility of trust. A brief excursus into civil society will clarify why Hegel's insights remain instructive despite the tremendous transformation of this realm in our time.

His dialectical analysis uncovers the dynamics of modern civil society in terms of two principles. To cite him:

The concrete person who, as a particular person, as a totality of needs and a mixture of natural necessity and arbitrariness, is his own end, is one principle of civil society. But this person stands essentially in relation [*Beziehung*] to other similar particulars, and

⁴³ Hegel differentiates the civil society from the state unlike his predecessors, Hobbes and Locke who use the term civil society and political society interchangeably. Steven Smith, Hegel's Critique of Liberalism, 141.

their relation is such that each asserts itself and gains satisfaction through others, and thus at the same time through the exclusive mediation of the form of universality, which is the second principle."

The first principle, the assertion of the particular, testifies to the inner strength of modern ethical life in contrast to the ethical life of the Greeks.⁴⁵ Modern freedom is not solely about participating as a citizen in the state but also about the right to be burghers or 'private' persons.⁴⁶ The right to individual freedom bursts forth in the form of subjective needs which are fulfilled through work and property. Needs and the means to satisfy them imply that the particular individual is entangled in a network of relationships with others. This relatedness to others is

⁴⁴ PR, par.189, p.220.

⁴⁵ Although the principle of subjective freedom glimmers in the figure of Socrates and Plato's Idea, Hegel argues that this principle is not integrated into Greek ethical life. According to him, Plato excludes the private realm of the family and property from the Republic. See PR, par.138 R & A, p.166-167 and par.184 R, p.222 and par. 185 R, p.222-223. But it should be noted that Plato excludes the family and property only for the guardian class. See PR, "Editorial Notes", note 2 to par.185, p.442-443.

⁴⁶ Given the general suspicion of the liberal definition of the economy as 'private' first by Marx and later by marxists and feminists, Hegel's idea of the right to be 'private' persons offers a ready target. However, what Hegel means here is best captured by Taylor's notion of 'ordinary life' because Hegel's contrast is with the Greek ethical life which does not recognize the particular. Moreover, Hegel recognises that being private persons with some abstract rights is not the end of ethical life.

evident in the role of social opinions in defining needs, in the division of labour and the emergence of 'estates.' ⁴⁷

At the same time, this 'social' sphere is neither one of unbridled conflict between private wills nor an apolitical zone.⁴⁸ Hegel advances a nuanced account of reason immanent within civil society by showing how the right to particularity intimates the second principle, the mediating role of the universal. The universal appears as a 'regulator' of different interests through laws, courts and the administrative authorities. From the vantage point of 'private individuals,' laws and institutions appear as 'external necessities' to be endured.⁴⁹

The civil society, in the form of system of needs, thus discloses the interdependence of the universal and the particular only partially. Because the 'private individual' does not grasp that laws and institutions are not outside powers regulating freedom but constitute freedom, his or her own rights appear merely formal. One of the major problems with this formal relationship is that freedom remains

⁴⁷ PR, par.192-199, p.229-233.

⁴⁸ Influenced by the tradition of modern political economy amplified in Adam Smith and Ricardo, Hegel argues that there is an inner reason at work in civil society. See Steven Smith, Hegel's Critique of Liberalism, 141. See also PR, par.189 R & A, p.227-228.

⁴⁹ PR, Par.183, p.221.

arbitrary and contingent. Further, the dynamics of civil society intensifies this contingent dimension of freedom. The mechanisation of work and accumulation of wealth reducing large numbers to want.⁵⁰ Although Hegel does not proclaim the complicity between the state and sections of capital, he realises that the inner dialectics of civil society can render individual rights meaningless for a large number of people.

In the face of this 'extravagance and misery' of civil society, Hegel argues that right is not only about abstract and formal rights to property and contract. The throwness of the individual to the vagaries of the market can only be redeemed by restoring the moral and spiritual dimension of freedom. Here, Hegel argues for intermediary associations such as the corporation. In vocational and functional associations, 'private individuals' have the opportunity to grasp that their rights are, in fact, recognised and sustained by a larger constitutional order. Associational activity fosters a greater self-consciousness about the normative dimension of modern freedom.⁵¹

Admittedly, the analyses of civil society has gained

⁵⁰ PR, par.243-245, p.266-267.

⁵¹ I treat Hegel's argument for corporations in detail in the following section.

in sophistication since Hegel's time. Following the Marxist initiative, analysts have focused on the intersection between capitalist economy and the state in the formation of civil society.⁵² Initially, this led to an emphasis on class based oppression and later, to multiple oppressions based on race, gender and ethnicity. Apart from identifying domination, theorists also began to affirm the 'agency' implicit within civil society turning attention to 'how' classes or identities are constructed in collective action. As the 'grand puppeteer' model of the capitalist mode of production waned, giving rise to more flexible analyses, the notion of civil society came to be seen as 'relatively autonomous' vis-a-vis both the state and the economy. And yet, civil society continues to be conceptualised as a 'mode

⁵² Marx's 'economistic' dismissal of civil society as bourgeois society gave way to Gramsci's approach to civil society as a realm of hegemony rather than coercion and therefore an important site of struggle. While Gramsci's strategic view continues to influence current interest in civil society as a site of 'contestation' over identity, Gramsci's own hope of consummating the struggle in socialist society is less audible. This is partly because the liberal notion of civil society as an intermediate realm has come to be reiterated. Several historical developments have contributed to the renewed attention to civil society like the dissident movements in Eastern Europe, the threat to civil initiatives due to the expansion of the welfare state and the subsequent bureaucratization and the emergence of new forms of collective action labelled as 'new social movements' which seek to democratise civil society in the West. See John Keane, "Introduction," in Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives (London: Verso, 1988), 1-12 & 21-25. For a detailed treatment of Hegel, see Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, Civil Society and Political Theory (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 91-116.

of regulation' which secures a specific 'regime of accumulation' or as a 'field of forces' from which to mount a socialist or radical democratic alternative.⁵³

Without denying the need to uncover and challenge power relations that intensify social or economic inequalities, the question is whether there is a moral and spiritual core that underlies the crises of civil society. The present exaltation of civil society as the site of struggle for recognition of multiple subject-positions fails to address the problem of contingency in any depth. As theorists discover the normative bases of civil society, they also warn us that norms are contingent historical constructions and that norms have to be continuously demystified. Behind the call for strategic manouvering between shifting subject-positions lies a Nietzschean idea of freedom as will to power.⁵⁴

⁵³ See Rianne Mahon, "From "bringing" to "putting": The State in late twentieth-century social theory," in Canadian Journal of Sociology 1, no. 2 (1991): 119-144. See also Chantal Mouffe, "Democratic Politics Today," in Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Plurality, Citizenship and Community (London: Verso, 1992), 10-11.

⁵⁴ While this line of thinking is openly espoused in postmodern and postmarxist thinkers, it is not so obvious in neo-marxist accounts. However, the classification of norms and customs as 'modes of regulation' that sustains a specific 'regime of accumulation,' for instance, hints at the affinity between a decentred marxism and Nietzschean thinking.

Hegel's phenomenological account already anticipates this dance of the particulars in civil society. The key difference is that Hegel, having discerned the breakdown of modern freedom also narrates its breakthrough to trust whereas a Nietzschean analysis paralyses the will.⁵⁵

Hegel's attentiveness to corporations and constitutionalism beyond the play of differences has to be located in this context of trust.⁵⁶ In moving beyond, we should

⁵⁵ While the neo-marxist acknowledgement of contingency is evident in the present pluralisation of capitalist logics and the discursive constructions of collective actors, they hold on to the possibility of liberation whereas the post-marxist creed of civil society as the realm of politics carries through the hermeneutics of suspicion and ends up with permanent revolution, if only because every liberation marginalises an-Other. The de-centering of the state and class politics in the neo-marxist theories is but a response to the challenge unleashed by deconstruction of grand narratives and macro-logics in history, economics and sociology, the political implications of which are fully clarified by those who advocate radical democracy like Chantal Mouffe and Laclau. The philosophical roots of this trend are in Nietzsche although it is arguable whether this is the only direction in which Nietzsche's thought leads. Vattimo argues for the possibility of truly overcoming difference in the figure of the superman in contrast to the repetition of difference in Derrida and Deleuze. See Vattimo, "Nietzsche and Difference," in The Adventure of Difference: Philosophy after Nietzsche and Heidegger, trans. Cyprian Blamires (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1993), 78-79.

⁵⁶ Of course, it may be objected that Hegel absorbs the particular within the universal at other levels and thus tames the play of difference. Firstly, the claim that there are only differences conceals a universality that needs to be questioned. Even if we grant there are only differences, Hegel might ask as to how these differences are related. Further, Hegel's dialectic defies such neat accusations hinted in phrases like the essentialisation of the particular. William Desmond argues that Hegel's dialectic shows the breakdown of univocal identity but also its breakthrough to another 'affirmative possibility.' Hegel's

remember that Hegel does not suppress civil society as a realm of appearances. Nor does he foresee the corporation as achieving an identity between the universal and the particular. Rather, the 'relation' between the particular and the universal already implicit in the system of needs is brought to self-consciousness in the corporation. Hegel's term for this relation is trust.

Corporations: Rectitude and Trust

In the corporation, Hegel claims that the 'ethical returns to civil society as an immanent principle.'⁵⁷ Hegel's corporation refers to the whole range of associations which emerge in civil society. It is the site of civic virtue and communal activity because the modern state is too large to be the object of the citizen's immediate affec-

Phenomenology, Desmond contends, is a 'prolonged encounter with failure' and even in its final success, in the form of Geist, it does not exclude the 'comic.' The comic according to Desmond differs from the merely laughable in that it affirms the excess of the other and exposes the pretensions of the self and yet, affirms a 'being together' in the tension. This 'being together' is what he calls the 'breakthrough' although Hegel himself does not always foreground this openness. Desmond rightly argues that it is important to avoid reductionist readings of Hegel if only because Hegel himself practised all the strategies of self-subversion that are directed against him. See William Desmond, "Comedy and the Failure of Logos," in Beyond Hegel and the Dialectic: Speculation, Cult and Comedy (Albany: SUNY, 1992), 280-281 & 291.

⁵⁷ PR, par. 249, p.270

tions.⁵⁸ Since Hegel emphasises the desire for recognition, he realises that civic virtue has to be mediated by individual freedom. While anticipating the modern 'malaise' of freedom degenerating into self-indulgence, he tries to check this slide by showing that recognition is tied to moral virtues like rectitude and trust.⁵⁹

Hegel links the virtue of trust to the 'truth' of the concept of right.⁶⁰ Trust emanates not from personal conviction but the rationality of institutions. It is 'a disposition, a habit' rather than a 'sudden burst of enthusiasm' for the state. In Hegel's words:

This disposition is in general one of trust (which may pass over into more or less educated insight), or the consciousness that my substantial and particular interest is preserved and contained in the interest and end of an other (in this case, the state), and in the latter's relation to me as an individual [*als Einzelnem*]. As a result, this other immediately ceases to be an other for me, and in my consciousness of this, I am free.⁶¹

Trust is different from the 'more educated insight' based on conceptual thought which establishes an immediate identity

⁵⁸ PR, par.255 A, p.273.

⁵⁹ Recently, Fukuyama has made a similar argument about trust and associational activity. See Francis Fukuyama, Trust: Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity (New York: Free Press, 1995).

⁶⁰ PR, par.268, p.288.

⁶¹ PR, par. 268, p.288.

with the ethical.⁶² It is higher than the 'less educated insight' based on 'fear of violent death.' For Hegel, trust manifests a self-consciousness where the self 'relates' to the other, whether it is other particulars or the state.

Trust is midway between arbitrary and formal acquiescence to the state on the one hand and complete identification on the other. It signifies a 'relation' and not a 'union' and as such, the corporations and civil society remain distinct from the constitutional state. While celebrating contingency and multiplicity, many recent theorists refer to 'relationality.' What distinguishes Hegel is that he is also attentive to the suffering unleashed by contingency, whether it is market induced, or a metaphysical split at the very heart of the 'unhappy consciousness.' Instead of exalting contingency, Hegel draws out the inner reason of the contingent in its relation to the universal. Trust is the disposition of the individual who subsists between thrownness and complete belonging with respect to civil society and the state.

In Hegel's short discussion, corporations promote common vocational interests, transfigure the desire for recognition into honour and rectitude, and foster trust in

⁶² PR, par.147, p.191. The 'more educated insight' arises from a conceptual cognition of ethical life as the embodiment of freedom and is manifested in the civil service for Hegel.

the constitutional state. Given the routinization of professional associations and the rarity of the notion of 'calling,' Hegel's discussion sounds utopian. However, Hegel provides a prescriptive standard with which to reappropriate associational practices so as to make room for both individual freedom and the common good. By reconstructing how the corporation alters even as it builds upon other moments like the family, civil society and the state, I clarify what it means to belong in the context of modern freedom.

Corporation as the Second Family

In the first place, the corporation has the 'right to assume the role of a second family.'⁶³ The nature of the corporation as a 'second family' should not be understood as secondariness. Just as ethical life is 'second nature' but not secondary to nature, the corporation is not inferior to the family. The recognition of subjective freedom testifies to the inner strength of the corporation vis-a-vis the family. Members choose to join a corporation or a vocation

⁶³ PR, par. 252, p.271.

although such choice depends upon their having the necessary qualifications.⁶⁴

At the same time, the corporation restores the sense of belonging characteristic of the family at a different level. By protecting the individual against contingency, by training the individual in caring for the common resources, the corporation not only provides a strong footing for the family but also raises the ethical aspect of the family to a higher level.⁶⁵ Whereas the family too educates the individual to take care of family property as a joint trust, this ethical role can lapse into arbitrariness in the right to testaments.⁶⁶

The significance of the 'second family' becomes clear only against the context of the 'first family.' Although there is much in Hegel's account that can be criticised as 'sexist' or 'puritanical,' he grasps the contingency of familial ties in the modern context.⁶⁷ Whether it is the

⁶⁴ Hegel recognises that natural disposition, birth and circumstances are important although he contends that the ultimate determinant in modern civil society is the arbitrary will. PR, par.206, p.237.

⁶⁵ PR, par. 170, p.209.

⁶⁶ PR, par.179, p.215.

⁶⁷ Hegel's preference for monogamy as well as his view that women are emotive beings incapable of abstract thought is vulnerable to attack.

idea of marriage based on love between two individuals or the idea that children have to be raised to become 'free persons', modern freedom renders the family open to arbitrariness and dissolution.⁶⁸ As such, the ethical basis of modern freedom is not always obvious within the family; for instance, the covenant of marriage which transfigures love into an ethical and spiritual experience is often reduced to a civil or ecclesiastical formality.

Hegel's attentiveness to the changed character of the family leads him to supplement the corporation as the 'second family' which nurtures moral virtues like trust and obedience. In our own time, both Jean Elshtain and Taylor call attention to the family as the sphere of intimacy or as the cradle of moral virtues and authenticity respectively. However, they do not pay sufficient attention to the contingencies or the selfishness that haunt the modern family.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ In this regard, Hegel is aware of the historical changes wrought in the family by subjective freedom. The contention of both Foucault and the feminists that the private sphere is constituted by the public sphere is to an extent recognised by Hegel although he assesses the formative role of modern norms differently.

⁶⁹ For instance, Elshtain calls for "stemming the tide of family collapse" in containing urban violence and concedes the importance of a larger civic culture in this task. However, she never probes the question of conventionality and selfishness that goes with familial bonds. Taylor is more aware of the 'unconventionality' of authentic relatedness to others in the intimate

Hegel's dialectical account suggests that restoring the family as a sphere of intimacy is part of a larger enterprise of reclaiming the meaning of modern freedom within civil society.⁷⁰ The 'immediate love' of the family is sustained by such taken-for-granted things like security against contingency and alternative spheres of self-discovery and recognition. As a 'second family' the corporation enables us to reappropriate the basis of the family in virtues like mutual trust and covenantal solidarity.

It may be objected that Hegel's elevation of the

sphere. See Jean Elshtain, Democracy on Trial (Ontario: Anansi, 1993), 8; Charles Taylor, Malaise, 52-53 & 65. However, the tension between the love of one's own in the shape of filial piety and civic virtue, a question that Aristotle hints at, is largely absent. See Nicomachean Ethics, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985), 242. See also Christopher Lasch, Haven in a Heartless World (New York: Basic Books, 1977) 97-107.

⁷⁰ The modern ideal of familial privacy, ironically leads to a proliferation of public agencies including a vast array of therapists and experts as if caring is only about acquiring the right knowledge about the body or the mind or various disorders and anxieties. I do not imply that the 'extended family' has to be restored. While it may be true that a larger familial network provides 'support structures' with respect to rearing children and so on, it should not be forgotten that such 'support structures' were rooted in a conception of family honour as well as religious beliefs, which were equally stifling. Besides, anxieties and disorders were not unheard of in the larger families. It is useful to situate the crisis of the family in the larger context of man's discontent with life and death and the search for freedom from dualities of happiness and suffering. Within such a larger context, questions regarding the family are neither solely of concern to feminists nor to conservatives nor therapists but to all those who are engaged in the Socratic question of 'how ought man to live?'

corporation over the family presupposes a hierarchical and gendered distinction between the private and the public; the moral virtues fostered in the family like mutual caring and responsibility are demoted as 'immediate' or 'natural.'⁷¹ To respond to such an objection--- firstly, Hegel does not substitute the corporation for the family. Given the contingency of family ties and the turbulence of civil society, he explores alternative spaces where we can cultivate virtues of belonging without foregoing individual freedom. Secondly, neither care nor love are exclusively cultivated in the family. Thirdly, familial piety is not always conducive to identification with a larger order. Finally, although Hegel affirms a gendered view of the private and the public, there

⁷¹ Where Hegel makes allowances for strong attachments as in the case of the agricultural estate, (it is subject to a modified civil law as well as a different mode of education and religious instruction), he also calls upon them to make tremendous sacrifices for the state. See PR, par. 203 A, p.236. Jean Elshtain is partly justified in arguing that Hegel's theory of the state and its coming to life in war implies a will-to-sacrifice the particular for the universal. Jean Elshtain, "Sovereignty, Identity and Sacrifice," in Millennium: Journal of International Studies 20, no.3 (1991): 397. But it must be recalled against current valorisation of familial ethics of care that genuine caring has also implied renouncing the particular. Whether it is Socrates who cares for Athenians like a father while neglecting his own family or Gandhi who claims that the whole universe is his family, what is involved is not simply a repression of the particularity of the family or body or emotions but the larger question of what is one's own.

is nothing in the legal determinations of right that fore-closes the right to gender equality.⁷²

This does not imply that reviving intermediary associations would solve all the problems of familial breakdown or the criticisms made by feminists that modern politics reinforces family as yet another site of 'violence.' But to the extent the question is about 'rights' within the private sphere, we are moving within the Hegelian framework of freedom as recognition, albeit modified, as authentic identity or difference. Here, his analysis clarifies that the question of reforming or reviving the family is not only about rectifying exclusions but also about linking modern freedom to the moral virtues of trust, honour and rectitude. Obviously, this would call for legal and political intervention and not shielding the family from

⁷² It may be alleged that Hegel's thought as a whole is reflective of a 'masculist' self-consciousness that 'violates' the 'otherness' of the feminine. Some radical feminists like Helene Cixous or Gayatri Spivak are not merely interested in incorporating women or 'feminine' virtues like caring into modern politics. They deconstruct the metaphysics underlying modern rights to expose its arbitrariness and suppression of genuine 'otherness.' In this sense, a feminist transformation of politics is not only about gender equality but about continuous exposure of the 'violence' intrinsic to all justice and right in the suppression of otherness. One of the problems with this search for radical difference and otherness is that it unleashes suspicion against all norms and institutions. The only exception to this suspicion appears to be the claim that there is only difference or otherness. If we concede that such deconstruction is not geared to destruction of modern rights but a weak relationship to the same, we still have to clarify how suspicion engenders trust.

politics. But such intervention has to balance autonomy and solidarity both within the family and intermediary associations.

It may be objected that this interpretation of Hegel's analysis of the 'second family' reduces the family to yet another association and thus dilutes the essence of loving one's own. By learning that freedom involves trust and solidarity, one does not learn about the spiritual core of familial attachments. The immediacy of love in the intimate sphere and the pain and pleasures of such attachments transcend the dynamics of recognition. For instance, the death of a loved one opens up the larger question of the meaning of human existence.

This charge can be addressed by deepening the existential sources of trust and here too, I think that Hegel's analysis of corporation provides a starting point. Trust emanates not only from the security of recognition but also from the concrete activity of seeking the good life through classical education or openness to the sacred in a spiritual community. Although this is not always obvious, trust among saints or philosophers or historians of religion stems from sharing a common quest and exploring human situatedness between the mortal and the immortal. Both Gandhi's spiritual politics and Althusius notion of

covenantal politics have the potential to deepen and enrich Hegel's argument for trust. By way of a politics attuned to the sacred, both Gandhi and Althusius show that a politics of trust can recollect and illuminate the inner essence of familial bonds.⁷³

Corporations and Civil Society

In the context of civil society where difference reigns supreme, the corporation discloses the inner reason of the desire for recognition. In an atomised society, an isolated individual is forced to seek social 'recognition through external manifestations of success which are without limit.'⁷⁴ The individual who belongs to the corporation attains recognition through 'rectitude and honour in one's estate.'⁷⁵

⁷³ Gandhi's meditation upon detached action and renunciation might appear to negate thick familial bonds. But renunciation is not simply negating bonds. Following the *Gita*, Gandhi attempts to transfigure one's attachments to the family or possessions in the light of the *atman*-Self or the ground of being. See Chapter V, 254 & 308.

⁷⁴ PR, par. 253 R, p.272.

⁷⁵ PR, par.253 R, p.272. Although Hegel restricts corporations to the estate of trade and industry, he also refers to churches and municipal governments as corporations. The corporation would be an appropriate model of organisation wherever the principle of particularity is at work. Steven Smith writes that it includes the whole range of professional associations and voluntary bodies that grow out of the conditions of civil society. See Steven Smith, Hegel's Critique of Liberalism, 142.

The selfishness and arbitrariness of the subjective will are partly transformed in vocational associations. The corporation admits members according to their qualifications, facilitates transmission of skills and protects them against contingency.⁷⁶ These rights of the corporation are not privileges granted by the state but flow from the inner reason of vocations and the fundamental right to associate.⁷⁷

According to Hegel, intermediary associations such as the corporation can secure the welfare of its members in a more rational manner than general authorities such as the police or civil service. In the corporation, "the help that poverty receives loses its contingent and unjustly humiliating character, and wealth, in fulfilling the duty it owes to its association, loses the ability to provoke arrogance in its possessor, and envy in others."⁷⁸

As the culminating moment of civil society, the corporation clarifies the interdependence between individual freedom and the common good. In the market or court of law, the individual is preeminently a 'private citizen' and regards the state as an external necessity. Although he or

⁷⁶ PR, par. 252, p.271.

⁷⁷ PR, par.252 R, p.271.

⁷⁸ PR, par.253 A, p. 272.

she serves common interests even while participating within the system of needs as consumer and producer, this common interest is elevated to a 'conscious end' only in the corporation.⁷⁹

By showing that recognition is earned through rectitude, that a profession is a normative activity, that law is integral to right and that charity is internal to the principle of universal freedom, the corporation provides an ethical context for the exercise of subjective freedom. By participating in the corporation, the individual becomes aware that trust and rectitude are not simply personal values based on goodwill but are objectively right.

The corporatist model has been incorporated in diverse ways within political theory. Guild socialists like G.D.H Cole and Laski advocated a 'corporate state' that integrates occupational groups into government.⁸⁰ Liberal theorists use the term to refer to the close association between interest groups and the state.

Though Hegel envisages a legally-regulated relationship between the occupational groups and the state, his model is a participatory rather than an administrative arrangement. The corporation provides an avenue for defining

⁷⁹ PR, par. 255 A, p.273.

⁸⁰ Steven Smith, Hegel's Critique of Liberalism, 142.

common purposes in accordance with the principle of individual freedom. The corporation, then, is a normative community and not an arbitrary or mechanical aggregator of diverse interests.⁸¹ Hence, Hegel's corporation cannot be conflated with the state-sponsored corporatism of fascist Italy or some Latin American countries. When Hegel emphasises the legal recognition of the corporation by the state, he does not endorse state control over these bodies but points to the constitutional right to associate.

Thus, Hegel combats the atomistic tendencies of modern civil society by recasting the desire for recognition into rectitude and trust. A useful contrast is Charles Taylor who recasts recognition in terms of the desire for authenticity. Although the search for authenticity does not preclude moral virtues, it elevates culture and tradition as constitutive of moral goods. Taylor contends that modern laws and institutions have succumbed to 'instrumental reason' and that Hegel's 'expressive' approach has to be reappropriated in terms of traditions.⁸² Hegel would probably remind us that linking recognition to cultural

⁸¹ The emphasis on common good and civic virtue distinguishes the corporation from medieval guilds as well as the modern business firms or joint stock company. See Steven Smith, Hegel's Critique of Liberalism, 142.

⁸² Taylor, Hegel, 539 & 569.

uniqueness obscures the transcultural and transpersonal character of moral virtues. Hegel remains close to the Protestant roots of 'calling' and hence, trust is not simply expressive of a specific culture but is 'analogous' to faith which, in turn, is an articulation of the human quest for the 'absolute.'⁸³

The Corporation and the State: Trust and Participation

Hegel writes that the corporation is the second ethical root of the state, the first being the family.⁸⁴ Hegel refuses to integrate individuals into the state qua individuals and argues that it is only as members of corporations that they participate in the state. Such participation is expected to enhance trust in the regime as a rational order.

The political role of corporations stems from his deep suspicion of "the people." The 'people' is a 'crowd, an unorganised aggregate, an abstraction.'⁸⁵ As such, the 'people' is vulnerable to demagogues and fanaticism.

⁸³ This becomes transparent in Hegel's argument regarding the inner affinity between modern ethical life and the 'absolute' religion of Protestant Christianity. See the last section of this chapter.

⁸⁴ PR, par.255, p.272.

⁸⁵ PR, par.301 R, p.340.

Notwithstanding his pride in the French revolution, Hegel always pointed to the destruction of mediating institutions as the source of the Reign of Terror.

Hegel realises that 'the people' does not exist as a unitary subject but is dispersed in different communities. Since individuals subsist as members of different groups in civil society, they enter political life as such. In his words:

The idea (*Vorstellung*) that those communities which are already present in the circles referred to above can be split again into a collection of individuals as soon as they enter the sphere of politics--i.e. the sphere of *highest concrete universality*-- involves separating civil and political life from each other and leaves political life hanging, so to speak, in the air; for its basis is then merely the abstract individuality of arbitrary will and opinion, and is thus grounded only on contingency rather than a foundation which is *stable and legitimate* in and for itself.⁸⁶

Because the universal is neither an atomistic aggregate nor a unitary oneness but an articulated universal, popular participation has to be mediated.

In Hegel's scheme, the corporations are integrated both at the level of the executive and the legislative powers. The corporations send deputies to the Estates Assembly which is one part of the legislature.⁸⁷ These

⁸⁶ PR, par.303 R, p.344.

⁸⁷ Although Hegel does not defend this inclusion for the extra insight corporations possess about popular will or public welfare but as a way of building trust in the regime. See PR, par.301 R,

deputies are said to represent and serve different objective interests.⁸⁸ The elected deputy is not a commissioned nor a mandated agent but relies upon the trust of the elector in fulfilling the common cause.⁸⁹ With regard to the executive which includes public administration, police and courts, corporations are partly entitled to elect or select local officials, who are then approved by a higher authority.⁹⁰ At each level, Hegel endeavours to relate the particular and the universal.

While Hegel recognises the centrality of associations in fostering trust and in raising the normative basis of modern freedom to self-consciousness, he minimises their political significance in his overall design. This is partly because he engages with the corporation from the standpoint of the estate of trade and commerce and partly because he relies upon an impartial and universalist civil service for a 'more educated insight' into constitutional politics.

But the attenuated role of corporations also flows from Hegel's grounding of trust in the desire for recognition. Associational activity has flourished not only because

p.340-341.

⁸⁸ PR, par.311 A, p.350.

⁸⁹ PR, par.309 A, p.348.

⁹⁰ PR, par.288, p.329.

human beings desire recognition but also because they engage in a quest for truth. Hegel recognises the 'spiritual' (Protestant) sources of vocational activity and yet, he fails to draw out the full political implications of trust. A useful contrast here is Althusius who enlists the symbol of the covenant in favour of a 'societal federalism' and Gandhi who explores the spiritual basis of trust to arrive at a notion of freedom that goes beyond mutual recognition.⁹¹ In such an exploration, Hegel's insights on the potential for solidarity are indispensable mainly because they clarify the inner logic of modern freedom.

The Constitutional State

The constitutional state is the highest manifestation of right in ethical life. Hegel's explication of the basic principles underlying the constitutional state like sovereignty, separation of powers and the forms of regime offers a vision of the common good that builds upon the modern commitment to subjective freedom. After examining Hegel's notion of 'organic unity' embodied in the state, I assess his views on the relationship between the constitutional state and the 'spirit of a nation.'

⁹¹ See Chapter VI, 289-294.

To begin with, Hegel celebrates the constitutional state as the 'actuality' of the ethical Idea. The constitutional order realises the inner unity between subjective freedom and objective good embodied in laws, customs and institutions. The constitution is not simply a guarantor of rights but itself the highest symbol of what it means to be a self-determining subject. By the same token, it is an attempt to create an enduring order that simply is, as natural mountains are.

But Hegel does not rationalise actually existing states.⁹² He admits that existing states often fall short of the ethical Idea.⁹³ Though states exist in a realm of arbitrariness, their essence cannot be reduced to

⁹² Rudolph Haym, Hegel's biographer, was the first to accuse Hegel of supporting the Prussian State, as it existed in 1821. This charge was renewed by Karl Popper in our time in terms of Hegel's 'juridical positivism.' But Hegel's notion of actuality refers only to those aspects of an existing entity that accord with the concept and not to all contingent features. Hegel admits that an existing state may be 'badly disfigured' but still bear some traces of reason 'provided it is one of the more advanced states of our time'. As will be clear from the following discussion, he counts principles like the rule of law or rights among such rational moments of a state. See PR, par.258 A, p.279. See also Steven Smith, Hegel's Critique of Liberalism, 223-225 & T.M Knox, "Hegel and Prussianism," in The Hegel Myth and Legends, ed. Jon Stewart (Evanston, Ill.: North Western University Press, 1996), 76-77 & Charles Taylor, Hegel, 457.

⁹³ Hegel's writings on the German Constitution as well as his article on the English Reform Bill attest to his critical approach to extant institutions. See Z. Pelczynski, Hegel's Political Writings (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), 246-330.

contingency. As a systematic articulation of political order, the constitution grasps both contingency and rational necessity. The Idea of the state is not merely an ideal or essence; it holds a mirror to what the state could become by reflecting the inner reason underlying constitutional sovereignty, division of powers, rule of law and so forth.

From the standpoint of the Idea of right, Hegel insists that the state is an 'organic unity' and not a mere aggregate of different individuals or different powers.⁹⁴ The organic unity of the state is expressed at several levels: as the summit of ethical life, the state brings together the principles underlying the family and civil society, namely of belonging and of subjective freedom; as a set of concrete institutions, the state is an integrated network of different powers; as the embodiment of Spirit, the nation-state reconciles the 'spirit of a people'

⁹⁴ Adriaan Peperzaak interprets organicity to mean that 'the state is a big animal' and argues that the nation-state suffers from a residual irrationalism which is fully overcome only in a 'humankind united in true religion and scientific speculation.' See Adriaan Peperzaak, "Second Nature": Place and Significance of Hegel's Objective Spirit in Hegel's Encyclopedia," in The Owl of Minerva 27, no. 1 (Fall 1995): 51-66. Interestingly, Kojève too notes the animality of man in the 'universal and homogeneous state' although he does not foresee its being overcome. This is because Kojève interprets Hegel's state in terms of the 'end of history.' Whether 'world-history' entrenches or attenuates our animal nature, Hegel's notion of organic unity provides clues on how the principle of self-determination may be institutionalised within the bounds of a territorial state or a more encompassing political order.

embodied in their art, religion and philosophy with laws and institutions. At every juncture, Hegel elaborates organic unity in terms of the immanent reason embedded within institutions rather than merely history or culture.

Hegel understands 'organic unity' in terms of a differentiated unity. Whereas the family fuses the subjective and objective aspects of freedom and the civil society relates them formally, the constitutional state unites the objective and subjective dimensions of the free will in a rational manner. For example, constitutional law enjoys 'objective being' like natural things but is also superior to the latter because it is infinitely self-determining.⁹⁵ A second example of organic unity is the way constitutional law unites duty and right. To quote him, "in the state, as ethical entity and as the interpretation of the substantial and the particular, my obligation towards the substantial is at the same time the existence of my particular freedom; that is right and duty are united in one and the same relation."⁹⁶ By fulfilling the duties of citizenship, the individual secures her rights and preserves ethical life.

⁹⁵ PR, par.146 R, p.190.

⁹⁶ PR, par.261 R, p.283-284.

The clearest articulation of differentiated unity emerges in his account of sovereign power. Hegel distinguishes three aspects of sovereign power, the monarch, executive and legislative power. He argues that these are not separate powers but different moments of self-determination; the legislative moment ascertains the universal will while the executive moment relates the laws of the state to particular circumstances. The monarchical power represents the unity of the universal and particular moments; it is the "I will" that marks the moment of ultimate decision making.⁹⁷ Rejecting any artificial separation of powers, he argues that each power includes the other two. This does not mean that he effaces the distinctions between the three moments but reminds us that ascertaining the popular will cannot be divorced from a consideration of the particular. As Steven Smith has noted, Hegel is not merely addressing 'different powers as parts of a whole but

⁹⁷ These three moments flow from Hegel's idea of the concept as raising the universal and the particular into a singularity or individuality which is a unity that contains the differences. The monarch represents individuality or the moment of 'I will.' The executive, which includes the civil service, the police and the judiciary, represents the particular moment. The legislature represents the universal moment and includes the monarch, the executive and the Estates Assembly. See PR, par. 273, p.308, par.287, p.328, par.300, p.339 & par.303, p.343.

as parts which have to be somehow expressive of the whole.'⁹⁸

As a rational articulation of sovereign power, the constitution is "more than an arrangement of offices; it is closer to what the Greeks called the *politeia* or regime, or what is today sometimes called political culture. It is the entire way of life of a people."⁹⁹ Because sovereign power unites different moments of self-determination, Hegel does not elevate the 'people' as the locus of such power.¹⁰⁰ For Hegel, the 'people' is an abstraction, a formless crowd because individuals do not live as 'the people' but as members of determinate institutions.¹⁰¹ Popular will is

⁹⁸ Steven Smith, Hegel's Critique of Liberalism, 153 & Charles Taylor, Hegel, 438-444. Fred Dallmayr prefers the term 'holism' to foreground the Greek ideal that runs through Hegel. See Fred Dallmayr, Hegel: Modernity and Politics (California: Sage, 1993), p.3.

⁹⁹ Steven Smith, Hegel's Critique of Liberalism, 155.

¹⁰⁰ Commenting on the hereditary monarch as the de jure locus of sovereign power, Steven Smith points out that an elective monarch or an American-style president would not do because the monarch must embody all the features of constitution, not just a part. Smith admits that modern states have been able to do without the institution of monarchy although not without adopting all the trappings of monarchy. See Steven Smith, Hegel's Critique of Liberalism, 154.

¹⁰¹ Ilting argues that Hegel originally proposed a republican regime in his lectures on right of 1818-1819. Later, he partly retracted this because of the Carlsbad decrees of 1820 which imposed strict censorship. See K.H Ilting, "Hegel's Concept of the State," in Z.A Pelczynski ed., The State and Civil Society: Studies in Hegel's Political Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University

ascertained through the corporations in which individuals participate directly.

Before proceeding to Hegel's discussion of the organic unity between the 'spirit of the people' and the constitutional order, it is pertinent to assess some elements of his state. Among others, Hegel's emphasis on the civil service as the 'universal class' is difficult to defend given both Marx's and Weber's critiques.¹⁰² While Hegel's confidence in a universal class is now suspect, we should note that he does not elevate the civil service on formal-procedural grounds. He envisages a close relationship between the corporations and the civil service so that local and particular interests are given their due. We should also note that Hegel considers university professors, clergymen and members of the liberal professions as servants of the state.¹⁰³ In this sense, the role of the civil service is homologous to the role of agencies and institutions that

Press, 1984), 94-100. However, in view of Hegel's deep suspicion of the 'people' as well as his own argument that classification of different regimes belongs to an earlier level of development of the state, this interpretation is debatable. See PR, par.273, p.308-313 & par.303 R, p.343-344.

¹⁰² Another controversial element is that of hereditary monarchy although Hegel's own concern is to identify an institution that can represent all aspects of the constitution. See Steven Smith, Hegel's Critique of Liberalism, 154-155 & Charles Taylor, Hegel, 440-441.

¹⁰³ Steven Smith, Hegel's Critique of Liberalism, 150.

preserve and enhance the normative bases of modern freedom.

Hegel would have endorsed the present denunciation of the instrumental and technocratic bias of the bureaucracy. At the same time, he would warn us against a romanticisation of participatory politics. To argue that the 'people' always already know how to rule themselves is to forget that partisanship and power are problems that haunt even small republics. The problem is one of enhancing self-consciousness about the reason underlying constitutional government while enlarging the participatory base. While Hegel's confidence in the enlightened few appears both utopian and elitist to us, the question is whether the normative bases of modern institutions is immediately transparent to all. After all, political rule involves prudence and judgement in applying the universal to the particular or seeing the exemplary in the particular (to use Arendt's formulation) and granting that the civil service is not qualified for this task, we still have to specify the agents and/or structures through which such practical virtues may be sustained.

This does not imply that Hegel's ethical life has to be affirmed in all respects. The spread of technology and the dissolution of homogeneous space and time may compel us to rethink territorial sovereignty. In addressing the crisis of

self-determination and sovereignty, we must remember that modern constitutionalism is not simply an arbitrary arrangement. In this regard, Hegel's insights about the 'organic unity' are best developed in the direction of societal federalism.¹⁰⁴

But Hegel's constitutional state is also attacked because it does not fully endorse cultural situatedness or authentic identity. In the following, I discuss Hegel's views on the relationship between the constitutional state and the nation to show how he adheres to the principle of freedom rather than identity.

Constitutional State and the 'Spirit of a Nation'

Hegel is clear that the constitutional state is not simply a rational model superimposed upon extant customs and usages. He recognises that the constitution has to be attuned to the 'spirit of a people.' His allusions to the 'German Spirit as the Spirit of the New World' have been exploited by both German nationalists and anti-Hegelians.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ I take this up in the final chapter on Althusius.

¹⁰⁵ Avineri notes how Hegel was attacked by the Germans of the nineteenth century for his hostility to German unity and how this assessment changed with Karl Rosenkranz 'nationalist' interpretations of Hegel. In our time, Popper found Hegel to be both a nationalist and racist. See Avineri, "Hegel and Nationalism," in The Hegel Myths and Legends, 111-113.

And yet, Hegel's notion of the Germanic Spirit refers not so much to a territorial or ethnic identity as much as to the Christian world.¹⁰⁶ Further, Hegel's enthusiasm regarding the French revolution and Napoleon hardly imply nationalist sentiments.

Hegel explicitly rejects Herder's idea of a German *Ur-mythos* without denying that Christianity destroyed the ancient teutonic traditions.¹⁰⁷ While rejecting a primordial essence that defines a people, Hegel does not swerve to the opposite pole of endorsing whatever that has come to be in history. The 'spirit of a people' is neither an ahistorical essence nor simply a contingent configuration of ideas and identities thrown up by historical conjunctures or concocted by elites. Then what is the relationship between the constitutional state and the 'spirit of a people?'

Hegel alludes to the constitution and state as the 'spirit of a nation' (Volk). He writes:

Since spirit is actual only as that which it knows itself to be, and since the state, as the spirit of a nation (Volk), is both the law which permeates all relations within it and also the customs and consciousness of the individuals who belong to it, the constitution of a specific nation will in general depend on the nature and development of its self-consciousness; it is in this self-consciousness that

¹⁰⁶ Shlomo Avineri, "Hegel and Nationalism," 125.

¹⁰⁷ Shlomo Avineri, "Hegel and Nationalism," 119.

its subjective freedom and hence also the actuality of the constitution lie.¹⁰⁸

As the embodiment of the 'spirit of a nation,' the state not only implies laws but also manifests the self-consciousness embodied in the customs and usages of a people. Does this mean that the constitution simply affirms existing customs and practices? What does it mean to say that the constitution reflects the self-consciousness of a people? How does one identify the 'spirit of a people'?

Hegel argues that the 'spirit of a nation' is embodied in the art, religion and philosophy of a people.¹⁰⁹ In art, religion and philosophy, a nation or a people express and explore what they uphold as 'absolute.' The 'spirit of a nation' becomes an object of contemplation in these forms of consciousness.¹¹⁰ For Hegel, the constitution of the state explores and expresses the 'spirit of a nation' in a manner similar to but not identical with art, religion or philosophy. In the constitution, 'the spirit of a nation' becomes self-conscious of its history.

¹⁰⁸ PR, par. 274, p.312.

¹⁰⁹ Hegel himself uses people and nation interchangeably. The jewish nation, for instance is not based on ethnic homogeneity or territorial unity but common worship, memories, customs and political institutions. See Hegel, The Philosophy of History, 174.

¹¹⁰ Hegel, "Introduction," in Philosophy of History, 53.

Hegel writes that "in the existence of a nation the substantial aim is to be a state and preserve itself as such. A nation with no state formation has, strictly speaking, no history."¹¹¹ Generally, the existence of a nation or a people implies a set of norms and institutions. For Hegel, laws and institutions are expressive not simply of common and shared bonds but a sense of history. Through its social and political institutions, the national spirit becomes aware of itself as an 'imperfect present' with a past and future.¹¹² This historical consciousness propels the national spirit in the direction of a progressive realization of its essence.

But Hegel does not regard all national spirits as equally significant. He evolves a progressive, though not strictly linear, account of Universal Spirit. Spirit comes to self-consciousness of its universality and freedom in History. For instance, the Hindu notion of the 'pure absolute *brahman*' is, for Hegel, Spirit in a 'dream state' and thus inhibits worldly activity and a sense of history. In contrast, the Christian Spirit grasps the intertwining of the human and the divine and reveals itself in History. In

¹¹¹ Hegel, "The Moral Life or Social Ethics," in The Philosophy of Mind, trans. A.V Miller (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), par. 549, p.279.

¹¹² Hegel, "Introduction," in Philosophy of History, 61.

Christianity, the infinite worth of the individual is affirmed although its concrete realization has to await the Reformation, Enlightenment, French revolution and the constitutional state.¹¹³

Clearly, Hegel is not arguing that different national spirits have different conceptions of freedom which have to be incorporated into the constitution.¹¹⁴ Rather, different nations are moments in the drama of the Cosmic Spirit coming to full self-consciousness in history. For Hegel, the march of world history will negate the particularities of different nations and culminate in the extension of modern principles of freedom to the whole of humanity.¹¹⁵ Although

¹¹³ Hegel distinguishes four realms in world history: the oriental realm where the spirit is submerged in nature and religion and its secular life is a theocracy where the constitution and the laws are also religion; the Greek realm where the spirit emerges into the 'daylight of knowledge' (unlike the dream-state of the oriental spirit) and becomes self-conscious of its subjectivity but this is not integrated into ethical life; the Roman realm where the unity of Greek ethical life is fragmented giving rise to an Empire which is the embodiment of an abstract freedom; the Germanic realm which encompasses the Protestant Reformation, the Enlightenment and the French revolution and the coming together of the principles underlying these in a constitutional state. See PR, par.352-360, p.376-380.

¹¹⁴ This is evident in his argument that civilised nations are entitled 'to treat as barbarians other nations which are less advanced than they are in the substantial moments of the state..., in the consciousness that the rights of these other nations are not equal to theirs and that their independence is merely formal'. see PR, par.351, p.378.

¹¹⁵ Hegel's acclaim for the modern constitutional state is partly based on his philosophy of history which sees the modern age

this philosophy of history is much contested, we must remember that many nationalist movements across the world call for 'recognition' of their 'right to self-determination.'

Given his philosophy of history and right, Hegel could argue for the 'organic unity' of the constitutional state and national spirit without valorising cultural specificity. While highlighting the significance of culture and history, Hegel avoids reducing the state to merely expressing the culture of a people. A particular 'national

as the consummation and/or end of history. The meaning of this claim has been the subject of intense controversy. Some scholars like Kojève have interpreted the 'end' of history as the termination of history in the 'homogeneous and universal' state--history starts with the negating action of desire and ends with the 'satisfaction' of desire when struggle and labour will become superficial because all otherness would have been eliminated. While Kojève did not regard such an end as a triumph, others like Fukuyama, following the fall of the Soviet Union, have celebrated the end of history in the triumph of American liberalism. However, given that neither the satisfied state of abundance and leisure is in existence nor is there a consensus that the institutions of post revolutionary Europe and America are embodiments of freedom, it may be too early to embrace the end of history. It may still be argued that history has ended to the extent the structuring principles of modernity, already enacted out in the French Revolution and the modern state are simply being reenacted by others. But we must remember that all these versions presuppose the Europeanisation or westernisation of the earth. But for whom is the 'end of history' a cause for despair or hope? Do we not forget that there are still vast sectors of people for whom history is not the primary site of meaning not because they are other-worldly but because they have a richer understanding of the human search for the whole? For all the blurring of boundaries between nature and culture, the human and the divine, man still lives in the cosmos structured by seasons, day and night, and is still in-between life and death.

'spirit' is the foundation of the modern state only in so far as it recognises the principle of subjective freedom. The constitutional state claims loyalty from a nation or a people on the ground of preserving freedom rather than identity. Hegel distinguishes between a formal acceptance of modern freedom and a more substantive acknowledgement. If a cultural or geographical entity adopts the trappings of constitutionalism and rights, such a revolution remains formal. Hegel contends that a political revolution without reformation is empty.¹¹⁶ A more meaningful link between the national spirit and constitutional state occurs when the inner life embodied in art, religion and philosophy is infused with the spirit of freedom.

In principle, Hegel does not envisage an entrenchment of specific national identities in relating the constitutional state with the 'spirit of a people.' While the modern state gets historically both enriched and sabotaged by the link with nationhood, Hegel himself does not endorse the nationalist principle.¹¹⁷ What Hegel's thought reveals is that the organic unity between the constitutional state and

¹¹⁶ Hegel, "The Moral Life or Social Ethics," in Philosophy of Mind, par.552, p.287.

¹¹⁷ Although it may be argued that the centralisation of the state facilitates the rise of nationalist identities.

national spirit will require a subtle balancing of freedom and belonging.

Recasting *Sittlichkeit*: Hegel Contra Taylor

The persistence of invented or imagined nationalisms has, among other things, renewed the debate about the relationship between freedom and communal belonging. In this context, Charles Taylor suggests that Hegel's notion of *sittlichkeit* or ethical life needs to be reappropriated in terms of the human longing for authentic identity. Taylor tries to restore Herder's idea of *volk* not as a primordial essence but as an ongoing exploration of a horizon of meanings embedded in language and culture.

Taylor's expressivist vision represents a departure from Hegel in one main respect; whereas Hegel finds in the 'spirit of a people' an attunement to the 'absolute,' Taylor approaches 'the spirit of a nation' in terms of their unique way of being. As such, where Hegel steers clear of celebrating specific nations and cultures in terms of their self-consciousness of freedom, Taylor argues that a people can relate to modern ethical life only if it preserves their uniqueness.

Besides calling for recognition of some distinct societies and enhanced regional autonomy, Taylor is arguing

that modern liberal institutions have to be rejuvenated not as paradigms of universal freedom but as expressive of unique identities. But what does it mean to recast the rule of law as an expression of uniqueness? What if a specific community conceives of its uniqueness in terms of a hierarchical order and rejects equality of all? Do we then restrict uniqueness to some groups and if so, on what principle?

At one level, Taylor defends language and identity not because he is parochial but because he cherishes the 'mysterious depths of being' disclosed in language.¹¹⁸ Rescuing the excess of the 'extra-linguistic' or 'pre-linguistic' from Hegel's System has been a dominant theme in western thought since Hegel and even resonates in the appeal to the experience of the 'ineffable' in some Indian thinkers.¹¹⁹ In this sense, discovering our authentic identity requires a dialogue with others and an understanding that we only have a partial grasp of the horizons that constitute us.

¹¹⁸ Taylor, Hegel, 568-569.

¹¹⁹ Although this attunement to the extra-linguistic or pre-conceptual stems from different sources among western and Indian thinkers. After Heidegger, western thinkers like Gadamer and Taylor are attentive to the 'pre-linguistic' but they also argue that this domain is constituted by history and language. In contrast, Gandhi or Radhakrishnan refer to the ineffable in terms of our longing for the eternal ground of being.

At the same time, Taylor's view that traditions and cultures give us 'unique' access to this extra-linguistic realm can fuel parochialism and fanaticism. Further, the question of 'who am I' has been posed in different philosophical and religious traditions before us and has been answered in terms other than historical or cultural situatedness. Given that the experience of the extra-linguistic or pre-conceptual has been symbolised in some traditions in terms of man's existence in a cosmic whole and his search for the ground of being, we have to ask whether we need to pose the question of freedom and community in terms of authentic identity.¹²⁰

Hegel was more aware and more wary of the patriotic enthusiasms unleashed by an appeal to *volksgeist*. This is why he does not focus on the specificity of cultures or traditions. The constitutional order has to resonate with the 'spirit of a people' in order to thrive. As mentioned before, this relationship is based on freedom rather than identity. Modern constitution does not require thick attachments but only trust in the underlying principles. If we set aside the question of authentic identity, what about

¹²⁰ The question of how can we rejuvenate freedom and community in terms of this openness to the cosmic or extra-cosmic ground of being without fetishising cultural traditions is the focus of my analysis of Gandhi in the next chapter.

the issue of spiritual politics brought up by some Indian thinkers? How would Hegel address the question of spiritual politics raised by Radhakrishnan or Gandhi?

The Secular and the Spiritual in Ethical Life

Hegel's allusions to the state as the 'divine will' or the 'march of God,' the monarch's exalted status as a 'divine right' and ethical life as 'indwelling divine spirit' proclaim the spiritual character of modern freedom. This spirituality consists in the fact that modern ethical life realises the principle of subjective freedom and the infinite worth of the individual affirmed within the 'absolute religion' of Christianity. I focus on some features of his argument like the relationship between religion, thought and ethical life, the idea of 'genuine' religion to highlight the curious mixture of sympathy and suspicion that runs through his analysis. While Hegel is instructive in grasping the spiritual sources of modern ethical life, his anxiety regarding faith as mere 'feeling' misses out some core aspects of religious experience.

Hegel repudiates the liberal separation between ethical life and religion as a 'monstrous blunder'.¹²¹ He

¹²¹ Hegel, "The Moral Life, Or Social Ethics", in The Philosophy of Mind, par. 552, p.284.

challenges both the assumptions underlying this separation-- that the state is an independent power based on force and power and that religion is subjective opinion without any effect on the constitution.¹²² In his view, the force-based theory of the state effaces the ethical dimension of laws and institutions. He dismisses the view that religion is merely subjective on the ground that religious consciousness is oriented to the 'absolute' truth and that it generates a 'disposition of the most exalted kind.'¹²³ Because it seeks the 'absolute truth', religion is the highest sanction of the ethical consciousness embodied in the state.

However, Hegel does not propose a theocratic state or civil religion. He discerns the inner link between Protestant Christianity and modern freedom. At the same time, he portrays the constitutional state as the unfolding of a reason that includes but is not identical to faith.

To this end, Hegel probes the inner affinity between ethical life and religion from the standpoint of speculative thought rather than religious consciousness.¹²⁴ Speculative

¹²² Hegel, The Philosophy of Mind, par 552, p.284 & 287.

¹²³ PR, par.270 R, p.292.

¹²⁴ In Hegel's Logic, speculative thought is the 'positively rational' moment that holds together the subjective and the objective sides of the concept both in their unity and difference. The first moment is understanding which makes binary distinctions between categories and holds them in rigid opposition; the second

thought, in his view, transcends the binary dichotomy of reason and religion and discloses the inner reason in the latter. It reveals the identity of 'content' between thought and religion in that both are geared to the 'absolute' truth. But the 'form' in which religion seeks the 'absolute' truth differs from that of thought.

Religion is oriented to the highest truth in the 'form of feeling and faith' while thought grasps the highest truth conceptually.¹²⁵ Because religious consciousness turns inward in its search for the absolute, it might regard all institutions as external and contingent.¹²⁶ For Hegel, this inwardness can be destructive of ethical life. If the state were to rely solely upon religious consciousness, then it would either lead to extreme subjectivism (when rules are left to be determined by one's own conscience) or extreme fanaticism when religious conscience seeks to intervene in the world based on its feeling.¹²⁷

moment is that of dialectical negation which radicalises the categories of understanding and exposes their passing into one another; the speculative moment gathers together the opposites and affirms their unity as well as difference. See Hegel, The Encyclopaedia Logic, par.80-82, p.125-133.

¹²⁵ PR, par.270 R, p.293.

¹²⁶ PR, par.270 R, p.292-293.

¹²⁷ PR, par.270, p.293. The critique of inwardness here is a restatement of his critique of abstract, subjective will which can mean inertia or incessant activity. Lacking any objective truth,

In contrast, speculative thought grasps that ethical life has its supreme sanction in religion and that 'true' religion gives rise to the laws and institutions of ethical life. In his words:

If religion then is the consciousness of 'absolute' truth, then whatever is to rank as right and justice, as law and duty, i.e. as true in the world of free will, can be so esteemed only as it is a participant in that truth, as it is subsumed under it and is its sequel. But if the truly moral life is to be a sequel of religion, then perforce religion must have the genuine content, i.e. the idea of God it knows must be the true and real.¹²⁸

Hegel links ethical life to religion only in so far as the latter is a consciousness of 'absolute' truth and has 'genuine' content. How can we ascertain the 'genuine' content of religion? Hegel relies upon the 'concept of religion'¹²⁹ which bypasses the empirical features of particular religions and focuses on the reason immanent in the human-divine relationship depicted in all religions.¹³⁰

such a will can generate both political and religious fanaticism.

¹²⁸ Hegel, "The Moral Life, Or Social Ethics" in The Philosophy of Mind, par. 552, p.283.

¹²⁹ Like the 'concept of right' which discloses the intertwining of subjective freedom and objective laws within extant states, the 'concept of religion' discloses the intertwining of the human and the divine, the finite and the infinite within religious representation. In both cases, the concept reveals the immanent reason within the object of inquiry.

¹³⁰ Emil L.Fackenheim, The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought (Bloomington: Indiana University press, 1967), 193-194.

In this sense, he writes that the absolute content of religion is God as the 'ultimate foundation and cause on which everything depends and from which everything receives confirmation and justification..' ¹³¹

Now the 'concept of religion' is not fully realised in all religions. Hegel's philosophy presupposes Christianity as the 'true' or 'absolute' religion. ¹³² He mainly draws upon the Protestant and Lutheran faith. ¹³³ As a 'revealed' religion, Christianity unites the transcendental Lord of Jewish religion and the worldliness of Greek religion so

¹³¹ PR, par.270, p.292.

¹³² Hegel regards Christianity as the 'absolute' religion because it is the comprehensive representation of the truth of all other religions. But recently, controversy has erupted over the 'absolute' status accorded to Christianity in the light of Hegel's usage of 'consummate' religion rather than 'absolute' religion. Walter Jaeschke argues that Hegel regards Christianity as the absolute religion not because it is the fulfilment of historical evolution of religion nor because of the uniqueness of Christian revelation but because the concept of spirit becomes an object of consciousness, of religious representation within Christianity. This opens up the possibility of seeing other religions as consummating the notion of spirit and not merely as anticipations of Christianity. But then the dialectical structure of spirit relies upon Christian Revelation and Resurrection. Hegel's idea of 'absolute' spirit draws upon the fact that Christianity attains the most adequate representation of Spirit in the Incarnation. See Walter Jaeschke, "The History of Religion and Absolute Religion" and "Comment", by John Walker in John Walker ed., Thought and Faith in the Philosophy of Hegel (Dodrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1991), 9-27.

¹³³ From Hegel's standpoint, the Protestant faith captures the truth of religion in that the spirit is no longer seen as existing outside the secular world but in it. See Emil Fackenheim, The Religious Dimension, 143 and 149-150.

that the divine is neither purely in a 'beyond' cut off from the finite human (as in Judaism) nor is it reduced to human projections (as in the Greek religion).¹³⁴

In Christianity, the 'truth of God' comes to consciousness as both infinite subjectivity and infinite substance. Because God appears as Man, the truth of God is also the truth of Man; this implies that Man is Spirit and has to realise that essence in his own life.¹³⁵ If the Incarnation discloses the interpenetration of the divine and the human, the death of God and the resurrection negate the immediacy of the Incarnation and show that the Spirit resides in the community.¹³⁶

In the context of modern ethical life, Hegel traces two principles to Christianity; one, the universal equality of all human beings and two, the right to subjectivity which demands that all moral and ethical life emanate from the

¹³⁴ Emil Fackenheim, The Religious Dimension, 136-137.

¹³⁵ Hegel, "The Roman World", Lectures on the Philosophy of History, 328.

¹³⁶ For Hegel, the death of God and resurrection are essential for the Spirit has to sublimate sensuous embodiment and become the indwelling Spirit of the Church. As he writes, "Christ dies; only as dead, is he exalted to Heaven and sits at the right hand of God; only thus is he Spirit." Through death and resurrection, the divine Spirit becomes visible as the essence of man and this essence has to be actualised by every man in history. See "The Roman World", in Lectures on the Philosophy of History, 325-328.

free will.¹³⁷ Although Christianity contains these principles implicitly, they are not realised immediately. Hegel charges Catholicism with 'externalising' the spirit, thereby depriving the state and moral life of its spirituality.¹³⁸ Protestant Christianity rescues the divine Spirit from the ethereal realm and rehabilitates it in the human heart.¹³⁹ By questioning the superiority of the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, and permitting marriage and economic activity, Protestantism affirms the spiritual significance of secular life.¹⁴⁰

But this relationship between modern ethical life and Protestantism does not lead Hegel to argue for a Christian state. The organisation of ethical life is based on thought

¹³⁷ Hegel, "The Roman World", in Lectures on the Philosophy of History, 334.

¹³⁸ Hegel, "The Moral Life, or Social Ethics", in The Philosophy of Mind, par. 552, p.284.

¹³⁹ Although there is some controversy about Hegel's Protestantism given its Enlightenment bias toward reason and the relative devaluation of scriptural authority. See Karl Loewith, From Hegel to Nietzsche: the Revolution in Nineteenth Century Thought, tr. David E. Green (New York: Holt, 1964), 19-20 & Merold Westphal, "Hegel and the Reformation," in Robert Perkins ed., History and System: Hegel's Philosophy of History (Albany: SUNY, 1984), 73-92.

¹⁴⁰ Hegel, Philosophy of Mind, 286. It must be added that Hegel notes that the reconciliation between the Church and the state is 'immediately' present only subjectively within Protestantism. Hence it is complete only when this reconciliation is objectified in the world and apprehended by thought as the unity of the subjective and the objective spirit.

and not faith.¹⁴¹ As a hieroglyph of reason, the state possesses an inner strength that enables it to preserve faith without promoting any particular religion. In concrete terms, religious groups preserve themselves through the right to form corporations and freedom of doctrine.¹⁴²

Although modern ethical life does not espouse a particular religion, it thrives on one 'theological' virtue, namely trust. Trust, it may be recalled, is half-way between faith and speculative thought. The affinity between trust and the Protestant notion of 'calling' is evident in Hegel's linking of trust and corporations (which are, in fact, vocational associations). At the same time, Hegel also realises that trust cannot be reduced to faith. Modern ethical life inspires trust by granting the right to particularity. Associations provide an opportunity to recollect both the spiritual and moral bases of modern freedom. Trust and rectitude disclose the spiritual side of the desire for recognition by elevating it from empty and forceful self-assertion to the search for the common good.

What are the possible objections that thinkers like

¹⁴¹ PR, par. 270, p.292.

¹⁴² Hegel restricts freedom of doctrine when he writes that religious doctrines which undermine the ethical aspect of the state can be regulated because the state derives its right from reason and self-consciousness rather than mere feeling. See PR, par. 270, p.297-299.

Radhakrishnan or Gandhi could raise to this redemption of the spiritual dimension of modern ethical life? Firstly, they could object that Hegel's synthesis is based on Protestant Christianity and hence alien to a Hindu context.¹⁴³ Hegel's reference to Christianity as the 'absolute' religion is questionable. But we should not forget that the inner affinity between Protestantism and ethical life also serves to establish the irrevocability of freedom. While there is some justification in alleging that Hegel requires every society to reenact the history of Protestant Europe, the spread of modern ideas of freedom has forced non-Christian religions in general (Hinduism in particular) to come to terms with individual liberty and equality.¹⁴⁴

Secondly, one could argue that Hegel's philosophical reconciliation is based on the actual existence of a synthesis between Protestantism and secular life.¹⁴⁵ Given the ero-

¹⁴³ But to dismiss modern liberal institutions as 'Christian' and hence 'alien' to a Hindu context would contradict the claims made on behalf of the 'openness' of Hinduism. For such an objection amounts to saying that Hinduism, though non-dogmatic, is somehow closed to the principle of individual freedom. Fortunately neither Radhakrishnan nor Gandhi adopts this position.

¹⁴⁴ I think modern Hindu apologetics on behalf of the caste system as an occupational order is an excellent example of the pressure unleashed by the principle of universal equality. See Chapter V, 234-235.

¹⁴⁵ Emil Fackenheim, The Religious Dimension, 212.

sion of faith as well as the growing scepticism about the freedom-enhancing capacity of modern secular life, Hegel's speculative reconciliation appears inadequate for our time.¹⁴⁶

Thirdly, Hegel may be faulted for reducing faith to 'mere feeling' and thereby effacing the paradoxical character of the experience of faith. His distrust of faith is evident in the anxiety about 'genuine content' and 'absolute religion.' While there are good contextual reasons for the speculative transfiguration of Christian doctrines like the influence of Pietism (with its subjectivist overtones), the rational theology of the Enlightenment as well as some attempts to raise faith above reason, Hegel's reconciliation is deeply problematic. In combating the doctrinal rigidity and 'other worldliness' flowing from

¹⁴⁶ Emil Fackenheim, The Religious Dimension, 233-242. Fackenheim shows that post-Hegelian attempts to reconcile faith and secular life take two forms: philosophy flees the world as in Bradleyan Idealism and renounces Hegel's claim that philosophy comprehends history and the world. Or, philosophy remains within the world but attempts to comprehend man's historical-existential condition: in this latter mode, philosophy either holds fast to the secular freedom at the cost of Hegel's Protestant faith and radicalises self-affirmation of the human (as in Marx and Feuerbach) or it holds fast to Hegel's Christian faith but renounces the claim of philosophy to reconcile faith with reason. However, Fackenheim also suggests that these extremes are not unavoidable and that philosophy has to grope for a 'fragmented middle.'

organised religion, Hegel misses the openness intrinsic to the experience of faith.

In the process of recovering the openness of religious experience, it is necessary to keep in mind some of Hegel's concerns. The politicization of religious symbols is a danger that cannot be underestimated. In the Indian context, the Bharatiya Janata Party presents a case of 'immediate feelings' being mobilised for political mileage. To argue that the BJP perverts faith into ideology (as Ashis Nandy does) or exposing such perversion as a reaction to secular modernity is insufficient. Precisely because Hegel is aware of the possibility of distortions that he seeks to preserve the distinction between religion as an exploration of 'absolute truth' and constitutionalism. What motivates this separation is not simply the fear of religious intolerance but the reality of power politics which, incidentally, is neither exclusively Christian nor western. Hegel's achievement consists in showing that constitutional norms provide some safeguard against such perversions.

Symbols and the Sacred: Tension and Reconciliation

I pointed out above that Hegel's reconstruction of the spirituality of modern ethical life misses the tension inherent in the experience of faith. In this context,

Voegelin's analysis of faith provides an alternative approach to the experience encrusted in religious symbols. In Voegelin's words, "in faith we are living in the tension between contingency and necessity while in the reflective symbols the necessary and contingent poles are reflectively hypostatized into immanent and transcendent entities."¹⁴⁷ This tension is not peculiar to the experience of faith but also appears in the noetic quest for the ground of being. In other words, the tension is not a datum or dogma but expresses the 'tonality' of seeking and questioning either in prayer or meditation or philosophising.

Plato's notion of *metaxy* explicates this tension in terms of man's situatedness in-between ignorance and wisdom, suffering and bliss, life and death, immanence and transcendence. These poles are not 'thingly entities' but are symbols which are engendered by the experience itself.¹⁴⁸ While the experience itself is not a static given but differs between cosmological and religious myths and noetic symbols, the difference is not so much about the former

¹⁴⁷ Voegelin, "Quod Deus Dicitur," in Published Essays 1966-1985, 379.

¹⁴⁸ Voegelin, 'The Gospel and Culture,' in Published Essays 1966-1985, 187.

being irrational and the latter being rational but between different 'styles of reasoning.'¹⁴⁹

The experience of tension ensues in the paradoxical structure of both religious and philosophic symbols. The openness to a reality that transcends consciousness even while it is revealed in consciousness is best captured in Voegelin's account of consciousness as both the 'site and sensorium' of the divine-human encounter. The Hindu symbol of *atman-brahman* (which Hegel dismisses as 'empty solitude' and 'other-worldly') denotes the paradox of the state of transcendence--that it is one of perfect freedom from all conditions of becoming and yet it is an event in an aspirant's life; it is a return to the primordial state before the universe was created and yet it is not a regress into the mother's womb; it implies acting in the world as if one were only a spectator of one's actions.¹⁵⁰ This is not because Hinduism is unaware of the logic of non-contradiction but because language can express the

¹⁴⁹ For instance, cosmological symbolism relates things to their ground by relating them to other intracosmic things while philosophy unveils man's psyche as the site and sensorium of divine presence. While the latter is more differentiated in articulating man's seeking and searching, the reality to which the former refers neither becomes obsolete nor sublated. Voegelin, "Anxiety and Reason," in Late Unpublished Writings, 78-79 & 91.

¹⁵⁰ See Mircea Eliade, The Two and the One, 119-121.

experience of perfect freedom only by contradictory images and symbols.¹⁵¹

In this light, Hegel's analysis of faith as mere feeling or sensuous immediacy appears inadequate. His attempt to sublate the gap between religious symbols and experience proceeds as if myth, religion and philosophy have always been Kantian.¹⁵² The narrative of the movement of cosmic Spirit towards self-consciousness in history misses the search for transcendence expressed in *brahman*. His criticism of the Hindu Spirit as Spirit in a 'dream state' and *brahman* as 'other-worldly emptiness' misses the fact that *brahman* signifies the search for liberation from opposites.

The ambiguity of religious symbols and representations stems not so much from the inability to think through the essence of symbols. Nor is it reflective of uncritical belief in revealed truth or tradition. Rather, the ambiguity in symbols flows from the attunement to the 'divine light

¹⁵¹ In the context of Plato's notion of Being as both intracosmic and transcendent, Voegelin has argued that the paradox must be understood in terms of the experience from which it arises rather than in terms of labels like transcendentalism. See Voegelin, "The Beginning and the Beyond," in Late Unpublished Writings, 221.

¹⁵² His critique of Hinduism is a repetition of his critique of Kant. See Chapter V, 230-231.

beyond human reason.'¹⁵³ As such, paradoxical symbols cannot be understood or rejected from the outside but call for a reenactment of the meditative experience that gave rise to them.

Being attentive to both the immanent and transcendental structure of the experience of faith, Gandhi grasps that spiritual politics requires more than the attainment of universal recognition. Attunement to perfect freedom intimated in *brahman* does not lead to fanaticism or rejection of laws and institutions but to a creative reconstruction of the same. Unlike Hegel who reconstructs laws and institutions in terms of the desire for recognition, Gandhi tries to reconstruct them in terms of the human search for the beyond. As such, when he appeals to *swadeshi* or indigenous traditions, Gandhi does not claim recognition for their uniqueness but highlights their openness to the ground of being. Similarly, he does not reject modern constitutionalism or rights but explores their potential within the field of education and social service. Gandhi would be receptive to Hegel's emphasis on trust even while deepening the source from which it springs.

How far is Hegel's ethical life open to such reappropriation? Firstly, Hegel directs us to the experience of

¹⁵³ Voegelin, "Quod Deus Dicitur," in Published Essays, 383.

freedom rather than freezing it into a set of rights. Secondly, Hegel shows that modern freedom is not antithetical to solidarity. Thirdly, Hegel grasps that ethical life is not simply about intersubjective consensus or morality but is part of a larger search for absolute freedom although as discussed, he forgets the tensions intrinsic to the search and the multiple articulations of the experience of the divine. Fourthly, Hegel's focus on the constitutional state maintains the autonomy and architectonic nature of political activity without sealing it from other realms of human activity or subordinating it to historical and cultural specificity. Finally, Hegel displays a keen awareness of the suffering unleashed by contingency in civil society without devaluing individual freedom.

Conclusion

Returning to Hegel's critique of Rousseau, I uncovered some of the problems with current communitarian discourse such as its resort to civic republicanism and its silence regarding the will. Like the communitarians, Hegel anticipates the crisis of abstract rights but he addresses it from within the framework of modern freedom. His phenomenological account of the will shows that freedom is not about arbitrary self-assertion but about creating and

sustaining norms and institutions. In his analysis of modern civil society, Hegel portrays the breakdown of freedom as well as the breakthrough to trust.

Focusing on his account of corporations and the constitutional state, I argued that trust is intimately connected with the recovery of the ethical and spiritual roots of modern freedom. In the corporations, Hegel draws together the principles underlying modern ethical life in the family, civil society and the state. For Hegel, the corporation is not simply an administrative arrangement but a site for the cultivation and practise of virtues such as rectitude and trust. In the light of the current call for rejuvenating intermediary associations, his analysis is a useful reminder that such a task involves reconstructing the ethical bases of rights.

Similarly, Hegel's account of the constitutional state uncovers the potential for community within modern freedom. Hegel articulates the organic unity of the constitutional order without reducing it to a mechanical concatenation of powers or an expression of cultural identity. He also avoids relying upon republican enthusiasm or strong nationalist identity in arguing for constitutionalism. As the grandeur of the principle of self-determination is challenged either in the name of

'difference' or because of technological upheavals, it is worth reassessing the 'exemplary validity' of modern constitutionalism.

This does not imply that Hegel is the last word on the issues that surface in communitarian debates. However, whether it is the issue of belonging or authentic identity, the question that cannot be pushed aside pertains to the limits and possibilities within modernity. Here, Hegel remains our best guide as well as an obstacle. He is our guide because he shows that modern freedom is not so impoverished with respect to solidarity and spirituality. He is an obstacle because he does not fully explore the existential sources of trust and faith. I suggested in the last few sections that Hegel's analysis of the spirituality of modern ethical life has to be deepened. What does it mean to recapture the experience of trust and faith? Does it mean a throw back to premodern conceptions? If not, how can we illuminate politics in terms of the human quest for transcendence? These questions provide the guiding thread for the next two chapters on Gandhi and Althusius.

Chapter 5

TRUSTEESHIP AND COMMUNITY: GANDHI'S SPIRITUAL POLITICS

Introduction

In the last chapter, I explored the potential within modernity for reconciling freedom and belonging. By way of a phenomenological account of the will, Hegel shows that modern freedom is fulfilled within the norms and institutions of ethical life in the family, civil society and constitutional state. This thesis is important for two reasons; one, the current communitarian case for substantive common goods and republican virtue does not adequately probe the potential within the constitutional regime or federalism to foster a sense of belonging; two, the rejection of liberal secularism in favour of spiritual politics in the Indian context ignores the fact that the constitutional state is 'spiritual' in that it embodies the norms of universal equality and freedom.

It remains to uncover why the claim to authentic and unique identity as in Taylor's work or the desire for making politics commensurable with an 'overall theory of transcendence' as in Nandy's work strikes a chord in our time. Even if we concede that the constitutional regime allows room for voluntary associations and religious freedom

within the private sphere, it is also true that it does not inspire 'love for the whole.' If the nation inspired such love because of its claims to represent an 'immortal whole,' it is a deeply ambiguous phenomenon in the twentieth century both because of its excesses and the globalization processes.

What animates the search for authenticity and difference in the West and spiritual politics in India is a deep anxiety regarding the claims of modern reason to autonomy. This restlessness manifests itself on the one hand, in the exposure of all kinds of situatedness (class, gender, culture) and on the other hand, in the return to 'primordial' 'preconceptual' 'interstitial' 'events.' The sovereign self-legislating subject elevated by the constitutional state is under attack. While it is necessary to be cautious about the rage against autonomy (this is why one has to be on guard with respect to the relentless hermeneutics of suspicion), it is also imperative to probe why there is this energetic pursuit of something 'outside' human reason (at least, the Cartesian model), something that is 'always already' there.

Hegel himself inaugurated this alertness to the horizon that constitutes reason when he attacked Kant's formalism and recounted the historical basis of ethical

life. But Hegel did not abandon the autonomy of modern reason when he acknowledged the significance of history; rather he constructed a Universal History within which reason progressively becomes self-conscious of its own autonomy. Since Nietzsche's unmasking of both reason and history as will to power, modern thought is somewhat nervous and suspicious about itself. Reason, now affirms its exposure to something that 'conceals and withdraws.' Despite this concern with the 'mystery' of the 'preconceptual,' what remains of Hegel in these reversals is the problem of historicity. The 'always already there' lurking in the background is a 'happening' and a 'presencing' which resists discursive reason but is caught up in temporality.

This problem of historicity and conditioning of human experience has also preoccupied diverse strands of Indian spirituality. However, instead of proclaiming that the essence of being human consists in historicity and contingency, some Indian and Hindu streams pursue and affirm the possibility of a trans-historical freedom.¹ The pursuit of *moksha* or liberation from the 'bondage of action' is a common theme in most strands of Hindu thought. In Eliade's words, "it is impossible, for example, to disregard one of

¹ Mircea Eliade, "Foreword," in Yoga: Immortality and Freedom, tr. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1958), xvi.

India's greatest discoveries: that of consciousness as a witness, of consciousness freed from its psychophysiological structures and their temporal conditioning, the consciousness of a "liberated" man, of him, that is, who has succeeded in liberating himself from temporality and thereafter knows the true, inexpressible freedom.'²

This idea of consciousness as a witness or spectator resounds in Gandhi's spiritual politics and his emphasis on trusteeship. This concept of Gandhi's has seldom been analyzed as a mode of being in the world.³ When Gandhi refers to the self and body as a 'sacred trust' or when he exhorts Hindus to become trustees of their religion, he is drawing upon trusteeship as a way of life. In this sense, it flows from the ideal of disinterested action upheld in the *Bhagavad Gita*. The impressive repertoire of Gandhi's spiritual politics including satyagraha or soul-force, love or non-violence, fasting, non-possession and so forth are

² Mircea Eliade, "Foreword," in *Yoga*, xx.

³ This is probably because Gandhi uses the term 'trusteeship' in the context of labour disputes more frequently. See Gandhi, *Trusteeship* (Ahmedabad: Navjivan, 1960); B.P Pandey, Gandhi and Economic Development (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1991), 133-174; For a marxist critique, see E.M.S Namboodripad, The Mahatma and the ism (Delhi: Peoples Publishers, 1959). However, I hold that his notion of trusteeship is closely linked to disinterested action; trusteeship stems from the experience of non-possession and disinterested action rather than simply a 'feudal' concern for others or a legal concept.

unintelligible except as diverse ways of experiencing the highest life upheld in the *Gita*. To the perennial question of how ought man to live, the *Gita*'s teacher, Krishna answers, "Imitate Me!" To imitate the divine action, it is important to understand what Krishna is and what he does.⁴ In the following pages, I elicit the intimate link between Gandhi's spiritual politics and the *Gita* view that one ought to live and act in the world as if one were a spectator.

In the context of the debates on individual freedom and community, Gandhi's trusteeship recasts both the poles. Although trusteeship appears to be an 'ascetic' morality, it is nourished by the desire for the freedom characteristic of the all-knowing 'seer' or *atman*-Self. To be a trustee is to take care of the ego-self in the light of the *atman*-Self. Through a sustained practise of non-possession, non-violence and selfless service, the individual tunes in to the divine Self or *atman*, that by which human beings participate in transcendence. But non-violence or non-possession is not a means to an end; one does not first give up possessions and then look for the *atman*. In renunciation, one experiences the Self which is 'truth, consciousness and bliss.' In other words, trusteeship is a striving toward immortality through

⁴ Mircea Eliade, A History of Religious Ideas, Vol.II, tr. Willard Trask (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 239.

the practise of renunciation. But neither immortality nor renunciation exclude living and acting in the world.

Although there is no account of rights, Gandhi espouses the liberal ideals of universal equality and dignity and anchors these not so much in the primordial desire for recognition but in the human desire for divine perfection. In his own words, this desire meant seeing God 'face to face.' This spiritual longing towards the 'transcendental ground of being'⁵ is the mainspring of individual freedom.

By virtue of the seeking and striving, human beings belong to a community of 'saints and seers' whom Gandhi calls 'spiritual scientists.' In the light of this 'invisible' community, Gandhi tries to re-form extant communities, fully conscious of the fact that the saintly community is, like 'Euclid's straight line,' a regulative

⁵ Throughout this chapter, I have drawn upon Voegelin's experiential analysis of symbols to illuminate Gandhi's spiritual politics. Voegelin has argued that symbols which manifest the 'tension of existence' between life and death, soul and God, cosmos and the society and the three worlds do not refer to objects in the external world. They embody the experience of a non-existent reality and their meaning conveys no other truth than that of the engendering consciousness. An understanding of such symbols calls for a meditative response. In my view, Gandhi's life-long effort at practising disinterested action and his cherished desire to see 'God face to face' exemplify the experience of existence structured by the search for and the pull of the divine *atman-brahman*. From this angle, it is possible to understand Gandhi's views on freedom and community as proceeding from the search for the right ordering of existence rather than simply as 'anti-colonial' or 'post-modern' or 'traditional.' See Voegelin, "Immortality" in Published Essays, 52-53.

ideal. Hence, Gandhi's call for *swadeshi* or one's own locality or country is not about authentic cultural identity but about a community that radiates an openness to the experience of the divine. If he invokes indigenous institutions, it is not because he wants to preserve historical and cultural specificity but because some institutions and practices reflect the perennial truths about human existence better than others.

Before proceeding further, it may be useful to review the main themes as they emerged in the preceding chapters. In the second chapter, I focused on Taylor's expressivist rendering of modern ideals of ordinary life and freedom in order to make room for community. I argued that Taylor's authenticity captures the human search for a larger order but fails to draw out the moment of self-transcendence intrinsic to this quest. As such, his argument for community, confined as it is to the constitutive role of culture and language, leads into the ethnocentric clamour for recognition of unique identities. I pointed out that the challenge posed by some archaic or non-modern traditions is best understood neither as a rejection of reason or ordinary life but as an invitation to recover the pull of transcendence in our search for a larger order.

Focusing on Radhakrishnan, I showed that the question of transcendence does not mean reinstating dogma but explicating the experience sedimented in some religious and cultural symbols. While Radhakrishnan apprehends the paradoxical experience of the 'known and the unknown' embedded in some Hindu symbols like *atman*, he fails to clarify the contours of a politics attuned to the human quest for transcendence. This lacuna is rectified in Gandhi's theory and practice of spiritual politics as trusteeship.

The attempt to restore the spiritual side of politics is not peculiar to the Indian context. Hegel was probably the forerunner in rejecting the arbitrary separation of religion and politics. But his speculative account of the affinity between Protestantism and modern secular life envisions Cosmic Spirit as progressively realising itself in human history. In the process, Hegel reduces non-Christian symbolisations of the Absolute to inadequate anticipations. Since it is difficult to concur with Hegel's view that Hinduism represents Spirit in a 'dream state' and there is growing scepticism regarding his view that the modern ethical life embodied in the civil society and the nation-state represent the highest state of freedom, it is useful to explore Gandhi's vision of spiritual politics.

For Gandhi locates human freedom not so much in the competitive desire for recognition but in the experience of transcendence. Freedom is not only about taming and incorporating competing claims for recognition but also about attaining liberation from the conditions of historical existence. But will this not encourage the destruction of extant norms and institutions? After all, this is the point that Hegel makes when he disenfranchises the immediacy of faith.

Only by clarifying the sources and structure of this experience of freedom is it possible to grasp what is at stake both in Hegel's fear of the religious man and Gandhi's religious politics. While the danger that symbols will be dogmatised and ensue in fanatical politics exists, it is also important to see if religious conceptions of the absolute are necessarily aggressive and drive forward to realise themselves in history. Gandhi shows that a certain kind of religious man is drawn into politics reluctantly and strives to maintain disinterestedness even while acting within that realm. Because he understands that the 'absolute' either as God or Truth (*brahman*) can be experienced but not fully compressed into a system, Gandhi does not bother to evolve blueprints of what a spiritually organised polity will look like. The absolute is both

immanent and transcendent and this is why it is possible to straddle both worlds, the world beyond and the one here below. It is possible to purge one's ego and be illumined by the 'inner voice' and yet return to the 'real' world of power with the weapon of non-violence. Throughout this chapter, I have tried to grasp this grandeur of spiritual politics and disinterested action without always succeeding in setting the fear of 'beautiful souls' and the clamour for recognition to rest. Spiritual politics appears to be less about erasing the norms and institutions of ethical life than about how politics can be transfigured to some extent in the light of a certain openness to transcendence. Such openness does not negate rights or individual freedom but educates us in trembling a little less before the 'beyond.'⁶

I begin by unravelling the presuppositions regarding the self and the world underlying disinterested action. Focusing on the cosmogonic dimension of the Gita notion of

⁶ In Continental philosophy, both Heidegger and Levinas attempt to revive transcendence either in terms of the 'revealing-concealing' of truth or simply the 'Other' that always already claims us. Heidegger's account of 'man as the shepherd of Being' is not entirely incommensurable with Gandhi's notion of trusteeship or dwelling in the realm of *atman-brahman*. However, Heidegger, writing at the 'end of metaphysics' emphasises the 'nearness' between Being and man and the event or happening of Being. See Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in Basic Writings, ed. David Farrell Krell (Harper SanFrancisco, 1977), 221-222. From this perspective, Heidegger would probably be suspicious of the 'oneness' suggested by *atman-brahman* but this is open to debate.

acting without attachment to rewards, I show that freedom is intimately intertwined with the quest for a transpersonal mode of being. This quest does not involve an archimedean standpoint but a 'turning around' to the *atman*-Self. Next, I probe the symbol of *atman-brahman* to explicate the paradox of spiritual experience as both immanent and transcendent. This paradox is captured in the *Gita* ideal of acting as if one were only a witness or spectator of one's actions. In the process, the 'lower' self anchored in the body-ego is neither resented nor rejected but transfigured in the light of the 'higher' Self of the *atman*. The mastery over the lower self of body-ego is less about a 'will to power' than about self-dispossession. The higher Self is not to be hypostatized into an entity but is the site of an experience of transcendence.

Given the desacralisation of the modern world and the critical turn of modern reason, is there any point in examining this ideal? Without denying the rupture with premodern cosmos, I address the above question in terms of Arendt's resort to the spectator-actor in her account of judging. My purpose is to show that judging provides a way of illuminating the potential within modernity to grasp some aspects of Gandhi's trusteeship. Following this, I examine the contours of Gandhi's 'swadeshi' or indigenous community.

I argue that the paradigmatic community is that of the 'seers and sages' rather than a territorial or cultural unit. In other words, Gandhi invites us to probe the potential within modernity and indigenous traditions not so much to entrench cultural authenticity but to forge communities which preserve and promote man's openness to transcendence. In the final section, I draw out the liberal side of Gandhi's politics by way of a brief comparison with Locke's trusteeship.

Hindu Dharma and Disinterested Action

Gandhi, like other modern Hindu thinkers, sees spiritual politics in terms of maintaining Hindu 'dharma.'⁷

⁷ Etymologically, 'dharma' derives from 'dhr' meaning 'to support and uphold.' In Vedic cosmogony, 'dharma' refers to the 'primeval opening, separation and holding apart of heaven and earth and upholding the space of the world. Halbfass, "Dharma in Traditional Hinduism," in India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding (Albany: SUNY, 1988), 317 Dharma also signifies the ideal socio-ethical order. In this sense, it is intertwined with (a) the four-fold caste order consisting of *brahmins* or priest-scholars, *kshatriyas* or warrior-kings, *vaishyas* or farmer-merchants and *sudras* or artisan-workers (b) the four stages of life namely *brahmachari* or student-celibate, the *grhastya* or householder, the *vanaprastha* or forest dweller, the *sannyasin* or renouncer and (c) the four ends of life namely *kama* or sexual love and aesthetic pleasure, *artha* or material prosperity, *dharma* or righteousness and *moksha* or liberation. There is some correlation between the four castes, stages and ends of life. The four stages of life are valid for the first three castes while the four ends of life are open, in principle, to all. However, the content of righteousness or dharma differs between different castes. There is also much controversy as to whether spiritual liberation is open to all given the denial of sacred knowledge (Vedas) to the lower castes. See Madeline

For Gandhi, the essence of Hindu dharma is contained in the 'mantra' of the Isa Upanishad,⁸ 'the whole universe is pervaded by God; renounce it and enjoy it. Do not covet what belongs to others.'⁹ Interpreting the *Bhagavad Gita* as a 'commentary' on this verse, Gandhi claims that renunciation in the sense of disinterested action constitutes the universal truth of Hinduism.¹⁰ Dharma, as both cosmic order

Biardeau, Hinduism: An Anthropology of a Civilisation (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 43-44.

⁸ The Isa Upanishad is considered to be one of the earliest Upanishads. It derives its name from the opening word 'Isavasya' and consists of eighteen verses celebrating the all-pervasive and ineffable nature of the Supreme. See S.Radhakrishnan, The Principal Upanishads, 567-578.

⁹ Interestingly, Gandhi's enthusiasm for the 'mantra' of the Isa Upanishad reaches its peak during the tours of Trivandrum (Kerala) in 1937-38, following the temple-entry proclamation for harijans (untouchables). Insisting that he is a 'man of the street' with no great learning, he argues that the essence of Hinduism is enjoyment and rebirth through renunciation. Considering that he addresses a predominantly harijan audience, his references to re-birth may be seen as an initiation of harijans into the caste order (for only the upper castes were considered twice-born). However, he was also initiating the 'upper' castes into a new Hindu order purged of untouchability and hierarchy. Is he simply trying to consolidate a Hindu identity? Such a contextual reading overlooks Gandhi's insistence that enjoyment through renunciation is a cosmic law and that by renouncing, one is re-born as a citizen of the world. See The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, (henceforth CWMG), vol.lxiv (Delhi: Government of India Publications, 1976), 257-305.

¹⁰ Gandhi's allegorical reading of the Gita was strongly influenced by the Theosophists. The narrative context of Krishna's revelation to Arjuna, Krishna's support for the war and the historical facts hold no interest for Gandhi, as they do for Tilak. He emphasises that the Gita teaches non-violence throughout. See Gandhi, "Anasaktiyoga," in CWMG, Vol.xli, 93. Being an eclectic

and socio-ethical order, is sustained through the practise of renunciation, disinterested action or sacrifice.¹¹

The association between *dharma* and sacrifice goes back to Vedic cosmogony according to which the cosmos originates in the sacrifice of the Cosmic Man (*Purusha*).¹² Because the cosmos ensues from sacrifice, every action, divine or human, has the character of sacrifice. Through ritual sacrifice, the cosmogonic act is reenacted, the 'person' (*atman*) of Prajapati is restored and the sacrificer himself gains immortality or *atman*.¹³ In the Upanishads, ritual sacrifice is substituted by renunciation of worldly

synthesis, the Gita lends itself to multiple and conflicting readings. My purpose is not to examine the accuracy of Gandhi's reading but to see how his accent on disinterested action coalesces with his argument for community autonomy. For an account of the different influences on Gandhi's interpretation, see Eric Sharpe, "Gandhi's Gita," in The Universal Gita (London: Duckworth, 1985), 103-122; Robert Minor ed. Modern Indian Interpreters of the Gita (Albany: SUNY, 1986), 106-108.

¹¹ Although these terms have different meanings in different strands of Hinduism, Gandhi uses them all interchangeably.

¹² Wendy Doniger O' Flaherty, "Purusha Sukta or The Hymn of Man," in The Rigveda: An Anthology (London: Penguin, 1981), 29-32.

¹³ The implicit identification between Prajapati and the sacrificer in the ritual act prefigures the Upanishadic discovery of the *atman*-*brahman* identity. Just as the Prajapati (*brahman*) is reconstructed through the ritual, so also the 'atman' of the sacrificer is re-collected making him immortal. See Eliade, "India Before Gautama Buddha: From the Cosmic Sacrifice to the Supreme Identity *Atman*-*Brahman*," in A History of Religious Ideas, Vol. I, trans. Willard Trask (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 223-246.

life and contemplation, which are seen as equivalent to the Vedic ritual.¹⁴ The *Gita* resanctifies worldly life by calling for renunciation not of action per se but the rewards of action. By renouncing the 'fruits' of action, "man transforms his acts into *sacrifices*---that is, into transpersonal dynamisms contributing to the maintenance of cosmic order."¹⁵

The 'activist' overtones of the *Gita* ideal has been immensely attractive for some Indian nationalist thinkers in rebutting the view that Hinduism is other-worldly.¹⁶ The dominant tendency is to render the ideal of disinterested action as the Hindu equivalent of a Categorical Imperative

¹⁴ Ritual sacrifice is rejected by the Upanishads because of the discovery of the law of universal causality or *karman*. If all acts have results, then ritual act is no exception; it can only ensure a short holiday in heaven after which the soul will have to take rebirth. As such, only wisdom or gnosis through renunciation and contemplation guarantees absolute freedom, *moksha*. At the same time, the principle of sacrifice is not abandoned but interiorised. Besides ritual and contemplation, yoga techniques as well as theistic devotion soon gained eminent status as paths to liberation. See Mircea Eliade, "India before Gautama Buddha," 238-243.

¹⁵ Mircea Eliade, "The Triumph of Yoga," in *Yoga*, 157. See also Ananda Coomaraswamy, "AtmaYajna: Self-Sacrifice," in Selected Papers, Vol 2, Metaphysics, ed. Roger Lipsey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 134.

¹⁶ Tilak and Aurobindo were among the most explicit proponents of an 'energistic' reading of *Gita*. See B.G Tilak, Gita Rahasya, trans. B.S. Sukthankar (2nd edition, Poona: Tilak Bros., 1887), 431-440. See also Aurobindo, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, vol II (Pondichery: Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1972), 105.

(duty for duty's sake).¹⁷ But this can be misleading because desireless action is not rooted in an autonomous self-legislating subject.¹⁸ For the *Gita*, the problem of freedom goes beyond purging heteronomous desires and making the will purely rational. The question is how can a human being free himself from all sense of 'I,' while remaining and acting in the world. Action is binding not only because humans act from a desire for rewards but also because it proceeds from the psychophysiological complex of the body-ego. The goal is to free oneself from the illusion of 'I am the doer' and act as if one were only a spectator or witness.¹⁹

But why should one act at all? Human beings are, by nature, prone to action.²⁰ Nature is two-fold comprising of the restless and dynamic part (the senses and the mind) and

¹⁷ Tilak, Gita Rahasya, 680-681 & 688-689.

¹⁸ This 'Kantian' reading of the *Gita* is also problematic because of the recognition of caste-duties and scriptural duties, if only to a minimal extent.

¹⁹ Although the *Gita* ideal of detached action and the Puritanical notion are not entirely dissimilar, we should note that the *Gita* does not associate the body-ego complex with sin but with metaphysical ignorance. Renunciation of rewards flows not so much from the fear of carnality or passions but from the experience of transcendence symbolised in *atman-brahman*.

²⁰ Radhakrishnan, trans. The Bhagavad Gita, chapter III, verse 5 (George Allen and Unwin, 1948; reprint, Delhi: Indus, 1995) 133. This text is henceforth abbreviated as *Gita*. Where I have used a different translation, I have used the full title.

a luminous aspect which is the Self.²¹ Because human beings partake of a lower nature, they cannot avoid action; "for no one can exist for even an instant without performing action; however unwilling, every being is forced to act by the qualities of nature."²² But this 'helplessness' does not mean that there is no freedom. For human beings can transfigure or sanctify their actions by virtue of the divine Self or *atman*.²³

Does this mean that the *Gita* negates the embodied nature of being in the world? Given that the modes of nature (*prakriti*) are beginningless and endless, there is no negation of the body or worldly life. But the 'field' of the body-ego, the five elements, the ten senses (cognitive and conative), the mind and the five objects of senses is

²¹ Nature or *prakriti* is the primal substance that manifests itself in three modes or qualities (*gunas*), the modality of luminosity or *sattva*, the modality of motor energy and mental activity or *rajas* and the modality of inertia or *tamas*. Both inner nature, i.e., man's body and mind and intelligence as well as external nature or the objective world of matter are approached in terms of these modes. See Mircea Eliade, *Yoga*, 19. While the system of Samkhya would subsequently regard this primal substance as independent of the Supreme (*Purusha*), in the *Gita*, Krishna regards it as his lower nature. His other and higher nature is the immortal Self which is the origin and eternal seed of all existence. See *Gita*, chapter VII, verses 4-13, p.213-217.

²² Chapter III, verse 5 in The Bhagavad Gita: Krishna's Counsel in Time of War, tr. Barbara Stoler Miller (New York: Bantam 1986), 41.

²³ *Gita*, chapter III, verses 5-19, p.133.

subject to endless modifications.²⁴ To be subject to the "conditions" is incompatible with freedom; to gain liberation, it is necessary to go beyond the empirical, historical 'I' which oscillates between happiness and suffering, good and evil, mine and thine to the Self that illumines this field. Paradoxically, going beyond the 'field of the body' also leads to an affirmation of the body-mind complex. 'One who knows' grasps that the *atman-self* is contained in the body 'like oil in sesame seeds and butter in milk.'²⁵

This notion of freedom has to be distinguished from both the modern version of 'self-mastery' of the Cartesian variety as well as the more recent affirmation of a historically situated freedom. In contrast to the former which sees the self (either as mind or reason) as an active legislator seeking optimal satisfaction or recognition and the latter which stresses our embodied, historical existence, the *Gita* vision recommends yoking both the body and the mind to the *atman-Self*, the Self which sees without being seen or rules without ruling. But what or who is this *atman-Self*?

²⁴ Gita, chapter XIII, verse 4, p.303

²⁵ Svetasvatara Upanisad, verse 15-16, chapter 1 in Upanisads tr. Patrick Olivelle (London: Oxford University Press, 1996), 254.

Atman-Brahman: Transcendence and Immanence

The *atman*-Self denotes the immanence of the transcendent principle, *brahman*, and as such, it is the inner Self or the inner controller. *Brahman*, the 'Absolute' or 'Supreme' is invisible, non-dual, beyond grasp, without qualifications, neither born nor unborn, neither one nor many. Just as ether in a pot is not different from ether at large, there is no diremption between *atman-brahman*. To realise this identity of *brahman* and *atman* is to gain absolute freedom from all conditioned existence, *moksha*.

The *atman-brahman* is often referred to as the Self, One without a second (*tad ekam*). In this sense, it is not possible to talk of your *atman* and my *atman*. Nor is *atman* reducible to the mind or intellect or life-force. Rather, it is that region of consciousness wherefrom one experiences oneness with the cosmic whole and/or 'that' which is 'beyond' the cosmos. Such an experience is, at once, 'in' this embodied consciousness and 'outside' this particular individual. As the sage Yajnavalkya tells his wife Maitreyi, "Just as a mass of salt has not inside or outside but is altogether a mass of taste, so also the *brahman* as Self has

no inside or outside but is altogether a mass of intelligence only.'²⁶

This notion of *brahman-atman* acquires a strong theistic twist in the Gita and Gandhi. *Brahman* as the Supreme, undifferentiated principle is seen as upheld by a personal God (*Ishvara* symbolised as Krishna).²⁷ This God (Krishna) also has a lower nature, manifest as *prakriti* or Cosmic matter as well as the three natural modes which impel action. But this does not diminish Krishna's transcendence for he declares that 'while they (the modes of nature) are in Me I am not in them.'²⁸ In this sense, the world of nature and cosmos does not exhaust the Supreme. The significance of this immanence-transcendence is that the Gita recognises both the experience of the absolute as unmanifest *brahman* and the experience of the sacred as loving intimacy (*bhakti*) towards a personal god.

²⁶ See Brihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, IV.5.13, in The Principal Upaniṣads, tr. Radhakrishnan, 285.

²⁷ The Gita being a 'synthesis' of diverse strands of Hinduism uses *brahman* in at least three senses; it connotes the Vedas, it stands for a personal God and it is the ultimate object of sacred knowledge. However, the theistic strand dominates within this synthesis. See Surendranath Dasgupta, "The Philosophy of Bhagavad Gita," in A History of Indian Philosophy, Vol 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 473-475 & 524-527.

²⁸ Gita, chapter VII, verse 12, p.217.

A useful simile is that of the *Ashwattha* (*pipul*) tree with its roots high up and branches downward.²⁹ But the tree is 'duplicated' in that its leaves and branches spread in both directions; while the leaves of the tree with its roots upward are the Vedas, the tree also gets 'grounded' because of the leaves of the senses. In order to know the real nature of the tree, one has to cut its roots here below.³⁰

How does one cut roots below? In Hinduism, the path of wisdom or *jnana*, of devotion or *bhakti* and of skilful action or *yoga* have all been recognised as equally valid in tuning or preparing the individual to the higher Self. In the Gita, all these paths are harmonised in the idea of disinterested action. The best way to unravel this maxim is to focus on what Krishna says about his own action in the world. In his words:

In the three worlds, there is nothing I must do,
nothing unattained to be attained, yet I engage in
action.

Gathering in my own nature, again and again I freely
create this whole throng of creatures, helpless in the
force of my nature.

²⁹ Surendranath Dasgupta, "The Philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita," 524.

³⁰ Surendranath Dasgupta, "The Philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita," 524.

These actions do not bind me, since I remain detached in all my actions, Arjuna, as if I stood apart from them.³¹

Like 'wise men,' Krishna acts to preserve order in the world. But Krishna acts in the world with detachment; he acts only 'seemingly' and is not bound by his actions or the 'lower nature' (of the body and mind). For he is also unchanging, eternal *brahman*. In turn, only by reenacting Krishna's action is it possible to grasp the mystery of acting as if one was only a spectator.

In and through such 'imitation,' one begins to understand both the 'human condition' of being embodied and the 'divine (non)condition' of free action. Subject to the varied pulls of the senses and their objects, the individual is deluded into equating the true Self with the empirical, historical 'I'. Driven by the 'insatiable fire of desire,' the ego-self thrives on 'projects' and yet, feels 'thrown' into the world. Only by understanding the 'nature' of desire, its roots in the 'field of body-mind,' its movement between opposites and its subjection to time and death is it possible to transfigure desire. Here, it is not so much the 'will to power' stemming from resentment for 'natural drives and passions' that is at work; rather, one affirms the body-

³¹ Barbara Stoler Miller, tr. The Bhagavad Gita: Krishna's Counsel in Time of War, chapter III, verse 22, p.44; See also chapter IX, verse 8, p.84 & chapter IX, verse 9, p.84.

mind complex or nature as part of an ordered whole. "Controlling the senses by the mind, the mind by the intelligence and intelligence by the higher Self," the individual seeks to pierce through the veil of ignorance cast by the ego-self.

Gandhi refers to the *atman*-Self mainly in terms of the 'inner voice.'³² The inner Self or inner voice is not to be confused with authentic or unique identity; 'just as the ocean drop has no individuality separated from the ocean,' so also the 'inner voice' has no individuality.³³ But this does not mean that the inner voice says the same thing in all beings at all times; the clarity and purity of the inner voice is contingent upon the extent to which one has overcome the ego.

To sum up, disinterested action is the mode of being for one who rests in the *atman*-Self. Transforming every action into an 'offering,' the wise person acts skilfully, yet with detachment. Having harnessed the senses and the mind and yoked them to the divine Self, the "enlightened one rests happily in the nine doored city of the body, neither

³² Gandhi uses the conscience, heart and inner voice interchangeably. See "Freedom of Conscience," in MPWM, vol.II, 126.

³³ This distinguishes Gandhi's 'inner voice' from Taylor's reading of Rousseau's 'inner voice' as a call to authentic identity. I will return to this point subsequently.

acting nor compelling action."³⁴ Only such a being can say that "I am not the doer" and act 'mechanically' as if one were only a puppet. Just as the 'automatic' action of the puppet testifies to the skill of the puppet player, so also the 'mechanical' activity of the wise person points to the rule of the inner Self.³⁵ Just as the puppet player acts without acting, sees without being seen, so also the inner Self is the spectator as well as the director of action.

Gandhi's notion of trusteeship, as an exercise in relinquishing the sense of 'I' rooted in the ego-body complex flows from the spectator-actor model of the Gita. The double movement of freeing oneself from the ego and living in the Self echoes in all his techniques like satyagraha, non-violence, non-possession or service. As such, the ground of trusteeship is not based on mere sentiments such as altruism or authenticity but the restless search for the eternal. Gandhi often describes renunciation as a 'wrestling with death' and a 'heart-churning exercise.'³⁶ Only one who is bound by the 'golden chord' of

³⁴ Gita, chapter V, verse 13, p.179. See also Ananda Coomaraswamy, "Traditional Psychology," in Collected Papers, Vol. II, Metaphysics, 373-377.

³⁵ Gandhi, "Anasaktiyoga," 107 & 111.

³⁶ Gandhi, "Anasaktiyoga," 95.

the *atman* can fulfil the role of a trustee; there is a close relationship between Gandhi's 'living in truth' and his call for non-possession and trusteeship.

The distinction between the lower self and higher Self as well as the appeal to a personal God might suggest that this vision is restricted to a premodern context. How far is this higher Self relevant given the modern affirmation of ordinary life? In analysing this question, one consideration has to be kept in mind. The *atman*-Self is immanent as the pull of the individual toward a freedom that transcends the conditions of human existence. Yet, there is no one path to such freedom; wisdom, action and devotion are all seen as equally valid. Detached action has been attractive because it affirms ordinary life albeit in a transfigured form. But the question is whether modern freedom is still open to the search for the eternal? Even if we reserve detached action to the Indian context, this question is likely to arise in view of the fact that the modern concept of freedom as mutual recognition is embedded in the political institutions of that country.

Disinterested Action and Caste: A Modern Critique

The commensurability between trusteeship and disinterested action on the one hand and modern freedom on

the other may be examined from two standpoints; one, by way of responding to the criticisms mounted against detached action and especially the Gita's support for the caste system: and two, by way of probing the potential within modernity to reappropriate some principles underpinning disinterested action.

Hegel launches a damaging critique of disinterested action when he accuses the Gita ideal of abstraction, emptiness, formalism and immorality.³⁷ Hegel's main problem with disinterested action is that it is a formal principle. For 'to act implies acting towards some purpose and the successful performance of action gives some satisfaction, a fruit inseparable from the performed action.'³⁸ It is empty because it conceives of the 'Absolute' (*brahman*) as an 'abstract universal,' a 'passive contemplation of nothing.'³⁹ Further, Hegel is repelled by the endorsement of

³⁷ Humboldt delivered two lectures on the Gita based on the Sanskrit edition published by August Schlegel in June 1825 and June 1826. Hegel's review of these lectures appeared in 1827. Arguing that the doctrines of the Gita are not to be judged on the basis of modern European conceptions of morality and religion, Hegel goes on to show how the doctrines of the Gita are full of contradictions; his key point being that the most sublime account of Spirit is also empty while the most detailed practical injunctions are naturalistic. See Hegel, On the Episode of the Mahabharata known by the name Bhagavad Gita by Wilhelm von Humboldt, 13-21.

³⁸ Hegel, On the Episode, 47.

³⁹ Hegel, On the Episode, 105.

caste-based duties in the Gita and finds it 'immoral' and 'naturalistic.'

Hegel's critique of the Gita is an extension of his critique of Kant. Yet, Hegel denies that the Gita is spiritual or moral in any modern sense.⁴⁰ He is justified in arguing that disinterested action is not moral in a modern sense because it is not based on a self-legislating subject. But his view that *brahman* is a 'purely negative and empty solitude' is wrong. As we saw above, the 'Absolute' (*brahman*) is not a 'beautiful soul hovering above' but is also immanent *atman*. In this sense, it is not unlike the cosmic Geist of Hegel except that the *brahman-atman* identity is not staged in world history.⁴¹ The *brahman-atman* identity is an individual experience of transcendence mediated through a series of disciplines of which detached action is one. If *brahman* is 'quality-less,' it is not because it is

⁴⁰ Given that Arjuna's doubts arise from a 'clan mentality' and not from the 'love of the family as the completion of the moral in itself', given that his concern is born of 'superstitious fears' about the soul's fate after death', given that Gita's duties are only based on caste and birth and not on reason, Hegel contends that we should not be 'deceived' by the moral tone of the Gita. In other words, it shares all the defects of modern morality (abstract, formalistic) without any of the positive discoveries regarding subjectivity. Hegel, On the Episode, 15-23.

⁴¹ Although Hegel is aware that the experience of the spiritual is a dialectical movement between the finite and the infinite, he tends to freeze this process into an evolutionary-historical scheme. As such, the spiritual has to move from the 'dream state in the Orient to the daylight of the sun in Greece' and beyond.

'unconscious stupefaction' but because it is luminous on its own and renders distinctions like the concrete and abstract superfluous.

Hegel might ask how this experience of oneness gets translated into ordinary ethical life. Gandhi's practise of non-violence or service is a good example of acting in the world in the light of the higher Self. Moreover, the very existence of some enlightened beings is seen as 'concrete' service because they remind us that to be human is to seek the whole. The point is that the *atman-brahman* experience is both immanent and transcendent and so while it is an individual event, it also goes far beyond the individual and society. Since the divine is neither totally out there nor here, the *atman* (non)event does not lend itself to a world-historical narrative of the kind that Hegel constructs with respect to Protestant and Christian Spirit.

What about Hegel's other charge that the Gita upholds arbitrary caste based duties? Although the Gita appears to be supporting caste based duties, it can also be interpreted in broadly humanist terms.⁴² In my view, it is pointless to

⁴² Krishna, the teacher of the Gita, himself endorses the caste hierarchy as a divine creation. See *Gita*, verse 41-44, chapter XVIII, 364-366. However, the Gita is the work of several authors and displays some ambivalence in this regard. For it also proclaims the superiority of devotional attachment to the divine over customary and conventional duties.

read the *Gita* as if it was a treatise on the right social order for there is hardly any sustained speculation on the issue. Hence Hegel's accusation that the content of duties is 'immoral' or 'naturalistic' misses the mark. The whole thrust of the *Gita* is to persuade the individual to recognise the natural modes (*gunas*) for what they are, fickle and deceptive and seek the eternal. The absence of a sovereign self-legislating subject does not lead to an elevation of 'raw nature.' The essence of the spiritual is not derived from or exhausted in 'raw nature' or morality. For one who has glimpsed into the 'cave of the heart,' the distinctions between good and evil, high and low, delusion and reality, ignorance and wisdom reveal themselves as provisional categories and lose their dualistic or oppositional character. Hence, both natural passions and moral norms are situated in terms of the human quest for the ground of being.

At the same time, Hegel's criticism is instructive in that it tends to hypostatise one pole of *atman-brahman*, the immanent aspect. Having started with an 'abstract sublime' spirit, Hegel finds that its translation into a set of caste duties is entirely arbitrary. But this tendency to bring the spirit down to earth and dogmatise it recurs among Hindu writers themselves although they would like to prove, contra

Hegel, that there is a consistency between the *atman*-symbol and caste. Some Hindu thinkers put forth a doctrinal justification that the four castes were created out of the Cosmic Man and therefore, detached action calls for upholding the caste system and ritual action.⁴³ However consistent this may be with Hindu 'scriptures' and the concept of *karma*, it is based on sealing off Hindu *dharma* to all modern challenges such as those emanating from the principle of universal equality.

In contrast, thinkers like Radhakrishnan wish to argue that universal equality is 'always already' implicit in the *atman-brahman* symbol or the thesis of 'oneness of all.' What then happens to the Gita's support of the caste order? For Radhakrishnan, the caste order upheld by the Gita is not based on hierarchy or heredity but upon vocational or psychological diversity of human beings.⁴⁴

This strategy is problematic because the *atman-brahman* thesis eludes easy translation into universal equality. The modern notion that 'all human beings are born

⁴³ For a useful discussion of how the Mimamsa strand of Hinduism defends scriptural sanction of the hereditary caste hierarchy, see Wilhelm Halbfass, "Homo Hierarchicus," in Tradition and Reflection (Albany: SUNY, 1991), 367-377.

⁴⁴ Radhakrishnan, "The Individual and Social order in Hinduism," in Eastern Religions and Western Thought (Oxford University Press, 1940), 383. See also his comments on verse 41, chapter XVIII of the *Gita*, 365.

equal' proclaims the 'infinite worth of every individual.' However, *atman* is not an entity or attribute inside an individual. As such, we cannot simply 'Hinduisse' universal equality and declare 'all *atmans* are born equal'. Even though there is no consensus among exegetes as to whether *atman* is singular or plural, there is some agreement that *atman* is invisible, unchangeable and unborn. Just as rivers merged in the ocean do not say " I am this river or that," so also one who has grasped this subtle Self does not cling to her name and form. At the same time, one does not initiate a radical subversion of all social and ethical conventions. In my view, this attentiveness to the immanent-transcendental tension symbolised in *atman-brahman* is crucial in addressing ethical and social implications.⁴⁵ As such, both the clinging to caste hierarchy as a divine creation and the reconstruction of it as always already modern are caught up in the trap of immanentising the transcendent.

⁴⁵ A similar alertness is perhaps one reason for the 'conservatism' of the non-dualistic vedantins on the question of caste. Of course, it could be argued that Sankara and Ramanuja, two eminent Vedantins are simply upper-caste thinkers upholding the status quo. Sankara maintains that the sudras (the lowest caste in the *varna* or caste order) cannot be admitted to study the Vedas or perform Vedic rites. Nor does Ramanuja arrive at any radical social consequences. See Halbfass, "Homo Hierarchicus" in Traditions and Reflection, 380-381. Freedom or transcendence does not imply radical negation of all norms and distinctions.

Does this imply that the *atman*-symbol can provide us no guidelines in assessing concrete social customs or practices? How can we respond to the challenge of modern equality from within disinterested action without erasing the delicate balance between the immanent and transcendental poles of the experience symbolised therein? In spite of his remarkably ambiguous turn-about on the caste question, Gandhi provides some leads when he unleashes *satyagraha* against untouchability.⁴⁶ He grasps that desireless action requires relinquishing the ego and this includes a strong attachment to a given social order in the name of 'our tradition.' Instead of scriptures, he uses renunciation, disinterested action and the experience of the 'seers' as critical standards against casteist claims to heredity and hierarchy.⁴⁷ Gandhi contends that untouchability does not

⁴⁶ Gandhi supported the *satyagraha* against the prohibition of untouchables from using a public road leading to a temple in Vykam (in present day Kerala) in 1925. This led to one of Gandhi's first encounters with 'orthodox' brahmins. For details see T.K Ravindran, Vykom Satyagraha and Gandhi: A Collection of Documents and Speeches (Trichur: Sri Narayana Institute of Cultural and Social Development, 1975) and Bhikhu Parekh, "Gandhi and the Logic of Reformist Discourse," in Bhikhu Parekh and Thomas Pantham ed., Political Discourse: Explorations in Indian and Western Political Thought (Delhi: Sage, 1987), 281-294. While Gandhi was opposed to untouchability from the beginning, he struggled much to defend the caste system as an occupational order and finally declared 'caste has to go.' See Gandhi, "Caste has to go," in Harijan III (16 November 1935): 316.

⁴⁷ The eminent leader of the untouchables and one of the drafters of the Indian Constitution, Dr. Ambedkar contested this

apply within his *ashram* because the *ashramites* are in the stage of *sannyasins* or renouncers.⁴⁸

The renouncer, having gone beyond the social order recognises the provisionality of social institutions and even ignores them in favour of the universal experience of the beyond. The renouncer does not come with a blueprint of a social order but provides a way of testing and criticising social institutions, whether they are indigenous or alien. From this standpoint, Gandhi consistently pushes the question of caste beyond scriptural correctness to an issue concerning the core of Hinduism. If it is a *sanatana dharma* or eternal religion, then it cannot be contrary to universal

appeal to 'sages and seers' saying that they preached equality before God, not among men. Further, he argued that the sages and seers never openly attacked the caste system and that they are honoured, not followed. See Ambedkar, Annihilation of Caste (Jullundar: Bhim Patrika Publications, 1935), 128-129. See also Gandhi's reply in 'Dr. Ambedkar's Indictment,' in Harijan IV (18 July 1936): 180. While there is some truth to Ambedkar's objections, his own portrayal of Hinduism as irrational, superstitious, rule-based and anti-individualistic relies purely on 'scriptures' and ignores that spiritual experimentation has been equally important within Hinduism. Even when 'seers' do not attack extant social customs, their practise of tolerance and unconventionality (at least within the devotionalist strand of Hinduism which emphasises love of the highest over rituals) sets off an internal questioning about some customs.

⁴⁸ See Gandhi, "Ashram--Experiments with Truth," in Raghavan Iyer ed., MPWM, Vol II, 516. Gandhi is not the only one to appeal to the renouncer model in challenging caste. Some ideologues of untouchables and dalits have also taken this route. See Ravinder Khare, The Untouchable as Himself: Ideology, Identity and Pragmatism among the Lucknow Chamars (Cambridge: University Press, 1984), 21-30.

reason and world opinion.⁴⁹ Through a rigorous practise of disinterested action and self-dispossession, Gandhi calls upon the upper caste 'guardians of tradition' to examine themselves in the light of the 'eternal truths' embedded in Hindu symbols.⁵⁰ To valorise hereditary caste as divine is to forget that the divine also transcends extant historical institutions. To be a genuine 'trustee' of specific

⁴⁹ Bhikhu Parekh, "Gandhi and the Logic of Reformist Discourse," in Political Discourse, 287.

⁵⁰ Gandhi's tendency to confine the 'purification' of Hinduism to the upper castes, his reluctance in accusing the upper castes of self-interest is seen as patronising and brahmanical. But to the extent the upper castes championed hierarchy in terms of *karma* and argued that they were defending a 'sacred trust,' they have to be educated as to what it means to be a 'trustee' of traditions. By falling back upon one's natural status for liberation, the upper castes regress behind the Gita insight that all sense of superiority is illusory, egotistic and hence, binding. If Gandhi does not engage in accusing the orthodox pundits, it is because, as a satyagrahi, he practises a hermeneutics of trust rather than suspicion. See T.K Ravindran, Vykom Satyagraha, 274. In assessing Gandhi's caste bias, it is necessary to pay attention to his ambivalence both towards brahmanical symbols like the 'sacred thread' as well as popular Hinduism. For instance, he complains about the hypocrisy and lack of sanitation of the Hardwar Kumbha Mela. Nor does he valorise the sensuous imagery and worship of popular Hinduism. Drawing upon an interiorisation of rituals already present in the Upanishads and the Gita, he emphasises 'inner purity of heart' and intuitive understanding of the *atman*-Self as both immanent and transcendent. Hence, Gandhi chants the 'Rama mantra' without losing sight of the fact that the divine transcends name and form. He may not have appreciated the aesthetic richness of popular Hinduism but his critique cannot be seen as simply rationalistic. For he does not seek to demystify the experience of the pilgrims or devotees as much as remind them of the transcendental pole of the experience and symbols. As such I think it can be very misleading to fix him as brahmanical or otherwise. I am indebted to my colleague Prof. Noel Salmond for this insight.

traditions, Gandhi shows that it is necessary to continuously learn the art of self-dispossession, both individually and collectively.

Simultaneously as he questions the caste system, Gandhi is also deepening the question of equality. Achieving equality is intimately associated with the practise of trusteeship or disinterested action. One of the main qualities of a disinterested actor is her equanimity in the world of action. This equanimity is not passive acquiescence in the status quo but an active inquiry into the sources of the oppositional pairs of high and low, rich and poor or pure and impure. The struggle for equality is thus constituted in terms of the quest for transcendence rather than exclusively as social or ethical reformation.

The upshot is that it would be inadequate to respond to the modern challenge by trying to ground all the modern principles in Hinduism or by shielding Hindu spirituality from all such 'western' incursions. Both the apologetic route of modernising Hinduism and the conservative holding on to a traditional order would only eclipse the openness of the *atman-brahman* complex. It is more useful to follow Gandhi's route of tapping the experiential basis of spirituality and exploring institutions for their recep-

tivity to the transhuman freedom. In this context, the question is whether modern reason is open to such an experience.

Modernity and Disinterested Action

Hegel's caricature of detached action and *brahman* is reflective of the depletion of sources within the modern understanding of the self and freedom. Attempting to elevate right from natural desires like self-preservation and happiness, Hegel discovers the desire for recognition as the ground of freedom and self-consciousness. This implies that the only larger order is human history which is the scene of a progressive realisation of freedom. Given this conception of human nature and freedom, how can disinterested action, which appears to sidestep freedom as recognition and history, be instructive for the current debates on situatedness and community?

On the surface, it is true that disinterested action is bound up with an openness to the sacred that celebrates a 'pre-modern' or 'non-modern' conception of the cosmos as permeated by the divine and as providing the standard for reason. Precisely this openness to something outside human reason comes to be questioned in modern thought which aspires to radical autonomy. Kant's critical turn stands at

the door of all return trips in favour of a recognition of natural limits or human finitude or religion.⁵¹

At the same time, modernity is at root a 'philosophical problem' in that the aspiration to radical autonomy of reason also spawns perpetual discontent and renewed questioning about what it is to be modern.⁵² The dialectic between dependence and independence entails continuous suspicion regarding claims to autonomy as witnessed in the charges about modernity's roots in a will to power. After Nietzsche and Heidegger, modern reason is highly nervous about its autonomy and admits its openness to something 'always already there' as well as its own historicity. This means that the notion of a sovereign self-legislating subject is not so sturdy and impervious to experiences which transgress the boundaries of human reason.

This fragility of modern reason makes several moves possible which reduce, though not erase, the unfamiliarity of the experience underlying such symbols like disinterested action. After all, the crisis in the self-assurance of modern reason also triggers the tremendous interest in collecting and reconstructing the experiences of different

⁵¹ Robert Pippin, Modernism as a Philosophical Problem, 166.

⁵² Robert Pippin, Modernism as a Philosophical Problem, 166-167.

civilisations and religions. As Mircea Eliade has pointed out, this "historiographical *anamnesis*" or the urge to discover, 'awaken', and repossess the pasts of the most exotic and peripheral societies is a defense against the pressure of historicity.⁵³ Such reconstructions can be transformative when they are attuned to the experiences of the sacred in different societies.⁵⁴ This is not to say that modern reason becomes receptive to the sacred in course of time. However, its excursions into exotic cultures, its permanent search for the 'new,' its preoccupation with death, its perennial angst about progress and its recent recognition of 'eternal recurrence of the same' are helpful reminders of the fact that human existence is structured by the consciousness of life and death, the movement from chaos to order and the search for transcendence.⁵⁵

⁵³ Eliade, Myth and Reality, 136-137.

⁵⁴ Voegelin argues that a reflective analysis of the meaning of symbols of order moves within the same Metaxy or In-Between reality that gave rise to the symbols. See Voegelin, "The Beginning and the Beyond," in Unpublished Writings, 188-189.

⁵⁵ Is not the surge of popular and scientific interest in whether there is life on Mars a camouflaged search for such trans-historical experience? Eliade has suggested that the modern psyche may have to be 'demystified in reverse' to show that the most profane of activities hide the sacred. His examples include activities like reading novels which by transporting the reader into a fabulous and trans-historical time fulfil the same function as myth in archaic societies. Mircea Eliade, "Survivals and Camouflages," in Diane Apostolos-Cappadona ed., Symbolism, 45-50. Voegelin notes how the explorations into dreams and mythical

From its exalted heights of sovereign self-legislation, modern reason has now come to affirm its 'thrownness' in the world. Except for the somewhat joyous celebration of contingency in some post-modern thinkers like Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy, modern philosophy is not entirely comfortable with its contingency and fragmentation. True, modern reason can no more pretend to occupy an archimedean standpoint from which to legislate the principles of pure or practical reason. It is also true that modern reason cannot claim to know the direction of Universal History and congratulate itself as consummating the end of History. Does all this imply that we can no more think or act freely and disinterestedly? Having deconstructed the hollowness of the 'metaphysics of subjectivity,' are we destined to reject every search for order as yet another attempt at 'will to power?' Or are we also engaged in recovering some form of a disinterested standpoint from which we can think, act and judge our own crises?

Neither the discovery of our historicity nor the alertness to something that exceeds our thought and speech

phenomena in Freud, Jung, James Joyce or Thomas Mann amount to a 'ritual restoration' of order inverting the radical immanentist revolt against man's search for the ground. See Voegelin, "Anxiety and Reason," in Late Unpublished Writings, 84.

(in Heidegger or Derrida or Levinas) is entirely new. The perfect actor of the Gita too recognises the conditioned and contingent nature of human existence. But the latter does not proceed to proclaim that there is nothing but contingency. Not even the gods escape nature (*prakriti*) and its modes that impel action nor the mind's movement between joy and sorrow, home and exile. And yet, the perfect actor affirms the existence and experience of a non-existent reality that lifts us beyond the ephemeral world. Simultaneously as one sees the 'lived world' (symbolised as *maya* or dream-world), one also sees *that* which transcends this world of pairs of opposites. Journeying back and forth between the cave and the sunlight, we learn what it is to be in-between life and death, ignorance and perfection, acting and witnessing actions.

In our 'dark times,' Hannah Arendt comes close to rediscovering this experience in the figure of the spectator-judge. After having argued for a radical phenomenology of freedom as the will's drive to 'begin anew,' she also realises that we need some criteria if our action is not to be entirely arbitrary. Instead of returning to thinking and its impartiality as the ground of willing and free action, she turns to judging. Drawing upon Kant's analysis of the judgement of taste, Hannah Arendt attempts

to retrieve disinterestedness not in terms of a higher life of contemplation or heroic action but in terms of the ideal of a spectator-judge who witnesses 'spectacles' like the French Revolution.⁵⁶

In her view, the spectator is disinterested in fame, unlike the actor. The onlooker has an insight into the meaning of events ignored by the actor because "the existential ground of his insight is his disinterestedness, his nonparticipation, his non-involvement."⁵⁷ Of course, the spectator does not possess any superior knowledge of the philosopher or the statesman but occupies a position that enables him to see the whole.⁵⁸ But given the lack of a cosmic order or mythic archetypes or the pattern of history, how does one judge? For instance, the disinterested actor of the Gita has the model of Krishna or the seers or his own experience of the sacred to guide him. But Arendt does not turn to myths or religious symbols. Rather, she turns to the phenomenology of judging to explicate the meaning of spectatorship.

⁵⁶ Hannah Arendt, 'Second Session,' in Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy, ed., Ronald Beiner (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), 15.

⁵⁷ Hannah Arendt, Lectures, 54.

⁵⁸ Arendt, "Ninth Session," in Lectures, 55.

Judgement is rooted in the conditions of an 'earth bound life' like communicability and impartiality.⁵⁹ In judging, we 're-present and reflect upon an absent object' using both our imagination and common sense.⁶⁰ Like spectators who witness without playing the game, we are thus distanced from immediacy which establishes the condition of 'impartiality.'⁶¹ Judging, especially in matters of taste, implies liking or disliking a particular object or event. In this sense, we are aware of being part of larger community not of supersensible beings endowed with reason but of embodied sensual beings. Quoting Kant, she writes, "in Taste egoism is overcome."⁶² We take other spectators into account and thus judge from an 'enlarged perspective.' Apart from impartiality and enlarged sympathy, judging also proceeds from a concern with the particular rather than the universal. But this does not mean judging is subjective or contingent because it proceeds by way of examples.⁶³ In her words, "if we say of somebody that he is good, we have in the back of our minds the example of Saint Francis or Jesus

⁵⁹ Arendt, "Thirteenth Session," in Lectures, 74-75.

⁶⁰ Arendt, "Eleventh Session," in Lectures, 66-67.

⁶¹ Arendt, "Eleventh Session," in Lectures, 67.

⁶² Arendt, "Eleventh Session," in Lectures, 67.

⁶³ Arendt, "Imagination," in Lectures, 84.

of Nazareth. The judgement has exemplary validity to the extent that the example is rightly chosen."⁶⁴

For Arendt, the spectator-judge is not secondary to the actor who acts on the stage of history; in fact, the actor is 'dependent' on the spectator, as one seeking fame and approval. The 'critic or spectator sits in every actor and fabricator.'⁶⁵ The spectator, because he or she is uninvolved with the immediate action and least interested in fame, judges as if historical events reflect the 'design of providence or nature.'⁶⁶ In this sense, the spectator is truly 'autonomous.'⁶⁷

Admittedly, the spectator-judge is not identical to the *atman*-Self. Arendt appears to separate the moment of disinterested delight from the moment of action although she realises their inter-dependence. The Gita symbol of disinterested action points to an experience that is, at once, acting and spectatorship. Arendt's spectator-judge does not aspire to a transpersonal freedom although he does possess an 'enlarged mentality.' The spectator-judge is not

⁶⁴ Arendt, "Imagination," in Lectures, 84.

⁶⁵ Arendt, "Tenth Session," in Lectures, 63.

⁶⁶ Arendt, "Ninth Session," in Lectures, 52-55.

⁶⁷ Arendt, "Ninth Session," in Lectures, 55.

inspired by the 'spirit' of the 'ineffable' as the *atman-seer*.⁶⁸

But Arendt recognises the need to reconstruct modern freedom not only from the standpoint of a subject demanding recognition but one who takes a disinterested delight in judging history and participates in an invisible community of world spectators. The spectator who overcomes parochialism by turning to the exemplary validity of some events is not unlike Gandhi's 'seer' who illumines the indigenous in terms of the human search for the eternal. In this sense, Arendt captures some aspects of detached action of the Gita and the latter's link between freedom and consciousness as witness.

If we grasp that the return to disinterested action is less about recovering a theistic perspective but about recollecting the experience of acting as if one were unattached, then both Arendt's attempt and the dynamic desire to document and preserve every exotic culture show that modern reason may not be completely disenchanting. But what would a community of spectator-actors or trustees look like?

⁶⁸ Arendt, "Tenth Session," in Lectures, 63.

Indigenous Tradition (swadeshi) as a Sacred Trust

Gandhi's call for village *swaraj* (self-rule) and *swadeshi* or one's own country has been hailed as a summons for indigenous development, grassroots democracy and local politics.⁶⁹ Coupled with Gandhi's trenchant criticisms of the 'Satanic' civilisation of modernity, *swaraj* and *swadeshi* have become the slogans for a politics that at its best is nostalgic and at its worst is merely rhetorical.⁷⁰ True,

⁶⁹ Bhikhu Parekh, Gandhi's Political Thought (Basingstoke Hants: Macmillan, 1989), 57-60; Glyn Richards, The Philosophy of Gandhi (London: Curzon, 1982), 141-142.

⁷⁰ Gandhi's *swadeshi*, at its best, has unleashed the politics around development exemplified in Tehri and Narmada valley. For a sample list of Gandhian initiatives, see Rajni Kothari, Growing Amnesia (Delhi: Viking, 1993), 126-127. While important issues like the destruction of nature and impoverishment of rural and tribal peoples have surfaced in both movements, one of the problems is that such issues are often formulated in terms of the indigenous versus the modern or Bharat versus India. What is obscured is that the claims for 'recognition' of indigenous ways of life, for common property resources and greater political autonomy flow from the opportunity spaces cleared by the modern constitutional regime. While none of these movements attempts to subvert constitutional politics, they do not always engage with the spiritual and ethical side of modernity. As such, the real issues of equitable development, autonomy and openness to the sacred are sometimes lost in anti-modern rhetoric. After all, the question does arise as to whether rural and marginal movements alone represent the authentic and pristine spirit of India. Rajni Kothari notes the sterility of this approach. See Rajni Kothari, "Globalization and Revival of Tradition," in Economic and Political Weekly (25 March 1995): 628-629. At its worst, Gandhi's *swadeshi* has become an ideological tool of the BJP which glosses over the contradictions of capitalist development in the name of a Hindu state. Although the BJP deploys Gandhian symbols and rhetoric, its politics is not about reversing liberalisation or evolving a more equitable social and economic order, let alone mould a spiritual community.

Gandhi articulates village self-rule or *swaraj* in terms of *swadeshi* or a commitment to the immediate neighbourhood and inherited traditions. However, if the individual good is to reduce oneself to a 'cipher,' is not a clinging to one's own village or tradition another form of egoism? In my view, *swadeshi* is not based on the superiority or uniqueness of indigenous traditions: it is a call to form communities that enhance the individual's receptivity to the inner Self. Just as one learns to be a trustee of one's own possessions and actions, as if one were unattached, so also one relates to the indigenous traditions.

The term *swadeshi* literally means 'what is produced in one's own country.'⁷¹ Seldom satisfied with literal meanings, Gandhi clarifies that *swadeshi* in its 'ultimate and spiritual sense, stands for the final emancipation of the human soul from its earthly bondage.'⁷²

The 'final emancipation from earthly bondage' is also called *swaraj* or self-rule. In the light of our exegesis of

⁷¹ For One who has realised the atman, 'swadesh' would mean all the three worlds, the heaven above, the earth below and the space in-between.

⁷² Needless to say, Gandhi does not advocate mortification of the flesh or fleeing worldly responsibilities to emancipate the soul; in fact, he spent a lot of time investigating whether polished or unpolished rice was better for the human body and whether love of service meant abandoning ancestral property and occupation. Gandhi, "The Doctrine of Swadeshi," in MPWM, Vol.III, ed. Raghavan Iyer, 366.

disinterested action, *swaraj* or self-rule implies renouncing the ego and acting as if one were a spectator-trustee of one's actions and possessions. To be ruled by the inner Self is 'absolute freedom' from all historical and social conditions of existence. Gandhi approaches both individual *swaraj* and collective *swaraj* in terms of this search for a transpersonal freedom.

In this sense, Gandhi contends that *swaraj* or self-rule involves selfless service, non-violence and a commitment to serve *swadesh* or one's own community. He defines *swadesh* in terms of one's own village or ancestral occupation or religion.⁷³ Sometimes, he claims that *swadesh* implies service to the neighbour. The general principle he employs is that of *yajna* or sacrifice which he interprets in terms of the Gita ideal of disinterested action. For Gandhi, *swadeshi* consists in relating to the indigenous as if it were a 'sacred trust'; as such, the experience of belonging to one's own religion or culture involves relentless questioning as to what is one's own. This is clear in the symbol of *swadeshi*, the spinning wheel.

⁷³ Although Gandhi appears to support the status quo, he was quite ambiguous about ancestral occupation (he had abandoned his own). He only opposes a change of one's religion or occupation for personal gain. Gandhi, "Swadeshi as a Rule of Life," in *MPWM*, Vol. III, ed. Raghavan Iyer, 326-333.

The spinning wheel is primarily a symbol of perfection through detached action. He regards it as a *mahayajna* or primary sacrifice, an act which promotes the welfare of the greatest number in the widest area, and which can be performed by the largest number of men and women with the least trouble.⁷⁴ Spinning is the secular equivalent of prayer and hence, Gandhi claims that he sees God 'face to face' in the wheel.⁷⁵ The extraordinary meanings that Gandhi attributes to the wheel, that it is economically beneficial because it creates 'backward and forward linkages,' that it is a natural law, that it is real socialism, that it is the highest *dharma* make sense only if we grasp the spiritual significance of the wheel.⁷⁶ Like other Gandhian symbols, it involves both death (of the ego and its disorderliness) and a rebirth or awakening (to the *atman* and ordered play).⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Unlike utilitarianism, this does not mean sacrificing the interests of a few. Gandhi, "Yajna and Sacrifice," in MPWM, Vol. III, ed. Raghavan Iyer, 463-464.

⁷⁵ When Tagore lamented that it is a 'mechanical' activity which might encourage blind loyalty to old ways, Gandhi defends it as a vehicle of self-perfection.

⁷⁶ "In a scheme of village swaraj, the spinning wheel is the centre. If you call it the solar system, the wheel becomes the golden disc and the industries the planets revolving round it in obedience to the inviolable law of the system." See "The Principle of Swadeshi," in MPWM, vol. III, ed. Raghavan Iyer, 373.

⁷⁷ Margaret Chatterjee has pointed to the multivalence of the symbol of spinning. On the one hand, it resonates with the 'sacred thread ceremony' by which an upper caste man becomes twice-born.

This does not mean that every community has to take up spinning. As a symbol of indigenous autonomy or village *swaraj*, spinning intimates a community oriented to self-sufficiency through self-limitation and self-transcendence. Spinning was at once sacred and secular; it promoted self-reliance with respect to basic needs and provided additional income. At the same time, spinning radiated the human longing to step out of historical time and space or *moksha*. Such a community mirrors the tension between freedom and necessity as well as freedom and communal belonging; each member aspires to as much self-sufficiency as possible and yet accepts that cooperation is essential for such self-sufficiency. Each individual would owe primary loyalty to her locality and yet be prepared to sacrifice the family for the village or village for the world. In other words, *swadeshi* is less an exercise in pride than one in humility; the effort towards self-reliance has to be tempered with practical judgement lest it become counter productive. Whether it is in the *ashram* or service communities, Gandhi realises that freedom involves a continuous inquiry into what is one's own.

On the other hand, it recalls the Draupadi episode in the Mahabharata. See Margaret Chatterji, Gandhi's Religious Thought (London: Macmillan, 1983), 3.

Swadeshi and the Tension of Belonging and Freedom

In the politics of *swadeshi*, Gandhi tries to reenact the experience of the sages and seers. The sages and seers are both insiders and outsiders with respect to inherited traditions. In their continuous pursuit of *atman*-Self, they often step outside customs and conventions. Like artists and scientists, they travel a pathless land.

At the same time, they do not occupy an abstract archimedean standpoint rooted in a transcendental ego that rejects our embodied being. Nor do they profess a sentimental attachment to natural limits.⁷⁸ The sage speaks and acts as a member of an invisible community--- a community of those whose eyes of understanding are opened. This is not to say that the sage vanishes into thin air; rather he or she is a living example of the in-between character of human existence and the human quest for the beyond.

For this reason, Gandhi does not call for recognition of the uniqueness of indigenous traditions. Confronted with caste hierarchy or untouchability, he appeals to the 'core principles' of Hinduism rather than historical or customary

⁷⁸ After all, the attempt to reduce oneself to a 'cipher' sounds 'unnatural.' Only through the continuous inquiry into both nature (*prakriti*) and the ground that transcends nature, the sage comes to see nature as divine. In other words, it is not the raw nature of instincts and 'gut feelings' but a sacralised nature that is accepted.

practices. He is also clear that such 'core principles' have to stand the test of universal reason.⁷⁹ But there is no abstract formal standpoint from which we derive and assess core principles. Only by reenacting the experiences embedded in some religious symbols both individually and collectively (through *satyagraha*) can we reclaim core principles and the reason animating them. In this sense, Gandhi practises a critical hermeneutics of the kind espoused by Taylor perhaps with one vital difference; he does not stop with affirming our historical situatedness but also explores the possibility of transcending historicity.

If we keep this spiritual dimension in mind, then Gandhi's *swadeshi* politics appears less about the cultural or moral superiority of indigenous traditions and even less about building a Hindu state. While focusing on the eternal relevance of the principles exemplified in some indigenous symbols and practices, he does not valorise them. For instance, he would acknowledge that indigenous traditions are more nature-friendly without losing sight of the fact that nature is part of a larger whole and that the divine transcends nature and the cosmos. As such, 'lower nature' of

⁷⁹ Gandhi alludes to three core principles of the *sanatana dharma* or eternal religion of Hinduism: Truth is God, love is the highest religion and *brahman* alone is real, all else is illusion. See Bhikhu Parekh, "Gandhi and the Logic of Reformist Discourse," in Political Discourse, 285 & 287.

qualities is ruled in the light of the 'higher nature' of the mind and intelligence and *atman-Self*. Only from this standpoint can Gandhi say that *swadeshi* implies a commitment to one's own community and also that *swadeshi* implies a willingness to sacrifice the self for the family for the village, the village for the nation and the nation for the world.

If the attunement to the transcendental and eternal prevents him from fetishising the indigenous, it also places Gandhi outside the thematic of nationalism.⁸⁰ Unlike other nationalist thinkers like Bankim Chatterjee or Tilak, Gandhi is not keen on proving the historicity of the Hindu texts or epics.⁸¹ Nor does he hesitate to perpetrate 'unreason' by declaring his 'instinctive belief' that physical phenomena like earthquakes are 'divine chastisement' for human sins.⁸²

Gandhi's own 'imaginary community' or *Ram rajya* is portrayed as a 'structure of innumerable villages' with 'ever-widening, never-ascending circles.'⁸³ This 'kingdom of

⁸⁰ See Partha Chatterjee, Nationalist Discourse and the Colonial World (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 93.

⁸¹ Partha Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World, 94.

⁸² Gandhi, "Superstition v Faith," in CWMG, Vol.57, 164-165.

⁸³ Gandhi "Independence," in CWMG, vol 85, 33.

Ram' epitomised the sovereignty of a people based on 'pure moral authority.'⁸⁴ Economically, it was based on *khadi* or home-spun cloth, animal husbandry, rural artisanal production and agriculture. But what was the role of modern industry in this utopia? Gandhi concedes that some 'key industries' would be necessary and that not all mill-manufactured cloth can be banned. Gandhi does not clarify how the ensuing competition between hand spun cloth and mill cloth is to be overcome.⁸⁵

Notwithstanding the archaic and incomplete character of Gandhi's *Ram rajya* and his trenchant critique of modernity, his practise of spiritual politics challenges us to evolve a model of development that fosters dignity and trust rather than a feeling of slavery to wants.⁸⁶ While arguably some strands of marxist and socialist thought may claim a more nuanced analysis of the contradictions of capitalist development, Gandhi's value consists in grasping that the question of social justice cannot be answered independently

⁸⁴ Gandhi, "Swadeshi--Self-Reliance," in *MPMG*, vol III, ed. Raghavan Iyer, 372.

⁸⁵ One of the many 'contradictions' in Gandhi noted by Partha Chatterjee. See Partha Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World, 123.

⁸⁶ Rajni Kothari, among others, articulates the need to think through the question of economic and social justice alongside the need to educate ourselves in restricting wants. See Rajni Kothari Growing Amnesia, 133.

of the other question of 'how ought man to live.' For Gandhi argues that any lasting change on the economic front cannot come through violence or force but only through a sustained effort at cultivating liberality and trusteeship.

This insight is neither unrealistic nor simplistic. Because means cannot be divorced from ends, the question of a just order is not simply about dispossessing the rich but about educating oneself about the limits of possession. Does this imply that he endorses inequality? Gandhi grasps that external equality can be achieved only through inward equanimity. This inward equanimity is not passive resignation in the face of suffering. It requires a consistent inquiry into the contraries of pleasure and pain or wealth and poverty and paying heed to the sources of such contradictions.⁸⁷ The value of his intervention lies not in the specific policies but in the fact that he goes beyond a moral critique to a metaphysical probing of the notions of equality and justice.

In our time, given the decentering of class categories and the heightened attentiveness to the modalities of constructing classes and the potential within

⁸⁷ Among Indian socialist thinkers, Ram Manohar Lohia attempts to deepen the notion of equality in this manner. See Ram Manohar Lohia, Marx, Gandhi and Socialism (Hyderabad: Ram Manohar Lohia Samata Vidyalaya Nyasa, 1978), 240. See also Rustom Bharucha, The Question of Faith (Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993), 57-61.

modern civil society such as unions or worker's democracy, Gandhi's approach is a reminder to reclaim the spiritual aspect of the struggle for justice. Here, we have to examine how Hegel's analysis of trust and intermediary associations can be deepened. By steering clear of recognition claims, Gandhi shows that trust implies an openness to the human quest for the beyond. In concrete terms, this implies tempering the politics of rights with the politics of self-dispossession. Such self-dispossession is not simply based on altruism or guilt but an alertness to the limits of recognition. Gandhi himself does not claim that this is possible in every sphere or for everyone. But he isolates the spheres of education, voluntary service and local government as critical spaces for the practise of trusteeship. In this sense, I think Gandhi's *swadeshi* directs us to pursue social justice and spiritual politics in terms of the widest possible federalism or what Hueglin has called 'societal federalism.'⁸⁸

Trusteeship and Liberal Politics

So far I have argued that Gandhi's notion of trusteeship is about ruling the ego-self in the light of the

⁸⁸ I treat the details of this societal federalism in the next chapter.

quest for the beyond. What forms will this politics take? Since the rediscovery of Gandhi's spiritual politics revolves around the principles of secularism and tolerance, I examine how trusteeship transforms both. I argue that Gandhi's politics is best understood in terms of 'theocentric liberalism,' a liberalism that anchors the dignity and equality of all human beings in the longing for and openness to the 'divine ground of being.'⁸⁹

The critique of liberal secularism in the Indian context relies upon the non-dogmatic and experiential character of faith in general and Hinduism in particular to argue for 'religious tolerance.'⁹⁰ Gandhi's thought and practise is the main inspiration behind the current arguments against secularism and the quest for a religious tolerance.⁹¹ There are two issues involved here; one the character and source of Gandhi's religious tolerance and two, its implications for liberal secularism.

⁸⁹ Highlighting the political implications of Voegelin's analysis of the 'existential tension' toward the ultimate ground of being, Dante Germino uses the term 'theocentric liberalism.' I think Gandhi's emphasis on the 'spiritual experience' of trusteeship and disinterested action within the framework of liberalism can be illuminated through this concept. See Dante Germino, "Political Theory and the Open Society," in Beyond Ideology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 222.

⁹⁰ See Chapter III, 91-92.

⁹¹ See Ashis Nandy, "The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance," 192 and T.N Madan, "Religion in India," 116-117.

The mainspring of Gandhi's religious tolerance lies in the Hindu-Gita notion of disinterested action. His appeal to *atman*, *moksha* or liberation, Ram Rajya and his support for cow-protection make his tolerance at once insightful and controversial. Gandhi's tolerance, as Nandy rightly notes, flows from the 'lived experience' of faith. Gandhi declares often that Hinduism is the 'most tolerant' of religions because it is non-dogmatic and imbibes whatever is good from all religions.⁹² In this spirit, he argues that Buddhism and Jainism are not 'separate from Hinduism'.⁹³ Given that the

⁹² Gandhi, Hindu Dharma (New Delhi: Orient Paperback, 1995), 8.

⁹³ Gandhi, Hindu Dharma, 8. According to some writers, Gandhi's appeal to Hindu symbols and his overarching account of Hinduism is best understood not as tolerance but as 'inclusivism' or 'hierarchical relativism.' Paul Hacker originally proposed 'inclusivism' rather than tolerance with respect to the claim advanced by some Hindu thinkers such as Radhakrishnan that "vedanta is not a religion but religion itself in its most universal and deepest significance." Paul Hacker is partly right in arguing that the philosophical presuppositions of the modern notion of tolerance such as the separation of religion and state and the emphasis on individual rights cannot be read into classical vedanta or traditional Hinduism. However, these presuppositions are not rejected by Radhakrishnan or Gandhi. Further, the tendency of 'inclusivism' is not peculiarly Indian: Hegel is one example; the Christian appeal to the 'unknown God' is another. For a concise discussion of Hacker's thesis, see Wilhelm Halbfass, "Inclusivism" and "Tolerance" in India and Europe, 403-418. For a critique of the ideological and nationalist use of 'inclusivism' see Peter van der Veer, Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 68-70. While Peter van der Veer is attentive to the 'orientalist' construction of 'Hindu tolerance,' he hardly attends to the biases in Hacker's 'construction' of 'inclusivism.' While aspiring to highlight the heterogeneity within Hindu nationalist discourse, Peter van der Veer ironically comes close to affirming the opposite. From

BJP deploys similar arguments in its celebration of Hindutva or a Hindu national identity, the question arises as to whether Gandhi's religious tolerance contains the potential for distortion.

While Gandhi's symbols figure prominently in the rhetoric of the BJP, his views on Hinduism and the Hindu-Muslim question are highly contested both within the BJP and other Hindu organisations.⁹⁴ The militant assertion of the BJP to revise history is a far cry from Gandhi's indifference to history and his adherence to non-violence. He does not appeal to scriptures but his own practice of truth and non-violence while endeavouring to spiritualise politics. However 'impractical' it may sound today, his demonstration of prayer and fasting did work during the 'communal' carnage after partition. In contrast, the BJP's violent assertions of Hinduness, its literal reading of myths and legends and its uncivil politics at Ayodhya is rooted in the anxiety of a doctrinaire religion.

It may be argued that Gandhi's resort to faith in the public sphere opens the space for the BJP politics. But this

Vivekananda through Gandhi and Radhakrishnan to the BJP, he sees a continuity regarding Hinduness and nationhood which is debatable.

⁹⁴ Gandhi was killed by a Maharashtrian Brahman who had been a member of the RSS, an organisation which is closely allied with the BJP as well as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad.

position misses the point of Gandhi's spiritual politics. It is not geared to preserving a particular faith or religion but illuminating politics in terms of the human quest for transcendence. His tolerance does not proceed from scepticism about matters of faith but from the experience of the tension embedded in religious symbols and myths.

What are the implications of this tolerance for liberal secularism? While Gandhi rejects an artificial separation between politics and religion, he also maintains that 'the state has nothing to do with religion.' While his tolerance flows from his faith or 'lived experience,' he is also clear that religious tolerance involves an intense preparation of the soul. While he calls for a complete negation of the ego, he also encourages independent thinking and experimentation in spiritual matters. Much as anti-secularists like Nandy and Madan enlist Gandhi in their common cause against Enlightenment modernity, Gandhi's thought resists such neat arguments. In my view, Gandhi's practice compels us not so much to reject liberal secularism but to deepen and recast it in the light of the human quest for transcendence.

Because Gandhi recognises that spiritual experience implies a systematic negation of the ego through non-violence and non-possession, he asserts that 'religion is a personal affair'. No individual can be coerced into

relinquishing possessions either by the state or by a religious community. The individualist bent does not lead Gandhi to say that religion or an attunement to the highest is simply a matter of choice. Like those who affirm the lived experience of customs and traditions, Gandhi upholds the significance of indigenous practices. At the same time, he shows that the commitment to the indigenous is not simply based on dogma or superiority but on core principles which transcend time and space. Only by focusing on the practise of disinterested action can we grasp the paradox of Gandhi's 'individualism.' Neither the unencumbered self nor the historically situated subject but the exemplary figure of the renouncer echoes in Gandhi's view that religion is a 'personal affair.'

For the same reasons, Gandhi maintains that the state be restricted to "secular welfare, health, communications, foreign relations, currency and so on."⁹⁵ Gandhi opposes a theocratic state or a state which endorses specific customs. Hence, he challenges the colonial legislation that protected untouchability on the ground that the law of a secular state cannot affirm religious beliefs.⁹⁶ In a similar vein, he also argues that cow-slaughter cannot be banned through

⁹⁵ Gandhi, 'Religion and the State,' in MPWM, Vol.I, ed., Raghavan Iyer, 395.

⁹⁶ Gandhi, "Human Manufacture," in Harijan (6 May 1933): 3.

state legislation.⁹⁷ Unlike Radhakrishnan who assumes that the role of the earlier Hindu jurists and scriptural commentators will now be fulfilled by the legislative bodies, Gandhi maintains that the state has nothing to do with religion.⁹⁸

Gandhi's secularism (separating state and religion) rests upon his distinction between 'power politics' and 'true politics.'⁹⁹ Power politics, with its elections and

⁹⁷ The call for a ban on cow-slaughter by the BJP is not only anti-secular but also un-Gandhian. In tune with the secular principles of the Indian Constitution, cow-protection was made a directive principle which means that policies that promote such principles are unenforceable.

⁹⁸ Gandhi, 'Religion and the State,' in Raghavan Iyer ed., MPWM, Vol.I, 395. See also Radhakrishnan, "Hindu Dharma," in Religion and Society, 113-119. Radhakrishnan argues for legislative reforms to bring Hindu *dharma* (codes of conduct) in tune with modern conditions even when he realises that such codification is less flexible than customary law. He also ignores the operation of prejudices and power politics. It is no accident that Radhakrishnan is cited in almost all the judgements of the Indian Supreme Court on religious disputes. Following him, the Indian Supreme court has employed a rather broad definition of Hinduism, which can be interpreted as a contribution to the ideology of Hindu nationalism. For instance, in the recent *Hindutva* cases, the Court argues that mere references to 'Hindutva' in politics is not a 'religious appeal' because Hinduism is a civilisation and culture, not a religion. See Hindutva cases, 1995 (7), SCALE, para.35. In another instance, the Court argued that cow-slaughter is not an 'essential practice' of Islam. See M.H Oureshi versus the State of Bihar, AIR 1958 Supreme Court 739-740, para.13. Neither separating the essential from the inessential nor upholding Hinduism as an eternal universal religion is a task for liberal political institutions. Gandhi too tries to spiritualise politics but not through the liberal state.

⁹⁹ See Gandhi, "True Politics and Power Politics," in MPWM, Vol I, ed., Raghavan Iyer, 415-434.

factionalism was a 'dreadful snare' that inhibited the pursuit of 'true politics.' By true politics, Gandhi meant the 'constructive programme' of spinning, removal of religious animosity and untouchability, non-violence and service. Announcing the withdrawal of a service organisation from electoral politics, he says, "the method of non-violence implies that when we do not have the capacity to undo an evil, we should keep away from it." ¹⁰⁰

Far from rejecting the liberal separation between religion and the state, Gandhi affirms it. But this does not lead him to argue that politics has to be neutral towards spiritual and religious goods. In the realm of civil society, Gandhi finds a place for spiritual politics. By way of a contrast between Locke and Gandhi, I want to highlight Gandhi's approach to the limits and possibilities of liberal politics.

¹⁰⁰ See Gandhi, "True politics and Power Politics," 418. Gandhi later conceded the 'lure of the legislature' and elections and the need to participate in power politics. Yet, Gandhi clearly did not entrust the state with the constructive programme or revival of village economies but left it to popular initiative. Gandhi's inconsistency has been interpreted as yet another example of the lack of mediation between his morality and his politics. See Partha Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World, 117. However, this reading hardly considers Gandhi's accent on faith and his complex attempts to preserve the insider-outsider position within politics.

Locke and Gandhi On Trusteeship and Tolerance

Locke's distinction between religion and politics too rests upon an intense alertness to the vagaries of power politics. Locke argues that the search for salvation is an individual task and all that politics can ensure is the freedom of conscience to pursue whichever path one may choose. Like Gandhi, Locke relies upon a notion of political and paternal power as a trust and trusteeship as a way of caring for 'God's workmanship.'

Given these resemblances, why should we go to Gandhi at all? Is it simply to persuade those who reject liberal secularism in India that Hinduism too is liberal? What is it that Gandhi's secularism and trusteeship reveal that is not prefigured in Locke? To take up the notion of trusteeship first; for Locke, trusteeship is a device for limiting both paternal and political power. In both instances, Locke clarifies rights and obligations.¹⁰¹ It is arguable that trust was also an epistemological and religious issue for Locke.¹⁰² Even if we concede this interpretation, Locke's

¹⁰¹ Locke, "Of Paternal Power," and "Of the Subordination of the Powers of the Commonwealth," in Second Treatise of Government, ed., C.B Macpherson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), 32 & 77. A similar argument for political power as a trust emerges in Burke's reflections on India. See James Conniff, "Burke and India: The Failure of the Theory of Trusteeship," Political Research Quarterly 46, no.2 (June 1993): 291-309.

¹⁰² John Dunn, "The Concept of Trust in the Politics of John Locke," in Richard Rorty, Quentin Skinner and J.B Schneewind eds.

emphasis on trust is grounded in his scepticism regarding certain knowledge about human beliefs.

Although Gandhi applies his notion of trusteeship to the family as well as political activity, he is not solely concerned with the proper use of power and authority. For Gandhi, trusteeship is more about taking care of oneself in the light of the *atman*. The moral aspects of trust such as accountability and publicity are anchored not in scepticism regarding beliefs but in the human capacity to reflect upon and reenact the spiritual experience expressed in religious symbols.

On the question of tolerance and secularism, two points have to be noted; firstly, Locke's toleration flows from his scepticism regarding the inner realm of beliefs whereas Gandhi turns inward to discover not a 'blank tablet' but an openness to the beyond. Secondly, Locke separates civil power from ecclesiastical power without probing the inner affinity between Protestantism and modern secularism. In contrast, Gandhi separates the state and religion and still makes room for spiritual politics. Both these points call for a brief elaboration.

Locke's toleration is not an offshoot of atheism for he often invokes 'God our Maker.' But the fragility of

Locke's scheme emerges from his delineation of the inner realm of subjective beliefs. The inner realm is a 'blank tablet' that registers different impressions coming from customs and conventions.¹⁰³ Confronted by diverse impressions, the individual has no certainty about his beliefs.¹⁰⁴ Locke rejects an innate disposition to the good on the ground that such a position shields first principles from inquiry.¹⁰⁵ The proper way to govern beliefs is to suspend judgement and examine beliefs on the weight of evidence and the force of better argument. But then Locke realises that human beings are not always moved to seek better argument and that it is necessary to cultivate a certain 'relish' for truth through educational and juridical practices.¹⁰⁶ The inculcation of proper inclinations and habits, given the absence of any pre-given love for the good, proceeds by manipulating the natural desire for pleasure and aversion to pain. Through proper customs and habits, the 'uneasiness for an absent good' is intensified so that the individual may be

¹⁰³ James Tully, An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), 183.

¹⁰⁴ In fact, Locke's scepticism regarding spiritual matters flows from his epistemology. Just as there can be no certain knowledge about ideas of 'substances,' similarly, it is not possible to know about the true path to salvation.

¹⁰⁵ James Tully, An Approach, 189-190.

¹⁰⁶ James Tully, An Approach, 200-201.

disposed to follow the divine law and seek the Rewards and Punishments of another life.

This scepticism regarding spiritual matters leads him to erect a boundary wall between the inner realm of subjective beliefs and an outer realm where civil power operates. The outer realm protects the right to life, liberty and possessions through laws. Because laws imply coercive sanctions, Locke insists that they only concern outward possessions of individuals. Laws are grounded in the natural law of self-preservation.

Locke's separation of the inner and outer can be criticised partly because it is not as natural and universal as he claims it to be; Hegel was the first to show that the inner realm is constituted by historical norms and practices. Hegel also criticised the artificial distinction between religion and politics and argued for the spirituality of modern ethical life in terms of the inner affinity between Protestantism and subjective freedom. But Hegel did not abrogate the distinction between the state and religion or devalue subjective freedom of beliefs.

Like Hegel, Gandhi would contest the empty 'inner realm' of Locke not only to show that beliefs are historically constituted but also to show that the 'inner Self' or *atman*-Self transcends distinctions of inner and outer. However,

Gandhi's own separation of religion and state resembles Locke's in that he associates the state with 'power politics.' Did Gandhi not see the spiritual and ethical basis of the modern state? After all, Hegel is right in pointing out that modern constitutionalism is not simply about self-interest and power.¹⁰⁷

But Gandhi's withdrawal from 'power politics' (which he equates with the state) is not based on despair about the potential for spirituality within politics. Just as Gandhi pursues a complex insider-outsider position with respect to indigenous traditions, he prefers an insider-outsider position within constitutional politics. Realising that the competitive desire for recognition entails partisanship and impedes an attunement to the *atman*-Self, he turns to education, research and social service as realms of 'true politics.'

Undoubtedly, the autonomy of these realms is secured by the constitutional regime. As Hegel points out, modern rule of law and the right to subjective freedom sustain the institutions of civil society. But Gandhi is also pointing to the quest for the ground of being and the practise of

¹⁰⁷ Gandhi's sarcastic comments on the British Parliament as a 'sterile woman and a prostitute' show that he did not always appreciate the moral and spiritual principles of constitutional and parliamentary government. See Gandhi, "Hind Swaraj," in MPWM, Vol.I, ed., Raghavan Iyer, 209.

self-dispossession within education and social service. In concrete terms, the rule of law and the right to particularity provide the conditions under which an organisation or activity devoted to artistic or educational fulfilment can flourish; at the same time, these activities cannot be reduced to the human desire for recognition. Gandhi regards the quest for truth and meaning as a spiritual activity. Hence, freedom is intertwined with the love of truth and not merely recognition. This is not to deny that educational and service institutions can be infested by 'power politics.' Gandhi himself periodically dissolved or renewed several institutions because they had become corrupted. But he also reminds us that true empowerment and true politics consists in reflecting upon the moment of self-dispossession in the experience of learning. Only then can we go beyond recognition without having to renounce politics or worldly activity.

The upshot is that even if one proceeds not from Locke's empiricist epistemology and scepticism or from Hegel's Protestant account of the spirit of ethical life, but from Gandhi's religious tolerance, the rejection of liberal secularism seems unwarranted. To the extent partisanship and ego based claims dominate in politics and so long as religious symbols are open to political manipulation, the modern constitutional separation of

religion and the state is necessary. But this need not negate the pursuit of spiritual politics. Gandhi explores spaces within modern liberal regime in his search for a politics attuned to transcendence. Through the praxis of disinterested action within education or social service, he aspires to push beyond freedom as recognition without rejecting the principles underlying the latter.

In this sense, Gandhi's 'religious secularism' clarifies the contours of a 'theocentric liberalism.' There is no rejection of the separation of state and religion nor a claim for distinct recognition of specific religious or spiritual goods. At the same time, Gandhi shows that this separation has to be illuminated in terms of the paradoxical character of spiritual experience as both immanent and transcendent. Through the practice of disinterested action and trusteeship, he grasps that it is neither necessary nor desirable to legislate faith into existence. The real issue is one of reenacting the openness to transcendence exemplified in religious or spiritual experience within politics. To this end, Gandhi reiterates the liberal distinction between state and religion even while attempting to spiritualise politics. Only by tuning into the moment of self-dispossession within the quest for truth or wisdom or God can we grasp this paradoxical affirmation of both

liberal secularism (as state neutrality toward religions) and spiritual politics.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the intimate connection between Gandhi's spiritual politics and the Gita ideal of disinterested action. I have argued that Gandhi's notion of trusteeship draws upon and reenacts the paradoxical structure of spiritual experience symbolised in the Gita ideal of acting as if one were a spectator of one's actions. Focusing upon Arendt's appeal to the spectator-judge, I pointed out that the principles underlying both the Gita and Gandhi's politics are not entirely beyond modern thought.

My main thesis is that Gandhi's trusteeship recasts both individual freedom and communal belonging without affirming an unencumbered self or a historically situated subjectivity. Gandhi consistently shows that the human quest for freedom is not solely reducible to the desire for recognition. Instead, he clarifies that freedom implies an openness to the beyond. Similarly, he reveals that our search for community is not reducible to an anxiety to preserve authenticity or superiority of specific indigenous forms of life. Instead, his symbol of *swadeshi* discloses

that the commitment to indigenous practices entails a continuous inquiry into the meaning of what is one's own. Gandhi's appeal to the role of seers and saints highlights the paradox of belonging and not-belonging to inherited traditions. Thus he directs us to the task of reconstructing both the indigenous and modern institutions in the light of the human quest for a transpersonal freedom. A concrete illustration of this endeavour glimmers in Gandhi's approach to liberal secularism. In the next chapter, I explore Althusius's 'societal federalism' as another route by which to recast modern constitutionalism in the light of Gandhi's *swadeshi* and spiritual politics.

Chapter 6

ALTHUSIUS AND SOCIETAL FEDERALISM

Introduction

Towards the close of the last chapter, I suggested that Gandhi's spiritual politics points in the direction of a 'theocentric liberalism' or a liberalism open to the experience of the ground of being. As already clarified, this does not mean a theocratic state or making politics the means to a mysterious spiritual salvation. Rather, openness to the ground of being implies reenacting the in-betweenness of human existence within politics. In the process, Gandhi recasts both individual freedom and communal belonging: *swaraj* or self-determination anchors the liberty and dignity of all not so much in the human desire for recognition but in the human quest for transcendence; *swadeshi* or the commitment to indigenous traditions is anchored not in historical or cultural authenticity but in terms of the search for the eternal or the whole. In concrete terms, I think that the principles underlying Gandhi's thought may be translated in terms of the widest possible federalism.¹ Since Gandhi does not elaborate upon the contours of such a

¹ See Chapter, V, 259.

federal polity, I turn to the writings of Johannes Althusius in the present chapter.

Johannes Althusius was the first thinker to counter Bodin's argument for absolute sovereignty with the notion of a federal and symbiotic realm. His work has been a source of inspiration for scholars who, disillusioned by the exaggerated claims of the modern state, struggle to restore the relevance of subsidiary associations below the state. From Otto von Gierke to Daniel Elazar and Thomas Hueglin, the attempt to resurrect this Calvinist thinker has proceeded steadily though not always for the same reasons.² So far, Althusius's work has been illuminated mainly from within modern Western political thought.

Building upon the earlier chapters, I examine

² Althusius' significance as the originator of some modern ideas has been explored by several thinkers. Otto von Gierke regards Althusius as the most systematic and comprehensive exponent of the idea of social contract in that Althusius extends the principle of partnership to all the associations of civil society. See Otto von Gierke, The Development of Political Theory, trans. Bernard Freyd (New York: W.W.Norton Co., Inc., 1939), 102. Others like Daniel Elazar focus on the covenant rather than the contract to highlight the federal structure of Althusius thought. See Elazar, "Althusius's Grand Design for a Federal Commonwealth," in Johannes Althusius, Politica, ed. & tr. by Frederick Carney, (Liberty Fund, 1995), xli-xliii. For the contemporary relevance of Althusius, see Thomas Hueglin, "Have We Studied the Wrong Authors? On the Relevance of Johannes Althusius," in Studies in Political Thought, 1, no.1, (Winter 1992): 75-93 and also Thomas Hueglin, "Federalism, Subsidiarity and the European Tradition," in Telos, no 100 (Summer 1994): 37-56. Throughout this chapter, I have drawn upon Hueglin's insightful reconstruction of Althusius's thought.

symbiotic politics and societal federalism from the standpoint of Gandhi's spiritual politics as well as Hegel's constitutionalism. I argue that the return to Althusius is useful not only in combating liberal atomism but more importantly, in rebuilding trust in liberal constitutionalism. On the surface, recovering trust implies encouraging intermediary associations, as Hegel had argued. But in Hegel's framework, trust emanates from the recognition of particular interests and is regarded along with faith, as a 'less educated insight.' By tying up trust with recognition, Hegel obscures the existential sources of trust.³ In contrast, Gandhi emphasises trust not only as a self-limitation induced by corporate activity but also as self-renunciation, spurred by the love of the immortal Self.⁴ For Gandhi, trust stems not so much from the fact that being all too human, we seek recognition but from the fact that being human, we seek the divine.

This dimension of trust glimmers in Althusius's idea of symbiotic politics. In building a symbiotic realm that includes both private associations like the family and collegia and public associations like the city, Althusius often invokes the covenant or the Decalogue. The association

³ See Chapter, IV, 168-169.

⁴ See Chapter V, 238-239.

between the symbiotic right and the Decalogue is not simply a dogmatic assertion based on Calvinist theology. In my view, the covenant is a symbol of the 'tension of human existence': it mirrors the fact that man is neither a beast nor God but in-between the two. The symbiotic right reenacts this in-betweenness in a series of associations. As an image of the archetypal covenant between God and man, the symbiotic right reflects the sacred moment of founding a partnership. Althusius recognises that such moments underlie every form of association including the family, the vocational group and the city. The symbiotic right is not just a distribution of powers or interests. Althusius often remarks that by virtue of the symbiotic right, an association is 'almost immortal.' In the course of elaborating the principles of symbiosis or the symbiotic right, Althusius captures some crucial moments of openness in politics---friendship in seeking the just order, prudence in ordering diverse consociations and civility in articulating common goods. In other words, the symbiotic right, embodied in different associations, elicits trust not so much by guaranteeing recognition but by reenacting the human search for enduring principles of order.

Althusius's notion of symbiosis foregrounds the heterogeneity of human existence. For instance, both the family

and the city entail the sharing of goods, services and norms or laws. And yet, the city or the commonwealth is not simply an extended family. Whereas the family relates individuals, the city brings together different collegia and the commonwealth or realm draws together different cities and provinces. Althusius does not trace such differences to a hierarchical account of nature or cosmos or the plurality of the human condition. The symbiotic realm is neither a tight unity nor a loose aggregation of associations. Instead, the symbiotic realm reflects how individuals and consociations articulate the search for a just and pious order in different realms of human activity.

For these reasons, Althusius's inclusion of the family and collegia into politics, his zealous defense of the autonomy of subsidiary consociations and his insistence that sovereignty belongs to the realm deserve serious consideration. The origin of symbiosis may be the need to survive but the 'art of symbiosis' (politics) builds upon the human aspiration for a 'just and pious' life. Althusius recognises that justice and piety presuppose the human capacity for friendship or sharing things in common. The task of politics is to nourish fellowship not in an abstract sense but in terms of concrete common practices. By participating in different symbiotic associations, human beings

learn the art of ruling and being ruled and virtues like mutual benevolence and trust and concord. Symbiotic politics does not impose a single vision of the good life but encourages us to explore the polycentric and paradoxical intimations of the common good in different spheres of activity.⁵

I begin with a brief outline of the main features of Althusius's thought to show that symbiotic politics provides one way of reviving trust in modern constitutionalism. Although Althusius does not anticipate all the salient features of modern constitutionalism, he captures the tension between formal rules and substantive goals, between autonomy and solidarity and between homogeneity and multiplicity. By way of a brief contrast between Hegel and Althusius with respect to sovereignty, I argue that the notion of symbiosis may enable us to recover some of the preconditions of constitutionalism such as civility and prudence.

My inquiry into Althusius's notion of sovereignty and federalism has another purpose. In the context of the growing scepticism about state and sovereignty, Althusius's

⁵ Although Walzer makes an argument for diverse interpretations of the common good in his Spheres of Justice, I have examined Althusius because he provides a more comprehensive account of federalism.

thought is a reminder that sovereignty has not always been conceptualised in terms of homogeneity.⁶ While espousing the autonomy of subsidiary associations, Althusius does not abandon the question of weaving them into a meaningful whole. The realm, as the locus of sovereignty, represents not so much an abstract aggregate called the people nor a territorial unit but an organised network of families, collegia, cities and provinces. For Althusius, the sovereignty of the realm is constituted in terms of a series of covenants which preserve the integrity of subsidiary associations.

Focusing on the role of regional associations such as the city and functional associations such as the collegia, I clarify the differentiated nature of symbiotic federalism. The city, for instance is both subsidiary to and constitutive of the realm. It is a microcosm of the realm and enjoys an inviolable status. The federal partners, whether it is the collegia or regional associations, are not merely juridical or administrative entities. By virtue of the

⁶ In a related vein, James Tully reminds us that there are 'hidden constitutional languages' which have historically evolved through the resistances of aboriginals and other excluded groups. For instance, the 'treaty constitutionalism' between the British Crown and Aboriginal nations from the 1630's to 1832 recognises the aboriginals as nations not in terms of foundational categories but in terms of 'customary criteria' of nationhood. See James Tully, Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 62-69, 120-121.

symbiotic right, they highlight the normative bases of federalism.

But why should we turn to Althusius when there are other contemporary thinkers who argue for the autonomy of intermediary associations? In my view, the return to civil society should not be understood as a simple transfer of responsibilities and power to the family or neighbourhood associations. The modern state reformed both the private sphere of the family and the public sphere in diverse ways so that it is unrealistic to expect that the decentering of the state would necessarily foster a vigorous civil society. The normative basis of intermediary institutions itself has to be reclaimed in order to enhance trust in liberal constitutionalism. Here, Althusius's federal design is helpful in combining a politics of recognition of identities and interests with a politics which illuminates the search for the good life.

One of the criticisms of Althusius's vision could be directed against the theological underpinnings of his work. Hence I examine the status of the Decalogue in symbiotic politics. Althusius reiterates that he approaches the Decalogue not as a theologian but as a political theorist. I argue that the symbiotic right is a reenactment of the exemplary covenant and is best understood as a symbol of

order. It evokes the human experience of the sacred rather than simply belief in doctrine. For this reason, Althusius repeats that every association is, by virtue of the symbiotic right, not simply a juridical entity but an 'almost immortal' fellowship. In this context, I argue that Gandhi's spiritual politics, with the emphasis on *swadeshi* or indigenous community is best explored in terms of societal federalism.

Politics as Symbiosis

Johannes Althusius's thought is interesting partly because he wrote at a time when the medieval plurality of rule was being replaced by the territorial sovereigns and partly because he espouses a constitutionalism that is midway between the ancients and the moderns. The turbulence of the early modern period, caused by religious wars, socio-economic factionalism and territorial conquest is the background against which Althusius defends his symbiotic vision.⁷ Despite the historical distance between Althusius

⁷ Althusius served as the syndic of Emden in the province of East Frisia of the German Empire. By the early part of the seventeenth century, this town had become one of the most powerful ports in Europe and attracted the attention of the territorial ruler of East Frisia. Althusius defended the autonomy of the city against the East Frisian count by converting what was a unilateral obligation of obedience to a covenant based on upholding the city's privileges. See Hueglin, "Have We Studied the Wrong Authors?" 77-78.

and the present search for community, the notions of symbiotic right and federalism can be instructive in rejuvenating modern constitutionalism.⁸

Althusius defines politics as "the art of associating men for the purpose of establishing, cultivating, conserving social life among them. Whence it is called symbiotics."⁹ The final cause of political life is 'holy, just, comfortable and happy symbiosis.'¹⁰ By symbiosis, he refers to the mutual communication or sharing of goods, services and rights or laws.

Echoing Aristotle, Althusius argues that the end of politics, pious and just symbiosis is, in tune with nature.

⁸ I do not imply that Althusius anticipates Hobbes, Hegel, Locke or the Federalist although it has been suggested that Althusius's thought may have influenced the Mayflower compact of November 21, 1620. See Hueglin, "Johannes Althusius: Medieval Constitutionalist or Modern Federalist," Publius 9, no.4 (Fall 1979): 25.

⁹ Johannes Althusius, Politica: Politics Methodically Set Forth, And Illustrated With Sacred And Profane Examples, trans. by Frederick Carney (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 12. This text is henceforth abbreviated as Politica.

¹⁰ Althusius makes one reference to the four causes but focuses mainly on the formal cause, i.e., the symbiotic right. In his view, the efficient cause of association is consent; the formal cause is the association brought about by contributing and sharing things necessary for social life; the final cause is a comfortable, useful and happy life where true piety toward God and justice among citizens are achieved; the material cause is the aggregate of precepts for communicating things, services and right which we bring together, each fairly and properly according to his ability, for symbiosis and the common advantage of common life. See Althusius, Politica, 19.

The inclination to associate flows from the fact that no human being is adequately endowed by nature to fulfil all bodily and spiritual goods. Only in society is man able to procure all the outward goods for a comfortable life.¹¹ More importantly, the virtues of justice and piety cannot be practised outside human fellowship and so it is the political or practical life that is superior to the contemplative life.¹² While extolling the active life, he does not portray human nature as tending to absolute fulfilment in any one consociation.¹³ Rather, all consociations from the family to the commonwealth are indispensable for the symbiotic life.

Despite the biological tenor of the term, Althusius is clear that symbiosis is not always already given a priori but is a task for politics. The art of politics transfigures naturally given instincts for association by way of law or the symbiotic right. The symbiotic right is the source of

¹¹ Althusius, Politica, 12.

¹² Althusius differs from Aristotle in the elevation of the active life and in this respect, he is more Calvinist. See Althusius, Politica, 19-20.

¹³ Althusius uses the term 'consociation' to emphasise the symbiotic basis of associational activity. I have used consociation and association interchangeably partly because there is no major technical difference between the two terms.

'proper order, self-sufficiency and good discipline' in any consociation.¹⁴

At a general level, the symbiotic right refers to the following principles which inform all consociations; first, all order involves 'imperium and subjection' or rulers and the ruled; second, all ruling elements have supreme power only over individual members and not over the collective body; third, all ruling is directed to the benefit of the ruled; fourth, the consent of the subjects or members is the origin of consociations; finally, the majority decides in matters which concern the association as a corporate body whereas matters which concern individual members require unanimity. In this context, Althusius often remarks that 'what concerns all should be approved by all.'¹⁵

These general principles are realised in all consociations in the form of 'proper laws' made by the consociations themselves with respect to the communication of goods, services and right.¹⁶ This communication or sharing is articulated in different ways in the family, collegia, city and the realm partly because what is communicated varies between different associations and

¹⁴ Althusius, Politica, 14.

¹⁵ Althusius, Politica, 15, 20 & 32.

¹⁶ Althusius, Politica, 16.

partly because solidarity is forged through identity as well as difference. For instance, the collegium is constituted by common vocational concerns whereas the city is constituted by both regional and functional groups.

Althusius conceives of the symbiotic right both as an immanent normative order and a juridical creation. The general principles are not deduced from an abstract standpoint but from the plurality of rule at the close of the Roman Empire. At the same time, Althusius recognises that symbiosis is not spontaneous but has to be fostered through the art of politics. Because of the symbiotic right, a consociation acts 'as if' it were 'one person.' In the absence of such a law, a consociation is merely a 'crowd' or a 'throng'.¹⁷ The symbiotic right is not only about formal rules of organisation. Both the proper laws (which actualise general rules according to the purpose of particular consociation) and the common laws form the symbiotic right. The symbiotic right does not emanate from any one consociation or any one legislative authority to be identified with one set of procedures.

¹⁷ Althusius, Politica, 34.

**Althusius Contra Hegel: Symbiotic Right, Sovereignty and
Modern Constitutionalism**

Based on his notion of politics as symbiosis, Althusius contests Bodin's notion of absolute sovereignty. He recognises that sovereign power is 'one, not many' and that it is inalienable but departs from Bodin in attributing it to the people or the realm.¹⁸ While Bodin is apprehensive that sovereign power will perish if it is located in the people, Althusius asserts that sovereignty is immortal only when it is invested in the people.¹⁹ The people, for Althusius is not an unorganised aggregate but the series of consociations such as collegia, cities and provinces which constitute the realm.

The realm, as the locus of sovereign power, is constituted by means of the symbiotic right. It comes into being not so much through conquest or force but through covenants (*pacta*) between different cities, regions and provinces.²⁰ These covenants make up the 'fundamental law' of the realm. The chief magistrate of the realm is only a 'trustee' or steward in charge of the administration of

¹⁸ Althusius, Politica, 66.

¹⁹ Althusius, Politica, 5, 10 & 65.

²⁰ Althusius, Politica, 123.

sovereign power.²¹ Hence, Althusius insists that sovereign power is not above law; it differs from tyranny only because it is attuned to the divine and natural law and by inference, to man-made law.²²

Both the argument for popular sovereignty mediated through the realm and the accent on sovereign power as rule of law prefigure Hegel's views. For Hegel too objects to popular sovereignty on the ground that the 'people' is only an 'abstraction' and argues for constitutional sovereignty. But Hegel may object to this comparison on the ground that Althusius does not grasp the inner essence of law and right as the self-determination of reason. As such, symbiosis appears to elevate historically acquired privileges of guilds and cities to the status of right.

Given that Althusius does not explicate symbiotic right in terms of the will's journey to freedom, Hegel's objections are justified. However, Althusius should not be reduced to an apologist for feudal privileges. Whether it is wresting sovereignty from kings and territorial lords or specifying the covenantal basis of authority, he questions

²¹ Althusius, Politica, 5 & 117.

²² Althusius, Politica, 66-67.

the idea of natural hierarchy and customary rights.²³ He is quite clear that the fundamental law of the realm arises from covenants and is sustained by consent.²⁴ While he invokes ideas of the will, artifice and consent, he does not reduce the relationship between different parts of the realm to mere exchange. The free power of consent is exercised by the people not as a mass or crowd but as an organised series of consociations. Thus consent is not a one-time act but is itself shaped through symbiotic or covenantal practices. The covenant is not yet the device of atomised individuals popularised by Hobbes.

Althusius grasps that covenants are not created *ex nihilo* but draw upon existing rights and obligations. As Hegel was to remind us later, constitutional law is not simply the command of the sovereign but a reflection of the immanent reason in extant institutions. Just as Hegel contends that the ethical basis of constitutionalism becomes transparent only through the practice of rectitude and civility, Althusius grasps that the symbiotic right of the

²³ See Harro Hopfl and Martyn Thompson, "The History of Contract as a Motif in Political Thought," American Historical Review 84, no.4 (1979): 935-937. We must also recall the pivotal role of Althusius as syndic of Emden in preserving its autonomy. See footnote 5 above.

²⁴ As Althusius writes, "God has formed in all peoples by the natural law itself the free power of constituting princes, kings and magistrates for themselves." See Althusius, Politica, 91.

realm has to be instantiated in a wide range of associational practices.

In this respect, Althusius's vision might enable us to reconstruct some features of modern constitutionalism highlighted by Hegel. For instance, Hegel is clear that a constitution is neither merely abstract and formal nor oriented to substantive ends. It reflects our situatedness in what Oakeshott has called the 'civil condition.'²⁵ The civil condition is a mode of relating to one another on the basis of certain norms. These norms are not simply procedures but a set of practices based on moral considerations.²⁶

However, Hegel's state apparatus, with its excessive reliance on the civil service, is not exactly conducive to an enhanced popular consciousness of the civil condition that underwrites modern institutions. In the absence of strong subsidiary associations, the modern constitutional state can be transformed from an instrument of law into an instrument of the nation.²⁷ Among other reasons, the

²⁵ Michael Oakeshott, "On the Civil Condition," in On Human Conduct, 108.

²⁶ Michael Oakeshott, "On the Civil Condition," 122.

²⁷ See Hannah Arendt, "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of Rights of Man," in The Origins of Totalitarianism (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 275 & 301-302. Arendt also recognises that the nation-state was not entirely a perversion.

principle of territorial sovereignty and the subsequent resort to a national identity trigger the derailment of constitutional rule.²⁸ By restricting the political role of corporations, Hegel fails to explore a federal alternative.

As such, the ethical basis of modern freedom never seems to be so obvious to the many. If self-enactment continuously slides into a narrow account of rights, if modern norms and institutions continue to be seen as 'external' to freedom, then it is necessary to ask why this is so. By concentrating on the self-realisation of reason, Hegel does not focus on the practical problem of applying universal principles to concrete contexts.

Against these drawbacks, Althusius's account of symbiotic right is a useful yardstick with which to

She argues that the question of creating an artificial space where individuals can be equal and free always requires homogenising them in some respects. The dark margin of difference that lies outside is both 'a frightening symbol' of uniqueness and a reminder that man is only the master, not the creator. The tension between identity and difference is ineluctable within politics. To embrace only uniqueness and difference on the ground that every artificial identity is, in some respect, exclusive, could precipitate the slide into savagery.

²⁸ Although Hegel does not support the nationalist principle, he envisions sovereign power as converging in one central authority and extending over a specific territory. He laments the lack of a central authority with control over the defense and finance in the German Empire. He compares the loose conglomeration of estates that made up the German Empire to a 'heap of round stones piled into a pyramid,' incapable of forming a stable whole. See Hegel, "The German Constitution," in Hegel's Political Writings, ed., Z. Pelzcyński (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), 180.

rearticulate some features of modern constitutionalism such as the link between autonomy, civility and solidarity. Althusius does not conceive of sovereignty solely in terms of territorial integrity. The realm, as a locus of sovereign power, facilitates an 'organised unity of action' between a series of territorial associations (such as the city) and functional ones (such as the collegia).²⁹ While including associations which pursue substantive goals such as the collegia, the city or realm cannot be reduced to a means for these common ends. The symbiotic right of the realm has to strike a balance between formal procedures and substantive ends. Through a series of covenants which are both general and specific, Althusius ensures that symbiotic practices are continuously reenacted and shape a common language of civil interaction that is never complete. Here a brief overview of Althusius's federal design is helpful.

Building Trust: Societal Federalism

Althusius does not envision the federal scheme as merely an intergovernmental technique or juridical division of powers.³⁰ Because he includes both territorial and

²⁹ Hueglin, "Have We Studied the Wrong Authors?" 84.

³⁰ There is some controversy as to whether Althusius's polity can be called federal. Following Friedrich who emphasised the unitary, collectivistic nature of Althusius's thought, Heinz Eulau

functional associations, Hueglin writes of the 'societal federalism' in Althusius.³¹ The federal arrangements in Althusius flow from his account of politics as the art of consociation.³² In the following, I focus briefly on the relationship between the city and the realm. Contra Hegel who approaches intermediary associations in terms of the recognition of the particular, Althusius foregrounds the constitutive role of subsidiary associations. As such,

argues that Althusius espouses decentralisation rather than federalism. See Heinz Eulau, "Theories of Federalism under the Holy Roman Empire," in American Political Science Review XXXV, no. 4 (August 1941): 648. Althusius's acceptance of inalienable sovereignty has led Patrick Riley to argue that Althusius is a medieval constitutionalist and not a modern federalist. According to Riley, Althusius erects a hierarchical polity. See Patrick Riley, "Three Seventeenth Century Theorists of Federalism," in Publius 6 no.3 (Summer 1976): 31, 36-37. Pointing to shared sovereignty, constitutional entrenchment of subsidiary consociations and the right to secession, Hueglin rightly claims that Althusius's federalism has to be judged not from the standpoint of American federalism but from a broader theoretical context. Further, Althusius defense of Emden's autonomy vis-a-vis East Friesland's territorial lord (and representative of the Empire) and his determined effort towards a covenant that defends the city's privileges hardly supports Riley's view that Althusius erects a hierarchical polity. See Hueglin, "Johannes Althusius: Medieval Constitutionalist or Modern Federalist," 39-41.

³¹ Hueglin, "Have We Studied the Wrong Authors," 86.

³² Daniel Elazar writes that "the essence of federalism is not to be found in a particular set of institutions but in the institutionalisation of particular relationships among participants in political life. Consequently, federalism is a phenomenon that provides many options for the organisation of political authority and power." See Daniel Elazar, Exploring Federalism (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1987), 11-12. From this angle, Althusius is an instructive federal theorist.

subsidiarity does not mean subordination. Further, Althusius anchors the inviolable existence of the federal partners not so much in their uniqueness but in terms of their commitment to symbiotic right.

According to Althusius, the city is the first 'public consociation' which comes into being when many 'private associations' such as families and collegia come together to form an inclusive political order.³³ The members are citizens, not spouses or colleagues.³⁴ Because the city is a territorial consociation, symbiosis is grounded in the sharing of things like roads or ports, judicial, administrative, financial and defense services and rights pertaining to voting on the city's affairs, making laws regarding common weights and measures, setting up workshops, commercial activity, disposing of property and so forth.³⁵

The governance of the city is vested in a senate, the members of which are elected by the collegia or vocational associations. The senate's functions and powers are based on covenantal agreements and cannot exceed those of the city unless specified. While decision making is normally by majority vote, in some matters, unanimity is required. In

³³ Althusius, Politica, 34.

³⁴ Althusius, Politica, 35.

³⁵ Althusius, Politica, 42-43.

his words, 'what touches individuals ought to be approved by individuals.'³⁶

The city is not a public space sealed off from economic and social issues. It coordinates different collegia which may be both regional and functional bodies. Is it not likely that the city may be captured by some powerful interest groups? Such a tendency is hampered by the need to build consensus among different consociations, not all of which may be clear and intent on their immediate interests. Further, no vocational consociation is likely to be confined to one region or city. Besides, the autonomy of different collegia has to be preserved by the city's senate even while enhancing cooperation between them. The principle of unanimity implies that deliberation and dialogue would be crucial in deciding issues which concern all individually.

Althusius grounds the communitarian character of the city in the symbiotic right. The city is sustained by civil virtues like mutual aid and concord among the consociations. While the citizens share a common language and customs along with common ports and granaries, Althusius reiterates that the city is a community by virtue of its normative framework.

³⁶ Althusius, Politica, 40.

In other words, there is no reliance simply on cultural affinity. One may object that Althusius probably assumed the existence of a homogeneous population. But then he was highly familiar with the diversity of the Empire and he clearly rejects one corollary of homogeneity, i.e., of an atomised 'people.' He mediates participation in the city through the representatives of the collegia rather than directly. While there is no direct suffrage, it does not mean less participation. In the collegia, individuals can discuss and deliberate on matters pertaining to the city. Participation is conceived in terms of the practise of civic and moral virtues such as mutual respect, mutual aid and caring for common property.

Although the details of Althusius's city may appear remote or even pedantic, his vision is useful in developing a normative theory of federalism. He recognises that federal arrangements are not simply mechanical devices. The city is subsidiary to the realm although chronologically, it may precede the latter. Subsidiarity does not mean that the city depends solely on the recognition granted by the superior consociation.³⁷ Althusius writes that the city is 'almost

³⁷ Hueglin points out that this balance between autonomy and solidarity is what distinguishes Althusius's notion of subsidiarity from the invocations of subsidiarity within the European Community. In Althusius, subsidiarity does not congeal into parochialism but derives from a commitment to the realm and the pursuit of equitable

immortal' although it is a 'representational and fictional person.'³⁸

The city's juridical status, which confers a fictional unity, is not the only basis of its existence. It has an inviolable existence emanating from the diversity of social life and facilitates a principled sharing of services and rights. Further, the city, along with other cities and provinces constitutes the realm and as such, the realm cannot simply approach the city as a juridical unit terminable at will. The city is a "microcosm" of the the realm and shares in the immortality of the latter.³⁹ Althusius contends that it is possible for 'one part of the realm' to withdraw from the realm when the fundamental laws are violated.⁴⁰

Thus, the trust between the realm and its subsidiary consociations is secured constitutionally. The realm is

living conditions for all. In contrast, subsidiarity is enlisted in favour of national and territorial actors and excludes societal actors like labour or regional units below the nation-state within the European community. Superimposed onto a largely unregulated market system, subsidiarity can become a mask for pursuit of self-centred territorialism. See T.Hueglin, "Federalism, Subsidiarity and the European Tradition: Some Clarifications," 48-51.

³⁸ Althusius, Politica, 36.

³⁹ Althusius, Politica, 41.

⁴⁰ Althusius, Politica, 191. We must note that the right to secession cannot be easily invoked because each city represents not popular will but vocational associations.

'pre-eminent and supreme not because it is above law or absolute but in respect to particular and special subordinate power that depends upon it, arises and flows from it, returns in time to it, and is furthermore bound to definite places.'⁴¹ In Althusius's view, the realm is a universal association that promotes mutual communication between diverse cities and provinces.⁴² It should be large enough to be self-sufficient and small enough to preserve virtue.⁴³

At levels higher than the city, Althusius emphasises the complexity of the symbiotic right. For instance, the symbiotic right of the realm pertains to both ecclesiastical and secular communication. Ecclesiastical communion ⁴⁴ is

⁴¹ Althusius, Politica, 69.

⁴² I have not dwelt upon the province separately because Althusius deals with it largely as an administrative unit with the provincial head as a subordinate official of the universal realm. At the same time, Althusius clarifies that the provincial estates which are constituted by the consent of the members (cities and regions) and prevail over the head. See Hueglin, "Johannes Althusius: Medieval Constitutionalist or Modern Federalist," 32.

⁴³ Althusius, Politica, 62-63. While too small a commonwealth is unable to defend itself in war or raise enough finances to be self-sufficient, too large a commonwealth is exposed to the danger of corruption and misrule. An example of a well-governed commonwealth is Venice whereas Rome under Caligula, Claudius and Nero is an example of a large but corrupt empire.

⁴⁴ Althusius uses communication and communion interchangeably.

the "process by which those means that pertain to the public organising and conserving of the kingdom of Christ are established."⁴⁵ Such means include not only the public introduction and preservation of religion but also the establishment of schools.⁴⁶ Althusius maintains that public schools inculcate piety and virtue both by transmitting doctrine and liberal arts.⁴⁷ Although Althusius does not endorse religious pluralism, he counsels prudence and moderation in dealing with 'unorthodox' faiths.⁴⁸

Secular communion pertains to appointing a supreme magistrate and councils of the realm, promulgation of the law of the realm and execution of the law. Althusius clarifies that this secular symbiotic right is the 'guiding light of civil and social life.'⁴⁹ Under this right, each symbiote is guaranteed his or her 'natural life, including the liberty and security of the body, possession and rightful use of external goods as well as honour and

⁴⁵ Althusius, Politica, 70.

⁴⁶ Althusius, Politica, 70-71.

⁴⁷ Althusius, Politica, 71.

⁴⁸ Althusius, Politica, 72. In this context, we must note that Althusius does not erase the boundaries between religion and politics. See the discussion in the last few sections of this chapter.

⁴⁹ Althusius, Politica, 75.

dignity.'⁵⁰ In the pursuit of such general principles, special laws suited to the particular circumstances of the realm are necessary. Secular symbiotic right consists in maintaining conditions for public trade and commerce, a uniform monetary system, common language, collecting taxes, administration, granting titles and maintaining defence.⁵¹ Beyond such material necessities, the realm provides aid and counsel to the constituent cities and regions in times of crises and enters into association with other realms either temporarily or permanently.⁵²

The administration of the realm is vested in a collegiate body headed by the supreme magistrate. This head is a trustee or administrator and not proprietor of sovereign power.⁵³ The covenant with the magistrate is subsidiary to the symbiotic right of the realm enshrined in the fundamental laws. The covenant is mediated through the 'ephors.'⁵⁴ Besides the magistrate and the ephors, there are

⁵⁰ Althusius, Politica, 75.

⁵¹ Althusius, Politica, 77-83.

⁵² Althusius, Politica, 84-85.

⁵³ Althusius, Politica, 106 & 117.

⁵⁴ The ephors are drawn from territorial associations but they may also be appointed by the ruler. Even when the ephors are appointed by the magistrate, they remain accountable to the territorial consociations. This double role, as representatives of the magistrate but also of the partial associations, makes them

the general councils, drawn from all the associated bodies, which deliberate and decide on important matters like the fundamental laws, taxes and sovereignty that concern the entire realm.⁵⁵

Whether it is the governance of the city or that of the realm, Althusius provides for a balance between authority and consent, autonomy and solidarity.⁵⁶ The authority of the prefect or leader of the city or the magistrate of the realm is balanced by the constituent power represented by the senate or the ephors. While the magistrate rules over the members individually, he or she cannot override the whole group. The authority of the ruling officials is bound by a covenant to preserve the fundamental laws of the realm. The symbiotic right confers legitimacy on authority and the latter is only the administrator, not the owner of the symbiotic right.

Although Althusius does not develop a theory of practical wisdom, the delicate balances that have to be struck in every consociation call for practical experience

mediators between the administrators of the realm and the cities and regions. See Hueglin, "Johannes Althusius, Medieval Constitutionalist or Modern Federalist," 37.

⁵⁵ Althusius, Politica, 85.

⁵⁶ Hueglin, "Johannes Althusius: Medieval Constitutionalist or Modern Federalist?" 28.

and judgement.⁵⁷ At every level, the rulers have to shape the specific laws of communication of things, services and rights according to some general principles of symbiosis. All consociations are political because they entail some form of mutual communication but not all of them communicate the same things or rights. The diversity of ethical life is to be addressed not only in terms of plural cultures or interests but in terms of a prudent understanding of the contingencies intrinsic to politics.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Althusius discusses prudence mainly as a virtue of the supreme magistrate. He argues that the magistrate ought to grasp the distinction between the Decalogue and the proper laws of Moses. The latter varies with the nature of the people and circumstances and so it is the task of the magistrate understand and interpret the eternal law judiciously. Besides, a prudent magistrate has to grasp the nature of the people in general and exercise gentleness and liberality. He also has to earn their respect and trust through his life and moral qualities. See Politica, 133, 143, 146 & 148.

⁵⁸ Whether modern constitutionalism can accommodate an older idea of prudence is open to debate. On the one hand, Straussian scholars such as Thomas Pangle and Martin Diamond trace modern constitutionalism to modern political philosophy (exemplified in Hobbes, Locke and Montesquieu). In this light, they argue that modern politics retreats from shaping souls to merely managing passions and factions in the interest of self-preservation. However, Charles Kesler points out that the regime question and the controversy between democracy and aristocracy link the American founding to the classical understanding of politics as a practical science. In other words, the exaltation of the 'great improvements' in the science of politics should not obscure the appeal to prudence and practical exigencies in the founding documents. See Charles R. Kesler, "The Founders and the Classics," in The Revival of Constitutionalism, ed. James Muller (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 43-68.

Admittedly, this federal sketch does not provide for dual citizenship, dual constituencies or constitutional courts. However, it grasps that federalism is more than plurality of power or participation zones. The city differs from the realm not by virtue of being less powerful or more participatory but by virtue of its proximity to functional associations. The realm manifests not the consolidation of territory or identity but the heterogeneity of associational life. Participation and representation in the city, province and the realm are mediated through a network of associations. The symbiotic and federal realm may appear undemocratic but it provides one model of differentiated citizenship.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ A similar argument has been made by Ulrich K. Preuss in the context of the institutions of the European community. Against the criticism of 'democracy deficit' within the European community, Preuss argues that the community should be assessed not so much in terms of whether it develops a collective European democratic will but in terms of whether it is an institutional formation that enables a better representation and coordination of heterogeneous interests than the institutions of the nation-state. See Ulrich K. Preuss, "Prospects of a Constitution for Europe," in Constellations 3, no.2 (1996): 221-222. I think this federalism-based approach differs from the argument for differentiated citizenship advocated by Iris Marion Young. For Young, differentiated citizenship is a response to 'oppression' defined as exploitation, marginalisation, cultural imperialism, powerlessness and random violence based on group hatred. Even if we concede that such special rights are temporary and foster inclusion, Young's own list of oppressed groups covers about 80 percent of the American population. Further, self-government rights solely based on traditional identities can trigger exclusion within such communities vis-a-vis new entrants or dissenting members. See Iris Marion Young, "Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of Universal

By approaching individuals as situated in different collegia and families, is Althusius conflating the private and the public or the social and the political? Althusius recognises that social and economic issues cannot be purged from the public space but avoids reducing the city or the realm to simply an economic unit or a conglomeration of different interest groups. As civil consociations, the city and realm aspire towards a just social order but they do not espouse substantive economic or cultural goals such as equitable distribution of wealth. Similarly, Althusius recognises the political side of such 'private' associations like the family and collegia without violating the autonomy of the latter. Here again, a few details of symbiosis at the level of the family and collegia are helpful.

Symbiosis and Heterogeneity

Althusius regards the family and the collegia as 'private and civil consociations.' Private consociations are

Citizenship," Ethics 99 (January 1989): 250-274. See also Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman, "Return of the Citizen: A Survey of Recent Work on Citizenship Theory," Ethics 104 (January 1994): 352-381. A common lacunae in the present debate on this question is that citizenship is addressed mainly in terms of preserving the right to identity and difference. Somehow the tension of human existence in a heterogeneous whole including the organic, inorganic, noetic or pneumatic reality symbolised in cosmological myths and religious symbols is hardly audible in all the noisy demands for difference.

"initiated by a special covenant among the members for the purpose of bringing together and holding in common a particular interest."⁶⁰ He argues that the family belongs to politics because it involves mutual communication of goods, services and rights.⁶¹ He clarifies that the household acquisition of goods belongs to economics but 'it is politics that teaches what the spouses, paterfamilias, materfamilias, servants and attendants may contribute and communicate among themselves . . . in order that private and domestic social life may be piously and justly fulfilled.'⁶²

Althusius's inclusion of the family is hardly revolutionary for our context given the sustained attempt by feminists to politicise the private realm. His portrayal of the family is conventional with the wife communicating obedience and can be charged with gender bias.⁶³ And yet,

⁶⁰ Althusius, Politica, 22.

⁶¹ His conception of the family follows the traditional model with the man as the head of the family and the conjugal association as indissoluble. Althusius considers both conjugal and kinship bonds under the family. While he does not subordinate the family to other associations, his account of what is mutually communicated between the spouses is, in contrast to his position on sovereignty, quite conventional in that the husband communicates his name, family reputation, legal protection and economic condition while the wife extends obedience, subjection, trust and compliance. See Althusius, Politica, 24.

⁶² Althusius, Politica, 26-27.

⁶³ Althusius's inclusion of the family into politics can be read as part of the Calvinist 'disciplining' of the private sphere

Althusius is instructive in refiguring the private and the public in the distinction he draws between the economic and political side of the family and the way in which he locates the family within a nuanced account of symbiosis as attunement to both piety and justice.

If 'politics teaches the family how to communicate goods, services and rights' then, is there not an erosion of the autonomy of this consociation? If we keep in mind that symbiotic right is both general and specific, then the symbiotic right of the family cannot be the same as the symbiotic right of the collegium (where for example, the leader has to be elected) or of the city. The symbiotic approach to the family as a consociation preserves its autonomy without sealing it off from politics. Understanding politics as symbiosis need not mean leaving the family to arbitrary rule nor moulding the family as if it were a school for 'rational and industrious subjects' nor simply as a realm of love, too sacrosanct for legislation nor subsuming it under the 'personal law' of a religious community. It would mean balancing autonomy and solidarity

in seventeenth century Emden. Scholars have noted that the presbyteries were increasingly occupied with the problems of quarrelling and violence, drunkenness, adultery and luxurious living among others. See Heinz Schilling, Civic Calvinism in Northwestern Germany and the Netherlands (Kirkville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1991), 41-68.

in such a way that the complex relationship between the family and other consociations is taken into account in formulating the symbiotic right. For instance, parental views on moral education may have to be addressed along with that of the collegia of educators in a symbiotic regime.

Alongside the family, Althusius also includes collegia or vocational associations within the class of private symbiotic associations. Whereas the family is a 'natural' association, the collegium is a voluntary and civil association based on common interests based on a craft or way of life.⁶⁴ The collegium is held together by mutual agreements and organises the communication (a) of things like books, seals, coffer and corporate records, (b) of services like admitting members or training apprentices and performing collegial duties, (c) of right or laws concerning administration of the craft and (d) of mutual benevolence through public banquets.⁶⁵ While the collegium makes its own laws concerning a craft, it cannot infringe upon public jurisdiction or in matters pertaining to individuals outside the corporate fellowship.⁶⁶ As in the case of other associations, decision-making is based on a majority in

⁶⁴ Althusius, Politica, 28-29.

⁶⁵ Althusius, Politica, 29-30.

⁶⁶ Althusius, Politica, 31.

common matters and unanimity on issues that affect members separately. Althusius divides the collegia into those which attend to 'divine things' like that of theologians and philosophers and those which attend to human things like that of magistrates, judges, craftsmen and merchants.⁶⁷ Among the diverse collegia, he contends that the collegia of magistrates is of special importance because 'by their public power, they set bounds for each and every other collegium.'⁶⁸

Althusius's system differs from the medieval guild system in that it includes all social groups and not just the 'weightier part.'⁶⁹ Further, unlike the medieval guilds which acquired their political rights from the prince or emperor, Althusius admits that the collegia constitutive of governance.⁷⁰

How is this portrayal of subsidiary consociations different from the role assigned to corporations in Hegel? While Hegel recognises the ethical basis of corporations, he does not fully explore their potential. He reconstructs the

⁶⁷ Althusius, Politica, 33.

⁶⁸ Althusius, Politica, 33.

⁶⁹ Althusius includes organised peasantry alongside professional associations. See Althusius, Politica, 56 and Hueglin, "Have We Studied the Wrong Authors," 81.

⁷⁰ Hueglin, "Have We Studied the Wrong Authors?" 81.

corporation in terms of the right to recognition of the particular. The corporations educate the desire for recognition by turning individuals away from external manifestations of success to 'honour and rectitude' in one's calling.⁷¹

But professional associations are not only channels for sublimating the desire for recognition. Some vocations may have a larger vision of their role in society than simply securing individuals against contingency. Some educationists might see their vocation as a 'sacred trust' (as Gandhi would put it) and not only as a source of livelihood. Or some ecologists may see their task not only in terms of conserving natural resources but in terms of the human openness to the divine. Within a symbiotic framework, this 'other' dimension may have a better chance of being voiced and heard.

In other words, the revival of intermediary associations has to be combined with an inquiry into the malaises of modern civil society which tends to emphasise freedom as recognition. The call for associational autonomy and 'family values' has to confront the radical transformation of the family and civil society in our time. The modern family is not an icon of a larger order but a realm of intimacy and

⁷¹ Hegel, Philosophy of Right, par.253, p.271-272.

self-fulfilment.⁷² A similar weakening of the civil society is reflected in the fact that the vocation is, in most instances, a source of livelihood. Both the family and civil society appear too fragile to burden the extraordinary expectations of moral and spiritual regeneration in the twentieth century. Hence, the task of reviving civic virtue or forging a 'new social covenant' will require not only creating participatory spaces but complimenting the politics of recognition with a politics attuned to the human search for the good life.⁷³

⁷² Locke reduces filial bonds to mutual gratitude and Kant approaches marriage as a contract. To some extent, Hegel recognises the weakening of the ethical basis of the family and hence calls for a 'second family' where individuals can learn to transcend selfishness. See Chapter, IV, 155-157.

⁷³ Jean Elshtain calls for a 'new social covenant' to combat the erosion of communal bonds in modern civil society. Appealing to the vision of the American founding fathers, she argues that democratic politics requires assuming responsibility for the here and now rather than retiring to 'Indian ashrams or a parallel polis.' See Elshtain, "Democracy and the Politics of Difference," in Democracy on Trial (Ontario: Anansi, 1993), 89. However, the exploration of exotic cults is not always an escape from responsibility or devaluation of one's own traditions. In seeking the ground of being, man also assumes enormous responsibility. The credo 'let us protect our own,' whether it is formulated in terms of the Hindu demand for indigenous or the current American summons to the founding fathers, raises the deeper question of 'what is one's own.' In some contexts, esoteric languages can reopen the psyche to the mysterious depths of being and thereby clarify the meaning of founding acts.

Societal Federalism and Spiritual Politics

In the next few sections, I explore the common ground between Gandhi and Althusius mainly to argue that the search for community cannot be delinked from the search for transcendence. The link between symbiotic politics and the biblical covenant can be helpful in thinking through 'theocentric liberalism' or a liberalism open to the human search for the ground of being.⁷⁴ The exemplary validity of the biblical covenant within symbiotic politics holds one important lesson in our attempts to reinstate liberal constitutionalism as the focus of community--- that is, to illuminate the rule of law, rights, representative government and enhanced local autonomy in terms of the human existence in-between immanence and transcendence.

At the outset, comparing Gandhi and Althusius may appear farfetched given the differences in the historical

⁷⁴ In the preceding chapter, I pointed out some aspects of a 'theocentric liberalism' by looking at Gandhi's approach to liberal secularism. By focusing here on Althusius, I do not imply that these thinkers alone have to contribute to an exploration into 'theocentric liberalism.' Undoubtedly, there are other thinkers who draw upon other spiritual traditions and symbols such as Martin Buber, Yves Simon or John Finnis, to mention only a few. My main purpose is to push the communitarian argument towards an inquiry into the spiritual roots of freedom and belonging rather than evolve an exhaustive vision of theocentric liberalism. If we grasp Voegelin's warning that the ground of being is not an entity, then the task is not so much about evolving a comprehensive definition or design but of reenacting the experience of *metaxy* or the in-betweenness of human existence within politics.

contexts and the religious traditions which mould their work. However, the meaning of symbiotic politics or spiritual politics is not reducible to the contexts from which they emerge. Neither thinker regards history as the sole horizon within which principles of order are revealed. While the problems of caste hierarchy or colonialism may have urged Gandhi's return to Hindu symbols such as *atman* or *moksha* (liberation), he does not regard the experience underlying them as purely historical or contextual. The reality which *atman* discloses is both immanent and transcendent--that is, it is the experience of this particular consciousness but also outside it. Hence, I argued that *swadeshi* is not only about protecting indigenous ways of life but also about creatively articulating the human search for the eternal within politics. A similar concern with grounding politics in the human search for transcendence makes Althusius insightful for communitarian discourse.

The Symbiotic Right and the Biblical Covenant as Symbols of Order

Althusius justifies symbiotic politics as indispensable for the fulfilment of the two tables of the Decalogue. He asserts that he uses the Decalogue not as theologians do

but as a political theorist.⁷⁵ In his words, "the subject matter of the Decalogue is political insofar as it directs symbiotic life and prescribes what ought to be done therein."⁷⁶ He draws upon the biblical covenant to emphasise the intimate link between piety, justice and politics. To quote him again, "for what would human life be without the piety of the first table of the Decalogue, and without the justice of the second? For what would a commonwealth be without communion and communication of things useful and necessary to human life?"⁷⁷

Althusius does not stress the historical context of the covenant nor its doctrinal content.⁷⁸ For Althusius, the covenant is not simply a contract based on the mutual interests of the concerned parties but involves trust and an

⁷⁵ Althusius, Politica, 8-9 & 142.

⁷⁶ Althusius, Politica, 142.

⁷⁷ Althusius, Politica, 8-9.

⁷⁸ Contra Barclay who argues against a covenantal understanding of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled on the ground that the religious covenant was applicable only to a specific historical context, Althusius avers that it is useful in any commonwealth. For Althusius, sacred and historical events are exemplars to be reappropriated through the art of politics. Referring to examples from sacred scriptures which have 'God or pious men as their author' and the 'wisely and perfectly constructed polity of the Jews,' he writes that 'we err..whenever in similar circumstances we depart from it.' At the same time, Althusius recognises the role of prudence and practical judgement in reappropriating exemplary principles within specific historical contexts. See Althusius, Politica, 9-10, 143 & 159.

attunement to a higher reality, traditionally symbolised as God. Hence the covenant is best understood as a 'symbol of order.'⁷⁹ The biblical covenant foregrounds symbiosis or mutual communication as the principle of right order within the realm.⁸⁰ On this basis, Althusius argues for a covenantal relationship between the realm and the King or magistrate as well as the realm and subsidiary associations.⁸¹ For the obligation to piety and justice

⁷⁹ Voegelin argues that noetic and pneumatic symbols are carriers of truth of a non-existent reality and that it is misleading to examine them as if they were propositional statements. The covenant with God need not be seen as a dogmatic fact but as an experiential symbol of the encounter with the divine. Does this mean we ought to neglect the historical dimension of the Judaeo-Christian symbol of the covenant? Voegelin admits that 'the encounter involving man with events . . . may culminate in a symbolism expressing concern with history.' However, Voegelin clarifies that the 'historical index' ascribed to phenomena cannot be abstracted from the 'transcendental texture' of history. Drawing attention to the double character of historical phenomena, he argues that even while they are objectified as occurrences in time and space, we cannot ignore the transcendental dimension of the experience. See Voegelin, "What is History" in Late Unpublished Essays, 34-35.

⁸⁰ Althusius, Politica, 142-143. For an account of the political use of the covenant ideal before and after Althusius, see Daniel Elazar, "The Political Theory of the Covenant: Biblical Origins and Modern Developments," in Publius 10, no.4 (Fall 1980): 19-24.

⁸¹ Hueglin notes that the covenant between the King and the people distinguishes Althusius from the monarchomachs who use the covenant merely to justify resistance but not in favour of popular participation in governance. See Hueglin, "Have We Studied the Wrong Authors?" 17.

cannot be confined to a single consociation, form of regime or authority.

There is a second reason why Althusius's political use of the Decalogue is best read in symbolic terms. He often claims that the city and the realm are "almost immortal."⁸² He explains this immortality in terms of the perpetual succession of generations as contrasted to the mortality of the rulers.⁸³ The symbiotic right which transforms a multitude into a community is the source of the immortality of the city and the realm. As images of the immortal, the realm as well as the city do not derive from the Bible in a dogmatic sense but mirror the longing for harmony and perfection. In forming consociations, individuals aspire towards the immortal; this is why the cities and the realm are not simply legal entities.

For these reasons, Althusius does not erect a theocratic regime or extend the jurisdiction of the secular powers to doctrinal matters. He regards piety as an individual affair and rejects coercion in matters of faith.⁸⁴ But the realm is not indifferent to religion. By

⁸² Althusius, Politica, 36.

⁸³ Althusius, Politica, 36 & 117.

⁸⁴ Although Althusius is less forthcoming on tolerance as compared to modern thinkers, he is clear that there can be no coercion in matters of faith. He also cautions against schisms and

relating different consociations in a just manner, it provides congenial conditions for piety. Althusius does not burden the realm with promoting theological virtues such as 'holiness of thought and desire' but with symbiotic virtues of mutual sharing and benevolence.⁸⁵ In essence, the biblical covenant provides a paradigm for an agreement that preserves the integrity of the parties even while binding them together.⁸⁶

Symbiotic politics thus reenacts the 'existential tension' embodied in the religious symbol of the covenant. It exemplifies human openness to the divine as a principle of social and political order. By balancing autonomy and solidarity, it captures the tension of human participation in a larger whole, both at the level of private associations such as the family and public associations such as the city and the realm. Because symbiotic politics entails an on-going search for a 'pious and just' order, the symbiotic realm cannot claim to be an absolute or complete representation of the divine or cosmic order.

intolerance. While denying that there can be two or more religions, he argues that the safety of the realm calls for utmost prudence in dealing with different faiths. See Althusius, Politica, 71-72.

⁸⁵ Althusius, Politica, 142-143.

⁸⁶ Daniel Elazar, "The Political Theory of the Covenant: Biblical Origins and Modern Developments," 11.

Swadeshi and Societal Federalism

In this light, Althusius's appeal to the biblical symbol need not inhibit a comparison with Gandhi's spiritual politics. Like Gandhi, Althusius does not invoke doctrines or dogma but the experience of partnership between the human and the divine in articulating symbiotic order. Like Gandhi, Althusius recognises the need to preserve a variety of associations and the role of trust in forging solidarity. Like Gandhi, Althusius draws a subtle distinction between the secular and the ecclesiastical without abandoning the possibility of a spiritual politics.

Admittedly, Gandhi's disinterested actor is not identical to Althusius's symbiotic partner. Gandhi is more preoccupied with the tension (not antithesis) between ordinary life (rooted in the ego-self) and the search for perfect freedom expressed in some Hindu symbols. Althusius evinces greater concern with just sharing in the family, collegia, city and the realm. However, as I pointed out before, Gandhi does not advocate other-worldliness nor is he oblivious to social justice. Similarly, Althusius does not erase the spiritual dimension of ordinary life. Further, there is a remarkable affinity between Gandhi's image of 'oceanic circles' to denote an overarching political order

geared to both freedom and community and Althusius's societal federalism. The concentric layout envisioned by Gandhi draws from the symbolism of the *yantra* or *mandala* which is a geometrical image of the cosmos radiating from a centre or *bindu*. The logic of composition of a *mandala* is such that the outer circles embrace the totality of manifestations of the divine while the inmost point represents the *atman* or the experience of the One. In concrete terms, Gandhi aspires towards a political order that can reflect the human predicament between the many and the One.⁸⁷

Although Althusius does not invoke the same metaphors, the symbiotic realm manifests an encompassing order that preserves the tension between the many and the One. It offers a glimpse of man's participation in a larger whole without destroying the autonomy of subsidiary associations. The pivot of the whole edifice is the

⁸⁷ In this context, Gandhi's image of concentric circles recollects the image of a sacred city within Hinduism. For instance, cities such as Madurai in south India or Kasi (Banaras) in north India symbolise the cosmos and celebrate the heterogeneity of Being in all its complexity and connectedness. Such cities are regarded as supreme but not unique because they not only refract the light of other sacred places but are also present elsewhere. At the same time, a city like Banaras also exemplifies transcendence or the extra-cosmic 'beyond' in that pilgrims also come to 'cross over' to the 'far shore' beyond the dualities of life and death. See Diana Eck, Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India (Pennsylvania: Anima Books, 1981), 73-74 and also Diana Eck, Banaras: City of Light (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), 39-41.

symbiotic right or the principled communication of goods, things and rights. Althusius does not reduce the symbiotic right to a set of formal rules or procedures. There are certain general principles enshrined in the fundamental law of the realm such as the principle, 'what concerns all should be approved by all.' At the same time, the 'proper laws' or the realisation of symbiosis in specific associations is a task for politics. Here, Althusius provides against the hegemony of any one association or one ruling authority by including both functional and territorial associations. The symbiotic realm provides for both a community based on rule of law and a community oriented to substantive goods such as the collegia.

These virtues make symbiotic politics more favourable to Gandhi's notion of *swadeshi* than Hegel's constitutionalism built upon recognition. For example, ecological degradation and lopsided development which often animate the call for *swadeshi* are often framed in terms of authentic ways of life or cultural specificity within a politics of recognition. If *swadeshi* is not based upon the uniqueness of indigenous traditions but upon the eternal principles of order intimated in such traditions, then the politics of recognition may be necessary but not sufficient. For Gandhi does not summon us simply to preserve the indigenous but to

transfigure politics as a whole in the light of the human search for transcendence exemplified in some traditions.

In my view, symbiotic politics, with its emphasis on consociational autonomy and solidarity offers one path by which *swadeshi* can be explored. In functional and regional consociations, it would be feasible to address *swadeshi* not only in terms of indigenous traditions but also in terms of civic institutions. True, robust conceptions of nature or cosmos underlying some indigenous traditions cannot be easily reconciled with the principle of self-determination animating modern civic institutions. However, symbiotic federalism allows us to pursue the question of commitment to one's own country or tradition (*swadeshi*) in a more differentiated manner. For instance, the collegia of teachers or philosophers may address the question of *swadeshi* in a manner different from the collegia of engineers. In other words, a symbiotic realm provides multiple sites upon which the dialogue can take place. While such a dialogue may be neither cogent nor conflict free nor produce quick results, it can foster the practice of trust and civility in forging a just order.

In the course of reviving trust in modern constitutions to reverse atomism, this spiritual thrust, so pronounced in Althusius and Gandhi needs to be foregrounded.

This does not mean that constitutions have to incorporate a charter of beliefs or pursue salvation. Nor does it mean evolving a civil religion. By tuning into the spiritual experience underlying religious or philosophical symbols, we can rearticulate the tension between our location in time and space and our search for the eternal within the debates on the constitution, community or multi-culturalism. In spite of the repeated proclamations of the death of God or gods, the search for the eternal survives in camouflaged forms.⁸⁸ The question is one of illuminating the impasse of identity and difference and globalism and tribalism in terms of the human quest for transcendence.

Conclusion

Focusing on Althusius's notion of symbiotic federalism, I have attempted to gather together some of the themes discussed in the earlier chapters. Althusius argues that the end of politics is 'holy and just symbiosis.'

⁸⁸ Voegelin comments that 'the God who is declared dead is alive enough to have kept his undertakers nervously busy' in the debates about whether he is substance or subject or both, whether he is personal or impersonal and so forth. See Voegelin, "Reflective Distance vs. Reflective Identity," in Order and History, vol.V, 67. Further, the current trend towards the totally 'Other' needs to be demystified. The popularity of exotic cults, science fiction, UFO's, 'spiritual channelling,' archaic rituals, adventure etc. show that the human search for mysterious ground thrives albeit faintly.

Symbiotic justice or right is explicated mainly in terms of some general norms drawn from the diversity of social and civil life. Although symbiotic right does not prefigure all the cardinal features of modern constitutionalism, it foregrounds civility, trust and prudence.

Given the constitutive role of cities and provinces, Althusius's federal and sovereign realm is less prone to centralisation than that of Hegel's. At the same time, Althusius shows that constitutionalism is not about forging a collective democratic will but about coordinating the diversity of associational life. As such, it involves practical judgement and prudence. He is thus a useful reminder that enhanced local or regional autonomy does not dissolve the question of authority and order. At a time when all authority is vilified as will to power, it is necessary to recall that sovereignty has been conceived at least once before us, in a non-statist and non-nationalist sense.

In my view, symbiotic politics offers a way of dealing with the question of community not only in terms of cultures but in terms of civil virtues such as trust and mutual respect. For Althusius, trust implies not simply a recognition of particular interests but also an attunement to the heterogeneity of human existence. Trust is mediated in terms of a series of covenants on different sites such as

the collegia, cities and the realm. This does not mean that all citizens have to be constitutional experts. It simply means that consent and participation are shaped through the continuous practise of ruling and being ruled, fellowship and caring for common goods, the foremost among which is the symbiotic right.

Like Gandhi, Althusius links symbiotic virtues to the human experience of transcendence. The covenant is not simply a contract based on mutual interests but a reenactment of the exemplary covenant between God and man. Here, my point is not that we need to reinforce civil religion to reclaim the modern constitution as the focus of community. Gandhi's appeal to disinterested action as well as Althusius's appeal to the covenant show that forging trust and community require an attunement to the paradoxical quest for a larger order. Man not only seeks freedom as recognition but also freedom in terms of a transpersonal ground. Without an effort to resymbolise this latter quest, our efforts at reviving community or civil society may be endangered by fanaticism, nostalgia or moral righteousness. While symbiotic federalism or *swadeshi* do not promise reenchantment, they make room for some virtues which are indispensable in steering through the contemporary crisis of

human consciousness namely, civility, solidarity and practical judgement in politics.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Having declared the 'end of history' and the triumph of American liberal democracy, Francis Fukuyama has begun to acknowledge the salience of some 'cultural habits' such as reciprocity and trust. To this end, he calls for reviving the art of association and 'languages of good and evil.'¹ All the thinkers who have figured in this thesis will concur with Fukuyama on the relevance of trust for human affairs in general and politics in particular. However, Taylor, Radhakrishnan, Hegel, Gandhi and Althusius are also keenly aware of the spiritual and religious sources which nourish trust and community and the erosion of some of these sources within modernity.

Charles Taylor traces one path through this dilemma by focusing on the romantic strand within modern thought. Returning to Rousseau and Herder, Taylor argues that modern freedom is constituted by the search for an authentic identity rather than abstract and formal rights. To be free implies discovering one's original way of being in and through dialogue with others. Such a dialogue discloses the constitutive role of culture and language in shaping our autonomy. On this basis, Taylor calls for the recognition of

¹ Francis Fukuyama, Trust, 10-11 & 35.

communal identities to reverse the malaises of modernity such as atomism and social fragmentation. In other words, reviving trust in liberal modernity implies recognising and preserving distinct cultural and communal identities.

While agreeing with Taylor on the need for a differentiated narrative of modernity, I have expressed some doubts regarding the accent on unique linguistic and cultural identities in articulating common goods. What if a specific community defines its uniqueness in terms of a hierarchical order or a religious world view? Taylor contends that liberalism is a 'fighting creed' and is open to some forms of communal claims and not others. This selective openness to some claims is not arbitrary but is anchored in the spiritual and Christian roots of liberal modernity. For instance, confronted with a challenge to the liberal distinction between politics and religion, Taylor clarifies that this dichotomy flows from Christianity.

At this level, the question of community within liberalism appears to involve more than an assertion of unique identity; it calls for an exegesis of the experiences of transcendence encrusted in religious and spiritual symbols and practices. My main contention against Taylor's advocacy of the politics of recognition is that it does not

illuminate the human longing for transcendence in the quest for a larger order.

This problem is not unique to Taylor or the West. It surfaces in Ashis Nandy's polemic against 'post-Enlightenment' modernity and his turn to indigenous traditions. In spite of the anti-West tone of this Indian version of authentic community, it is formulated in terms of the 'rights' of indigenous knowledges or 'recognition' for subaltern traditions. Nandy wants to retrieve a non-dualistic world view from within subaltern traditions and yet, his own argument is replete with binary oppositions between the subaltern and the modern, West and East. It appears to me that this contradiction is inevitable if we phrase the demand for community in terms of unique or authentic identities. To break out of this impasse, I returned to the philosophical and religious sources that animate the search for authenticity in the west or spiritual politics in India.

Focusing on Hegel, I argued that modern freedom is not simply about will to power but about forging norms and institutions. Like the current communitarians, Hegel recognises the role of intermediary institutions in civil society. However, he is intensely aware of the potential and limits of modern civil society.

Civil society is at once an achievement of and a threat to freedom. It affirms the right to individual freedom from pre-given hierarchies and inherited status; it is also torn asunder by a proliferation of particular rights. Given this dance of the particular, Hegel realises that strong communal attachments are not possible for us moderns. But this does not mean that civil society is bereft of ethics. The ethical basis of civil society is rooted in trust. Trust differs from the intimacy and love of the family as well as the patriotic zeal of the nation. It is halfway between formal acquiescence and complete identification vis-a-vis the constitutional state. For Hegel, trust is fostered through the recognition of the right of particularity in civil society. The task of intermediary associations such as the corporation is to recover and enhance this ethical dimension of modern freedom. Civic virtue is less about patriotic enthusiasm than about cultivating civility, trust and rectitude by grasping the inner reason of modern norms and institutions.

Just as Hegel steers clear of thick attachments without surrendering to formal or atomistic freedom in civil society, he avoids reconstructing the constitutional state as an arbitrary arrangement of offices or an instrument of a nation. The modern constitution is not simply a product of

force or contract but an articulation of the different moments of self-determination. It exemplifies the affinity and tension between the subjective and objective, universal and particular, formal and substantive poles of modern freedom. This dimension of Hegel's thought is best evident in his approach to *volksgeist* or the 'spirit of a people.' Hegel realises that modern constitutionalism has to resonate with the 'spirit of a people' if it is to thrive. But this does not mean that the constitutional state has to preserve distinct cultural or religious identities. The constitutional state claims trust on the ground of promoting freedom rather than unique identities. Caught up as we are between a Rousseauian longing for community and a Nietzschean suspicion towards universals, Hegel is useful reminder of (what Arendt calls) the 'exemplary validity' of modern institutions.

Hegel not only has much to say to the communitarians in the west but also to thinkers who articulate similar concerns in terms of 'spiritual politics' in India. By demonstrating the inner affinity between Protestantism and modern ethical life in the family, civil society and the state, he clarifies the spiritual roots of modern freedom. Hegel does not argue for a Christian state; rather, he affirms the irrevocable nature of modern freedom.

But this does not mean that Hegel's thought needs to be affirmed in all respects. He may be criticised for assigning a restricted role to the corporations, the primacy accorded to the civil service and the reliance on territorial sovereignty. In this respect, I have argued that Hegel's insights regarding constitutionalism and corporations may have to be reappropriated in terms of a societal federalism. Similarly, Hegel's reconciliation between Protestantism and modern ethical life can be criticised for its presuppositions about faith in general and non-Christian conceptions of the spirit in particular. I have argued that Hegel's characterisation of faith as 'mere feeling' or belief misses the tensional nature of the experience of the divine. This is particularly evident in his attack on *brahman* as abstract 'dream state.' In raising the spectres of arbitrariness or other-worldliness, Hegel is unwilling to entertain the paradox of immanence-transcendence disclosed in the experience of the divine and its symbolisations.

By way of Radhakrishnan's analysis of spiritual experience and Gandhi's practice of spiritual politics, I have attempted to highlight the tensional character of trust and faith. Focusing on the Gita symbol of disinterested action, Gandhi clarifies that faith and trust emanate from

the human quest for the ground of being. This quest is open-ended and reveals our situatedness in-between immanence and transcendence, ignorance and wisdom and life and death.

In this light, Gandhi's practice recasts both individual freedom and community. Freedom is not simply about gaining recognition but about transcending the pairs of opposites rooted in the ego-self. It is about tuning into consciousness as both the site and sensorium of the ground of being. Such attunement does not imply a rejection of the body-mind or the world; rather, it requires living and acting in the world as if one were both actor and spectator. Similarly, Gandhi attempts to preserve the tension between immanence and transcendence with respect to our search for a community. His argument for *swadeshi* or one's own country is a call to forge a community that mirrors the human search for transcendence. Just as clinging to the ego hampers the pursuit of freedom, so also clinging to inherited customs obscures ambivalent character of belonging. Gandhi often appeals to the community of sages and seers who are both insiders and outsiders with respect to traditions. He is less interested in preserving the uniqueness of indigenous traditions than in the eternal truths intimated in them. Gandhi's experiments in the *ashrams* and service organisations show that the reenactment of immanence-

transcendence or in-betweenness is intrinsic to the search for community.

In this context, I have argued that Gandhi's spiritual politics directs us to explore and illuminate liberal constitutionalism. His own affirmation of secularism as well his withdrawal from power politics flow from his understanding of the paradoxical nature of the human quest for freedom and belonging. He trusts such institutions like the rule of law or representative government. This affirmation is not simply a product of the recognition of the particular as in Hegel but stems from the practice of self-dispossession. Hence, he does not reverse the separation between the state and religion even while aspiring toward a spiritual politics. He would thus concur with the current call for revitalising civil society and community. And yet, he would point to the limits of recognition and identity politics. For him, an 'inclusive' politics has to reenact the paradox of our movement in-between immanence and transcendence, the many and the one.

To map the contours of such an inclusive politics, I have examined Althusius's notion of symbiotic federalism. Writing before the entrenchment of the nation-state, Althusius conceives of politics as the art of initiating and maintaining a 'just and pious' social life. Neither justice

nor piety are defined in abstract or theological terms. For Althusius, politics is about ordering the heterogeneity of social life. To this end, he invests sovereign power in the fundamental law or symbiotic right of the realm. The symbiotic right of the realm builds upon a series of covenants between subsidiary associations such as cities and provinces. Alongside territorial associations, Althusius includes associations like the family and the collegia. At every juncture, Althusius grasps that politics involves balancing the autonomy of different associations with solidarity. Both the family and the city are political and yet, they articulate different kinds of symbiosis. In politicising the private sphere, Althusius neither glorifies the family as the exclusive site of moral virtues nor reduces it to a realm of intimacy. Symbiosis in the family derives from symbiosis at the level of the larger realm. As we try to redeem the family from excessive politicisation, it may be useful to remember that the task is not simply one of disburdening the state but a larger one of reconstructing modern constitutionalism as a whole. What Althusius's federalism reveals is that trust and civility flourish when politics is attuned to the heterogeneity of human existence. At the same time, heterogeneity is not mere plurality. It is about recollecting the tension of human existence.

Subsidiarity, covenantal politics and *swadeshi* are instructive as attempts to recapture and resymbolise the pull of the divine. We need not adopt the details of Althusius's realm; his thought invites us to redeem the existential sources of trust while endeavouring to rekindle civil society and community.

In the absence of such an inquiry into the deeper sources of trust and faith, the summons for community, presently resonant across cultures and intellectual disciplines, is likely to lapse into nostalgia for glorious founding moments or a celebration of alternative lifestyles. Already, these dangers are evident in the politics of the Bharatiya Janata Party which, in the name of a golden Hindu past, attempts to reduce the question of community to one of religious identities. Ironically, the appeal to Hindu symbols and Hindu tolerance, formulated in terms of preserving a Hindu identity, unleashes violent destruction and intolerance against the Muslims.

In a less dangerous version, a similar fate lurks behind the euphoria of multiculturalism in the West. Curiously, the love for the 'Other' is tinged with a profound suspicion of transcendence. As such, the construction of a sand *mandala* by Tibetan Buddhists, is at best, an event for consciousness-raising about human rights

violations and at worst, a piece of performance art. Somewhere along the line, the mystery of the cosmos and the extra-cosmic ground of being symbolised by a *mandala* is lost. By the same token, the Socratic invocation, 'know ThySelf' is demystified as an exercise in essentialism or Eurocentrism. We are left wondering over the fact that Ramana Maharshi, in a completely different space and time, also reminds every seeker who questions about the existence of God or the world, "Know the Self."

But neither the BJP politics nor the parade of identity and difference is a cause for despair about the salience of religious and philosophical symbols of order in thinking through freedom and community. In the midst of deconstructing western metaphysics, Heidegger reminds us that recovering ethical life implies experiencing the 'essence' of being human. To be human is to dwell in the 'nearness of Being' and Being is 'transcendens pure and simple.' Without denying the distance between Heidegger's notion of transcendence and Hindu symbols, we should also pay heed to the astonishing *Upanisadic* tone of the following:

"Being" ---that is not God and not a cosmic ground.
Being is farther than all beings and is yet nearer to
man than every being, be it a rock, a beast, a work of

art, a machine, be it an angel or God. Being is the nearest. Yet the near remains farthest from man.²

To see a parallel with *Upanisadic* symbolisation of *brahman* as that "which moves and does not move; It's far away and yet it is near at hand; It is within this whole world and yet it is also outside this whole world," is not to say that Heidegger was 'influenced' by Hinduism.³ My point is that the question of transcendence is far from dead in our postmodern (non)time.

By reenacting the paradox of 'that which is near and yet far,' we may begin to see that the crisis of trust and communal belonging is not only about abandoning the 'unencumbered self' and affirming the constitutive character of history and culture. In the spirit of *brahman* which is often described as 'not this, not that,' I have suggested that the quest for community is not exhausted in identity or authenticity. At the same time, I have tried to grasp the meaning of the saying, "*brahman* is all this" and hence the dialogue with those who affirm the indigenous traditions and the historically contingent communities.

In different degrees, this paradoxical immanence-transcendence glimmers in the thinkers I have probed in the

² Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," 210.

³ The citation is from Isa Upanisad, verse 5 in Upanisads, trans. Patrick Olivelle, 249.

present inquiry. Hegel would agree that the dialectic exists but also push us to reconcile the two. The enduring appeal of Gandhi or Voegelin consists in the fact that they preserve the tension between the two poles and resist hypostatizing either. As Voegelin never tired of reminding us, human existence is situated in the *metaxy* or the in-between. The in-between is not only about the interstitial space that arises from our finitude or plurality. The in-between discloses our nearness and even oneness with the eternal. Only by remembering and reenacting the experience underlying the paradoxical symbols can we learn to tremble a little less before the 'beyond.' Only then can we see that community is not so much about preserving different interpretations of the common human condition of 'birth, copulation and death' but about transcending pairs of opposites. As the Zen teachers say, it is to experience the paradox of one's face before one's parents were born. Needless to say, there are thinkers such as Martin Buber or Kitaro Nishida or Paul Tillich whose reflections may further illuminate the links between freedom, community and transcendence.

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