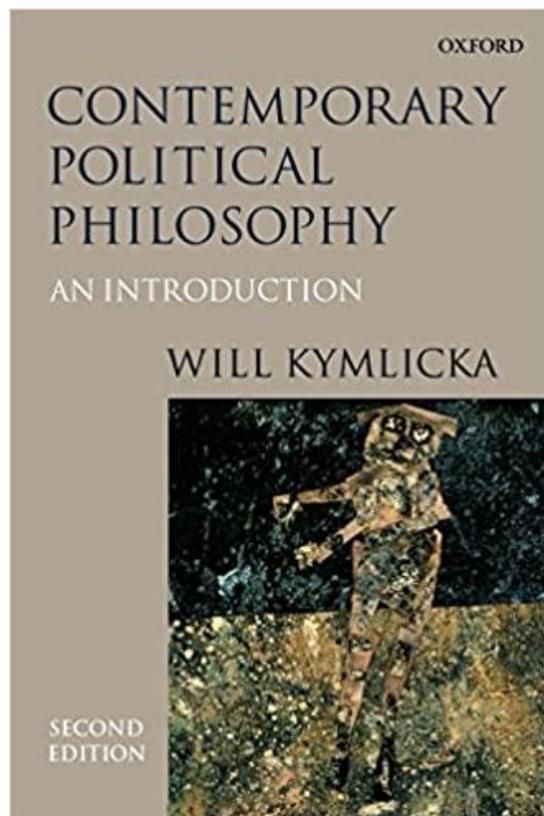


Classic Text 31 – Political Philosophy: Communitarianism

Communitarianism is a relatively recent political philosophy that emphasises the relationship between the individual and the community alongside, if not prior to, notions of liberty and equality. In this study unit we follow chapter 6: *Communitarianism* of Will Kymlicka's (2002) *Contemporary Political Philosophy* (2nd ed.), which may be downloaded for free [here](#). (Under South Africa copyright law individual chapters may be reproduced for educational purposes.)

Although Kymlicka treats the various arguments in favour of communitarianism according to their merits and according to the principle of charitable interpretation, he does not allow the hard-won rights of liberty and equality to be overridden or subverted in the interests of any ideology.



According to Kymlicka, until recently, most liberal philosophers have had little to say about the idea of community. Since the 1980's however an entire school of political philosophy has arisen, with the central claim that the values of community should be considered alongside with liberty and equality. According to communitarians, the value of community is not (sufficiently) acknowledged in liberal theories of justice or in the public culture of liberal societies. (p. 208)

As we saw in Classic Text 12, community was a defining feature of the communist ideal, which could only be achieved by revolution, the overthrow of capitalism and the reconstruction of a socialist society. Contemporary communitarians however point out that "community already exists, in the form of common social practices, cultural traditions, and shared social understandings". Community therefore does not need to be reconstructed *de novo*; instead it needs to be respected and safeguarded.

According to Amy Gutmann (1985) contemporary communitarians are inspired by Hegel in his desire to reconcile people to their world. There are many similarities between communitarian critiques of modern liberalism and Hegel's critique of classical liberal theory. Classical liberals such as Locke and Kant tried to come to an understanding of universal human needs and rationality, using this ahistorical conception to evaluate existing social and political affairs. Hegel, on the other hand, dismissed this *Moralität*, referring to the sphere of morality, as too abstract and individualistic to provide much guidance, since it neglected the way in which humans are embedded in their historical context and relations. Hegel's alternative, *Sittlichkeit*, referring to the sphere of ethical life, emphasizes the way that human welfare, identity and our capacity for moral agency is bound up with the community to which we belong, including family, civil society and the State. (Kymlicka p. 209)

According to Kymlicka, “Echoes of this contrast between *Moralität* and *Sittlichkeit* can be found in many contemporary communitarian writings.” The latter accuse modern liberals of espousing an abstract, individualist approach rather than a contextualized, community sensitive one. However for contemporary communitarians there are also specific issues reflecting more recent concerns about the nature of community in Western democracies. Although contemporary communitarians are united in their belief that political philosophy should take more cognoscence of shared practices and understanding within each society, they also believe that this requires a modification of traditional liberal principles of rights and justice. Where they differ is how this should be achieved. (p. 209)

Kymlicka discerns three distinct, sometimes inconsistent, strands of communitarian thought:

- The belief that community *replaces* the need for principles of justice
- The belief that community and justice are consistent however the value of community requires us to modify our conception of justice. This divides into two camps:
 - The belief that community should be seen as the *source* of principles of justice
 - The belief that community should play a greater role in the *content* of principles of justice (p. 209 - 210)

Community and the Limits of Justice

According to some communitarians, the principles of justice are not needed in a true community. While Marxists regard the idea of justice as purely “remedial” of material scarcity, communitarians, on the other hand, regard the principles of justice as defective because they lack the “more noble” virtues of benevolence or solidarity. Michael Sandel (1982), for one, argued that if people responded to the needs of others out of love or shared goals, then they would not need to claim their rights. By way of example, he suggests that the family is just such a social institution in which justice is not needed; where a preoccupation with justice would diminish the sense of love and thereby lead to conflict. However this is not the experience of most parents of siblings who will tell you that children who are old enough to grasp the concept have a fierce and independent sense of justice, and that the only way to avoid sibling rivalry is to be absolutely judicious in treating them with equal concern. In no way does this diminish or displace love. (Kymlicka p. 210)

Elsewhere Kymlicka discredits the idea of justice as a purely remedial virtue. (p. 173 - 175) He also points out in the section above that justice does not preclude persons from altruistically choosing to forego their rights. On the contrary, justice simply ensures that such decisions are voluntary and that no one can arbitrarily subordinate another person against their will. Justice moreover facilitates loving relationships while safeguarding them against the abuse of power. (p. 210)

Justice and Shared Meanings

Many communitarians agree with Rawls about the importance of justice; however they claim that liberals misinterpret justice as an ahistorical, external standard for passing judgement on the way of life of all societies. While utilitarians, liberal egalitarians and libertarians disagree about the nature of justice, they all agree that their political theory provides a standard against which all societies

should be judged. They do not consider it an indictment that local beliefs may be in conflict with their theory. (p. 210 - 211)

Potential conflict with local beliefs is seen by liberals as a motivation for deliberating on justice. The various theories of justice provide a stable platform for questioning our beliefs and ensuring that they are not simply local prejudices. According to Ronald Dworkin (1985):

In the end, political theory can make no contribution to how we govern ourselves except by struggling, against all the impulses that drag us back into our own culture, towards generality and some reflective basis for deciding which of our traditional distinctions and discriminations are genuine and which spurious. (p. 219)

So for Dworkin, justice should be our arbiter not our echo. (Kymlicka p. 211)

Michael Walzer (1983) however argues that there is no such thing as perspective external to the community. We simply cannot step out of our historical or cultural context. Accordingly, the only way to identify the requirements of justice is to appreciate how each community understands the value of social goods. Therefore a society is just in so far as it acts in accordance with the shared understandings of its members, as embodied in their cultural practices and institutions. Hence, identifying principles of justice is more akin to cultural anthropology than philosophical argument. (Kymlicka p. 211)

Walzer's theory is a form of cultural relativism where what is right or just is defined as relative to each community, society or culture. Besides the inherent circularity in any form of relativism; Kymlicka raises two further objections to communitarian attempts to define justice in terms of a community's shared understandings: Firstly, according to cultural relativism, slavery is wrong if it conflicts with our community values. However this is not how most people understand it. Slavery is wrong and that explains why, as a society, we are against it. That something is wrong is a reason for our collective condemnation, not the other way round as communitarians would have it. Secondly, it is not clear how we should identify a community's shared understandings about justice, especially if we take into consideration the weak and marginalised and not just the voices of authority. Moreover, people of all stripes disagree about such things as the role of government in the provision of health care (which Walzer endorses). They also disagree about affirmative action (which Walzer opposes). Therefore we need a more general conception of justice to resolve these disagreements. So, even if we start with local understandings, our disagreements and our own critical assessments urge us towards a more general, less parochial point of view. (p. 211 - 212)

Individual Rights and the Common Good

Communitarians are not opposed to the liberal emphasis on justice; however they are concerned with their emphasis on "individualism". While again, communitarians are not opposed to individual rights or personal freedom, they are opposed to the way that liberal theories neglect the extent to which individual freedom and wellbeing can only be realised within the community. Given the dependence of human beings on society, we are beholden as much to foster and sustain the common good as our rights to individual liberty. "Hence, communitarians argue, the liberal 'politics of rights' should be abandoned for, or at least supplemented by, a 'politics of the common good'." (p. 212)

This belief is at odds with most Western conceptions of justice, including utilitarianism, liberalism, libertarianism, and (Kantian) Marxism, according to which we should show equal concern for people's interests, by letting them choose for themselves what sort of life they want to lead. Though they may disagree about what sorts of rights and resources best enable people to pursue to their own conception of the good, they do agree that denying them this self-determination fails to treat them as equals. Communitarians however challenge many of our ordinary assumptions about the nature and value of self-determination. *E.g.* they argue that liberals misconstrue our capacity for self-determination and neglect the social preconditions required for self-determination to be meaningfully exercised. (p. 212)

Many liberals regard the value of self-determination as self-evident: Allowing people to be self-determining is to respect them as fully moral beings. Denying people self-determination is to treat them as children or non-human animals, rather than fully fledged members of the community. But is this naïve? Many people are not in a position to make the difficult decisions that life requires. Some choose foolishly to devote themselves to trivial, degrading or even harmful pursuits. So should we intervene and stop such people from choosing foolishly and wasting or ruining their lives? Would respecting such people's self-determination amount to indifference – abandoning them to their unfortunate fate? According to Dworkin (1981), it is “the final evil of a genuinely unequal distribution of resources” that some people “have been cheated of the chance others have had to make something valuable of their lives.” (p. 219) Even then, there are those who *have* had the chance to make something valuable of their life but haven't or couldn't. Kymlicka asks, “Do we not have obligations here too?” (Kymlicka p. 212 - 213)

Liberals do allow for acts of paternalism *e.g.* in dealing with children, the insane or those temporarily incapacitated. They also allow for the compulsory wearing of seatbelts or facemasks during an epidemic. However, apart from such exceptions, liberals insist that every competent adult should enjoy a sphere of self-determination that should be respected by others. Here Kymlicka paraphrases Mill:

[I]t is the right and prerogative of each person, once they have reached the maturity of their years, to interpret for themselves the meaning and value of their experiences. For those who pass the threshold of age and mental competence, the right to be self-determining in the major decisions in life is inviolate.

But surely this threshold is arbitrary. There are those who have attained the “age of reason” and would pass a test of “mental competency”, who continue to make terrible choices about how to lead their lives. So should governments not intervene and decide for its citizens what sort of life is best for them? (p. 213)

Marxist perfectionism, for example, prohibits people from engaging in alienating labour. They identify the good life with one of productive labour on the grounds that it makes us distinctly human. But this is only one conception of the good. It is possible for governments to intervene paternalistically to encourage other “advantageous” ways of life over others. For example, artists in Ireland are exempt from paying income tax on the proceeds of their work. Professional wrestlers on the other hand are taxed according to the usual scale. Defenders of this policy do not pretend that the artistic life is the only or even the most important life worth living, only that given the two options: art vs. professional wrestling, the former is more valuable. (p. 213 - 214)

According to liberals however, no matter how plausible or well-intended, such a practice is an illegitimate restriction on self-determination. If there are willing participants and spectators to support the events, then an anti-wrestling policy is not justified in restricting people's free choice of leisure. What about other leisures such as pornography? Surely people can be mistaken about the value of their activities. Liberals would deny this: even if individuals are not always right, only individuals themselves can be the best judges of what is most valuable to them in life. Value judgements, unlike factual judgements are not subject to rational justification or criticism; they are subjective choices. According to Kymlicka, "Self-determination involves deciding what to do with our lives... At the most general level, our aim is to lead a good life, to have those things that a good life contains. [However,] leading a good life is different from leading the life we currently believe to be good." We may come to realise that were mistaken about the value our current preferences. Perhaps after many years devoted to following professional wrestling or pornography, we may realise that we have been wasting our lives pursuing trivial goals instead of matters of great importance. We deliberate, or we should deliberate, carefully about such matters because we know we could be wrong, not just about our predictions or uncertainties, but also because we may come to regret our decisions even if everything turned out as we had planned. (p. 214 - 215)

Such deliberation is not only about maximising outcomes consistent with a particular set of unquestioned values, it is also about questioning and agonising over what values we truly regard as worthy of pursuing. According to Rawls (1980),

As free persons, citizens recognize one another as having the moral power to have a conception of the good. This means that they do not view themselves as inevitably tied to the pursuit of the particular conception of the good and its final ends which they espouse at any given time. Instead, as citizens, they are regarded as, in general, capable of revising and changing this conception on reasonable and rational grounds. Thus it is held to be permissible for citizens to stand apart from conceptions of the good and to survey and assess their various final ends. (p. 544)

That we can "stand apart"¹ or "step back" and question their value to us only makes sense on the assumption that our authentic interest is in living a good life, not necessarily the one we currently believe to be good. (Kymlicka p 215)

The difference between trivial and worthwhile activities really matters to us, even if we are sometimes unsure which is which. Dworkin (2000) makes the distinction between **volitional interests** for which there are no wrong or right answers, such as whether we prefer chocolate instead of vanilla, and **critical interests** where we make fallible judgements about what is truly worthwhile. (p. 242 - 254) Therefore any political theory worth its salt should take this difficulty and fallibility into account. (Kymlicka p. 215)

Notwithstanding, our good is tied up with cultural practices that we share with others in our community, so that a case could be made for a well-intentioned perfectionist government to intervene on our behalf to make better choices in our conception of the good. However, liberals point out that life is better when led from the "inside", rather than from the "outside", according to values that a person may not endorse. Prayer, for example, may be a valuable activity, but only if

¹ Our word 'ecstasy' comes from the Greek ἐκστασις (ékstasis) for 'stand outside (of oneself)'.

one believes it is worthwhile doing. Any paternalistic policy that tries to override or bypass people's beliefs about value or what Dworkin (1989) calls the **endorsement constraint**, is self-defeating. As Kymlicka points out, "If I do not see the point of an activity, then I will gain nothing from it. Hence paternalism creates the very sort of pointless activity that it was designed to prevent." (p. 216)

So, we have two preconditions on our interest in leading a good life: leading our life from the inside in accordance with our beliefs about what is valuable to our lives and being free to examine such beliefs in the light of what culture provides. This is only possible if we have access to the cultural resources and the personal liberty to do so, without being penalized for unorthodox choices, be they religious, sexual, political, aesthetic *etc.* Hence the traditional liberal emphasis on a well-rounded education, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom of information, freedom of artistic expression *etc.* Such liberties enable us to judge for ourselves what is valuable in our lives. (p. 216 - 217)

According to Rawls, this account of self-determination should lead us to endorse a **neutral state** *i.e.* one that does not favour policies or actions justified by the intrinsic superiority or inferiority of conceptions of the good life, and does not attempt to sway people's judgement concerning the value of such conceptions. Rawls contrasts the idea of state neutrality with perfectionist theories that advocate particular values about what ways of life are considered most worthy or fulfilling. Perfectionists require that the state should distribute resources so as to encourage their conception of the good life. Under this arrangement, one's share of resources or the amount one contributes, depends on this view of the good life. People are therefore penalized if they follow their own conception of the good life not endorsed by the state. (Kymlicka p. 217)

When Kymlicka speaks about neutrality, he is not speaking about moral neutrality. On the contrary, **liberal egalitarianism** is a moral theory based on the intrinsic moral worth of individuals, race and gender equality and the notions of justice and fairness, equal opportunity, individual rights and responsibilities *etc.* Liberal egalitarianism also requires that the state should uphold and enforce such values and prohibit actions that violate them. However Rawls' and Dworkin's sense of neutrality is more circumscribed – focused solely on the intrinsic merits of different conceptions of the good life, so long as they respect the principles of justice. On this view, the role of the state is twofold: to protect the capacity of individuals to judge the worth of different conceptions of the good life for themselves, and to provide a fair distribution of rights and resources that enable them to pursue the life they choose. While the state may adjudicate between what rightfully belongs to one person and not another, it has no place in evaluating the intrinsic merits of a person's way of life, so long as it respects the principles of justice. (p. 217 - 218)

There is another sense in which liberals' use of the term 'neutrality' can be misunderstood. Neutrality in ordinary discourse often refers to the outcome or consequences of actions, rather than their justification. A 'neutral' policy in the ordinary sense would be one that ensured that the outcome of all conceptions of the good were guaranteed to fare equally well, no matter how ill-conceived or lavish they might be. However a liberal society requires people to pay for the costs of their choices, which seriously disadvantages those that are expensive and unattractive. Hence, for liberal neutrality, it is the justification of state policies that are neutral, not their outcome or consequences. According to Kymlicka, "State neutrality is simply the idea that there is no public ranking of the value of different (justice-respecting) ways of life." (p. 218)

Notwithstanding, even a liberal state must make some judgements about what is in people's best interests or well-being. When a liberal state tries to secure certain liberties, opportunities and resources for its citizens, it assumes that their lives will turn out better for such things. For some critics, this demonstrates that even liberal politics must incorporate some perfectionist ideals in developing their theory. However liberals distinguish between the sorts of *means* or resources that people require on the one hand, and the *ends* they choose to pursue with such means on the other. Even those who do not yet know what ends they might choose, such as those in Rawls' original position (under the veil of ignorance), could still agree on what resources are essential or useful for virtually any way of life. Kymlicka calls these "all-purpose means" that can be "used by individuals to help form, revise, and pursue their own particular conception of the good." (p. 218 - 219)

Communitarianism and the Common Good

Communitarians believe that the liberal ideal of a "neutral state" should be rejected in favour of a "politics of the common good". However, this can be misleading because they do not represent binary opposites. There is unquestionably a common good in liberal politics as well, because the aim of a liberal state is to promote the interests of its members. The common good for liberals is determined by political and economic means by which individual preferences are combined into social choice function. The liberal policy of state neutrality therefore is not a rejection of the common good but one of the means of achieving it. According to Rawls (1982 p. 172), individual preferences are given equal weight, not because they are regarded as having equal intrinsic value but because "they are not evaluated at all from a [public] standpoint." (Kymlicka p. 220)

According to Kymlicka however, the common good in a communitarian society is conceived of as a substantive conception of the good life and it is this conception that defines the community's "way of life". Thus, instead of the good life adapting itself to people's preferences, people's preferences are instead evaluated according to the standard of a good life offered by a communitarian society. A communitarian state therefore promotes conceptions of the good life that conform to the community's way of life, while discouraging those conceptions that are at variance with it. A communitarian state is therefore perfectionist, in that it involves a public ranking of the value of different ways of life. (p. 220)

Kymlicka asks: "Why should we prefer this 'politics of the common good' over liberal neutrality?" According to liberals, state neutrality is required for legitimate self-determination. Communitarians however, object to the liberal model of self-determination and to the connection liberals draw between self-determination and neutrality. (p. 221)

The Unencumbered Self

The liberal view of the self is of one that is free to question its participation in social practices and that is free to opt out of such practices should it choose. Thus, selves are not defined by their membership or participation in any particular social, economic, religious, sexual or recreational relationships because they are always free to question or reject any such relationship. According to Rawls (1971), "the self is prior to the ends which are affirmed by it". (p. 560) In other words, the self can always step back from any particular undertaking and question whether it is worth pursuing.

There are no ends that are exempt from revision by the self. This is known as the 'Kantian' view of the self because it was strongly endorsed by Immanuel Kant who believed that "the self is prior to its socially given role and relations, and is free only if it is capable of holding these features of its social situation at a distance and judging them according to the dictates of reason." (Taylor, 1979 p. 75 - 78, 132 - 133) (Kymlicka p. 221)

Communitarians oppose this view. They point out that the self is always "embedded" or "situated" in existing social practices and that we cannot always stand back and opt out of them as we choose. Instead, some of our social roles and relationships must be taken as given when it comes to personal deliberation. According to Alisdair MacIntyre (1981), we "all approach our own circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity Hence what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles." (p. 204 - 205) Therefore, we exercise self-determination within such roles, rather than by stepping back from ourselves. The role of the state in the politics of the common good should enable us to be more deeply immersed in and understanding of such roles. (Kymlicka p. 221)

Kymlicka discusses three communitarian arguments against the liberal account of the self and its ends; namely that the liberal view of the self is 1) empty, 2) violates our self-perceptions, and 3) ignores our embeddedness in communal practices. He adds a fourth objection in the footnote to the paragraph. (p 221)

1) According to Charles Taylor (1979), being free to question all our social roles is self-defeating because, "complete freedom would be a void in which nothing would be worth doing, nothing would deserve to count for anything. The self which has arrived at freedom by setting aside all external obstacles and impingements is characterless, and hence without defined purpose." For Taylor, true freedom must be "situated". The demand to be self-determining is indeterminate, therefore the desire to subject all aspects of our social situation to rational self-determination must be empty. According to Taylor, it "cannot specify any content to our action outside of a situation which sets goals for us, which thus imparts a shape to rationality and provides an inspiration for creativity". (p. 157) Instead, we must accept the goal that our situation "sets for us"; if not, then pursuit of self-determination is on a slippery slope towards Nietzschean nihilism, which rejects all communal values as ultimately arbitrary. And according to MacIntyre (1981, Ch 9), if we deny that communal values are 'authoritative horizons', then they will appear as arbitrary limits on our will, and hence our freedom will require rejecting them all". (Kymlicka p. 221 - 222)

According to Kymlicka however, this misconstrues the role of freedom in liberal thinking. If as Taylor argues, liberals claim that freedom to choose our projects is inherently valuable, *for its own sake*, then such a claim would be empty. As he correctly says, there must be some project that is worth pursuing or fulfilling. However the liberal concern for freedom does not displace these tasks and projects. On the contrary, the importance of such projects is precisely what motivates the liberal defence of freedom. Liberals do not pursue freedom for its own sake but because the tasks and projects we value are so important that we should be free to revise them or reject those that we may come to believe are no longer worthwhile. Similarly, liberals do not suppose that more choices for their own sake is necessarily a better thing. We do not suppose that the life of a person who receives 20 marriage proposals is even *ceteris paribus* better or more free than that of someone with fewer such choices. (p. 222 - 223)

Liberals and communitarians are in agreement that our life tasks and projects should be our primary concern. Where they differ is how we acquire them and judge their worth. According to Taylor above, we can only acquire such tasks by treating communal values as “authoritative horizons” which “set goals for us”. For liberals, on the other hand, we can detach ourselves from any particular social practice, should we choose. Society does not set tasks for us. Particular practices have no authority over us that is beyond our individual judgement, including possible rejection. We can and ought to acquire our own tasks through conscious deliberation, informed by a broad education instilled by the best understandings previous generations have had to offer us. Even then what we are offered are possibilities, which we may affirm or reject. “Nothing is ‘set for us’; nothing is authoritative before our judgement of its value.” (p. 223 - 224)

Of course, liberals do acknowledge that we must take some things as “given”, such as our present place in school, work or family. However, what we choose to substitute for the “given” in order to make meaningful judgements will be different for different individuals and according to different stages of life. At one stage a person may make certain choices about what is valuable given their commitment to the religious life, only to revise some of those choices later on given their commitment to family life. As Kymlicka points out, the question then is not whether we must take certain things as “given” in making judgements about the value of our tasks and projects, but whether we can question and possibly substitute for what is the “given”, or whether the “given” is set for us by community values. Taylor however has not shown that we ought to take community values as “given”, nor has he shown why weighing up community values for ourselves and possibly rejecting some of them should be empty. (p. 224)

It is however possible for communitarians to retreat to a slightly weaker position. Suppose they concede that we do obtain our purposes in the liberal manner above, we should nevertheless treat communal ends as authoritative because the liberal view relies on a mistaken account of the self. The account they refer to is that “the self is prior to its ends”, in the sense that we are free to question even our most steadfast convictions concerning the nature of the good life. According to Sandel (1982) however, the self is not prior to its ends, rather constituted by them, so that it is not possible to distinguish oneself from one’s ends. Instead selves are, at least partly, constituted by ends that we do not choose but must discover as part of our shared social context. (p. 55-59, 152 - 154) Therefore, our lives go better, not by having the capacity to select and revise our projects, but by having the capacity to discover these shared ends. Thus a politics of the common good, by expressing these shared constitutive ends, enables us to “know a good in common that we cannot know alone”. (p. 183) (Kymlicka p. 224)

Sandel supports this claim by two arguments which Kymlicka calls “self-perception” and “embedded-self” arguments. According to the first, Rawls’ view of the unencumbered self simply does not correspond with our deepest self-perception. If the self is prior to its ends then, our unencumbered self as a pure subject of agency and possession should be transparent to introspection. Instead what we perceive is “thick with particular traits”. (Sandel, 1982 p. 94, 100) On Rawls’ view, identifying characteristics as *mine* implies “some subject “me” standing behind them, at a certain distance”. (Sandel, 1984 p. 86) Thus to accept Rawls’ view, we would have to regard ourselves as a propertyless, disembodied, rather ghostly things in space. Or, as Richard Rorty (1985) put it: a kind of “substrate” lying “behind” my ends. (p 217) For Sandel however, our deepest self-perceptions

always include some motivations, which confirms that at least some of our ends are constitutive of the self. (Kymlicka p. 224 - 225)

According Kymlicka, the question of self-perception is misleading. Liberals do not make the empirical claim that they can perceive the self as prior to its ends, but rather that we can understand ourselves prior to our ends, in the sense that no end is exempt from reconsideration. For that to be meaningful, we must be able to envision our encumbered selves with potentially different motivations in order to reason about whether one or another may be more valuable to us. The imaginative act of perceiving the self prior to its *present* ends does not require that we can actually ever perceive ourselves unencumbered by any ends. Rather, it is always matter of practical reasoning comparing one encumbered self with another potential encumbered self. It may be that there are always some or other given ends within the self when engaging in such reasoning, but it does not follow that a particular end must always be constitutive of the self. (p. 225)

There is a further claim that Sandel must substantiate: not only can we not perceive a totally unencumbered self, but we cannot perceive ourselves encumbered by different ends. For this Sandel would have to supply a third argument which Kymlicka calls this the “embedded-self argument”. Such an argument would have to compare the communitarian view of practical reasoning as a matter of self-discovery, with the liberal view of practical reasoning as a matter of judgement. For liberals, the question of the good life requires us to make judgements about who we wish to become. For communitarians, it is a question about discovering who we already are. For liberals, the relevant question is, “What should I be, what sort of life should I lead?” For communitarians the relevant question is, “Who am I?” (p. 225)

Undoubtedly we do come by some knowledge of who we are by a process of introspective self-discovery, but this does not replace or foreclose judgements about how we wish to lead our lives. We are not trapped by our present attachments or by the goals we inherit or those we chose for ourselves earlier on in life. No matter how immersed we are in social practices, we are still free to question the personal value of such practices. At one point Sandel (1982) does allow that,

the bounds of the self [are] open and the identity of the subject [is] the product rather than the premise of its agency... The subject can, after all, make choices about which of the ‘possible purposes and ends, all impinging indiscriminately on its identity’ it will pursue, and which it will not. (p. 152)

It is not clear whether this view doesn’t simply collapse into the liberal position. There is however one difference: For Sandel, the self is constituted by its ends, yet the boundaries of the self are fluid; while for Rawls, the self is prior to its ends, and its boundaries are antecedently fixed. However the discrepancy over where to draw the boundaries of the self, if meaningful, is a question for the philosophy of mind, not one of political philosophy. (Kymlicka p. 226 - 227)

According to Sandel (1984), liberalism ignores the way we are embedded in our social roles. Instead he emphasizes that we are ‘self-interpreting beings’ capable of interpreting the meaning of our constituent attachments. (p. 91) However we ought to ask, whether we should reject some or all of them if what we come to regard what we interpret as trivial or degrading. On one interpretation of communitarianism, we cannot or should not. A Catholic housewife in a monogamous heterosexual marriage can interpret what it means to be a Catholic housewife, including her shared religious,

economic, and sexual practices. However she cannot or should not stand back and reject the attachments she finds herself in, namely those of a Catholic housewife. We can interpret the meanings of the roles we find ourselves in, but we cannot reject the roles themselves, or the goals at the heart of them, as worthless. Since these goals are constitutive of a person, the question of a good life can, at best, be one of how faithfully to interpret their meaning. (Kymlicka p. 227)

It is not clear whether all communitarians hold this view, since we can and do more than just interpret the meaning of the roles we find ourselves in. We can also question their value. Kymlicka suggests that perhaps communitarians do not deny this. Perhaps their view of embeddedness is not incompatible with the liberal idea of questioning our attachments and rejecting or revising them based on their value. If so then the advertised contrast between the liberal and communitarian views is a ruse. “[O]nce we agree that individuals are capable of questioning and rejecting the value of the community’s way of life, then the attempt to discourage such questioning through a ‘politics of the common good’ seems an unjustified restriction on people’s self-determination.” (p. 227 - 228)

The First Liberal Accommodation of Communitarianism: Political Liberalism

Although the communitarian conception of the embedded self is not accepted by most citizens of Western democracies, a number of liberals have gone some way to accommodate the position in such a way as to show that those who accept the communitarian conception of the self can still accept a *version* of liberalism known as “political liberalism”. (p. 228)

While liberals reject the broader communitarian critique, there is a narrower critique which many liberals take seriously. On this version, some communitarians accept the idea of rational revisability as compelling, even attractive to most citizens; however not *all* citizens. Thus, even if the communitarian conception of the embedded self is wrong in general, it is not wrong to claim that for *some* people, the conception of the embedded self is an accurate description of the way they see themselves. This is true of *some* strongly traditionalist groups, such as religious fundamentalists and isolated ethnocultural minorities. Such groups are weary of liberalism’s emphasis on autonomy. They fear that should their members become aware of other ways of life and the capacity to understand them and evaluate them, they might choose to abandon their way of life and their group. To prevent this, fundamentalist isolationist groups often raise their children and limit their education in such a way as to minimise the capacity for critical thinking and rational revisability. They also make it very difficult for members to conceive of or actually leave the group, ensuring that they remain “embedded” in the group. (p. 228)

For example, some minority religious groups forbid girls to be educated beyond a certain level. In South Africa, parents who object to a secular curriculum or do not want their children to be taught the principles of Natural Selection or Sex Education on religious grounds, simply school their children at home, where they can instil “traditional values”. On the other hand, some isolated religious minorities hold all property in common so that anyone who chooses to leave the group is reduced to complete poverty. Whether consciously or unconsciously intended, such measures limit the freedom of individuals to either question or revise their traditional practices. (p. 228 - 229)

Such practices fly in the face of the liberal commitment to individual freedom and autonomy; therefore the challenge for political liberalism is to provide a narrower communitarianism critique

which offers an account of how certain traditionalist groups conceive of themselves. Such a communitarian position would be considerably weaker because it would be relevant to only a subset of individuals. However, according to Kymlicka, it raises a question which many liberals take seriously: how ought a liberal state to deal with non-liberal minorities who do not value autonomy? Are liberals justified in imposing their belief about autonomy on them? (p. 229)

If a illiberal minority seeks to forcefully impose their traditionalist views on others, most people would agree that the state would be justified in preventing them from doing so, in the name of self-defence. But what if the group had no interest in influencing others, but simply wished to be left alone to conduct their affairs in accordance with their own illiberal, traditional norms? Would it then be wrong for liberals to impose their values on them? Is it not a form of *intolerance* to force a peaceful ethnic minority or religious sect, which poses no threat to outsiders, to restructure their community according to liberal principles? According to Kymlicka, these are difficult questions which have given rise to disputes both between liberals and non-liberals, but also within liberalism itself. On the one hand tolerance is a fundamental liberal value, yet promoting individual freedom or autonomy among illiberal groups seem to entail intolerance towards them. (p. 229)

There is thus a debate among liberals over whether to value autonomy or tolerance as fundamental; however there is a common concern that underlies the various contrasting views. There are many minority groups within liberal states that do not value personal autonomy and who restrict the ability of their members to question or oppose traditional practices. Liberal theory based on autonomy threatens to alienate such groups while tolerance-based liberalism may provide a wider base for the legitimacy of government. However Kymlicka is sceptical that new theories of political liberalism will remove or diffuse the conflict between liberal principles and illiberal groups. (p. 229 - 230)

Liberalism and tolerance are closely related, both conceptually and historically. According to Kymlicka,

The development of religious tolerance was one of the historical roots of liberalism. Religious tolerance in the West emerged out of the interminable Wars of Religion, and the recognition by both Catholics and Protestants that a stable constitutional order cannot rest on a shared religious faith. According to Rawls, liberals have simply extended the principle of tolerance to other controversial questions about the 'meaning, value and purpose of human life' (Rawls 1987: 4; 1985: 249; 1993a: xxviii).

But if liberalism can indeed be seen as an extension of the principle of religious tolerance, it is important to recognize that religious tolerance in the West has taken a specific form – namely, the idea of individual freedom of conscience. It is now a basic individual right to worship freely, to propagate one's religion, to change one's religion, or indeed to renounce religion altogether. To restrict an individual's exercise of these liberties is seen as a violation of a fundamental human right. (Kymlicka p. 230)

However there are other non-liberal forms of religious tolerance, such as the right of religious groups to freely organise their communities along illiberal lines. For example, in the **millet system** in place during the Ottoman Empire, Muslims, Christians and Jews were recognised as autonomous units or millets who were free to impose restrictive religious laws

on their own members. This system endured for about five centuries from 1456 until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War. Each non-Muslim millet had official recognition as a self-governing community headed by the relevant religious leader. Legal traditions and practices of each group, especially family status were respected and enforced throughout the empire. However relations between millets and the ruling Ottoman Turks were tightly regulated; in particular non-Muslims were not permitted to proselytize. Beyond this, collective freedom of worship in churches and synagogues was guaranteed, including education in their own schools. (p. 230 - 231)

According to Kymlicka, this system was generally humane, tolerant of group differences and remarkably stable. But it was not liberal because it did not recognise any principle of *individual* freedom of conscience. Since each millet was self-governing, so was their right to religious based governance, including the enforcement of religious orthodoxy. There was thus no scope for individual dissent or the freedom to change one's faith within each religious community. While the ruling Muslims did not interfere with how Christian and Jewish communities enforced their religious practices, they did suppress heretics within their own community: heresy and apostasy were punishable crimes. There were similar restrictions on individual freedom of conscience in the Christian and Jewish communities. (p. 231)

Some contemporary traditional minorities have, in the name of "tolerance", demanded federal systems along the lines of the millet model. However such tolerance is not the sort that liberals have endorsed. Historically, liberals have advocated a specific notion of tolerance that involves individual freedom of conscience, not simply the right to collective worship. Liberal tolerance protects the individual's right to dissent from their group; it also protects groups themselves from being persecuted by the state. Furthermore, it limits the power of illiberal groups to impede the liberty of their members and limits the power of illiberal states to restrict the right to collective worship. (p. 231)

According to Kymlicka, this demonstrates that although liberals have historically seen autonomy and tolerance as "two sides of the same coin", what characterises *liberal* tolerance is its commitment to autonomy – that individuals should be free to rationally evaluate and potentially revise their existing ends. (Mendus, 1989 p. 56) However, what about groups in a pluralistic society that do not value autonomy? Should liberals not try to find some alternative basis for liberal theory in order to accommodate such groups? In short, is there some form of liberal tolerance that is more tolerant of illiberal groups? (Kymlicka p. 231 - 232)

Rawls and others have been seeking such an alternative. This reformulated liberalism or **political liberalism** stands in contrast to **comprehensive liberalism** which incorporates the value of autonomy. According to Rawls, such a reformulation need not change the fundamental conclusions of his original theory, namely the greatest equal liberty principle, according to which everyone is has an equal right to basic liberties and the difference principle, according to which any unequal distribution of resources should favour the least well off. What Rawls does modify is his argument for these two principles, especially that for the principle of liberty. Accordingly, he proposes that there are several different arguments in favour of the protection of basic liberties, only some of which appeal to the value of autonomy. Different arguments will appeal to different groups in

society, but the hope is that there will be an **overlapping consensus** among groups on the necessity of upholding basic liberties, albeit for different reasons. (p. 232)

Rawls illustrates the idea of overlapping consensus by considering two important but different arguments for freedom of conscience. According to the first argument,

religious beliefs are “seen as *subject to revision* in accordance with deliberative reason”, and we need freedom of conscience because there “is no guarantee that all aspects of our present way of life are the most rational for us and not in need of at least minor if not major revision”. (1982 p. 25 - 29; emphasis Kymlicka)

In other words, we need religious liberty in order for us to rationally evaluate and potentially revise our conceptions of faith. According to the second argument,

religious beliefs are “regarded as *given and firmly rooted*”, and we need freedom of conscience because society contains “a plurality of such conceptions, each, as it were, non-negotiable”.

This second argument acknowledges the communitarian view of the person, but since we are all embedded in various competing religious groupings, we need to accept a principle of religious liberty that allows for freedom of conscience. (Kymlicka p. 232 - 233)

According to Rawls (1982) these two arguments “support the same conclusion” (p. 29) – “*i.e.* that recognizing the plurality of conceptions of the good within society, each of which is seen as fixed and beyond rational revision, has the same implications for individual liberty as affirming the *revisability* of each individual’s conception of the good.” Hence, both sides can develop an overlapping consensus concerning freedom of conscience, motivated by their own reasons. Moreover, Rawls believes that the idea of overlapping consensus can be generalized to other basic liberties, including freedom of association, speech, sexuality, and so on. (Kymlicka p. 233)

For Rawls, the overlapping consensus should be more than just a strategic compromise, it should be a principled agreement. Nor should the overlapping consensus be a *modus vivendi* or compromise “way of life” because each side lacks the power to impose what they truly believe or desire. Rather, both sides should accept the principles they arrive at as morally legitimate, albeit for different reasons and for different conceptions of the self. If so, both sides should arrive at an agreement they consider legitimate and stable because it does not depend on maintaining a power balance between opposing groups. However, should one group attain ascendancy in society, it should not seek to renege on the agreement. (p. 233)

Kymlicka however is not convinced; although he does concede that both arguments for religious liberty do support the same conclusion on some issues. Both the liberal and communitarian arguments support the conclusion that dominant religious groups should not impose their faith on minority religious groups – a form of *between group* tolerance. However both arguments do not endorse the same conclusion concerning individual freedom of conscience, *i.e.* the freedom of individuals *within each group* to question or reject their received beliefs. On the first argument, for example, heresy, proselytization, and apostasy are essential liberties, since they allow for rational revisability. On the second communitarian argument however, heresy, proselytization, and apostasy

are futile, disruptive, even dangerous because they encourage people to question their inherited beliefs, which should be sacrosanct. (p. 233)

Without dropping heresy, proselytization, and apostasy as essential liberties, communitarians and liberals will seemingly never reach an overlapping consensus. Therefore it may be tempting to allow communitarians to revert to a millet-like system in which such practices can be legally forbidden for their members. Yet Rawls does not allow for this. Because he endorses a fully liberal conception of conscience, he expects communitarian groups to accept that individuals have the power to revise, as well as to pursue, their own conception of the good. But why would traditionalist communitarian groups accept this? Rawls suggests two reasons, namely, it provides certain benefits, and does not involve any costs. According to the first: only a strong right to individual freedom of conscience can protect smaller religious groups (including communitarian religious groups) from the tyranny of larger religious groups. So even if the members of a communitarian group consider their religious doctrines as absolute, they still ought to endorse individual freedom of conscience as the best (or only) way of protecting themselves from oppression by other groups. "Once we recognize that a diversity of religions is an inevitable part of modern plural societies – this is part of what Rawls calls 'the fact of pluralism' – then individual civil liberties are the only way to protect minority religions." (p. 234)

According to Kymlicka however, this claim is wrong. As we can see from the Ottoman millet system, tolerance *between* groups can be achieved without accepting individual dissent *within* each group. While communitarian minorities may accept that freedom of conscience is *one* way of protecting themselves against the tyranny of the majority, they may not agree that it is the best or the only way. They may still prefer the millet model or some other model depending on the costs involved. (p. 234)

According to Rawls' second argument, even if communitarian groups do not endorse the full liberal right to individual freedom of conscience, they can at least accede to it because it does them no harm, nor does it interfere with their way of life – so long as it applies only to certain limited *political* questions. In a surprising move, Rawls claims that the idea that an individual can form and revise their conception of the good is a 'political conception' of the person, adopted solely for the purposes of determining our public rights and responsibilities. It is not, he asserts, intended as a general account of the relationship between the self and its ends in all spheres of life or of our most profound self-understandings. On the contrary, a person's private life may be bound up with particular ends that preclude rational revision. Therefore accepting liberalism as a political conception in public life does not require communitarians to abandon their belief in an embedded self or constructive ends in private life. (p. 235) According to Rawls,

It is essential to stress that citizens in their personal affairs, or in the internal life of associations to which they belong, may regard their final ends and attachments in a way very different from the way the political conception involves. Citizens may have, and normally do have at any given time, affections, devotions, and loyalties that they believe they would not, and indeed could and should not, stand apart from and objectively evaluate from the standpoint of their purely rational good. They may regard it as simply unthinkable to view themselves apart from certain religious, philosophical and moral convictions, or from certain

enduring attachments and loyalties. These convictions and attachments are part of what we may call their 'nonpublic identity'. (1985 p. 241)

Rawls draws a distinction between his "political liberalism" and that of John Stuart Mill's comprehensive liberalism". For Mill, people should examine the worth of inherited social practices in *all* spheres of life, not just political life. Regarding social customs, Mill insists that people should not simply obey them because they are customary, but only if they are worthy of allegiance. Each person must decide for himself whether they are "properly applicable to his own circumstances and character". (Mill, 1982 p. 122) According to Kymlicka, Mill was not simply concerned about people's right to question and revise social practices in the political sphere but also about the way that people blindly follow popular trends and social customs in their personal life. Mill would be astonished by the influence of Social Media on people's conduct today where truth and rational reflection are far less important than the number "views", "shares", "likes" and search engine rankings. (Kymlicka p. 235 - 236)

Rawls is rightly concerned that members of communitarian groups do not accept Mill's idea of autonomy as governing human thought and conduct as a whole; although he believes that they can be persuaded to accept it if it is restricted to political life. Or, as Kymlicka puts it, "'political liberalism' is to say that, ... people can be communitarians in private life, and liberals in public life." (p. 236)

Kymlicka is unconvinced that such a move can be successful. Rawls' assumption that for communitarians to adopt political liberalism is free of costs depends on a very sharp distinction between public and private life. In public, members of communitarian groups must actually or pretend to value the capacity for autonomy, while being free to refrain from exercising it in private life. And while political liberalism allows people to rationally assess and revise their ends, it does not require them to do so. Even if this view of autonomy conflicts with the self-understanding of a religious minority, there is no cost involved in accepting it for political purposes. Communitarian groups could continue to view their traditional practices and customs as non-revisable in private life. However accepting revisability, even only in public has "spill over" effects on private life which impose considerable costs on communitarian groups (Tomasi, 2001). Kymlicka identifies two potential problems: one concerning civil liberties, and the other concerning the distribution of resources. (Kymlicka p. 236)

Although a liberal state does not require or actively encourage people to engage in rational revisability in private life, it does *enable* revisability in ways that some communitarians would resist. Recall that some religious groupings would like to legally forbid apostasy, heresy, and proselytization, which they believe undermines people's constitutive ends. Yet, Rawls did not allow this. Under political liberalism such groups have no reason why limiting such liberties should not be an option. On the other hand, the liberal state is obliged to ensure that these liberties are in fact available to everyone. For example, as Rawls himself points out, it is the duty of any liberal state to inform its citizens of their basic liberties, including their right to revise their ends. According to Kymlicka,

People must know that apostasy, heresy, and proselytization are not crimes. People must also know how they can enforce their rights if someone tries to prevent them – *i.e.* they must know how to access the police and courts. This is in itself a major blow to those

traditionalist minorities who would like to make the very idea of apostasy or heresy 'unthinkable'. (p. 236 - 237)

More importantly, a liberal state must go further than simply disseminating information about rights; it must also ensure that its citizens have the personal capacity to exercise such rights. Children in a liberal state must be taught the cognitive and imaginative skills required to evaluate different ways of life for themselves and to survive outside of their community of origin. Moreover, a liberal state must ensure that the costs of exercising one's right to revisability are not prohibitive. For example, communitarian religious groups must not be allowed to place so many obstacles in the way of exiting the group that its members are *de facto* imprisoned by their group. Kymlicka cites two cases in law in which such rights came into conflict with the right of religious groups to freely practice their religion as they saw fit. (p. 237)

In the case of *Hofer vs. Hofer*, two lifelong members of the Canadian Hutterite Church were expelled from their colony for apostasy. The men subsequently demanded their share of the colony's assets that they had helped to create over the years by their labour. The colony refused and the men sought redress in court. They objected that they had "no right at any time in their lives to leave the colony without abandoning everything, even the clothes on their backs." (Janzen, 1990 p. 67) The Hutterites defended their action on the grounds that freedom of religion protects their community's right to live in accordance with their religious doctrines, even if it limits individual freedom. However Justice Pigeon of the Canadian Supreme Court noted that the same right to freedom of religion also protects "... the right of each individual to change his religion at will" and that churches "cannot make rules having the effect of depriving their members of this fundamental freedom." Justice Pigeon was also of the opinion that it was "as nearly impossible as can be" for members of a Hutterite colony to reject its religious teachings because of the high cost changing their religion, so that they were in effect deprived of their freedom of religion. According to his view, the Hutterites had to compensate apostates for their labour in order for their departure to be a meaningful option. (Kymlicka p. 237 - 238)

In the second case of *Yoder vs. Wisconsin*, the Amish community wanted to withdraw their children from school before the age of 16, in order to limit the extent to which their children could learn about the outside world or acquire the skills needed to succeed outside the group. They too defended this practice by appealing to freedom of religion to live in accordance with its doctrines, even if this limits the individual freedom of its children. According to Kymlicka, "They saw no value in educating their children so as to be able to question community practices, or to succeed outside the community." (p. 238)

There is a similar conflict in both cases where the communitarian groups perceive the liberal right to revisability as a threat. In order to mitigate this threat, both groups placed obstacles in the way of their members to exercise this liberty. However, because the liberal state is committed to ensuring certain basic legal rights for all, including the right to revise one's ends, it must oppose or seek to remove obstacles that nullify this right. This is the inevitable spill over of legal rights into private life alluded to by Tomasi above. Unfortunately, such cases raise difficult and controversial issues. In both cases above the courts found in favour of the religious minorities: The Hutterites were allowed to expel members without compensation, (Justice Pigeon's opinion was in the minority), and the Wisconsin Amish were allowed to pull their children out of school before the age of 16. (p. 238)

According to Kymlicka, it might seem that the decisions of the two Supreme Courts in favour of the communitarian groups were examples of political liberalism in action; however the courts did not invoke the idea of political liberalism. Had they done so, it is doubtful that it would have supported their decisions. Recall that according to Rawls, for the purposes of political argument and legal rights, we should assume that individuals have a basic, vested interest in their capacity to form and revise their conception of the good. As Justice Pigeon argued, the power of religious communities over their own members must not interfere with individuals' freedom to exercise that capacity. Had the Hutterites or the Amish accepted Rawls' conception of the person, even if only the purposes of political debate, then they too would have had to accept that freedom of religion ought to have been interpreted by the courts in terms of, *inter alia*, the capacity of individuals to form and revise their religious beliefs. But that is not what happened. On the contrary, both Supreme Courts arrived at the opposite conclusion by upholding the groups' right to defend their religious doctrines over the right of individuals to freedom of conscience. However, "this desire is not defensible, or even articulable, in the framework of Rawls's political liberalism, which requires that political debate be framed in terms of our moral power to form and revise a conception of the good." (p. 238 - 239)

It is not surprising then that Rawls' political liberalism does not succeed in accommodating many or even most communitarian groups because it offers them so little. While it does offer them a different argument for liberal principles and liberal institutions, it does not offer them any change in terms of the principles or institutions themselves. In particular, it offers them no way to limit the civil liberties of their members, including the right of their members to question and revise their received conception of the good. According to Kymlicka, it is not so much the arguments in favour of basic liberties that communitarians object to, rather it is the liberties themselves that they fear and dislike. Recall that political liberalism is committed to the same basic liberties as comprehensive liberalism; therefore even if, as Rawls maintains, the liberal conception of revisability is accepted only for political purposes, communitarians will be wary that this will facilitate the exercise of revisability in private life. And because political liberalism not only gives people certain formal legal rights, but also the education and conditions under which to exercise them, this will be all the more undesirable from the communitarian perspective. (p. 239)

This suggests that too much is made of the distinction between political and comprehensive liberalism. Both emphasise not only public rights but also furnishing the conditions in private life required for the exercise of such rights. Both are also committed to the legal recognition of liberties and moreover creating conditions enabling their practice. One could go even further by imagining a form of comprehensive liberalism that requires or urges individuals to actually exercise their right to rational revisability, and that teaches them to be deeply sceptical of traditional values. However Rawls is at pains to avoid this kind of "hyper-liberalism" and so are most comprehensive liberals. Studying Analytic Philosophy by contrast *does* require one to cultivate a sceptical attitude about one's unexamined beliefs and values. The standard liberal view however does not require that people should proceed philosophically or that they should revise their ends; only that they should be legally and practically free to do so in the light of new circumstances, experiences or updated information that is in conflict with their previous commitments. Both Rawls' political liberalism and comprehensive liberalism are committed to this autonomy. And, to paraphrase Kymlicka: that is why political liberalism will never be acceptable to communitarian groups. (p. 239 - 240)

What Rawls has not explained is why people who are communitarians in private should be liberals in public life. According to Rawls (1980), "Within different contexts we can assume diverse points of view toward our person without contradiction so long as these points of view cohere together when circumstances require." (p. 545) However he does not demonstrate that these points of view do cohere or how they might. There is a clear conflict of interest on issues such as intra-group dissent including proselytization, apostasy, heresy, and mandatory education. Given that there are clear spill over costs to communitarians adopting political liberalism, if only in public, and given that they can isolate themselves from the intolerance of the majority through a millet like system, there is no incentive for them to be part of the overlapping consensus on liberalism. (Kymlicka p. 240)

This suggests that the difference between the communitarian conception of the self and the commitment of liberals to the priority of civil rights is irreconcilable. However it seems that Rawls, in his sincere attempt find some common ground, has dropped the assumption that autonomy is a general value. It follows then that religious and cultural groups should be allowed to shield the constitutive ends of their members by restraining certain individual liberties. But then we are faced with a dilemma. If we wish to defend individual freedom of conscience, over and above group tolerance, we must reject the communitarian belief that individuals' ends are fixed and beyond rational revision. On the other hand, if we wish to accommodate the communitarian conception of the self, then some communitarian groups must be exempt from the enforcement of individual liberties. Either way, Rawls' attempt at reconciliation cannot succeed without a major concession by one or both sides that neither is prepared to make. (p. 240 - 241)

The Social Thesis

Communitarianism is not just an account of the self and its ends. Indeed, there are many communitarians who reject Sandel's notion of constitutive ends but who endorse rational revisability. Yet they criticise liberalism, not for its account of the self and its interests, but for neglecting the social conditions required for the fulfilment of such interests. Taylor, for example, claims that many liberal theories are based on an "atomistic" view of individuals, who are self-sufficient outside of society. Perhaps Taylor was thinking of Margret Thatcher's oft quoted "atomistic" remark, "There's no such thing as a society" taken out of context. What in fact she said in an interview for *Women's Own* in September 1987 was:

Who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves and then also to help look after our neighbour and life is a reciprocal business ...

There is no such thing as society. There is a living tapestry of men and women and people and the beauty of that tapestry and the quality of our lives will depend upon how much each of us is prepared to take responsibility for ourselves and each of us prepared to turn round and help by our own efforts those who are unfortunate.

Whatever the correct metaphysical analysis of society, Taylor's **social thesis** maintains that the capacity for self-determination can only be exercised in a certain kind of society, with a certain kind of social environment. (p. 244 -245)

According to Kymlicka, if this were really the debate, we would have to agree with communitarians that the social thesis is true. However the idea that we could exercise the capacity for self-determination outside of society is obviously false. Indeed liberals such as Rawls and Dworkin do not deny this. On the contrary, “[t]hey recognize that individual autonomy cannot exist outside a social environment that provides meaningful choices and that supports the development of the capacity to choose amongst them. They [also] recognize and discuss the role of the family, schools, and the larger cultural environment in nurturing autonomy.” (Rawls 1971, 563 - 564; Dworkin 1985, 230 - 233) (Kymlicka p. 245)

According to Taylor, the social thesis requires us to abandon the liberal idea of a neutral state, which is blind to different conceptions of the good life and does not attempt to influence people’s value judgements concerning these different conceptions. For Taylor, a neutral state cannot adequately protect the social environment necessary for self-determination. The sort of community that supports our capacity to choose our conception of the good can only be realised by a non-neutral **politics of the common good**. And it is only possible to sustain such a community, including the commitment to the liberal values of freedom if the state takes an active role in protecting and privileging the community’s traditional or dominant way of life. This includes placing some limits on individual self-determination in order to preserve the social conditions which enable self-determination. (Kymlicka p. 245)

Taylor’s argument challenges political philosophers to work out the social preconditions of liberal freedom. The debate can, perhaps by over simplifying, be divided into two broad headings: Firstly, there are questions concerning the social conditions necessary for the *development* of autonomy. These include the raising and education of children, including family life and schooling. Secondly, there are questions about the social conditions for the *exercise* of the capacity for autonomy by adults, including social culture, social life and the public domain. Taylor is more concerned with questions of the second sort, which Kymlicka discusses in the rest of the chapter. (p. 246)

According to Kymlicka, there are both theoretical and practical reasons why the social conditions of freedom have become a matter of intense debate. On the one hand, political theory is considered incomplete if it does not address such questions. On the other hand, there is a growing concern that such social conditions, be they family, schools, civil society or the state, are failing. The popular press and rhetoric are replete with claims about the “decline of the family” or of schools, civic organisations, public spaces, and democratic institutions. These questions now occupy a major portion of political theory because people sincerely believe that there is a growing problem in the actual practice of liberal democracy. (p. 246)

Kymlicka proceeds to consider three versions of Taylor’s argument that liberal neutrality cannot sustain the social conditions for the exercise of autonomy: the first about the need to sustain a cultural structure that provides people with meaningful options; the second about the need for shared forums in which people can evaluate such options; and the third about the preconditions for solidarity and political legitimacy. In each case, communitarians invoke the social thesis to demonstrate how a concern for self-determination supports, rather than precludes, a communitarian politics of the common good. (p. 246)

(a) Duties to protect the cultural structure

If we are to make meaningful choices about our projects, we require meaningful options. According to the social thesis, such options derive from our culture. But liberal neutrality is not concerned with the existence of a rich cultural diversity which affords such options. Therefore self-determination requires pluralism in the sense of a diversity of possible way of life. However according to Cragg (1986):

any collective attempt by a liberal state to protect pluralism would itself be a breach of liberal principles of justice. The state is not entitled to interfere in the movement of the cultural market place except, of course, to ensure that each individual has a just share of available necessary means to exercise his or her moral powers. The welfare or demise of particular conceptions of the good and, therefore, the welfare or demise of social unions of a particular character is not the business of the state. (p. 47)

Liberals believe that the state may not intervene in the cultural marketplace so as to encourage or discourage any particular way of life because this restricts people's self-determination. However if the cultural marketplace is left to evolve unchecked it may undermine the cultural structure that supports pluralism, therefore liberal neutrality may be potentially self-defeating. On the other hand, as Rawls suggests, good ways of life may be self-sustaining in the cultural marketplace because, under conditions of freedom, people will recognise the value of good ways of life and will support them. (Rawls, 1971) But according to Kymlicka, "this is inadequate." People may have an interest in a good way of life, and voluntarily support it, however this may not necessarily sustain its existence for future generations. *E.g.* some people may have an interest in a valuable social practice that eventually depletes the resources requires to sustain the practice much beyond their lifetime. (Kymlicka p. 246 - 247)

Consider the need to preserve historical artifacts or locations, or wilderness ranges of great natural beauty. If people were to use them ordinarily they would soon be degraded so that future generations would be deprived of experiencing them, were it not for state protection. So even if the cultural marketplace could be relied upon to ensure that one generation could value them, it could not be relied on to ensure that future generations also have the option. (p. 247)

Suppose that state support is needed to ensure the survival of an adequate range of options for those who have not formed their aims in life. Why would this require rejecting state neutrality? There are two possible cultural policies: Firstly, the state might act so as to ensure that there is an adequate range of options by providing tax incentives to individuals who make contributions towards supporting culture in accordance with their personal perfectionist ideals. In this case the state ensures that there is an adequate range of options, but the choice of options lies with civil society. Secondly, the choice of options or conceptions of the good becomes a political question, with state intervening not only to ensure an adequate range of options, but also to promote particular options. One or both of these policies must be implemented. (p. 247)

So, at least on the first option, the existence of duties towards the protection of the cultural structure is not incompatible with state neutrality. Indeed Dworkin (1985) discusses our duty to

protect the cultural structure from “debasement or decay”. (p. 230) Like Taylor (1985), he envisions the capacity imaginatively to conceive of various conceptions of the good life as requiring specialised debate among intellectuals who would attempt to define and clarify alternatives facing us. Others may attempt to revive past culture in the art of the present. Still others may be drivers of cultural innovation. Dworkin also writes about how the state can and should protect essential cultural activities. (Taylor, 1985 p. 204 - 206; Dworkin, 1985 p. 229 - 232) Rawls, meanwhile, does not include state support for culture in his theory of justice, because according to Kymlicka, he thinks that the functioning of his principles of justice would safeguard the preconditions for a diverse culture. However there is no reason why Rawls would reject state support if this were not the case. (Rawls, 1971 p. 331, 441 - 224, 522 - 529) Nevertheless, both Dworkin and Rawls would agree that it is not the job of the state to rank the value of various options within the culture. (Kymlicka p. 248)

A communitarian state by contrast might hope to improve the quality of its cultural options by encouraging more valuable aspects of their community’s way of life over less valuable ones. But liberal neutrality also strives to improve the range of people’s options by encouraging freedom of speech and association, so that different groups are allowed to pursue and promote their ways of life. Those that promote unworthy ways of life, it is hoped, would find it difficult attracting adherents and would soon fade into obscurity. Since individuals are free to choose among competing views, liberal neutrality crates a marketplace of ideas, where the success of a particular way of life depends on what it has to offer to prospective adherents. Liberals thus endorse civil liberties because, as Mill (1982, p. 54) remarked, they make it possible “...that the worth of different modes of life should be proved practically.” (Kymlicka p. 248)

So both liberals and communitarians strive to secure a range of options from which individuals can autonomously chose. What they disagree over is whether and where perfectionist ideals should be invoked. For liberals, good ways of life are more likely to become established in the marketplace of civil society, whereas for communitarians, the preferability of different ways of life are a matter of political advocacy and state action. According to Kymlicka, the dispute should perhaps not be seen as a choice between perfectionism and neutrality but between social perfectionism vs. state perfectionism. (p. 248)

(b) Neutrality and collective deliberations

Some communitarians regard the liberal preference for the cultural marketplace, over state control of evaluating different ways of life, as a product of the atomistic belief that judgements about the good can only be autonomous when made by individuals shielded from social pressure. Liberals, by contrast, believe that autonomy is encouraged by taking judgements about the good out of the political arena. However, even individual judgements about the good depend on collective evaluation of shared practices. Indeed, if they are cut off from collective deliberation they become subjective and arbitrary. According to Sullivan (1982)

[S]elf-fulfilment and even the working out of personal identity and a sense of orientation in the world depend upon a communal enterprise. This shared process is the civic life, and its root is involvement with others: other generations, other sorts of persons whose differences are significant because they contribute to the whole upon which our particular sense of self depends. Thus mutual interdependency is the foundational notion of citizenship ... Outside a

linguistic community of shared practices, there could be biological *homo sapiens* as logical abstraction, but there could not be human beings. This is the meaning of the Greek and medieval dictum that the political community is ontologically prior to the individual. The polis is, literally, that which makes man, as human being, possible. (p. 158, 173)

In the same vein Brian Crowley (1987) describes state perfectionism as

an affirmation of the notion that men living in a community of shared experiences and language is the only context in which the individual and society can discover and test their values through the essentially political activities of discussion, criticism, example, and emulation. It is through the existence of organised public spaces, in which men offer and test ideas against one another... that men come to understand a part of who they are. (p. 282)

Accordingly, the state is the proper arena in which to articulate perceptions of the good, precisely because they require shared enquiry. They cannot be pursued, or even known, by solitary individuals. (Kymlicka p. 249)

However, this is not the sense in which Rawls claims that the valuation of ways of life should be taken out of the political arena. Liberal neutrality does not constrain the scope of perfectionist ideas in the collective activities groups. Instead Rawls (1971) claims that such collective activity and shared experiences concerning the good are essential to the “free internal life of the various communities of interests in which persons and groups seek to achieve, in modes of social union consistent with equal liberty, the ends and excellences to which they are drawn.” (p. 543) What he wants to preclude is “the coercive apparatus of the state” in the forum of such deliberations and experience, especially to win for one party “a greater liberty or larger distributive shares on the grounds that their activities are of more intrinsic value.” (p. 328 - 329) (Kymlicka, p. 249 - 250)

Unfortunately, communitarians, seldom draw a distinction between collective activities and political activities. Participation in shared cultural practices allows individuals to make intelligent decisions about the good life, but there is no reason to think that such participation should be orchestrated by the state, instead of through the free association of individuals. Indeed by guaranteeing freedom of speech, assembly and association, liberal societies create opportunities for people to express the social aspects of individual reflection. Such opportunities occur below the level of the state, between friends and family, but also within cultural associations, churches, professional societies, trade unions, universities and the media. These need not involve a public display of character or judgement about the good nor a demonstration to others that I “hold [my] notion of the good responsibly.” (Crowley, 1987 p. 285) What liberals deny is that citizens should have to give an account of themselves or their deliberations to the state in order to justify their claim to public resources based on their way of life. (Kymlicka p. 249 - 250)

According to Kymlicka, “a similar failure to consider the distinctive role of the state weakens radical critiques of liberal neutrality, like that of Habermas in his earlier work.” Habermas believed that the evaluation of different ways of life should be a political matter, but unlike communitarians, he did not expect that such political deliberation would promote people’s embeddedness in prevailing practices. Instead, he thought that political deliberation was required precisely to lift people out of acceptance of the given, including false consciousness associated with historical practices. Thus people’s existing ways of life must become the “the objects of discursive will-formation” for them to

understand the good, free of deception. Neutrality does not demand the scrutiny of such practices; therefore it makes no appeal to emancipate people from false needs and ideological distortions. (p. 250)

Kymlicka asks why the evaluation of people's conceptions of the good should affect their claims of justice and why should the state be the appropriate arena for this evaluation. Communities smaller than the general population, as well as other groupings and associations of various sizes, would probably be more appropriate forums for Habermas' "discursive will-formation" in evaluating the good and interpreting one's genuine needs. While Habermas rejects communitarians' tendency to uncritically endorse existing social practices, he does share their tendency to assume that anything that is not politically debated is left to the will of individuals, who *as individuals* are incapable of rational judgement. (p. 250 - 251)

So, contrary to communitarian criticism, liberal neutrality does not neglect the importance of a shared culture for meaningful individual options, nor the sharing of experiences for meaningful individual evaluation of such options. Nor does liberal neutrality deny that individual autonomy has a social component, which it interprets as reliant on social rather than political processes. However it does not follow that liberal neutrality should necessarily be endorsed. Rather it relies on a certain degree of faith in the operation of non-state forums and the unfolding of individual judgement and cultural development. In addition, it relies on a certain degree of distrust in the operation of state forums in evaluating the good. However there is nothing to show that such faith and distrust are warranted. Nor, on the other hand, have critics of neutrality shown that *their* faith in politics and distrust of non-state forums are warranted either. (p. 251)

According to Kymlicka, it seems that both sides in the neutrality debate have failed to learn the lesson taught by the other side. For centuries liberals have insisted on the distinction between state and society, yet communitarians still assume that what is properly social must be the domain of the political. Furthermore, they have not faced up to the liberal concern that the supreme authority and coercive means of the state make it especially inappropriate for the genuinely shared deliberation and commitment to which they aspire. On the other hand, communitarians have been maintaining for centuries that the nature of our culture is historically fragile and that we need to consider the conditions under which a free culture can be self-sustaining. Liberals have also taken the existence of a tolerant and diverse culture for granted, as something that arises spontaneously and sustains itself indefinitely. That the latter is simply assumed in Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* makes it a sceptical read – real societies are messy and populated by individuals who are far from purely rational. (Kymlicka p. 251)

Communitarians are correct that a culture of freedom is a historical achievement; however liberals need to show why the cultural marketplace does not threaten that achievement one way or the other. Liberals must chart a challenging course between the Scylla of failing to connect people strongly enough to their communal practices and the Charybdis of failing to detach people sufficiently from the expectations of existing practices and ideologies. A culture which supports self-determination requires a combination of both connection with existing practices and a certain distance and dissent from them without being drawn in too perilously by either. Liberal neutrality may provide that combination, but it is not a foregone conclusion that it does; even then, it may only be able to do so at some times and some places. So, according to Kymlicka, "both sides need to give

us a more comprehensive comparison of the opportunities and dangers present in state and non-state forums and procedures for evaluating the good.” (p. 251)

In an earlier paper Kymlicka (1989) argued that before invoking the state as the proper arena for evaluating conceptions of the good, we should first develop the forums within civil society for non-politicised debate, so that all groups have free and equal access to the cultural marketplace that liberals so highly value. But this matter is not settled, at least not while the debate is polarised as liberal atomism vs. the communitarian social thesis. According to communitarians, liberals fail to recognise people as social beings. Liberals on the other hand (supposedly) think that society is founded upon an artificial social contract, which the state is required to enforce in order to maintain naturally antisocial people together in society. However, Kymlicka argues that in a sense, the opposite is true: Liberals believe that people spontaneously form and enter into social relations and forums in which they come to understandings of and mutually peruse the good. The state is not required to provide the communal context. Indeed if it were to intervene, it would likely impede the natural processes of collective deliberation and cultural development. It is communitarians who believe that, left to their own devices, individuals will drift into anomic isolation without the state actively corralling them together in order to evaluate and pursue the good. (Kymlicka p. 251 - 252)

Solidarity and political legitimacy

The social thesis raises another issue: individual choices require a secure social context; however a secure cultural context requires a secure political context. Whatever the proper role of the state in protecting the cultural marketplace, it can only do so if public institutions themselves are stable, which in turn requires that they are perceived as legitimate in the eyes of the citizenry. According to Taylor however, political institutions governed by the principle of neutrality will be incapable maintaining legitimacy, and hence incapable of maintaining the social context required for self-determination (p. 252)

According to Taylor (1985b), the neutral state undermines what should be a shared sense of the common good required for citizens to accept the costs incurred by a welfare state. Citizens will only identify with the state, and shoulder its burdens if there is already a “common form of life” which “is seen as a supremely important good, so that its continuance and flourishing matters to the citizens for its own sake and not just instrumentally to their several individual goods or as the sum total of these individual goods”. (p. 213) For Taylor, a political culture of state neutrality undermines the sense of the common good, at least in part, because people then are free to choose their goals independently of “a common form of life”, which if pursued would violate their individual rights. A communitarian state however would foster identification with the common form of life, whereas a rights based atomistic model would move one some distance from the community. (Kymlicka p. 252 -253)

This “distancing” from the community’s shared form of life means that people will be less inclined to shoulder the burdens of liberal justice. Consequently, liberal democracies are experiencing a “legitimation crisis” as citizens are required to sacrifice more and more in the name of justice, yet share less and less with those for whom they are making such sacrifices. “There is no shared form of life underlying the demands of the neutral state.” Unfortunately, no evidence is adduced to support these claims. (p. 253)

Rawls and Dworkin disagree. They believe that citizens will accept sacrifices in the name of justice even if they have relations with people who have very different conceptions of the good. Liberal neutrality allows people to pursue any conception of the good life that does not conflict with the principles of justice, even if it differs from other ways of life in the community. Such conflicting conceptions of the good can be accommodated so long as the public accepts that the principles of justice are sufficient to ensure stability, even in the face of such differences. According to Rawls (1980), "... although a well-ordered society is divided and pluralistic ... public agreement on questions of political and social justice supports ties of civic friendship and secures the bonds of association." (p. 540) People with different conceptions of the good will respect each other's, not because it promotes a shared way of life, but because everyone has an equal claim to consideration. What unites people in this sense is not a shared way of life, but a shared sense of justice. Liberals therefore seek to sustain a just society on the basis of public acceptance of principles of justice without, and precluding, the acceptance of principles pertaining to the good life. (Kymlicka p. 253)

Taylor (1985b) believes that this is sociologically naïve: people will not voluntarily respect others' claims unless they are united by shared conceptions of the good and can identify with a politics of the common good. Furthermore, he believes that by insisting on individual rights and state neutrality, a liberal state impedes the public adoption of principles of the good. He asks, "Could the increasing stress on rights as dominant over collective decisions come in the end to undermine the very legitimacy of the democratic order?" (p. 225) Kymlicka thinks that Dworkin and Rawls' liberal model is indeed sociologically naïve. Shared political principles may be a *necessary* condition for political unity but they are not *sufficient*. Where people disagree profoundly about questions of justice, the outcome may be civil war. On the other hand, just because they may share similar beliefs about justice it is not sufficient to maintain solidarity, social unity, or political legitimacy. (Kymlicka, p. 254)

Kymlicka also points out that the liberal view does not tell us to whom we have obligations of justice or with whom we ought to be making democratic decisions. Neither Dworkin nor Rawls endorses the idea of a single world government; instead they assume that the principles of justice should be adopted and implemented by some circumscribed political community. Therefore we have obligations of justice primarily to our fellow citizens. Both Dworkin and Rawls do accept that we have obligations to humanity at large, but that these "humanitarian" obligations are secondary to our "egalitarian" obligations to our fellow citizens. (Rawls, 1993b; 1999b) It is possible to imagine a global form of liberalism which is not limited to political communities; however Kymlicka postpones that discussion to his section on *Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism*. (Kymlicka, p. 254)

Cosmopolitanism aside, liberalism presupposes that nation-states comprise of "ethical communities", whose citizens have special moral obligations to each other that they do not have to "outsiders". (Miller, 1995) Therefore liberal justice does require a sense of community, as Kymlicka expands, "... a sense that citizens belong together in a single country, should govern themselves collectively, and should feel solidarity towards each other." So although liberal theory begins as one about the morality of *persons*, it typically ends up being about the moral equality of *citizens*. (Black, 1991) As it turns out, the rights that liberalism accords to individuals extend only to citizens of the state. Only citizens have the right to freedom of movement within the boundaries of the state, to work without special permission, to share in collective self-government and to receive social support. (Kymlicka, p. 254)

Thus liberal justice functions within bounded communities and requires that citizens acknowledge such boundaries as morally significant. Boundaries also distinguish “us” from “them” with respect to claims of justice and rights. However political boundaries are, in a sense, arbitrary if they do not run parallel to certain geographic features or separate ancestral population groups. So what explains this sense of “ethical community” that we (supposedly) share with our compatriots? Rawls and Dworkin suggest that this sense of ethical community represents a shared commitment to common principles of liberal justice. But this does not explain the different senses of ethical community between the vast majority of Western democracies that share the same liberal-democratic political principles. Such principles are shared, not only *within* states, but also *between* them. *E.g.* the international border between Sweden and Norway does not demarcate a boundary in conceptions of justice; nor the one between Belgium and Holland, or Spain and Portugal, or Australia and New Zealand. (p. 255)

Rawls and Dworkin acknowledge the problem but trust that,

so long as citizens within these (arbitrary) boundaries come to share the same political principles, this will be sufficient to generate a sense of ‘ethical community’ amongst citizens, and thereby ensure solidarity, legitimacy, and stability.... Put another way, Rawls and Dworkin assume that if people share the same liberal-democratic principles, they will not question historic boundaries and jurisdiction.

However, we have seen quite the opposite. Within several countries that share the same liberal principles there has been a push towards national independence and secessionism. Witness the Québécois in Canada, the Scots within Britain, the Catalans within Spain *etc.* In each case the minority territories accept the liberal-democratic values of the parent state, but wish to implement them within their own self-governing institutions and thereby create or sustain their own “ethical community”. (p. 256)

According to Kymlicka, stability requires not only agreement on the principles that political communities wish to implement, but also agreement on the how these political communities identify themselves – on the fact that they form a single ethical community which belongs together and which ought to govern together. If this sense of community is lacking then agreement concerning liberal justice alone will not mend the rift. People must feel that they *belong* together. They must also desire to live together and govern themselves together. This sense of shared belonging and shared identity sustains, not only obligations of liberal justice, but also trust and solidarity between citizens required to accept the outcome of democratic decisions (even when they are in the minority on a particular issue). (Miller, 1995) (Kymlicka p. 256 - 257)

What else, beside shared principles of justice, is required to explain political legitimacy and solidarity? Kymlicka identifies three broad approaches to the question that emphasize different approaches: (a) a common way of life; (b) nationhood and (c) political participation. The first approach he refers to as “communitarian”; the second “liberal nationalist” and the third “civic republican”. Kymlicka discusses the first two in the remaining section and the third in his next chapter. He freely admits that these labels are potentially misleading. In one sense, all three approaches can be thought of as “communitarian”, in that they recognise the need for liberal democracies to develop and sustain a sense of ethical community. Many theorists also combine aspects from different approaches to produce hybrid theories that address the problem of social

unity. However for analytic purposes it is worth considering each separately, before deciding whether any can indeed be successfully combined. (p. 257)

According to the communitarian approach, the basis of social unity is a shared “way of life” – a common conception of the good life. Citizens who share a way of life will want to live together in a single state with legitimate boundaries. They will also want to govern themselves and so will accept the legitimacy of common political decision-making forums. Moreover, they will be more likely to fulfil their just obligations to the less well-off within their community by redistributing some of their resources. This has the effect of strengthening their shared way of life, and so indirectly helping themselves. Liberals, on the other hand, are required to redistribute some of their resources to people who may have different, or even conflicting, ways of life. If people share a way of life however, they can be assured that their contributions to the welfare state will promote their own conception of the good life. (p. 257 - 258)

But this communitarian outlook rests on a romanticized view of earlier societies in which legitimacy was based on the effective pursuit of shared ends. If only, they believe, we could recover the sense of allegiance of olden days and accept their politics of the common good, and encourage everyone to partake in it. Examples include the republican democracies of ancient Greece and eighteenth-century New England town governments. However the perceived golden age of such democracies ignores the fact that they were racist, sexist and intolerant of religious diversity. Had women, barbarians, slaves, atheists and the landless been accounted as citizens, communitarians would not be impressed by their conception of the “common good”. In short, their legitimacy was based on the principle of exclusion. (p. 258)

Contemporary communitarians do not advocate denying membership to those who have historically not participated in their “common way of life.” Instead they believe that there are communal practices that everyone will endorse as a basis for a politics of the common good. According to Kymlicka, communitarians write as if the historical exclusion of certain groups from various social practices was arbitrary, so that they can now be included and proceed forthwith. But their exclusion was not arbitrary. They were excluded for reasons, such as sexism or racism, in order to subserve the interests of white male heterosexual citizens. We cannot now demand that women or other races should accept an identity that white heterosexual men have defined for them. Nor can we side step the problem by declaring, as Sandel does, that their identities are constituted by their existing roles, when so many have rejected their presumed identities. (p. 258 - 259)

According to Sandel and Taylor, there are certain shared ends that can serve as the basis for a politics of the common good which will be legitimate for all groups in society. But according to Kymlicka, they furnish no examples because there are none. Sandel and Taylor say that such shared ends are to be found in historical practices, but they fail to mention that those historical practices were defined by a small segment of society, namely white property owners, to serve their own interests. Attempts to promote such ends simply reduce legitimacy and further exclude marginalised groups. Witness the loss of legitimacy among many components of American society in the 1980’s, including blacks, homosexuals, single mothers and non-Christians, as the right wing “Moral Majority” pushed back in its attempt to implement its Christian, patriarchal family agenda. Of course, many communitarians distance themselves from the right wing view of the common good; however the problem of exclusion of historically marginalised groups appears to be endemic to the

communitarian agenda. According to Hirsh (1986) “any “renewal” or strengthening of community sentiment will accomplish nothing for these groups... [On the contrary, our historical sentiments and traditions are] part of the problem, not part of the solution”. (p. 424) (Kymlicka p. 259)

Consider one of Sandel’s (1984b) few examples of communitarian politics, namely the regulation of pornography. Accordingly, such regulation by a local community is acceptable “on the grounds that pornography offends its way of life”. (p. 17) Contrast this with more recent feminist discussions of pornography. Besides condoning violence towards women, many women’s groups have demanded the regulation of pornography on the grounds that they have been excluded from defining traditional views of sexuality and that pornography perpetuates the subordination of women to male-defined sexual and gender roles. Whether the latter is convincing is controversial; however if pornography does in fact play this role, it does so, not because it “offends our way of life” but because it conforms to our stereotypes about women’s sexuality. According to MacKinnon, “from a feminist point of view the problem with pornography is not that it violates community standards but that it enforces them.” (Kymlicka p. 259)

The problem with Sandel’s argument can be seen by applying it to the “regulation of homosexuality” which many would like to see. For many Americans and other nationalities, homosexuality is “offensive to their way of life”. According to Kymlicka, more people are offended by homosexuality than pornography. Should Sandel therefore encourage local communities to criminalize homosexuality? And if not, why not and what distinguishes the two cases? The difference for liberals is that homosexuality does no harm to others. That some others are offended by it is of no moral consequence. Even a majority in a local (or national) community have no right to enforce their “external preferences” concerning what a minority of consenting people do in private, outside of the mainstream way of life. However on Sandel’s view, the members of a marginalised minority are expected to adjust their preferences and practices so as to be inoffensive to the dominant values of the community. Nor is there any scope for the marginalised to reject the historical identity by which others define them. (p. 260)

Similarly, Sandel’s argument is not about affording women the opportunity reject their male-defined view of sexuality, and to define their own. Instead it permits the regulation of pornography produced by one male-defined view of sexuality because it conflicts with another male-defined view of sexuality reflected in the “way of life” of the community. Nor is there any guarantee that those men who are offended by pornography will not have similarly oppressive views about woman’s sexuality *e.g.* that their sexuality should be repressed or that they should confine themselves to “woman’s work”. Like any marginalised group, women would be expected to adjust their preferences and practices so as to be inoffensive to the dominant values of the community. However this does the opposite of promoting feelings of legitimacy among them. (p. 260)

Sandel (1982) concludes by saying that when politics goes well “we can know a good in common that we cannot know alone.” (p. 183) However, according to Kymlicka, given that modern societies are so diverse, we should instead say that politics goes well precisely when it does not adopt an ideology of the “common good” that can only serve to exclude many groups. Promoting state legitimacy may well require greater civic participation by all groups in society, but as Dworkin (1983) points out, it only makes sense to invite people to participate in politics (or for them to accept), if they will be treated as equals. (p. 33) And treating them as such is incompatible with defining them in terms of

roles they did not chose or endorse. Legitimacy cannot be earned by strengthening communal practices that have been defined for others, but only by empowering them to define their own aims. According to Don Herzog (1986), if liberalism is the problem, how could communitarianism be the solution? (p. 484) (Kymlicka, p. 260 - 261)

The Second Liberal Accommodation of Communitarianism: Liberal Nationalism

In the previous sections, we were unable to provide a satisfactory answer to Taylor’s challenge regarding the bases of social unity and political legitimacy in a liberal state. Both the traditional liberal view, that solidarity is sustained by shared beliefs about universal principles of justice, and the communitarian view, that solidarity is sustained by shared beliefs in a particularistic conception of the good, were found wanting. Beliefs about justice were found to be shared too widely across states, and beliefs about the good life were found not to be shared by all within states. Nor could either of the accounts adequately explain why we feel a special sense of obligation towards our compatriots. (p. 261)

If we examine the historical practice of liberal democracies in the West, we can discern the outlines of one possible solution. States promote solidarity by appealing to ideals of *nationhood*. Each state endeavours to convince its citizens that they constitute a **nation**, and hence belong together in a single political community and therefore share a bond of solidarity and mutual obligations to one another. And because compatriots are also co-nationals, they share a natural desire for self-governance. According to Kymlicka, the idea is a relatively recent one in world history. In the more distant past the significance of territorial boundaries of states was purely legal: boundaries defined which laws people were subject to within a given domain and which rulers and institutions exercised authority over which territory. (p. 261)

In modern democracies, the boundaries of nation-states also define a body of citizens or a political community which is the harbinger of sovereignty, and whose will and interests constitute the standards of political legitimacy. Democracy (from the Greek δῆμος (dēmos) for ordinary citizens or common people from a district) is thus defined for “all those individuals permanently residing within the state’s territorial boundaries.” (p. 262)

Although the first democracy appeared as early as the 6th Century BC in the city-state of Athens, historical democracies and republics have been rare. According to Kymlicka, it is important to remember just how recent the idea of a modern democracy is. Early European ruling elites tried to dissociate themselves from the **plebs** or commoners, justifying their power and privilege precisely in terms of their aloofness from the masses. Political boundaries designated the scope of a lord’s fiefdom but did not delineate a single people or community. Although lords and serfs occupied the same geographical region, the idea that they belonged together would have been incomprehensible to denizens of the feudal era. The ruling elite not only physically distanced themselves from peasants, they also spoke a different language. In one extreme example, Catherine the Great (1729 - 1796) made French the official language of the Russian Court – a tradition that continued until its demise in the Russian Revolution. Language aside, Lords were regarded not only as a superior class, but a superior race that legitimised their right to rule. (p. 262)

The rise of **nationalism** however promoted the interests of “the people”. Indeed, nations themselves were defined in terms of “the people” – *i.e.* the mass of population within a territory, regardless of their class or occupation. According to Greenfeld (1992) “the people” thus became the “the bearer of sovereignty, the central object of loyalty, and the basis of collective solidarity”. (p. 14) The value of national identity has remained robust in the modern era, in part, because of its emphasis on the importance “the people” which, at least theoretically, provides a source of dignity to all, irrespective of class or station in life. (Kymlicka, p. 262)

The shift in use of the vernacular in political life is one manifestation of the emergence of national identity. The official use of the “language of the people” in public affairs and legal documents confirms that the political community really does belong to the people, and not some elite. While economic inequalities and class differences still exist, and in some cases have widened, they are no longer regarded as separate races or cultures. Fittingly, lower class children are exposed to high culture literature and the arts in the vernacular, while upper-class children are exposed to the history and folk culture of the masses. All persons within national bounds are supposed to enjoy a common culture, speak the same mother tongue, and participate in the same educational and political institutions. Within Western democracies, at least, this vision has been gradually, all be it partially, realised. (p. 262)

National boundaries no longer simply circumscribe legal jurisdictions, they also define a “people” or “nation” who comprise of a common political community and share a common language, culture and identity. Of course national boundaries rarely coincide neatly with people’s national identities. Most states contain people who do not feel part of the dominant national community, either because they are perceived as “aliens” by the majority, or because they wish to establish their own identity such as the Québécois in Canada or the Basques in Spain and France. (p. 263)

According to Kymlicka, “As a general rule, however, liberal democracies have aspired to forge a common national identity amongst the people permanently residing on their territory. Moreover, they have been surprisingly effective in this ‘nation-building’ project.” *E.g.* French, which was not widely used in France at the time of the Revolution, is now a defining feature of French identity throughout France. Similarly, immigrants to America from all over the world who spoke no English and had no knowledge of American institutions were quick to adopt English and an American national identity. The success of these nation-building efforts is captured in the term **nation-state** to refer to modern states that have successfully dispersed a common language and identity among almost all of its citizens. (p. 263)

In most cases, modern-day national boundaries do coincide with people’s national identity. To date this has been achieved in two ways. Firstly, some national boundaries have been redrawn. *E.g.* The succession of Norway from Sweden in 1906, or of Slovakia from the Czech Republic in 1993. More often however, the aim has been to revise people’s national identity within existing boundaries. So called “nation-building” efforts have been undertaken by all Western democracies by establishing common institutions functioning with a common language throughout their territory. Western and many non-Western states have also used a variety of “nation-building” means to help diffuse and consolidate a sense of nationhood. These include, compulsory education, national media, laws governing the use of the official language, national holidays and symbols, as well as compulsory military service, sometimes euphemistically called “national service”. (p. 263)

Where these efforts have been resisted by certain minority or ethnic groups, more drastic measures have been applied. There include colonial rule and conquest, “ethnic cleansing”, forced sterilisation and the mass resettlement of people so as to “dilute” the minority. According to Kymlicka, one reason why Western states have invested so heavily in the promotion of nationhood is that, if successfully inculcated among the majority, it overcomes the problems highlighted by Rawls’ and Dworkins’ account of social unity. Recall that merely sharing political principles cannot account for solidarity within a state or the existence or meaningfulness of national boundaries. However if solidarity is based on a shared nationhood, and if states succeed in promoting a distinct nationality within their borders, then national boundaries do become morally significant because they will, in fact, delineate the limits of ethical communities. National borders would no longer be simply the outcome of historical accident but demarcate the actual change in people’s loyalties and identity. People on either side of a national border are no longer “one of us” but “them”, even if they share the same principles of justice or a common ancestry and are only separated by a short distance. (p. 264)

This approach to social unity has come to be known as the **liberal-nationalist** approach, and is now adopted by most real-world liberal democracies. Although liberal in name, “liberal-nationalist” efforts to promote a particular language or identity may seem closer to a communitarian politics of the good. According to Kymlicka, whether this is so depends on the sort of national identity being promoted, and the reasons for doing so. Recall that communitarian accounts of the common good typically presuppose a shared conception of the good being promoted. Historically, Greek national identity was tied up with Greek Orthodox religion. Thus, being accounted a true member of the Greek nation involved accepting the Greek Orthodox Church as a *de facto* criterion for citizenship, whereas members of other religions were at a legal disadvantage. (p. 264)

However, nation-building need not involve the promotion of a particular conception of the good life. A common identity may involve a more distributed sense of belonging such as sharing a common territory, a common past and a common vision for the future. At least this is how citizens of many Western democracies think about themselves. Most South Africans, for example, identify with other South Africans without necessarily sharing a religion or even a common culture or language, of which there are at least thirty-five (11 of which are official). South Africans are also united by both highlights and tragic events in their history, as well as a common vision of the nation they aspire to become. (p. 265)

Kymlicka asks, “What underlies this shared national identity?” The shared identity of non-liberal states may be based on a common ethnic descent, religious faith or a shared conception of the good. However these cannot be the basis for social unity in a liberal state, since none of them is shared in a modern pluralistic society. What makes citizens feel that they belong together as members of the same nation likely involves a shared sense of history, territory, language groupings and common public institutions. Crucially, they also see their life-choices as bound up with the perpetuation of their society and its institutions. In the case of South Africa, at least, ethnicity, religion, and different conceptions of the good, contribute relatively little to a shared national identity. (p. 265)

Kymlicka uses the adjective “thin” to qualify the sort of national identity that liberal states actively promote. Presumably this is in contrast to the “thick” sort of national identity that communitarians

promote. Citizens who share a thin national identity are more likely to feel obligations of justice towards one another without necessarily being bound to a particular conception of the good. It is almost a truism to say that people will be more likely to make sacrifices for others if they are perceived as “one of us”. Therefore, “promoting a sense of national identity strengthens the sense of mutual obligation needed to sustain liberal justice.” (p. 265)

Historically, liberal states have promoted their national identity for less commendable means *e.g.* encouraging uncritical patriotism, even to the extent of being willing to die for one’s country, especially during wartime. According to Kymlicka, these policies were often aimed at promoting a relatively thick conception of national identity based on a particular religion or way of life. Witness the process of “Americanization” imposed on immigrants to the United States in the early parts of the twentieth century. Immigrants were expected to conform to the customs and habits of the dominant White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (**WASP**) culture. However, during the post-war period there was a trend among Western democracies towards a thinning of national identity so as to encourage national solidarity without requiring cultural assimilation. (p. 265 - 266)

There is no violation of liberal neutrality for a state to promote a thin national identity for the purposes of encouraging citizens to fulfil their obligations of justice to one another. Nor is such an identity grounded in a particular conception of the good, or the ranking of the intrinsic merits of different ways of life. The liberal nationalist state remains anti-perfectionist, leaving the evaluation of competing conceptions of the good life in civil society to individual choice (and revision). Sceptics however argue that liberal nationalism is always on a slippery slope towards “thickening” the content of national identity so as to favour particular lifestyles, religions, or traditions. According to Kymlicka, we see examples of this in contemporary Eastern European countries where the tendency to thicken notions of national identity endangers efforts to build unity through ideas of nationhood. (p. 266)

A liberal nationalist however would insist that nation-building can be thinned in such a way as to promote a common national identity without endorsing any common conception of the good. If so, then there is an essential difference between liberal nationalism and communitarian conceptions of a politics of the common good. Indeed, according to communitarians themselves, liberal nationalism does not qualify as a “politics of a common good”. Compatriots may share common languages and a sense of belonging to a common historical tradition, and yet fundamentally disagree about ultimate ends in life. However such a common national identity would be too thin a basis for communitarian politics. For this reason many communitarians have a preference for the local level for communitarian politics, where there is more likely to be a consensus on questions of the good life. So for some communitarians, at least, politics is unfortunately, inevitably liberal at the national level but potentially and desirably communitarian at the local level. (p. 266 - 267)

From a liberal perspective however, what makes national identity unattractive to communitarians, *i.e.* that it is not founded on shared beliefs about the good, is precisely what makes it attractive as a basis for liberal politics. (Tamir, 1993 p. 90) A common national identity is a source of trust and solidarity that can accommodate even serious disagreements over conceptions of the good life. Moreover, exposure to the common culture provides citizens with a range of choices without preventing them from questioning or revising particular values or belief. (p. 267)

Until recently “liberal nationalism” was regarded as something of an oxymoron because all “nationalisms” were considered to be illiberal by definition; however it appears that liberal nationalism can indeed be a distinctly liberal approach to social unity. According to Kymlicka,

... the more people have examined the actual practice of liberal democracies in trying to sustain social unity, and the more people have considered the link between national identity and individual freedom, the more people have concluded that ideals of nationhood provide an important basis for the achievement of liberal ideals of justice and liberty. To date, nationhood has provided the best basis on which to promote communal trust and solidarity without limiting the freedom of individuals to form and revise their conceptions of the good. (p. 267)

Whether liberal nationalism can sustain feelings of solidarity and legitimacy is another question. According to some communitarians, whatever liberal nationalism’s recent success, it remains too thin a basis for solidarity in the long term. On the contrary, liberal nationalists point out that such solidarity is based, not only on shared beliefs about justice, but also on a shared national identity. This account of solidarity is stronger than that argued for by Rawls and Dworkin; however it is an open question as to whether it goes far enough. After all, it requires compatriots to make sacrifices for others who may be quite different in terms of ethnicity, religion or way of life. Are being co-nationals enough to motivate such altruism? As we have seen, some communitarians, *e.g.* Sandel (1996), argue, without empirical evidence, that there are growing feelings of apathy and discontent in Western democratic welfare states, that suggest that the bonds between citizens themselves and the state can no longer sustain liberal nationalism. (Kymlicka, p. 267)

Perhaps the “thin bond of common nationhood”, which was a powerful motivator in the past, is less substantial in an era of rapidly evolving multiculturalism, transnationalism, and globalisation. According to Kymlicka, many commentators have begun discussing “the end of the nation state”, as some political entities are moving up towards transnational institutions (like the World Bank or European Union) or moving in the opposite direction towards local or regional governments. (Guéhenno, 1995) Whether or not we are witnessing the end of the era of the nation-state is unknown; however as mentioned at the end of the previous section, if liberal nationalism proves to be inadequate to the task, it is difficult to see how communitarianism could be the solution. (p. 267 - 268)

If a politics of the common good is not viable at the national level then, according to communitarians, whatever lack of solidarity and legitimacy at the national level must be remedied by decentralising power to the local level, where stronger forms of solidarity and legitimacy can be forged based on the pursuit of a common conception of the good. Kymlicka, however is sceptical that such shared conceptions of the good exist even at the local level. But even if they do, the situation would be as follows: weak liberal politics at the national level and strong communitarian politics at the local level. But this does not solve the challenge posed by Taylor of motivating citizens to fulfil their obligations of justice imposed by a welfare state. A communitarian decentralised approach cannot meet the challenge because it operates only at the local level, yet the problems to be addressed are injustice in modern states. It may be that redistribution of resources is sustainable *within* local communities that share a common conception of the good; however the most urgent injustices require redistribution *across* communities. *E.g.* from heavily capital-

endowed suburbanites to impoverished rural subsistence farmers. Local communitarian politics cannot make a difference on this level. What is needed is a source of solidarity that is neither local nor grounded on a shared conception of the good. What *is* requires is a common national identity. (p. 268)

Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism

One shortcoming of liberal nationalism is its seeming indifference to transnational issues of global justice. While there may be inequalities within Western nation-states, these pale in comparison to those in developing world. Not only is the scale of inequality enormous, but it also epitomises what Rawls and Dworkin referred to as “morally arbitrary”. According to Carens (1987), the gulf in life-chances between rich and poor countries is the modern equivalent of feudalism. People born on the one side of the Rio Grande are born into the latter day equivalent of nobility, while those born on the other side, just a few miles away, are born into the latter day equivalent of serfdom. (p. 268 - 269)

Commentators on Rawls have argued that liberal egalitarianism’s commitment to remediating undeserved inequalities should also pursue a global or cosmopolitan conception of distributive justice. Accordingly, Rawls’ theory of justice should be applied both globally and domestically. People in the original position would not want their fate to depend overwhelmingly and arbitrarily on the country in which they might happen to be born. (p. 269)

Global inequality could be tackled in two different ways: firstly, by the redistribution of resources from citizens in wealthy countries to those in poorer countries; secondly, by opening the borders of wealthy countries to those from poorer countries. Of course, both approaches have been met with fierce resistance by wealthy countries as they have scrambled to literally and figuratively “ringfence” both their economies and territories from either the transfer of resources outward or the movement of people inward. Notwithstanding, defenders of global justice argue that Western countries must permit either one or a combination of such strategies. For example, to the extent that one country limits immigration, they should in turn be obliged to offset this by the transfer some of their resources to immigrant countries. (Goodin, 1992) According to Kymlicka, “This, it seems, is the inescapable conclusion of liberal-egalitarian principles.” (p. 269)

Liberal nationalism however is seemingly only concerned with distributive justice on a domestic level, taking for granted the right of Western nation-states to both amass their unequal wealth and close off their borders to immigrants. Accordingly, some critics maintain that this indifference to global justice is one of the main flaws of liberal nationalism, and that to defend global or cosmopolitan justice requires abandoning liberal nationalism. Yet some liberal nationalists are, without contradiction, in defence of a more cosmopolitan conception of justice. (p. 269)

Whether we view nationalism and global justice as conflicting ideals depends, in part, on our assumptions about people’s innate moral sympathies. According to Kymlicka, cosmopolitan critics of liberal nationalism write as if the default position of humans is one of altruism towards all other humans across the globe. On this view, nationalism artificially restricts our natural altruistic tendencies to pursue global justice. Liberal nationalists, on the other hand, argue that people’s natural sympathies are much more parochial, far narrower indeed than the nation-state. Historically,

the only sort of redistribution that people have been willing to accept has been limited to their kin and/or members of their own religion. Nation-building, far from restricting our natural altruistic tendencies, has, in fact, artificially extended them to encompass all citizens within the state, including those with different ethnic backgrounds, religions and ways of life. The fear is that if we were to reject the moral salience of nationhood, we would regress to our more restricted natural moral sympathies towards kin and co-religionists, as was the historical norm. (p. 269 - 270)

For liberal nationalists, then, the extension of moral concern to all compatriots was a momentous, yet fragile, historical achievement that should not be abandoned on the gamble that our natural moral concerns are globally altruistic. That is not to say that we should reject all moves towards global justice, only that we cannot realise them by destroying the substantial achievements of liberal nationalism. How the centrality of nationhood can be maintained while simultaneously working towards justice on a global scale is not yet known, when the relations between liberal egalitarianism, liberal nationalism, and cosmopolitanism, are still to be worked out. (p. 270)

The Politics of Communitarianism

As Kymlicka has pointed out, communitarianism is supported by two lines of argument, each with a different political emphasis. The first line of argument concerns the relationship between the self and its ends. The communitarian idea of “constructive ends” and the “embedded self” are proffered as an alternative to the liberal belief in rational revisability. As such communitarianism is a very conservative doctrine that would limit the ability of individuals to question or reject traditions or practices they might find oppressive, debasing or simply unacceptable. Leaders of traditionalist or fundamentalist ethnic or religious groupings may find this position attractive; however it is doubtful that most communitarians actually endorse such an illiberal position, supported by straw-man arguments about the self and its ends. (p. 270)

Most of the communitarian debate has therefore shifted to the second line of argument concerning the need for a social context for individual freedom. Sometimes this too involves straw-man arguments, such as when liberals are portrayed as believing in “atomism”, thereby denying the “social thesis”. At other times, there are substantive political issues at stake, most of which are concerned with the tension between unity and diversity. (p. 270 - 271)

To oversimplify matters, we could say that liberals accept and indeed welcome citizens in modern societies that have adopted a wide range of different and competing conceptions of the good life. They view such a diversity of ends as a source of cultural richness and individual autonomy, without undermining social unity, just so long as everyone shares a commitment to liberal justice (and perhaps a “thin” national identity). (p. 271)

Communitarians, on the other hand, are worried about the proliferation of a diversity of ends in modern societies and its potential impact on social unity and the ability of groups to come together and accomplished shared goals. They are sceptical that social unity can be sustained by principles of social justice (or a “thin” national identity). They also fear that the balance between diversity vs. unity has been upset. This anxiety, which is characteristic of contemporary communitarianism, is often expressed as laments about the “decline” or “failure” of various social institutions, be they family, neighbourhood associations, the media, schools or churches and their capacity to generate a

sense of “ethical community”. Liberals by contrast, in popular discourse, are portrayed by communitarians as focused exclusively on the protection of individual rights and civil liberties and on access to economic resources. (p 271)

If communitarians share in their anxiety about the disequilibrium between diversity vs. unity, they disagree about how to re-establish the balance. According to Derek Phillips (1993) communitarians can be regarded as either “looking back” or “looking forwards”, and these two perspectives lead to very different political conclusions. Those who look backwards typically bemoan the “decline” of community, whose social institutions they suppose functioned well in the “good old days”, but have since been eroded by the hostile assertion of individual rights and cultural diversity. These undermining forces include feminism, gay rights, multiculturalism as well as a general trend towards consumerism and materialism. For the “backward looking” communitarian, society has “gone too far” in accommodating individual choice and cultural diversity, to the extent that we have become a “permissive society”, that is more concerned with pursuing individual preferences over communal responsibility. Such “nostalgic” communitarians seek to redress the balance by reclaiming a conception of the common good that would reduce the sort of diversity that threatens their traditional conservative values by, for example, limiting gay rights, restricting divorce and promoting prayer in schools. (p. 271 - 272)

Phillips believes that most communitarians belong to this “backwards looking” category. Contrast these with those communitarians who accept that individual choice and cultural diversity are desirable features of modern society. These “forward looking” communitarians acknowledge that we live in a multiracial, multireligious, and multicultural society whose members have the right to decide for themselves whether or not traditional ways of life are worthy of pursuing. Forward looking communitarians however worry that traditional sources of social unity will not be able to accommodate so much diversity. They therefore seek newer and stronger sources of commonality to counterbalance these wider forms of diversity. To this end, they seek out new ways to build bonds of community that integrate and accommodate (rather than constrain) diversity. (p. 272)

Thus, forward looking communitarianism need not rest on illiberal values or assumptions. Indeed, as noted earlier, liberal nationalism that draws upon the modern idea of nationhood to unite diverse peoples, can be viewed as one such forward-looking form of communitarianism. Forward-looking communitarianism, at least in theory, merges with nationalism and republicanism. To the extent that it is committed to protecting the rights of women and minorities, it also merges into feminism and multiculturalism. According to Kymlicka, for anyone who is concerned about sustaining bonds of ethical community in an era of individual choice and cultural diversity, virtually all political theorists today would qualify as forward-looking communitarians. So, although forward-looking communitarianism may not represent an actual position, it is “a question or a challenge which all political theories must now face up to”. (p. 272)

In practice, the distinction between forward and backward-looking communitarianism is not so clear cut. Many communitarians combine both varieties into their theories, at times lamenting the decline or failure of various social institutions and at others envisioning the building new bonds of solidarity across differences. Communitarianism, in general, cannot therefore be located on a continuum from conservative reaction at the one extreme to progressive reform on the other. Nor is the debate just about those who do or do not accept the social thesis, when there a number of different debates

going on. Amongst others, there are debates about civil society, cultural structures, political legitimacy and state boundaries, each of which should be considered on their own merits. (p. 273)

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