

# CHAPTER 5

## Conservatism, communitarianism, and the social conception of the self

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Liberalism is the approach to political philosophy that places individual autonomy at center stage, so that under the rubric of liberalism, justice is defined as that set of principles that would be accepted as legitimate by autonomous citizens. And such principles of justice must be enforced prior to the promotion of controversial conceptions of value, lest the autonomy of those citizens in determining what is valuable be ignored. In this way, equality of moral status – the equal value of autonomous persons – is fundamental to liberalism as we have developed it here. The priority of justice and equal respect for autonomy will be the linchpins of the liberal paradigm we will be critically discussing in this and the following chapters.

Our concern in this chapter will be whether the liberal approach to political philosophy rests on a problematic conception of the person (as autonomous and independent), one which illegitimately ignores the importance of communal values and community stability as well as the deeply social nature of the self and its principles. In a related manner, we will look at claims that liberalism unfairly tilts away from a more traditional, conservative approach to social values and political principles. In both cases, the underlying accusation against liberalism is that its presuppositions do not live up to the neutral universality it claims for itself; rather than expressing an overall approach to justice that people of different ideological persuasions, value commitments, and moral orientations can all work within, liberalism will be accused of being just one more parochial value system among others, and one which many in modern society reject.

## Conservatism

As explained in the Introduction, the liberalism we are considering here should be taken to represent a general approach to justice in the modern era, a theoretical view which underlies constitutional democracy and popular sovereignty in general, and not a particular political agenda or set of policies. The reason for this is that we were trying to develop a more abstract view about political power and justice *generally* that speaks to both 'liberal' and 'conservative' policies, in the narrow senses of those words. Liberalism in this broad sense certainly is in opposition to various forms of political fundamentalism, fascism, and despotism, but it is not meant to oppose (most of) what goes by the name 'conservative' in the policy debates of the current day.

Some theorists, however claim that this is inaccurate, that liberalism in our broad sense represents a theoretical framework that actually *does* contrast with what could be called a theoretically 'conservative' view, one that more congenially supports many policy initiatives that conservatives (in the narrow sense) advance. Now we certainly want to maintain a distinction between disagreements on matters of policy and more abstract philosophical disputes about the nature of justice (and freedom, equality, and so on). And for ease of exposition, we can use 'conservative policies' and 'liberal policies' to refer to those initiatives aimed at particular problems for specific societies (whether to expand the military or revoke the use of the death penalty, for example), reserving 'conservatism' and 'liberalism' for the more general philosophical stances.

There is, I think, a philosophical position that can be called 'conservative' that is significantly different from the liberal paradigm we have been discussing, and it may be true that such a philosophical view supports more strongly conservative policies of the usual sort, such as demanding strict, retributive penal systems, a strong military, promoting certain pronounced moral ideals ('family values'), strongly supporting certain traditional religious practices, and the like.<sup>1</sup> Though we will not discuss the relation between conservative philosophy and conservative policy, we will consider this more abstract conservatism in order to draw a contrast with the liberal paradigm we have been developing.

The bases of such a conservatism can be found in the philosophical work of thinkers such as David Hume (1985), Edmund Burke (1968), Hastings Rashdall (1924), Michael Oakeshott (1991), Robert Nisbet (1986), and more recently John Kekes (1998). Some of these thinkers present these views as more of a turn of mind or an 'attitude' rather than a codified political view (Oakeshott 1991).<sup>2</sup> But for conservatism to offer itself as a rival to liberalism, it must be more than an attitude, for

attitudes are simply dispositions that various people may or may not have, not general considerations that provide others without the attitude with reasons to adopt it. (Though, of course, a claim that a dominant view does not pay sufficient *respect* to some specific attitude is a valid criticism of that view, so we will have to take note of that separately.)

But more than an attitude, conservatism can be understood as a philosophical view about the purposes and limits of government power. The mark of a conservative philosophy, of course, is that it aims to protect traditional values and pays great heed to history and established practice. Correspondingly, it is wary of attempts at 'progressive' change in order to restore or establish a new, allegedly more just, social arrangement, since such changes often have the effect of destroying those traditional practices without sufficient basis for the belief that things will be better, overall, with the change. So, in short, conservatives are traditionalists.

Conservatism also is *perfectionist*, however, in our sense of that term. This is because it views the point of state power as the promotion of the good for its citizens.<sup>3</sup> The aim of political institutions, on this view, is to establish (and more importantly to protect) the conditions necessary for citizens to lead flourishing lives. Just social relations may be one aspect of such lives, but it is one among others, including such things as citizens' enjoyment of good health, shelter and rest, companionship, self-respect, and so on. Certain social conditions are necessary for these goods, then – things such as freedom, equality, a healthy environment, justice, peace, order, security, toleration, adequate levels of education, and the like (Kekes 1998: 22). On this view, most of the population can lead fulfilling lives even when some face conditions of injustice, at least to a degree. This is what distinguishes conservatism from liberalism most starkly: liberals insist that justice, defined with reference to equality and autonomy, is the primary virtue of a decent society and a condition that is necessary for citizens to lead worthwhile lives.

Expanding on this last point, conservatives view autonomy as one possible element of a good life, but one which may well be forsaken (to some degree) in localities where adherence to traditional practices gives greater weight to obedience and authority than individualized autonomy. If autonomy is conceived simply as the capacity to make unforced choices based on open alternatives which agents evaluate for themselves (see Kekes 1997: 16–20, Raz 1986: 369–78), then the liberal claim that autonomy is a fundamental necessary condition of good lives is wrong-headed (or at least controversial and hence non-neutral). For some lives are embedded in traditions or authority structures that do not afford individuals with this power of independent choice, and therefore if such

lives are indeed worthwhile (and conservatives claim that, in principle, they can be), autonomy is not always crucial for a worthwhile life. (This argument turns on the precise conceptualization of autonomy to which liberalism is committed, a topic to be discussed further below.)

These elements of good lives, however, are very general and abstract. Conservatives of the sort we are discussing go on to insist that any specific interpretation of what those values should mean for a particular society, and any ranking of their importance in cases of (inevitable) conflict among them, cannot be determined by *a priori* philosophical reflection outside of established social practices themselves. For conservatives insist that the more specific determination of the components of good lives in a society must be based fundamentally on the traditions and established practices of that society, at least those that have shown themselves over time to have succeeded in providing decent lives for the majority of its citizens. Conservatives, then, refer to the *past* to answer all questions about the future, and they regard the danger of destroying what is good about a society as always more worrisome than correcting what is bad, at least correcting it according to untried and non-traditional practices.

Because of this required reference to established practice in defining value for a society, conservatism implies that establishing and maintaining social stability against both internal and external threats is a fundamental state concern.<sup>4</sup> Social reform in the name of securing justice for some part of the population, then, is less important in the conservative view than retaining the orderly practices that make the pursuit of values possible for the general population. Though the exact recommendation concerning what policies to pursue in this regard will be, for most conservatives, a matter of community discretion, again based on the lessons of past practice.<sup>5</sup>

The distinction between conservatism and liberalism, at this level of abstraction, is deep but surprisingly subtle. After all, there are many similar claims made from both perspectives. Both view values as ultimately plural and not given by a single philosophical theory of the good (since conservatives may well accept that what is good varies from one society to another). And both are willing to countenance the promotion of values that all in a society freely judge to be worthwhile. Liberals, however, justify the pursuit of such values by government authority, not based on the abstract validity of the value claims themselves, but on the autonomous endorsement of those values by those whose lives are shaped by their promotion. Autonomous judgment is at the root of all confirmation of values, for the liberal theorist. While the conservative insists that being grounded in the dominant practices of a

community is what establishes the validity of conceptions of value. Autonomous endorsement is not directly relevant.

Admittedly, it will not always be clear what the dominant values of a community *are* that make the overall stability of its way of life possible. Indeed, in all political conflicts there will be disagreements both about how to interpret the value foundations of an established practice as well as how to rank conflicting priorities when they are well defined. This point also shows the contrast between liberals and conservatives, since liberalism claims that the procedure for deciding such (inevitable) conflicts must be *just*, and hence must involve equal respect for the autonomous judgments of all participating in the debate. Conservatives, and perfectionists more generally, claim that 'just' procedures for collective deliberation are not always required, and certainly not normatively basic. What conservatives claim is that those with authority as established leaders of a community will be best positioned to interpret the historical record (Kekes 1998: 40). Procedures that require equal participation, fully democratic processes, and the like may well be unnecessary.

But why should persons already in power be best suited to determine what is truly worthwhile for citizens in a diverse community? Such a procedure virtually guarantees that inequalities of power and status will be maintained, no matter what the justification for them, since conflict about their legitimacy will be adjudicated by those who, virtually by definition, are positioned so as to favor the status quo (the already powerful). Societies that have been seen as relatively flourishing always contain sectors that have not shared fully in that flourishing: oppressed minorities, (often) women, the poor, and groups who were conquered when the dominant groups gained power. The values guiding such a society will be seen in one way by the dominant group – as prizing stability, peace, overall happiness for most citizens, and so on – while in quite another by those not sharing power – as distorted, illusory, unjust, and so on.

However, even when the values being successfully pursued in a decent society are well enough understood, the question will always arise whether further reform is needed to correct whatever shortcomings remain, including most often problems of injustice. Conservatives hold that established practice must always be the ground to determine what course of action to take – whether to pursue reform at all, and if so how vigorously and in what manner. But this is simply one side of a debate whose opposition will be those who claim that overwhelming evidence exists that past practices are corrupt and new initiatives must be tried. In other words, the conservative 'attitude' that sees established practices as more reliable than untested but progressive proposals is simply one

side of the debate in question, namely whether the society is truly promoting the good for its citizens. The claim that defenders of historical traditions must always carry the day in such an argument is simply an article of faith, a dogmatic position unsupported by general philosophical (or indeed empirical) evidence. What we are left with in the end is merely the conservative 'attitude' with which we began, a disposition that some hold but surely not a principled position that will convince those with another view.

But this still leaves us with the other elements of the conservative view that contrasts with liberalism and which should be investigated more thoroughly, namely the view that states should indeed promote shared communal values in the first place, and that those who define their value commitments with reference to communal ties and traditional practices are not adequately represented in the liberal philosophy. These and related claims will be taken up in the remainder of the chapter as we discuss the position that for many years was thought of as the major opponent of liberalism in political philosophy.

## Communitarianism

Throughout the 1980s in the Anglo-American philosophical world, the debate between communitarianism and liberalism held center stage in much of political philosophy. Spurred by Michael Sandel's critique of Rawls (Sandel 1982), and important books by Charles Taylor (1979), Michael Walzer (1983), and Alasdair MacIntyre (1984), the communitarian critique of liberalism was one of the central concerns of political theory for a full decade and beyond (for an overview, see Delaney 1994). The challenge of communitarianism, as with other lines of thought we are considering, proceeds in two parts: a critique of the liberal paradigm; and an offer of an alternative view. As we will see, the first is more powerful and fully worked out than the second, but both provide profound questions for the tradition of Enlightenment liberalism.

The critique of liberalism offered by communitarians develops at several levels: against the liberal conception of the person, concerning the liberal account of value commitment, and regarding the social effects of the implementation of liberal principles. Let us touch on each of these in some detail.

### *The communitarian critique of the liberal self*

Communitarianism is certainly not the first, or only, view to challenge the alleged hyper-individualism of liberal theory – Marxists, for example,

have done so for quite some time (see, for example, MacPherson 1962). As has been discussed, liberalism rests on the proposition that political power is justified only when it is acceptable to citizens considered as rational autonomous agents; such agents are imagined to be choosing to accept such power on the basis of values and commitments they have chosen or judge to be valid, independent of any 'external' factors, such as their society, history, culture, or other people. Such connections are simply contingent aspects of their identity, understood as objects of choice rather than elements that constitute one's very being. As a result of such a framework, the interests considered basic in a free society are things like freedom of speech, assembly, mobility, and the like, or more generally, freedom to enjoy the autonomy by which such agents are defined. So the autonomous agent is both the model of the person judging the acceptability of political principles as well as the agent whose interests those principles are designed to protect. The critique of liberalism mounted by communitarians, then, draws a bead on this specific target.

Speaking in general terms first, communitarians reject the conception of the autonomous person with capacities to reflect upon and possibly reject any particular aspect of herself or her place in society as a model upon which to build political principles. On the communitarian alternative, selves are fundamentally *social* both in their metaphysical constitution and their psychology (though we have been speaking of these claims in psychological terms).<sup>6</sup> On the communitarian view, agents engage in thinking and acting not in a detached reflective mode, but as fully embedded personalities defined and shaped by a social milieu. In contrast to the liberal ideal of free agency according to which persons engage in activities only as a result of reflectively choosing them, communitarians stress the way in which all action is *defined* by ongoing practices and social institutions (for discussion, see MacIntyre 1981: 203–25). One steps back and reflects on some aspect of one's social life only when ongoing modes of action and reflection have been interrupted or break down (Bell 1993: 39). Therefore, a key component of the positive communitarian framework will be the protection and promotion of goods defined by ongoing practices.

The way in which ongoing practices provide the normative framework within which reflection takes place (rather than present themselves as objects of it) can be seen by consideration of *language* (Bell 1993: 156–69, Rorty 1989: 3–22, Taylor 1991: 33ff.). Though we might stop to reflect on certain aspects of the language(s) we use; for the most part, the norms that govern our mode of thinking, communication, and self-expression function as unchosen structuring devices within which all these acts of reflection take place. Such norms are not simply

options we can choose to ignore, nor are they ‘facts’ about the world that can be discovered, they are rules that *constitute* the thinking and acting (and self-conceptions) that make up our world. And language is a social practice, which, along with other social practices, provides the building blocks of our thinking rather than the object of our reflections.

Relatedly, value commitments should not be seen as grounded in autonomous, reflective choice. Rather, they are often the unchosen horizons within which particular choices are made and aims are defined. Foundational values, for many, are simply given to us as a background framework within which we can pursue our projects. Such ‘strong valuations’ are not merely options that can be weighed in moments of rational reflection but provide frameworks that organize our thoughts about values more generally (Taylor 1979: 157–59, 1989b: 4, Sandel 1996: 14–15). Moreover, many fulfilling pursuits and value orientations do not involve reflective choice and open options; they simply involve playing out the defining value orientations within which one finds oneself and according to which one presses on in life. The idea that only the life-pursuing aims that one sat back and chose independently like items on a smorgasbord blinds us to the myriad pursuits structured by unchosen factors and traditional commitments. And it also occludes those aspects of all our lives that are never questioned or reflected upon but accepted as given (Bell 1993: 34–43, Christman 2001). As I discuss below, some people view questioning one’s basic faith or value commitments as a *wrong*, indicative of weakness and lack of resolve.

To see these points from a different angle, let us look once again at Rawls’s original position and the way it functions in the formulation of his theory of justice (see Chapter 2). For Rawls, principles of justice are those that would be chosen by agents understood as ignorant of any contingent facts about themselves that are ‘arbitrary from a moral point of view.’ Indeed, such agents choose principles without reference to their own conception of value and the good. This implies, then, that the identities by virtue of which political principles are justified are not conceived with any reference to the values people hold. Such values, this model implies, are simply the object of reflective choice – left up to the person when she begins her life in the well-ordered society – not what *defines* her as a person and so not what helps determine principles of justice. Communitarians, however, claim that models of such ‘unencumbered’ selves do not resonate with the self-images of actual people, who see their commitments to certain values and their place in a tradition not as something to be shed like an old coat when judged to be obsolete, but rather the stuff that makes them who they are. Attempts to justify

principles of justice that abstract from that fact are simply wrong-headed, they claim (Sandel 1982: 15–65).

Now, this critique can be expressed as a metaphysical claim – namely that as a matter of ontological status, persons must be understood as ‘constituted’ by relations with others or be committed to values, without which they would cease to be who they are. Indeed, this is usually the manner in which such claims are made and how they are taken (Sandel 1982: 62, Gutmann 1985: 309). But this leaves the critique open to an easy reply, for as a general, ontological claim about the essential nature of persons, it is surely as controversial as the liberal view it is opposing. For it is not obviously incoherent to understand ‘persons’ as beings who can reflect upon and choose all of their values, at least in a piecemeal manner.<sup>7</sup> We certainly can point to many individuals that undergo radical change in their lives and remain (by all the usual accounts) the same person (Waldron 1992: 762, cf. Kymlicka 1995: 85).

But the communitarian challenge should better be understood as a contingent claim about social psychology, that *some* or *many* people – or all people *sometimes* – understand aspects of themselves as so deeply constitutive of their identity that they cannot be assumed to be able to question those aspects at all. This assumption, then, conflicts with their own understanding of themselves and so should not be used as a basis for political principles. That is, if some or many of us cannot realistically stand back from some of our most basic, self-defining commitments, then political principles justified in a manner that assumes we can, and which generates policy priorities that assume we have a highest order interest to do so, do not neutrally represent all of our self-perceptions and interests. Such a contingent, social-psychological basis for an alternative conception of the self is sufficient to support the view that liberalism merely represents a parochial standpoint rather than the neutral framework fairly representative of all of people that it has claimed to be.

So according to the communitarian picture of moral personality, reflection on values and connections takes place, but often as a matter of self-*discovery* rather than self-*creation*. On this view, people do not (or do not always) review their commitments and connections in order to validate or to reject them; rather, they look into themselves and at their relations with surrounding others to try to better understand what constitutes their own identity, what connections lie at the root of their moral being and provide the basis of their judgments. The alternative liberal model would understand these reflections as a process of decision and choice: should I remain a Catholic or consider another faith? Should I reject the values of my culture? Do I really connect with my community any more? On the communitarian view, however, such questions

cannot reasonably be asked in that manner but would take the form: 'As a Catholic, do I continue to feel as deeply about my faith? Is my culture or community going in the right direction?' One discovers aspects of oneself and perhaps questions aspects of the larger movements and value systems of which one is a part, but one does not ask whether or not to *be* a part of them (MacIntyre 1984: 220).

Liberal theorists reply, however, that this is not a realistic general picture of moral personality, even taken as a psychological claim. They insist, for example, that '[n]o matter how deeply implicated we find ourselves in a social practice or tradition, we feel capable of questioning whether the practice is a valuable one – a questioning which isn't meaningful on [the communitarian] account (how can it *not* be valuable for me since the good for me just *is* coming to a greater self-awareness of those attachments and practices I find myself in?).' (Kymlicka 1989: 54) Granting the obvious fact that we cannot choose or reflect upon all our commitments at once, nor did we create such commitments and connections out of nothing, it is nevertheless always possible, liberal theorists claim, to subject those commitments to piecemeal review and to reject them if we judge them inadequate. And more importantly, it is a fundamental *interest* of all human beings to have the capacity to undertake such review, to live in institutional settings (systems of law) that allow such reflection, and be able to communicate with and move freely about networks of others as part of this process of questioning and review (cf. Macedo 1990, Galston 1991).<sup>8</sup>

But this is to miss the most powerful aspect of the communitarian challenge. For such critics of liberalism need not claim, as a general thesis of human psychology, that *all* deep commitments are unrevisable in this way or that all people experience such self-constituting connections. All that needs to be claimed is that for a significant number of people, or for most of us relative to some of our connections, such revision is not psychologically possible; and hence seeing the power to engage in such reflective revision as the fundamental interest of all citizens misrepresents the values of many segments of the population (Christman 2001).

So the liberal ideal of the autonomous self seems to presuppose powers of self-revision not experienced as possible or valuable by some (or all of us some of the time). This raises the question, though, that if autonomy is both what is presupposed and protected by liberal principles, what do we mean by 'autonomy' here: does it require that we have the power to reflect upon and revise under any circumstance our connections and commitments? If so, the communitarian challenge remains in play. The challenge for liberalism will be to develop an altered conception of

autonomy – one which captures the fundamental commitments of the liberal approach to justice, but which does not imply Herculean powers of self-alteration of the sort communitarians object to. We will return to this question later in the discussion.

### *The social self and value commitments*

These controversies can be approached from a slightly different angle. What is really at stake in these debates over the psychology of identity concerns whether the liberal model of the autonomous self paints an acceptable picture of people's motivations, and hence their basic interests. For the basic tenets of liberalism imply that any value a person has, including ones that are seen as the basis of moral obligation, is valid because (in part at least) it was *judged acceptable* to her. That is, liberalism rejects the strong perfectionist claim discussed in the last chapter that values can be valid for a person independent of that person's choice or reasoned embrace of those values. Communitarians often counter, however, that many values hold for people quite irrespective of the individual's own decisions about their status; they *impose* themselves upon the person, as it were, and organize her life externally. Of course, the person may recognize the importance of the value, but her seeing it as such is not a constitutive condition of its validity.

Consider how such things as a relationship with another person, a family member, an ethnic heritage, or a religion have value for a person. It is often not that one looks around, considers the options and *chooses* any of these things. Rather one *finds oneself* in the midst of them and comes to see their virtues, thereby discovering aspects of the (already established) situation that were in no way chosen, but which have come to define one's outlook and value orientation (see, for example, Bell 1993: 5–6). Liberals, of course, acknowledge this, but insist that the ability to reflectively embrace or reject these commitments is nevertheless possible and desirable for the person, and this partially constitutes the basis of the value in question. But communitarians reply that the source of the value of these connections, traditions, and belief systems is decidedly not the choice of the person involved; rather it is the intrinsic nature of the thing itself; reflection merely reveals this to the person.

In addition, communitarians point out the cost of designing social institutions in a way that (wrongly, they say) puts primary value on the powers of reflective choice. Some traditions, for example, see faith as a *virtue* and view doubt and questioning of one's commitments as a moral failing. One need not endorse this view of commitment oneself to see it functioning in the psychological make up of some of us and to argue that

liberalism fails to reach its ideal of neutral regard for all personal value systems by not acknowledging this. For as long as such groups exist and are not clearly irrational or deluded, then a liberal emphasis on mobility, choice, and review of all value commitments will not express basic respect for this orientation, and hence will fall short of this neutrality.

These criticisms once again highlight the liberal commitment to what has been called ‘constructivism’ in moral theory (Rawls 1999a: 303–58). That is, the validity of values on the liberal view is partially secured by the fact that individuals themselves rationally grasp or embrace the value in question; things are worthwhile for a person only if they are ‘endorsed’ by her (R. Dworkin 2000: 217–18). What communitarians are claiming is that the ground of values can reside completely in the existence and flourishing of traditional practices which partially constitute the entire value orientation of the person. Someone’s community can, they say, be the source of what is good for a person independent of her choosing to embrace or endorse that value.

This brings up what some have described as the vacuousness of the liberal conception of human freedom, that liberal philosophy values freedom (or autonomy) not because of what it allows the person to accomplish – finding true values grounded in factors external to her – but for its own sake, as a formal condition of choice (Taylor 1985). But individuals as such cannot meaningfully be said to value freedom of choice *fundamentally*; for that is merely valuing the means to, or on some views a component of, what is truly valuable – the object of such choice. When a person pursues a project, embraces a value system, or embarks on a life path, she does not do so simply as a way of valuing the capacity to choose freely *per se*, rather she is guided by the aims of the project (value system, life path, etc.), the value of which informs and structures decisions. It is simply paradoxical to claim ultimate value for a capacity. Capacities are, by definition, capacities *for* something.

Of course, liberals can reply that states shaped by liberal justice can certainly advance people’s values indirectly, through the creation of settings and spaces that people can use to achieve their aims themselves (Kymlicka 1990: 209–10). But the paradox remains: liberal justice sees as a first priority the protection of what for citizens themselves is merely a means to what is truly valuable, the freedom to pursue worthwhile goals but not the goals themselves. As we saw in the last chapter when discussing perfectionism, liberalism seems to entail the unsettling view that state action is justified with reference to justice or the right, while the motives of those living under those policies are aimed toward the pursuit of the good. And when there exists a shared conception of such goods that people use to orient their own pursuits, it is problematic to

claim that the state should nevertheless avoid getting involved in promoting that good for fear of violating its basic neutrality.

A similar point arises concerning human motivation and the connection between individual value commitment and political obligation. For according to liberalism, people's reasons to conform to the principles of justice cannot involve any particular conception of the value of social life (since they cannot involve any particular conception of the good generally). Justice is prior to the good in that the rules of just social relations do not rest upon or presuppose any particular set of motivations or value systems on the part of those living under them. This implies, then, that citizens' motivations to conform to social justice principles do not involve any shared values or conception of the good life. Political legitimacy of state institutions is established merely in so far as such institutions are regarded as just (as we saw in Chapter 2).

But communitarians (and others) argue that public support of such institutions, specifically when they require day-to-day sacrifices of one's own narrow self-interest for the sake of social programs required by justice, will be lacking unless the guiding principles of such institutions are grounded in a conception of value citizens actually hold. When principles of justice demand personal sacrifices on some people's part such as taxation to reduce inequalities or provide welfare benefits to the poor, or to support educational programs to ensure equality of opportunity, and the like, they will lack the requisite citizen support unless they are seen to advance shared conceptions of the good (Taylor 1985: 248–88, Sandel 1982: 66–103). Communitarians argue that liberal principles rest on such an individually oriented conception of political obligation that this measure of social solidarity and communal support will always be lacking.

In this way, communitarians claim that liberal individualism is, or will eventually be, self-defeating, unable to maintain itself as a viable political order over time. But liberals have a reply: they can argue that such civic unity can indeed be part of the goals of a liberal state, just as such states are not enjoined from promoting *generally shared* conceptions of the good as long as doing so does not take priority over ensuring justice. However, the promotion of social unity in this way, they argue, should not be accomplished by *political* means, not by the coercive power of the state (Kymlicka 1989: 81–95, 1990: 223). They argue that only informal, voluntary social organizations such as civic groups, religious congregations, and the like can shape communal ties in a way that fosters required degrees of social connectedness, but do not use the state's police power in doing so.

But this reply may not adequately respond to the challenge raised here. On the one hand, to insist that the promotion of civic unity and

shared endeavors should be a non-political, and so in a way ‘private,’ activity is to underestimate the necessity of these practices and connections for people’s pursuit of their values. For in an area where such ties are either not established or disintegrate, the effectiveness of the principles of justice to that degree breaks down. (Recall that the communitarian argument pointed to the need for shared civic identity focused on the promotion of community values for the stability that enforcing rules of justice requires.) It then becomes a matter of justice, not merely expediency, to foster the social cohesion necessary for principles of right to have effect. Moreover, the line between public and private here is an exceptionally blurry one, as state power is used in many ways to indirectly foster the collective activity of groups and the general public which, in turn, creates this kind of civic feeling. Public parks, city plazas, public television and radio, monuments and museums, neighborhood murals, meetings spaces, and countless other supplementary resources are generally provided by political institutions (that is, paid for by public money) and are essential for the successful carrying out of the collective activity we are considering. Political acts – legislative provisions and the use of public funding – are necessary to support these communal actions; without such state action, this activity would almost certainly devolve (a tendency we will say more about in a moment), so in so far as they are necessary to support just institutions, then state action (direct or indirect) is necessary for their existence. The good of supporting these sorts of group activities in support of common aims goes hand in hand with enforcing justice, rather than occupying a lower priority in the ordering of political provisions.

In further criticizing liberal presuppositions about values, communitarians stress the way in which many values cannot even be *understood* as attached to individuals or individual interests alone. That is, some values are essentially social, in that they are meaningful only as part of a collective activity and communal pursuit. The interests they express, then, are not individual interests, but the interests of groups (as such). Consider public monuments and patriotic symbols. Whatever value such objects have, it is a value contingent upon a *collective* participation in their meaning. Indeed, when such symbols are controversial, it is precisely because of the intended collective expression. In recent debates over the use of Confederate symbols in the flags of some southern US states, for instance, the issue was controversial just *because* such symbols ostensibly expressed common values, and many in the population felt alienated from such symbols for this very reason, specifically the implicit association between such iconography and the legacy of slavery. Such a controversy would never arise if these symbols were merely meant to express the

values of some self-selected individuals acting on their own. Therefore, in so far as liberalism is built upon the interests of individuals *per se* – interests relating to autonomy in particular – then such theories denigrate those values that cannot be expressed in individualist terms.

But this brings us back to the question of what exactly we mean by ‘autonomy’ in the liberal pantheon of basic political values. Does the autonomy that liberalism presupposes and promotes, and in reference to which it defines basic human interests, require that all values are individually defined, that detached reflection on values and commitments is always possible or desirable, or that people must view their own powers to reflect on values as more basic than the pursuit of the values themselves? While we cannot spell out a full view of such a concept here, we have been alluding to the idea that autonomy merely requires that a person have the capacity to rationally reflect upon single aspects of the self in a piecemeal fashion, and that such reflection need not have actually taken place in each instance for the person to be autonomous, but merely that it be possible. Autonomy then requires that, were a person to review any particular commitment, personal trait, or aspect of her value orientation, she would not reject or repudiate that factor. This does not imply that these elements of her existence are individually defined or the product of her own prior choices, merely that she would not feel deeply alienated from them were she to reflect.

Seeing liberal autonomy in terms of such hypothetical self-reflection takes the sting out of examples of unreflective, but fulfilling lives presented by communitarians. For a person to live a good life but not be autonomous in the manner here proposed, she would have to be pursuing values that she not only has not reflected upon, but which she would *repudiate or reject were she to do so*. But it is hard to see why we should accept a view that claims that social structures which induce subjects to maintain ties that they would reject upon reflection ought to be protected. Liberals could plausibly argue that social conditions that induce people to live within such value systems amount to a kind of oppression.

### *Liberalism and the breakdown of communities*

One line of critique communitarians have mounted that does not directly come down to the contested models of moral psychology we have been discussing concerns the *effects* of liberal justice on the social life of communities living under it. In various ways, critics of liberalism have claimed that the priority placed on justice, conceived in terms of individual rights to autonomy, have tended to *produce* patterns of social existence that tend to erode crucial elements of a fulfilling life,

where the factors that people themselves would name as essential to a successful and happy life are made more difficult to maintain. Those factors include such things as long-term family ties, stable communities, active social and civic life, long-standing connections with neighbors and (geographically proximate) extended family, and the like. But the patterns of existence that result from the emphasis on individual rights prized in liberalism involve mobility, change, review of connectedness, rejection of problematic relationships, openness to alternative lifestyles, and so on. These critics point out, not that these latter tendencies are somehow intrinsically evil, but that according to what people themselves say about what they want in life, the patterns listed in the second group make impossible the enjoyment of the factors in the first, and hence make more difficult the very fulfillment that liberal justice was meant to allow (Bellah et al. 1985, Putnam 2000).

The charge raised here is more a question of sociology rather than philosophy.<sup>9</sup> It concerns the social patterns that tend to arise when legal, political, and civic emphasis is placed on the rights of autonomy rather than the good of connectedness. This pattern can be seen in the very language of liberal principle, for what liberal justice protects as a first priority is liberty, specifically the freedom to review and reject any conditions or networks one finds oneself in, and to move to other forms of social life that seem more in keeping with one's values. The *right to exit* is foremost in the pantheon of liberal privileges (Kymlicka 1995: 37). The challenge being discussed here does not denigrate the importance of those freedoms – clearly, being denied the right to exit from stifling relations is the very definition of oppression – but it claims that putting the primary emphasis on such rights and building social and legal institutions that enshrine this emphasis has definite costs. These costs are ones that liberal philosophy not only underestimates, but in some of its guises cannot even acknowledge.

To be more specific, liberalism insists that the right to reflectively review all value commitments and personal ties is fundamental to a just society. Hence, social institutions are constructed so that such rights are given first priority. This has produced a society in which *exercising* such rights has naturally come to be prized. But reviewing and rejecting commitments whenever they seem unsatisfying produces a life that is devoid of the very constituents of a fulfilling existence (at least for many), the enjoyment of long-standing and self-justifying ties to others, characterized by loyalty, reliability, unquestioned support, and stability. In short, liberal politics produces liberal culture, which, in turn, produces hyper-mobile, individualized populations who change their lives often, concentrate on the individual self-fulfillment they enjoy at

various stages in their lives, and forget the very things that (they will come to realize) make life worth living. (I speak here in terms of voluntary choice, but critics point out that the very opportunities afforded to people in liberal cultures, especially concerning professional aspirations and employment prospects, are strongly geared toward *inducing* these lifestyle patterns.)

This line of critique, however, relies on the precarious claim that protection of liberal rights as a basic component of justice *inevitably* leads to the social pattern of atomistic, isolated lives described here. Certainly, there is evidence (in the US for instance) that certain sorts of communities have eroded, but it is not clear that new types of communal ties may develop in different forms (through the Internet for example) or that people may insist on reversing this individualist trend through non-political means (see Kymlicka 1995: 88–89). More importantly, the connection between liberal values and large-scale social trends certainly has much to do with commercial and economic factors associated with global capitalism, factors which reward labor mobilization, re-orientation of professions, and consumer-oriented values. Globalization of economic production and the consequent decentralization of productive processes (along with the increased centralization of economic power) is likely to bear a large share of the responsibility for the breakdown of communities and the hyper-mobility of individuals. And while liberal principles bear a traditional connection with private property and free market capitalism, we saw in the last chapter that there is by no means a necessary connection between them. So unless the case can be made that the priority of right and the value of the autonomous person has some inherent connection to the patterns of globalized capitalism that have put such pressure on communities, this line of criticism will remain incomplete. (Though we will further consider arguments that insist that consideration of material and economic forces should be fundamental to political philosophy in Chapter 7 below.)

*Communitarianism as a positive alternative to liberalism*

Most of the writing in the communitarian vein is critical, attempting to show that various aspects and presuppositions of liberal theory are problematic, in particular the conception of the autonomous person at its roots. Far less has been said about communitarianism as a positive doctrine, one specific enough to mark its contrasts with liberalism as well as guide social policy (for critical discussion see Kymlicka 1990:

230–32). But we can construct in broad outlines the communitarian approach to political life and mention some of the responses to it that liberal defenders may voice. This can be added to our consideration of conservatism discussed earlier which, as should be clear in the end, is a variation of communitarianism.

A central aspect of the positive program of communitarianism concerns the ways that communities should govern themselves, in particular the manner that collective deliberation operates and the grounds upon which it is justified. On the liberal view, collective deliberation is necessary to establish and maintain legitimacy of the authority structure of the state (as we saw in Chapters 2 and 4). On a communitarian view, deliberation is not the source of legitimacy of the values of the community, but a means of discovering these values. Public discussion and deliberation is an activity that aims at revealing the implicit shared meanings that (already) constitute the moral frameworks of citizens (Bell 1993: 126–27). Engaging in such activity, directly or through representatives, manifests the freedom of citizens as social beings and it requires (according to some communitarians) a host of virtues and skills that society must instill in its members through robust civic education (Sandel 1996: 126–27).

There are many variations of this picture and several details in its structure that must be put to the side here. The fundamental point is that mechanisms of collective choice are needed in order to find, interpret, and prioritize the values that define the community. Those values comprise ‘the good’ for that community, so the principal difference between this view and liberalism is a reversal of the priority of right; for communitarians, the purpose of collective decision making is to identify the common good and consider ways to best promote it (Sandel, 1982: x, 1996: 26–27). In this light, democracy embodies the ideals of classical ‘civic republicanism’ of the ancient world, where participation in the collective self-government of one’s society in pursuit of the common good was a manifestation of virtue and freedom (Sandel, 1996; for a contrasting understanding of republicanism, see Pettit 1997).

A quick side note about the idea of ‘the common good.’ This can be understood, to one degree or another, objectively or relativistically, as we mentioned earlier.<sup>10</sup> The common good for a people can mean the aggregated desires of that population – the values they accept for themselves at a time. This is a highly relativistic and, at the collective level, subjectivist understanding of the values underlying political life. But communitarians need not be subjectivist in this way; they can claim rather that the good for a population is, objectively, what is best for them given various background facts about their society and its history

and the social nature of its people. This is one way to understand Rousseau's idea of the General Will, for example (Rousseau 1760/1987; for discussion see Bell 1993: 55–89). This is relativistic but not subjectivist, and this will be the understanding of the communitarian vision we will assume here.

But two questions arise concerning communities and democracy that raise serious issues about the communitarian vision. One involves the procedure for such collective deliberation and the other concerns its ultimate justification. First, what guarantee is there, if any, that the methods of collective discovery of the common good for a community will actually involve all of the citizens and do so in a relatively egalitarian manner. Certainly there are countless examples of closely knit communities that come to decisions by way of strictly hierarchical procedures, ones that systematically exclude segments of the population and thereby relegate them to secondary status (the Catholic Church is one example). We saw above how the conservative strand of this sort of thinking embraces this implication, and this was grounds for criticism of it. But must communitarians generally endorse whatever collective process a particular community uses to discover and interpret its values, no matter how exclusionary, unequal, and oppressive it turns out to be?

The second question flows from this one: if the ultimate aim of collective deliberation on the communitarian view is the discovery of shared meanings (the common good for that population), is there any vantage point to criticize those values themselves, including the values implicit in the traditional procedures the society uses to make decisions? We certainly know of many communities who shared what we would judge to be despotic and unjust values (the murderous racism of the antebellum south, the horrible anti-semitism of Nazi Germany, and the like). Do communitarians have the resources to critically appraise those cohesive communities that are constructed on the basis of oppressive values (see Bell 1993: 74–78)? Or are communitarian theorists committed to the processes of equal participation, basic rights, and fair procedures that liberalism enshrines as part of any community's process of collective choice that is worthy of support? If so, such theories are not based unqualifiedly on the value of a search for the good prior to protection of rights, but rather on an endorsement of fair and just social relations in a common process of searching for shared values. The distance this second position stands from liberalism, then, diminishes to a vanishing point.

A common line of argument in communitarian thinking is that there exists no Archimedean point from which a person or a society can judge the good, no position behind a veil of ignorance which defines our true

nature. Societies as well as individuals always judge values from a position ‘always already’ (in the Heideggerian phrase) ensconced in a thick network of background values and shared norms. For this reason, they argue, collective choice in a society is always a process of interpreting and revealing those shared ideals (Bell 1993: 67). But it is one thing to point out that all judgements are set against a backdrop of unspoken value assumptions, taken for granted but operative in shaping the substance of what is in fact decided consciously, but it is another to say that such factors *justify* the values they shape. Were we to turn our attention to the factors that lead us to consider a question a certain way or orient our thinking, and we judge such a factor (and its effect on us) *negatively*, would we still have to say that, nevertheless, ‘that’s just the way things are around here and we’ll have to accept it’? No, we would say that any factor relevant to a decision *were it to be reviewed* must be subject to general endorsement or embrace by those shaped by it for such a factor not to be labeled oppressive. This is the lesson of the revised conception of autonomy suggested above: it is not that countless factors beyond our conscious awareness don’t shape our thinking, it is rather that all such elements are subject to at least hypothetical review according to (other) accepted standards of value.

So the communitarian alternative to liberalism turns on the claim that consideration of the good for a person or a community takes precedence over the specification of what is just for her or them. But liberals reply that no ideal of the good is self-justifying, certainly not independently of collective human judgement about its merits; and they go on to insist that part of what grounds values is precisely this human judgement about them. At least this is true for what we have called ‘constructivist’ liberals, those who insist that values are grounded in part by human reflection and judgment.<sup>11</sup>

Communitarians, in rejecting this idea, take one of two positions, one pointing to the conservatism discussed earlier and the other to the perfectionism we considered in Chapter 4. On the one hand, they may claim that the ultimate ground of values for a community, after these are duly discovered and interpreted, is the fact that such values form and undergird the traditional practices of that society – they simply, though at a deep level, are what make up the historical structure of a given society and are justified because that is what forms the individual consciousness of the citizens of that community (Bell 1993: 55–89). On the other hand, communitarians can step beyond this position and claim that the ‘common good’ for a society is grounded in what can be seen as objective values, ideals that are valid not merely because that society always has accepted them as such, but rather because of the ‘moral

worth or intrinsic good' of the ends themselves (Sandel 1982: xi). This second position is perfectionist (and many may claim that it is thereby no longer identifiably communitarian) and hence subject to the analysis we gave earlier of that view.

One final issue must be raised in the consideration of the communitarian alternative to liberalism, an issue that will occupy much of our thought (in different form) in the next section: just how should we identify our 'community'? Most of us live in highly mobile and multi-layered social worlds, with connections to our family, local community, our race and its heritage, collections of people organized around a common goal, groups defined by sexual orientation, and countless other overlapping collectivities. Communitarians tend to focus on civic groupings, small groups of physically located individuals engaging in common practices and living under shared norms. But if the linchpin of social groupings is the set of factors that 'constitute' our value orientation and consciousness, clearly, the influence of this local group may well pale in comparison to the connections we feel with other, physically dispersed people and causes. At times being Jewish may mean more to a person than being a member of a local school district, while at others the reverse may be true. Communitarian thinking becomes vague and unhelpful when trying to answer the question of how to define the 'community' about which they theorize. And for this and related reasons, critics have been quick to point out the problem of 'scale' in the communitarian program: how could their views ever be applied to the large complex and multicultural populations that make up even the relatively smaller political units that operate in modern society (for discussion see Kymlicka 1989: 57–58 and Sandel 1996: 338–49)?

## **Liberalism, freedom, and culture**

The insight of communitarianism is that the pursuit of human goods and a fulfilled life is clearly not an individual matter, but takes place and depends on a network of social relations in which the person is deeply entwined. Culture refers to that array of practices, rituals, language, and symbolic structures that constitute meaningful pursuits for many people. The conception of value that structures and guides a life is often made meaningful by its place in a historically grounded network of symbolic understanding. One's identity, in fact, is often constituted by relations with such cultures (at least in the case of what Kymlicka calls 'societal cultures' – see Kymlicka 1995: 75, and Margalit and Raz 1990).

The question that arises for traditional liberalism, then, is whether the value it places on individual freedom (autonomy) – and the rights and

privileges considered basic to that freedom – is compatible with the protection of cultures and cultural practices which, for many, are essential to the enjoyment of that very freedom. People value freedom because it makes possible the pursuit of goals and activities whose meaning depends on a network of cultural practices and traditions; the continued existence of such cultural practices depends on social support (or at least special exemptions from general social rules that typically do take account of culture). The question, then, is whether the liberal commitment to the priority of the right prohibits the protection of specific cultures for fear of violating neutrality and equal respect for autonomy. This question has been at the center of a large and important literature on the relation between liberalism (in particular its conception of autonomy) and multicultural societies (Kymlicka 1995, Tamir 1993, Sterba 2001: 77–104).

Autonomy cannot simply mean being left to oneself, for self-government implies being moved by forces that one in some way embraces (or does not stringently resist), and lacking a supportive environment with which one minimally identifies would not count as being so moved. Imagine, for example, being kidnapped and dropped in the middle of a completely foreign culture, where the social practices, rituals, symbolic expressions, religious and general way of life was totally alien. Even if all one's basic, individual rights were protected – speech, association, religious practices – one would certainly not feel that one was being moved by forces one could embrace. The feeling of alienation and dislocation would be acute. This illustrates the deep connection between being a truly self-governing agent and being able to pursue values – especially collectively constituted and culturally grounded values – that are meaningful. Cultures give meaning to values one pursues (Kymlicka 1995: 75).

Liberal theorists have attempted to respond to this by adapting their conceptions of autonomy to take into account the importance of culture to self-identity (Kymlicka 1995, Raz 1986, Tamir 1993). For two related reasons, protection of (some) cultures is essential for the exercise of the autonomy basic to liberalism. The first is that a wide array of diverse cultural practices in modern societies provides a rich panoply of value options from which to choose, and in so far as autonomy requires open choices, autonomy requires protection of diversity of culture (Raz 1986: 390–99). However, this alone would not be sufficient to support the continued existence of *one's own* culture (for it only requires that there be a diversity of cultures generally). The second reason for requiring the support of culture in virtue of its connection with autonomy picks up on our earlier point about meaningful options: continued

existence of cultural practices is necessary for one's living one's life 'from the inside' (R. Dworkin 2000: 217–18, Kymlicka 1995: 86), pursuing values which one endorses and embraces. In some cases, the erosion or disappearance of ways of life would mean that one lost this ability.

Therefore, there is room in the liberal framework for supporting the continued existence of certain identity-defining cultures. Such policies would include perhaps (following Kymlicka 1995) granting special group-related rights concerning representation on governing bodies and special exemptions from general rules (such as allowing members of Native American tribes to possess and consume peyote as part of religious practices). The argument for any particular policy of this sort would be that it is necessary to ensure the health and survival of cultures that provide for their members deep and meaningful modes of living and value orientations.<sup>12</sup>

There are limitations in utilizing such arguments for the protection of cultures and communities, and some will not think that this sufficiently insulates liberalism from the community-based critiques being developed here. For example, the justifications of policies outlined just now ties the value of culture to particularly *liberal* values – individual autonomy – rather than the intrinsic value of the culture itself. Many members of, for example, religious societies do not regard the protection of their way of life as merely a part of a valuable autonomous life, but rather something required by morality itself, as a directive from God perhaps.

But this shows that liberal theory must also pay attention to its own commitment to value pluralism (and constructivism), as discussed earlier. No particular cultural practice or value system can be given priority in the justification of policies for a multicultural and pluralistic society without implying secondary social status for those who do not embrace that practice or system, according to liberalism. The commitment to the equal moral status of all persons would rule out any government policy that rested upon the promotion of contested values or particularized ways of life, even those which its followers considered the only true path to fulfillment. At the national level, at least, liberalism is, then, committed to respect for the autonomy of the individual even if, in doing so, it allows and supports the existence of sub-cultures that those individuals rely on for the autonomous pursuit of their values.

This points once again to the problem that liberal politics will always have with balancing a commitment to justice of a sort that can gain general legitimacy from the population with recognizing the wide diversity of moral outlooks found there. This is the issue to which we will now turn. In particular, we need to ask whether our approach to justice and politics has up to now been sufficiently sensitive to the varieties

of human beings found in modern societies, to their differences and multiple self-identities.

## Chapter summary

The focus of this chapter generally is the individualist conception of the autonomous person at the heart of liberalism. This conception was placed under scrutiny by considering alternative theoretical approaches that placed social *groups* at the center of analysis, in a way not reducible to individual members of these groups. We first considered 'conservatism' as a view put forward in contrast to liberalism at the theoretical level (and not merely as a set of policies that might be justified from within traditional liberalism). Conservatism amounts to a theoretical stance that posits the goal of political institutions to be the promotion of the general well-being of the citizens living under them. Such institutions succeed in this task when traditional values definitive of the way of life in a given community are protected from erosion or threat, both from within and externally. Values which define the health of such societies will surely include just social relations but, in contrast to liberalism, securing justice will not necessarily be the primary goal of political structures. Rather, such institutions should protect valued ways of life as interpreted by persons of prominence and experience, based on past success and established practice. We raised serious questions about this philosophy, however, in casting doubt on the presumption that prominent members of the society will be neutral judges in matters of interpreting the society's dominant values (as well as its history) and challenging the presumption that past practice is as reliable a guide to successful social forms as reform-minded speculations about alternative (more fully just) modes of social life.

Next, we considered communitarianism, a view motivated by a direct attack on the individualist conception of the person in liberalism. Communitarians argue that both in the model of the person assumed in the derivation of liberal principles and in the conception of the actual citizen whose interests such principles protect, liberal theory assumes a problematic view about the unencumbered nature of the self. Rather, persons should be understood as socially constituted and their interests defined with crucial reference to their place in ongoing, historically entrenched communities and social practices. We considered in some detail the communitarian critique of the liberal self and the conception of value based upon it, but concluded that in both cases the challenges raised turned on the precise conception of autonomy presupposed in liberal theory.

But communitarians also point out that independent of the theoretical commitments of liberalism, societies governed by liberal structures tend to experience the breakdown of communities and the atomization of social life. People in societies where basic individual rights (justice) are given priority over promoting socially defined projects and ideals tend to act as competitive individuals without constitutive social ties, producing an erosion of social practices, stable communities, and collective pursuits. The reply was given, though, that these patterns are as much the result of economic trends under an increasingly globalized capitalism, a system that has no intrinsic link with most versions of liberalism (and is positively resisted by egalitarian liberals). Finally, we examined communitarianism as a distinct program for political institutions and found that serious problems arose, in particular concerning the procedures that would be adopted for locating the defining characteristics of the community and interpreting its values, in so far as communitarianism was to remain distinct from the conservatism considered earlier, the perfectionism examined in Chapter 4, and liberalism itself.

But can liberals give a plausible account of how cultural and communal connections *are* fundamentally valuable for people? Are the critical challenges raised by communitarians still valid, namely that the liberal conception of the self remains overly individualistic and detached from cultural connections and communal ties? We considered attempts to show a close connection between the freedom that is protected in liberal societies and the survival of certain cultural practices. We concluded that, once again, the plausibility of these attempts turned on the flexibility of the conception of autonomy upon which they relied. If autonomy could be understood as the capacity to reflect upon and embrace those values which form one's character and motivate one's behavior, and the connection between such embracing of one's values and the existence of cultures is made, then the link between the protection of autonomy and the protection of cultural practices can be established. Though this does not relieve liberalism of the difficulty of balancing the need to articulate well-defined principles for just and stable political institutions and recognizing the broad pluralism of values and perspectives found among those governed by them.

### Case to consider

The US Supreme Court, in *Wisconsin v. Yoder* ruled that the Old Order Amish of Wisconsin could gain an exemption from that state's mandatory education laws (which required attendance at formal schools up to the age of sixteen) based on the claim that such education conflicted with

the traditional values of that religious community. Consider a parallel (hypothetical) case where a traditional religious group which lives in a certain self-contained geographical area has as part of its traditional value system a prohibition on the education of *girls and women* (and a corresponding social hierarchy of men over women). The males in this society make all of its decisions and the girls are trained to become homemakers, cooks, and domestic workers. The women do not protest this arrangement, at least not openly. The group claims that this arrangement is part of its traditional social structure dating back hundreds of years. They further claim that the values of obedience, religious devotion, protection of community ways, and strict adherence to established law define the good for them and orient their thinking about common values.

Consider that such a group now argues that its members should receive an exemption from mandatory education provisions in that they insist that girls should not receive higher than an eighth grade education (the group has no similar provision for boys). This, they argue, is crucial to their common way of life, and the forced public education of girls of their community will directly conflict with their pursuit of the common good, organized in this traditional way.

Can such an exemption be justified on communitarian grounds? Does the possibility of such a justification provide a counterintuitive implication for communitarian arguments? Independent of how the laws of the larger society should be enforced, how should we approach the question of what is just or good for this community? Does it make sense to say that since it is unjustly organized (if you think it is) it is not really pursuing its own good? If it is pursuing its good, given its traditional self-understanding, does it make sense to say that it is unjust?

## Notes on further reading

Writers developing a conservative political philosophy of particular interest are Nisbet 1986, Oakshott 1991, and Kekes 1998 as well as the readings in Kirk 1982. (Those defending the new 'natural law' approach are listed in n. 5 above.) Communitarianism has been much discussed. The famous progenitors of the view (though not all of whom embrace the label) are: Taylor 1979 (though compare 1989a), Sandel 1982 (2nd edition, 1999, which has an important Preface and Epilogue commenting on recent developments in the controversy over liberalism and communitarianism), Walzer 1983, MacIntyre 1984, Bell 1993, and Sandel 1996. See also Walzer 1990, Mulhall and Swift 1992, and the essays in Avineri and de-Shalit 1992, Paul et al. 1996, and Etzioni

1999. The sociological critique of liberal individualism can be found in Bellah et al. 1985, and Putnam 2000.

The liberal commentary on the communitarian challenge is interestingly developed, for example, in Guttman 1985, Buchanan 1989, Taylor 1995 (especially chs 7 and 13), and Kymlicka 1989 and 1990: 47–134. For analysis of this debate that focuses especially on the concept of liberal individualism, see Crittenden 1992 and Pettit 1993. Liberal attempts to incorporate considerations of culture and multiculturalism can be found in Margalit and Raz 1990, Tamir 1993 and especially Kymlicka 1995 (for commentary on Kymlicka, see Kukathas 1997). For a recent overview of this literature, see Kymlicka 1998 (and the essays in that volume to which that article is an introduction).