

On Communitarians and Human Freedom

Or, How to Square the Circle

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IN THE SPRING 1994 (Vol. 8, No. 2) issue of *Critical Review* a number of prominent political philosophers published their thoughts on the chances of embracing the liberal and communitarian principles in one coherent, non-contradictory system of thought. Since on that occasion all the arguments most favoured by each of the two sides were rehearsed, restated and summarized, this collection of statements offers an excellent starting point for the consideration of moot issues, stakes and prospects of the ongoing liberal/communitarian *querelle*.

The exchange was prompted by the publication of Will Kymlicka's *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (1991) – 'a penetrating, highly illuminating, and exceptionally lucid book' as Ronald Beiner (himself the author of another influential study, *What's the Matter with Liberalism?* [1992]) writes, and other writers agree. What, in their opinion, made Kymlicka's book so interesting and worthy of extended comment, is that it confronted point blank the arguments raised against the liberal theory by the most influential spokesmen of communitarianism (thinkers like Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor or Michael Walzer) with the intention to defuse such arguments by either showing that their opposition to liberalistic tenets is wholly illusory, or by accommodating them into a 'new and improved' version of liberalism; as well as the book's overall peace-making tone, its underlying conviction – refreshing and welcome after years of acrimony – that short of merger and unity, at least a lasting truce and friendly cohabitation between adversaries are feasible.

Among Kymlicka's (1991) propositions, one which his commentators like most (though some, on the communitarian side of the argument, think it does not go far enough to cure liberalism of its ills through making it more

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- *Theory, Culture & Society* 1996 (SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi), Vol. 13(2): 79–90

communitarian-minded) is that, in fact, the plurality of cultures and cultural allegiances is something which liberalism, far from frowning upon, considers as an asset: as cultures multiply, so do the choices open to the individual, and liberalism is all about freedom of choice. The liberal, therefore – so Kymlicka suggests – should be interested in actively promoting variety and resisting all homogenizing pressures.

Why this opinion is seen as ‘highly illuminating’ by the reviewers seems at the first glance to be something of a mystery, since on the same ground cultural (even moral) pluralism has been defended and praised by the foremost liberal thinkers for a long time now.¹ Perhaps, however, the excitement is less mysterious than it seems; the arguments, stated in liberal thought in a generalized and thus relatively uncontroversial and inoffensive form, Kymlicka extended as an olive branch to the communitarian critics of liberalism. By the same token, he suggested that the repeatedly declared liberal devotion to difference may be stretched far enough to embrace the kind of difference which the communitarians promote and so renders their charges against liberal thought null and void. In order to do so, Kymlicka (1991) gives the liberal call for variety a wording meant to placate the communitarian grievances without offending liberal conscience:

Liberals should be concerned with the fate of cultural structures, not because they have some moral status of their own, but because it's only through having a rich and secure cultural structure that people can become aware, in a vivid way, of the options available to them.

So the liberals may stay happy, since the difference now, as before, has not been recognized as a finite value in its own right; but the communitarians may feel appeased, since whatever their motives, liberals promise to respect and even promote the difference so dear to the communitarian heart (they manage to do so by imputing to the ‘cultural structure’ an instrumental value in promoting liberal goals). The communitarian joy may well be rendered even more complete by the hand-on-heart acceptance, by a liberal writer, what they used to aver all along *against* liberalism – namely, that ‘having a rich and secure cultural structure’ is a good and humane thing (they may be worried, though, as well as baffled, by a surprising suggestion that ‘secure structure’ is a good thing because it prompts awareness of options – but then what it does or does not promote is an empirical statement, not an issue of policy, and thus may be quietly left to future quarrels of social-scientific archivists. And if this is how the liberals prefer, for the sake of convenience, to couch their surrender, why should those, whose point has been thereby granted, object?)

It seems that Kymlicka's stratagem is to get both sides to agree on a joint policy statement through convincing each one that not only has the pursuit of their goals not been compromised, but that the signing of the agreement testifies to the intention to go on pursuing them to yet better effect.

This is, however, glossing over the genuine bone of contention, not resolving the controversy. The difference loved (or declared to be loved) by the liberals is not the difference loved (or declared to be loved) by the communitarians. All similarities, one is tempted to say, are purely coincidental. . . . The difference the liberals esteem and hold dear is external to the human individual; 'difference' stands here for the profusion of choices between the ways of being human and living one's life. The difference for which the communitarians clamour is of the internalized kind; 'difference' stands here for the refusal, or inability, to consider other forms of life as options – for being determined or fated to remain what one is, to stay this way whatever happens, and resist all temptation to the contrary. To put it in a nutshell, the liberal 'difference' stands for individual freedom, while the communitarian 'difference' stands for the group's power to limit individual freedom.

The communitarian theorists, notably MacIntyre, complain about the skindEEP, volatile and insecure nature of the identities obtainable under liberal regime of free choice and 'disentrenchment' of formative structures. They hanker after identities which are neither phoney nor shallow (that is – to deploy Weber's metaphor – identities more like iron cages than cloaks lying lightly on the individual's shoulders, ready to be taken off at any time), which they, for reasons not at all obvious yet never argued explicitly, consider equivalent to *meaningful* identity. Again, for reasons not at all clear and even less convincing, the communitarians want the outcome of the choice to be settled before the act of choosing takes off: to a communitarian mind, the good choice is the choice of what is already given – the discovery and giving a conscious expression to 'historical identity' transmitted through birth (this time one may recall Mao's understanding of the once famous policy of 'let a hundred flowers bloom'; the blooming was innocuous to Mao in as far as there was certainty that one flower, the sole one deserving to bloom forever, would overwhelm and stifle all the others). The tribute paid to individual choice is no more than lip service; ideally, freedom ought to be employed solely to choose unfreedom; voluntariness means here using individual volition to abstain from exercising free will. The true choice has been made and signed before the individual's birth. The life that follows the birth is (should be) all about finding out what that choice was, and behaving accordingly.

Communitarian theory is a *modern* ideology, constructed and preached under modern conditions – that is, under circumstances when choice is not only a possibility, but a reality difficult to escape; modern individuals are 'sentenced' to the life-time of choosing. And so communitarian hints about the irretrievably 'encumbered' nature of individual identity stop short of developing a fully fledged theory of ascriptive determinism. Communitarian-style determinism is not automatic; paradoxically, its work cannot be completed without an active role being played by human will and choice. Fate runs its full course only when willingly (joyfully!) embraced by the fated individual. But in admitting this, communitarian philosophy places willy-nilly the communities of tradition and history it promotes on the same footing

as all other 'groups of belonging' (including those in direct or oblique competition with 'rooted' reference groups); all such groups 'hold' their members only as much as the members 'stick' to them; perpetuation of all such groups depends on the intensity and resilience of their 'members' active allegiance. It is risky to leave the destiny of the favoured, 'rooted' reference groups ('communities of tradition') to the vagaries of open competition. One would much prefer to have the favourable outcome of the competition guaranteed in advance. But this means *privileging* one choice over all the others; making the odds against other choices overwhelming, and increasing the stakes entailed in making the 'right' choice. At this point, though, communitarianism leaves the ostensibly philosophical discussion of the human existential predicament to enter the realm of practical politics.

The paradox is not new, of course, and not of the communitarians' making. It has haunted modern nationalism from the start of which present-day communitarianism is, so to speak, a discontinuous continuation (racism was then, as it is now, a constantly tempting path of escape from the paradox which nationalism and communitarianism share). Maurice Barrès, one of the most insightful and influential philosophers of nationalism, struggled with the same problem: nationalist beliefs are pointless without an assumption, that there is a point 'from which all things can be seen in true proportions' – but also without the premise that this point cannot be designed, but only found, recovered or lost; this must be a point fixed *beforehand* – but (and here comes the crux) it must be yet dug up and fortified by each individual, using his skills, reason and will. In other words, human lot is inevitable, but this inevitability of fate works through *voluntary* efforts . . .

I must place myself at the point demanded by my eyes, as they have been formed in the course of centuries, at the point from which all things make themselves to the Frenchman's measure. The assembly of just and true relations between the objects and the concrete man, the Frenchman, are French truth and justice: to discover these relations is French reason. Pure nationalism is nothing else than being aware of such a point's existence, searching for it, and – having reached it – clinging to it in our arts, our politics, and all our activities. (Barrès, 1902: 8–13)²

We know where this lyrical encomium of the roots has pointed to, with an irresistible momentum of its own: to an overwhelming urge to *make sure* that the 'I must' means what it says, that the 'discovery' is made by everybody and that everyone 'clings' to what has been discovered in 'all activities'. And there was but one way of making sure: using the state prerogative of legislated coercion to render 'missing the point' as unlikely as possible, and 'finding the point' virtually inescapable. The nation without a state would be, after all, just one 'reference group' among many – like them forever uncertain of its survival, like them buffeted by cross-currents of changing fashions, like them having to appeal daily to flickery loyalties, and like them having to lean over backwards to deliver proofs of the advantage of its benefits over the offers of the competitors. Nation-state (the idea of a nation made

into the state's flesh) could, on the other hand, *legislate* loyalty and determine in advance the results of free choice. The postulated roots could be legislated into existence and taken care of by the state agencies of law and order, the state-defined canon of cultural heritage and the state-authorized curriculum of history teaching.

Let us recall that the purpose of all that was to put paid to the grip in which 'communities' (*local* traditions, customs, dialects, loyalties) held the would-be patriots of the one and indivisible nation. The idea guiding all these efforts of the nation-state was to superimpose one kind of allegiance over the mosaic of communitarian 'particularisms' in the name of the nation's interest which overrides and puts in abeyance all other interests, including what this or that individual might believe was his or her 'own', individual, interest. In terms of practical politics, this meant the dismantling or legal disempowering of all *pouvoirs intermédiaires*, the self-government of any unit smaller than the nation-state which was more than executor of the nation-state will, and claimed more than delegated power.

From Charles Taylor's contribution to the *Critical Review* debate, we learn that after all these (as it transpired later, inconclusive) efforts to achieve national unification 'minority communities' are 'struggling to maintain themselves'. They struggle to maintain themselves, that is, *as communities*. And this means in turn that 'these people are striving for more than their rights as individuals'. Taylor is undaunted by the fact that it is only thanks to the old stratagem of *petitio principii* that his statement makes sense: what was to be proved has been entered as an axiomatic premise. If there is something *more than the 'rights as individuals'* (that is, is there is something so important that it justifies the suspension of the rights of the individuals *qua* individuals), then of course, struggle is inevitable and any benevolent person owes the fighters sympathy and assistance. But what is that 'something more'?

'Something more' (let us repeat, that 'something' which makes certain restrictions of the individual right to choose palatable and even welcome) is the 'goal of *survivance*'; and this means in turn 'the continuance of the community through future generations'. Put in simpler, and above all *practical*, terms, the pursuit of the 'goal of survivance' calls for the right of the community to limit or pre-empt the choices of younger and not-yet-born generations, to decide for them what their choices should be like. In other words, what is demanded here is the power of enforcement; to make sure that people would act in a certain way rather than in other ways, to taper the range of their options, to manipulate the probabilities; to make them *do what they otherwise would not do, to make them less free* than they otherwise would be. Why is it important to do so? Taylor points out that this is to be done (how often have we heard such an argument . . .) in people's own well understood interest, since 'human beings can only make meaningful choices of their way of life against a background of alternatives which can only come to them through the language and cultural tradition of their society'. A similar idea was expressed over and over again by the generations of prophets and court

poets of the *nation-state*, and it is not immediately obvious why under Taylor's pen it should be an argument in favour of the cause of the 'struggling minorities'. For the change of address to become justified, one needs first to reveal a hidden corollary: namely, the realization that the nation-state has not delivered on its promise, that for one reason or another it is now bankrupt as a fount of 'meaningful choice of the way of life', that nationalism devoid of its state foundation has lost the authority without which the overriding of individual choosing rights is neither feasible nor felt acceptable, and that in the resulting void it is the 'struggling minorities' which are now believed to be the second line of trenches where 'meaningful choice' can be protected from slaughter; they are now hoped to succeed in the task which the nation-state has definitely failed to perform.

The striking similarity between the nationalist and the communitarian hopes and paradoxes is not at all accidental. Both 'future perfect' visions are, after all, the philosophers' reactions to the widespread experience of acute and abrupt 'disembedding', caused by the accelerated collapse of the frames in which identities were habitually inscribed. Nationalism was the response to the wholesale destruction of the 'cottage industry' of identities, and the ensuing devaluation of the locally (and 'matter-of-factly') produced and endorsed patterns of life. The nationalist vision arose from the desperate hope that clarity and security of existence could be rebuilt at a higher, supra-local level of social organization, around the membership of the nation and citizenship of the state melted into one. For reasons too vast and numerous to be listed here, that hope failed to come true. The nation-state proved to be the incubator of a modern society ruled not so much by the unity of feelings as by the diversity of unemotional market interests. The thorough job it made of uprooting local loyalties looks in retrospect not so much like a production of higher-level identities, but like a site-clearing operation for the market-led confidence game of quickly assembled and fast dismantled modes of self-description.

And so, once more, 'meaningful' identities ('meaningful' in the sense once postulated by nationalists, now by the communitarians) are hard to come by, while keeping them in place and intact, for however brief a moment, taxes the taught and learned juggling skills of individuals far beyond their capacity. Since the idea that the 'society' institutionalized in the state will lend a helping hand no longer holds much water, no wonder that eyes shift in a different direction; by some irony of history, however, they drift towards entities whose radical destruction used to be seen, from the beginning of modernity, as the condition *sine qua non* of 'meaningful choice': it is now the much-maligned 'natural communities of origin', necessarily *smaller than the nation-state*, once described by modernizing propaganda as parochial backwaters, prejudice-ridden, oppressive and stultifying, which are looked to hopefully as the trusty executors of that streamlining, de-randomizing, meaning-saturating of human choices which the nation-state abominably failed to bring forth.

There is no denying that the life of a free agent is not all roses. The

torments, which the critics of a life no longer securely founded in ascription try to capture in the image of ‘shallow and meaningless identity’, are genuine. The torments are many, but they all boil down to the noxious and sickening feeling of perpetual uncertainty in everything regarding the *future*. The fast and continuously accelerating pace of change makes one thing certain: that the future will not be like the present. But the quick succession of futures dissolving into the succession of presents teaches as well, and also beyond reasonable doubt, that today’s present (at least its subjectively mastered, ‘domesticated’ and ‘tamed’ part) does not bind the future, that present of tomorrow – and so there is little the individual can do today to make sure that the results s/he wishes to hold tomorrow will be achieved. Living in a *Risikogesellschaft* (the extremely apt term coined by Ulrich Beck [1993]), we may say, rebounds in personal experience as *Risikoleben*. As Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck Gernsheim (1995) put it, ‘certainties have fragmented into questions which are now spinning around in people’s heads. But it is more than that. Social action needs routines in which to be enacted.’ But it is

precisely this level of pre-conscious ‘collective habitualizations’ of matters taken for granted, that is breaking down into a cloud of possibilities to be thought about and negotiated. The deep layer of foreclosed decisions is being forced up into the level of decision-making. Hence the irritation, the endless chafing of the open wound – and the defensive-aggressive reaction. . . . Life loses its self-evident quality. (Beck and Beck Gernsheim, 1995)³

Trying to grasp the infuriatingly evasive identity, demanded with the same superhuman power as it is denied, individuals fight a losing battle. Hence the irritation that punctuates and poisons the delights of their successive avatars. What makes the prospect of a radical cure dimmer still, is the fact that individuals, torn between intoxicating freedom and horrifying uncertainty, desire the impossible; they want no less than to eat a cake and have it – relishing and practising their freedom of choice while having the ‘happy ending’ guaranteed and the results insured. Whatever name they select to call their worry, what individuals truly resent is the risk innate in freedom; whatever they call their dreams, what they desire is a *risk-free freedom*. The trouble is, however, that freedom and risk grow and diminish only together. Thus the ultimate solution to the plight of the modern individual is not on the cards.

Pseudo-solutions, on the other hand, abound, thanks to an inexhaustible demand for straightening up the twisted loop of contradictory pains and desires. At times when the continuous uncertainty is, dramatically, pushed further a notch or two, the dream of homely security prevails over the allure of adventure. This happened at the onset of the modern restructuring of structures and re-evaluation of values, then paving the way to the early success of the nationalist promise of homely tranquillity. This is happening once more today, with the onset of the postmodern stage of modern revolution – with the radical change in the rules by which the game of livelihood is played, with the thorough redefinition of all particular, acquired skills and of

the meaning of skill as such, with the disavowal of the habitualized patterns of partnership and devaluation of the social know-how which that pattern required – and is paving the way for the sudden popularity of communitarianism, that ‘nationalism mark two’.

Admittedly, old-fashioned nationalism is far from running its course, particularly in the post-colonial world, in Africa or in Eastern Europe, among the debris left by the collapsing capitalist or communist empires alike. There, the idea of a nation providing a home for the lost and the confused is still fresh and, above all, untried. It is all in the future (even if nationalism, just like communitarianism, deploys with gusto the language of heritage, roots and shared past), and the future is the natural place in which to invest one’s hopes and cravings. For Europe (with the exception of its currently post-colonial part), on the other hand, nationalism together with its crowning achievement, the nation-state, lies fairly and squarely in the past. It failed to resolve in the past what once more is to be resolved now, and it would be foolish to expect that the second time round it will perform any better. Europe knows as well what the post-colonial world does not know or does not care much about: that the closer the nation-state’s works approach the ideal of solid foundations and a secure home, the less freedom there is to move around the house, and the air inside the house gets rank and foul. For these, as well as for other reasons which I tried to explain elsewhere (Bauman, 1995: ch. Europe of Nations, Europe of Tribes), nothing which the present-day nation-states are able, willing or used to doing seems adequate to meet the anguish of uncertainty which devours the psychic resources of the postmodern individual.

Under the circumstances, what makes the visions of ‘natural community’ conjured up in the communitarian writings so attractive, is above all the fact that it has been imagined independently from, and even in opposition to, the state. It looks as if the state, in accordance with popular feelings, has been abandoned by the communitarian philosophers to the ‘risk-producing’ side of human existence: it takes care of freedom, but in so doing it leaves individuals to their patently inadequate resources in their struggle to navigate among the risks of freedom in order to sail into the haven of ‘meaningful choice’. As once the nation, so now the ‘natural community’ stands for that dream of safe haven. This haven is located away from the explored routes, having been moved to places which the lonely sailors were thus far discouraged from visiting. However eager the communitarians are to ‘root’ such places in a genuine or invented, pre-modern past, it is the modern spirit of adventure, of exploring the unexplored, of trying the untried, which makes them attractive to the philosophers and to their readers alike. Perhaps this time . . .

The ‘community’ of the communitarian philosophers is expected to enchant and attract for the same reason the nations of the nationalist philosophers once did: for their homely cosiness, the promise of mutual support and understanding, harmony of interests, unity of desires. Once more, the dilemma as old as modernity itself is left out of account or glossed over: *either* ‘community’ is a *result* of individual choices, an entity made and freely

chosen (in Roberto Unger's [1987: 167] words, 'accidental, made up, pasted together' as the result of unpredictable coalitions, unforeseen consequences, and missed opportunities),⁴ and thus their very existence, and the choices of loyalty which sustain that existence, are incurably burdened with the same anxieties of risk-taking as all other aspects of life of the thoroughly individualized persons acting under conditions of permanent uncertainty; or this 'community' *precedes* all choice, in the sense of a priori predisposing the individuals to stay loyal to its values and behavioural precepts (through indoctrination, drill, control) – and thus the community membership comes into direct conflict with individual freedom of self-constitution, self-assertion and self-definition.

This dilemma signals a trade-off situation; the value acquired and cherished needs to be sacrificed in order to gain the value missed. But the homely cosiness of no-choice owes its allure solely to the hardships of daily freedom. Without that freedom, the plight of no-choice has all the attraction of prison life.

This dilemma remains today as genuine and unsolved as it ever was, and no amount of argument is likely to square this particular circle. It preoccupies the philosophers, but it also saturates the experience of the post-modern individual reiterated daily in the world which is fragmented, episodic and hostile to consistent, consequential action; the individual burdened with the task of daily choices and the daily task of getting the choices 'confirmed' and validated among the cacophony of contradictory and ephemeral ideals and precepts. Such an experience gestates an acute need of reassurance, which in contemporary society is sought in two kinds of authority: of the experts, or of numbers.

There is today a proliferation of analysts, advisers and counsellors basking in the glory of the 'latest word' of science, as well as of the teach-yourself textbooks they produce; their overall message is 'choose, but choose wisely'. And there is the reassurance derived from the awareness that many 'others like me' share my predicament and choose similar 'solutions' to similar 'problems'. Here, the message is 'choose what others have chosen, and you cannot go wrong'. Between themselves, the two authorities draw the line separating the torments of individuality from the agony of madness.

It is the search for the second kind of authority, that of the numbers, which sediments the 'neo-tribes' (or, more precisely, *postulated* tribes) – the wholes which in the last account (and contrary to their promise) seldom prove to be more than the sum of their parts, and whose imputed authority is measured by the determination of each part to make sums. Such 'neo-tribes' are products of multiple choices and are no more durable than the choices which made them – as long, that is, as the choosers retain their freedom of choosing, so that they are free to revoke their decision when the need arises. Neo-tribes, conjured up with the intention of giving the choices that solidity which the choosers sorely miss, share in the *inconsequentiality* of choices, and change little in the episodicity of the chooser's life.

These are the problems which haunt those who are in a position to

choose. Freedom of choice is, however, a graduated quality; indeed, it has become a major stratifying variable in our multi-dimensionally stratified society. In the postmodern/consumer society choosing is everybody's *fate*, but the ranges of *realistic choices* differ, and so the supplies of *resources* needed to make them. It is the individual *responsibility* for choice that is equally distributed, not the individually owned *means* to act on that responsibility. Notoriously, casting everyone equally into the situation of the 'chooser by necessity' does not promote equality of the practical ability to choose. For all we know, the effect is exactly opposite. As Jerzy Jedlicki (1993: 65) pointed out, what the liberal vision of the universal and equally awarded right to choose failed to take account of, is that 'adding freedom of action to the fundamental inequality of social condition will result in inequality yet deeper than before'. What liberal society offers with one hand, it tends to take back with the other; the duty of freedom without the resources that would permit a truly free choice is, for many affected, a recipe for life without dignity, filled instead with humiliation and self-deprecation.

This is all too real a problem in a society organized around liberal principles, and one which the communitarians purport to assault and tackle. Yet the problem consists in matching the practical ability to choose against the requirements imposed on the individuals by the necessity of choosing; while the communitarians propose, instead, to heal the painful consequences of the mismatch not by increasing the rights to the level of the possibilities which the condition of freedom entails *in potentia*, but by making a virtue out of the restrictions imposed on the exercising of the right to choose, and thus to make the actualization of that potential of freedom still more difficult. As so often in the practice of social engineering, the medicine proposed has every chance of rendering the ailment more acute.

'The values more important than the rights of individuals', or the task of 'survivance' which ought to take precedence over individual entitlements, are slogans which appeal to humane conscience, and have every right to trouble liberal complacency, as long as they come from the deprived quarters which agonize over their lack of the possibility to choose in a society in which being an individual is tantamount to being a free chooser, yet practical freedom of choice is a privilege; and as long as these slogans are deployed as reminders that the job of freedom-promotion is far from complete and that its completion would require doing something to rectify the present distribution of resources which deprives large sectors of would-be individuals from exercising their individuality. It is all too easy to overlook, however, the fact that apart from being effective 'bargaining points' in the legitimate struggle for redistribution of resources serving individual freedom, these slogans carry a proposition which, if accepted uncritically, will have exactly the opposite effect of curtailing that freedom. Ronald Beiner (1992) justly points out that, in his zeal to accommodate communitarian postulates in the liberal promotion of freedom, Kymlicka 'does not fully face up to the fact that what he is advocating as an entailment of liberalism is assistance for a community to fend off liberalization of its way of life'. One recalls willy nilly the Soviet

rulers' proposition that the ultimate communist goal of the abolition of the state is to be achieved through radical increasing of the coercive power of the state. And one recalls also the consequences of that instance of double-think.

Philosophical well-wishers on both sides of the liberal/communitarian divide are all too often blackmailed or shied to courteously close their eyes to the realities of those 'minorities' whose cause they are prompted to advocate by their laudable sympathy for the left-behind and deprived. But all too often the reality, when contemplated at close quarters, and particularly from inside, does not look exactly prepossessing. More often than not the 'survival' postulate turns into an awesome weapon of subjugation and tyranny, exercised by the acclaimed or self-proclaimed guardians of the 'community' (ethnic, racial, religious) traditional values in order to exact obeisance from their hapless wards and to stamp out every inkling of an autonomous choice. The values of rights and freedom, dear to the liberal heart, are appealed to to promote the demotion of individual rights and the denial of freedom. 'Minorities' are products of illiberal practices of the state; but they are all too fit to be deployed in the service of illiberal practices of the 'community leaders'.

Communitarianism is not a remedy for the inherent defects of liberalism. The contradiction between them is genuine, and no amount of philosophical gymnastics may heal it. Both communitarianism and liberalism are projections of dreams born of the real contradiction inherent in the plight of autonomous individuals. Each one is but a one-sided projection, which for the sake of its own coherence tends to gloss over the fact that none of the virtues of the individual's plight may survive the elimination of its banes. Community without freedom is a project as horrifying as freedom without community. For better or worse, the life of the autonomous individual cannot but be navigated between the two equally unattractive extremes. For better or worse, steering clear of both is all the chance of meaningful and dignified life human individuals may reasonably hope for, however much is done by the philosophers to bar them from facing that truth.

Notes

1. For instance, both the necessity and desirability of pluralism has been emphatically argued by John Rawls – for whom the multiplicity of religious, philosophic and moral beliefs which are all rational yet mutually incompatible, is the trademark of the liberal/democratic society. Rawls (1984) points out that the variety of views is by itself a good thing – in a well-constructed society members are right, wishing their plans to be diversified. It goes without saying that liberal thinkers never condemned the will to defend freely chosen beliefs, while decrying state attempts to impose choices by force. Jerzy Szacki (1994: 245) sums it up succinctly and convincingly, pointing out that to the two questions – may the government take a side in moral conflicts; and whether such conflicts can ever be overcome – 'liberalism answers in the negative'.

2. There is only one thing which I may, according to Barrès (1902: 16), will with any effect: to be in all I think and do determined by *la terre et les morts*, to say to myself 'I wish to live with these masters, and, by making them consciously objects of my cult, to partake fully of their strength'. The alternative is *déracinement* – a horrifying state of disempowerment, a limp body without a backbone.

3. The process of 'individualization', understood as primarily an unstoppably rising level of uncertainty and 'subjectivization' of risks, has been most extensively and persuasively analysed in other works of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, notably in *Das ganz normale Chaos der Liebe* (1990) which they wrote jointly and *Riskante Freiheiten: Individualisierung in moderne Gesellschaften* (1994) which they jointly edited. In that latest book they pithily summarize their findings: "Take whatever you like – God, Nature, truth, science, technology, morality, love, marriage – modernity transformed everything into "risky freedoms"...". For instance, 'marriage – like driving with excessive speed on a winding road – a personal, risky undertaking, not eligible for insurance' (1994: 11, 25). Consult as well Christopher Lasch's essential *The Minimal Self* (1984).

4. Unger points out that 'if the triumph of certain institutions and ideas was relatively accidental, their replacement can also more easily be imagined as realistic'. Compare Will Kymlicka's (1994) discussion of Unger in *Critical Review* 8(2), mentioned earlier.

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