

How Much of Communitarianism is Left (and Right)?

INTRODUCTION

This paper is addressed to those who find the communitarian critique of liberalism somewhat plausible, but who wonder how communitarians should act in the political world as it exists today.¹ An answer to this large question will have two parts. The first will present a policy strategy for communitarians, an account of the kinds of institutions, practices and policies communitarian should support. The second will present a political strategy for communitarians, an account of where and how communitarians can find support for their favored policies.

At present communitarians do not seem to have either kind of strategy. Communitarian theorists—or theorists adopted by communitarians—have provided us with analyses of the problems of liberal political thought² and of the difficulties faced by liberal political communities.³ They have offered historical accounts of the civic republican political tradition upon which their own ideals rest.⁴ And a number of communitarians have presented concrete proposals for the reform of specific institutions, practices and policies in America.⁵ But we still lack a general account of what a more communitarian political community would look like.

¹ I could not have written this paper without the help, advice and love of Diane B. Gottlieb and Katja Gottlieb-Stier.

I am indebted to the work of Michael Walzer, Jean Elshtain and Charles Taylor for the fundamental perspective on political and social life that guided me in writing this paper, as well as for more than a few of my specific arguments. See, among their other works: Michael Walzer, *What It Means to Be and American*, Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Democracy on Trial* and Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition” in *Philosophical Arguments*. Walzer, Elshtain and Taylor should not, however, be held responsible for what I have done with what I learned from them.

² See, for example, Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*; Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*; William Galston, *Liberal Purposes*, and a number of works by Charles Taylor, including *Sources of the Self*, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, the two volumes of his *Philosophical Papers* and *Philosophical Arguments*. Given their extraordinarily rich work, neither Taylor nor MacIntyre can be simply characterized as communitarians. But their theoretical analyses of liberalism have played an important role in shaping the liberal-communitarian debate.

³ Robert Bellah, Robert N., Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart*.

⁴ See, in particular, Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent*. There are many other works that trace the civic republican tradition without necessarily endorsing it. Of particular importance is the work of J. G. A. Pocock, especially *The Machiavellian Moment*.

⁵ One very important work which contains a number of detailed policy proposals is *The Spirit of Community* by the Godfather of communitarianism, Amitai Etzioni. This work makes some practical proposals to deal with the issues I discuss in this paper as well as many other proposals having to do with issues I do not discuss such as: how to shore up the family; where to strike a balance between individual liberties and the requirements of public health and safety; how to diminish the impact of hate speech without suppressing free expression; how to reform national politics so as to minimize the impact of special interest groups and others. While I have some quibbles with some of Etzioni's conclusions, I find the arguments of the book to be plausible on the whole. But while I think they would make things better in this country, I very much doubt that, even taken together, they would create a much more communitarian political community. That is why the proposals I defend here are far more radical than those Etzioni considers—especially in what I have to say about the political economy. I do believe, however, that there is a broad congruence between his proposals and my own. On the other hand there is no

It is possible that no such account is possible or desirable. Perhaps communitarianism would best be served precisely by more proposals for specific reforms. I shall return to this possibility at the end of the paper. But there are two good reasons to look for a more general account of the kinds of institutions, practices and policies communitarians should support. First, changes in one institution, practice or policy tend to have unintended, and often undesirable, effects on others. If we are to avoid making matters worse, it would be helpful to have a general policy strategy, one that showed us how proposed reforms of different parts of our political and social life hang together. Second, if we are to develop a political strategy, we need some idea about the relationships between the political goals of communitarians and the political goals typically found on the left and right in contemporary America. Indeed, thinking about where communitarianism fits into the contemporary ideological may be the best way to see what distinctive ends communitarians should pursue. At least this is the presupposition of this paper.

So in presenting a policy strategy for communitarians, I will address such questions as: Should communitarians see themselves as standing above or apart from the battle between left and right? Or is communitarianism a variant of one of the ideological tendencies conventionally found on the left or right? Most of the paper tries to answer these questions. Then, in the last part of the paper I more briefly turn to political strategy. Here the questions are: If we see communitarians as raising new issues different from the contemporary left and right, then how should communitarians organize politically? Should they pick and choose, siding on some issues with the left and on others with the right? Or should they try to organize a political movement independent of contemporary leftists and rightists? If, however, we see communitarianism as a new version of one of the conventional political ideologies, the key issue becomes: is communitarianism is a left or a right wing movement?

The answers to these questions are by no means obvious. Nor are the answers I give in this paper. So I put forward the following proposals in a very tentative manner and with full recognition that many communitarians would disagree with part or all of what I say. Indeed my own thoughts are still unsettled on many of these issues, especially since they involve the consideration of a wide range of complex problems about which no one can be expert. Moreover, as a good Aristotelian, I believe that, though a general policy strategy would be helpful, we cannot derive any concrete reforms of specific institutions, practices and policies from it. Rather, we have to adapt our strategy to the specific problems of particular institutions, practices and policies. That being said, a general policy strategy would be useful to have. And we will not have one unless we think long and hard about difficult and controversial issues. To stimulate such thought, I will try to make the case for a particular policy and political strategy for communitarians as directly and forcefully as I can, leaving aside many of my own doubts and questions.

One final prefatory note: Given the aims of this paper, I will not rehearse the communitarian analysis of the problems of the contemporary liberal democracies. That is not to say I find the most common communitarian views unproblematic—I do not. But my reservations about some communitarian ideas, and even more, about the presuppositions of much communitarian thought, can wait until another day. There is, I shall suppose, enough agreement

necessary connection between his ideas and those found in this paper. Thus Etzioni might very well disagree with my own view of the policy strategy communitarians should adopt. I am speaking for myself here and do not want to claim that my ideas would be approved by others who adopt the communitarian label.

about essential ideas among those of us who from time to time call ourselves communitarians—or who are, at least, unembarrassed by being called communitarians—that it is profitable to raise the question of what policy and political strategy is appropriate for communitarians to adopt today.

I. SANDEL'S RETICENCE

My point of entry into these questions are some reflections on Michael Sandel's *Democracy's Discontent* and recent criticisms of it. Sandel has been criticized for his reticence in addressing two important questions. First, while Sandel praises forms of political thought that emphasize the civic virtues, he does not endorse any particular conception of the virtues or of the human good. Second, Sandel has very little to say about what institutional forms would create a more communitarian—or as he now puts it civic republican—form of political and social life.⁶ There are a number of philosophical reasons for Sandel's reticence on these two issues. I will not be able to discuss them here. Instead, let me mention another, more political source, of Sandel's reticence.

Communitarians have often hoped for support from many different points across the political spectrum. Both leftists and rightists are concerned about the excessive individualism of contemporary life. They are apprehensive about the decline of civic knowledge and participation in community life. They are uneasy in the face of the growing imbalance between what we demand from and what we are willing to give to public life. While they support the extension of human freedom, they have misgivings about the consequences of freedom for the ties that bind individual to other individuals, families, local communities and the country as a whole. And they worry that an excess of individualism threatens the very rights that makes individualism possible.

So communitarians hope for support from people on both the left and on the right. Trouble begins, however, when communitarians begin to offer specific proposals to enhance civic virtue and communal life. At this point, communitarians often find themselves in the cross-fire that results from two divisions between the left and the right today. First, while some leftists and some rightists are comfortable talking about civic virtue, they often have rather different virtues in mind. Second, leftists and rightists drawn to communitarian ways of thought differ on how economic policies and institutions ought to be reformed so as to strengthen communities, and the civic virtues that sustain them, in America. These conflicts are so serious that anyone who wants to make a case for communitarianism that has broad appeal would do well to avoid them. And that is precisely what many communitarians, including Sandel, do. The difficulty, however, is that these conflicts are so serious that communitarians will not get anywhere unless they address them. To do that, however, we need concrete proposals for political and social change

⁶ Except when talking about Sandel's argument I shall use the term communitarianism rather than civic republicanism in this paper. I believe that the aims of communitarianism are, in important ways, different from those found in the civic republican tradition. In particular, communitarianism should be more open to pluralism and to what I will call partial rather than full communities.

These two criticisms were raised at a recent roundtable on *Democracy's Discontent* at the 1996 APSA meeting. Thomas Pangle forcefully delivered the first objection while Jeremy Waldron and Jean Elshtain more gently raised the second one.

and renewal. An implicit recognition of this need lies behind the frustration with Sandel's work so apparent among his critics, including those sympathetic to his project and very appreciative of his important book.

In the next part of the paper, I will say a few words about where leftists and rightists disagree on these two kinds of issues. Then, in the next two parts of the paper, I will make some suggestions about where communitarians should stand with regard to these conflicts between left and right. That will allow me, in the last part, to draw some conclusions about what political strategy communitarians ought to adopt in the present political context.

II. POLITICAL CONFLICT IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICA

Augustinians, Aristotelians and Liberationists

The virtues are all the rage these days. They have made the cover of a news magazine. And they have made William Bennett rich. Bill Clinton and Bob Dole, New Gingrich and Jesse Jackson all call for their renewal. But they do not necessarily agree in their definition of the virtues or perhaps even in the list of virtues to which they would subscribe. And there are some people who are deeply suspicious of the revival of this old idea in its entirety.

Disputes about the virtues are particularly evident in the views expressed on the left and right about matters mainly sexual in nature, such as abortion, homosexuality, and the more broadly, the relationship between men and women and the nature of the family. It is no accident that sexual matters are so much in conflict. For we can best understand the dispute over the good and the virtues as one between an Augustinian view on the right, a counter-Augustinian liberationist view on the left, and an Aristotelian view in the center. At the middle of this conflict is a profound disagreement about human nature.

This is not the place for a full account of this disagreement. But, at the risk of caricature, let me provide a rough sketch of the contestants. The religious right's immense frustration with the direction of contemporary America rests, implicitly or explicitly, on an Augustinian view of the double nature of human beings.⁷ Augustinians hold that the appetitive part of our soul is the product of mere nature, that is, our bodies. It consists of extremely powerful, and never entirely satisfied, bodily desires that are one, but not the only, source of our urge for domination over the world around us, and especially over other human beings. Our first nature underlies a second,

⁷ I can give no more than a potted account of this argument here. I have given a somewhat longer version of this account in a manuscript entitled *Discovery or Invention*, chapter 1.

I call this view Augustinian because it is Augustine who is in large part responsible for making it so central to our civilization. Some would argue that we should call this view Platonic. And, at times Plato certainly talks about our bodily, and particularly, our sexual desires as "mad masters." But, as I suggest in note 5, below, I think that Plato's view is far different from that I attribute to Augustine. From time to time, and for one purpose or another, Plato does suggest support for something like the Augustinian view and the notion that the notion of the body corrupting the soul. These ideas were found, earlier, in a number of strands in Greek thought. They are also found in later Platonists and in other philosophical schools, all of which influenced Augustine more directly than Plato.

that is the product of the interaction between the rational part of our soul and our culture. The desires of our first nature are, in fundamental ways, in conflict with those of our second nature. Indeed, Augustine takes this conflict to be both the result, and an indication, of original sin. That our bodies are in conflict with our souls also means that conflict among human beings is difficult to control. For civic peace is impossible if the lustful and tyrannical desires of the body are not kept firmly in their place.

For Augustinians, government is essentially the imposition of authority. And that is true whether we are talking about governing ourselves or governing others. The tyranny of our desires can only be prevented by a stronger, and opposed tyranny. The soul rules over the body essentially by repressing our unruly desires. Part of this effort involves elevating these desires, for example, by allowing sexual desires to be fulfilled within the confines of marriage. But marriage constrains even as it provides an outlet for our bodily desires. Even if we have been properly brought up, it is always difficult to accept these constraints. To be trained to repress ourselves is to come to exercise authority over our desires. But, at the same time, it is to accept the authority of our parents, our community, the state, the church and, ultimately, of God, over ourselves. To accept authority, then, is to become the agent of authority in the struggle with our lower desires for control over our lives.

When Augustinians look at contemporary America, they tremble. For they fear that liberal regimes have given up all efforts to encourage men and women to accept and become the agent of the proper authorities. And they worry that those in authority are less and less likely to be the kinds of people who have mastered their own lower ends.⁸ For the consequences of ever freer speech, ever more shameless advertising, legal abortion and the breakdown of taboos against infidelity, divorce, and homosexuality encourages everyone to identify with their first, rather than their second nature. The consequence of this liberation from traditional forms of authority is, for Augustinians, readily apparent. People are ever more inclined to serve their own ends at the cost of neglecting their responsibilities to others. The result is the collapse of academic and moral education; the rise of crime; the breakdown of communal sentiment and intermediate associations; the intensification of commercial and political conflict; pressures on government that result from the irrational demand for low levels of taxation and high levels of government service; and many of the other problems that plague our political community..

So, when Augustinians call for the revival of community, they have a particular kind of community in mind. They would like to see what they regard as the traditional virtues and authorities reestablished. And, to attain that aim, they are willing to place limits on freedoms that many of us think liberal governments are obliged to protect and extend.

This Augustinian view of community is opposed by two other tendencies of thought. The first is the counter-Augustinianism of those I call liberationists. Though their ideas are most directly influenced by romantic, Nietzschean or Freudian thought, liberationists are, in a way, descendants of Augustinian thought as well. For at least vulgar romantics, Nietzscheans and Freudians accept the dual view of human nature characteristic of Augustinianism. But they reverse the Augustinian valuation of the two parts of the human soul. Augustinians call for repression, liberationists for the emancipation of our lower ends. Augustinians call for reestablishing traditional authority, liberationists for overthrowing it.

⁸ This concern partly explains the peculiar fascination that people have with the sex lives of our Presidents.

Though this is not the place to make the case, I think we should agree that liberationist thought is partly responsible for the ills that communitarians hope to remedy. But this should not lead us to conclude that communitarians must be Augustinians. For there is another tendency of thought supportive of communitarian ideas, one that I will call Aristotelian.

The Aristotelian tradition differs from the Augustinian in two important ways. First, while they acknowledge that human beings can suffer from the tension between what Augustinians call the lower and higher desires, Aristotelians do not think that this conflict is a product of the implacable desires of the appetitive part of our souls. For, on the Aristotelian conception, all of our desires, including our natural bodily desires, are subject to the shaping force of culture. This is true for two reasons. Aristotelians hold that reason and / or language is so central to human beings that even our most basic bodily wants must be articulated in rational or linguistic terms before we can act on them.⁹ This metaphysical claim is supplemented by a psychological claim. Aristotelians hold rather than being asocial or tyrannical in our first nature, as Augustinians typically assume, men and women naturally seek to be a part of their polity and society. Given this view of human nature, for Aristotle, it is conceivable that a man might have the virtue of *sophrosune* (often translated temperance) as opposed to being merely *enkrates* (continent). The latter must control unruly desires. He has, but suffers from his efforts at self-control. The former, on the other hand, acts on the proper desires without pain or strain. This, Augustinians claim, is impossible for sinful man, without the grace of God.¹⁰

⁹ I can do no more than gesture to this argument here. I have defended an account of human ends and action that explicates this argument in great detail in a book manuscript entitled *Nature and Culture* and in a short paper drawn from that manuscript “Reason and the Human Good.” My argument attempts to re-present, in contemporary philosophical terms, the point of view developed in Aristotle’s *Nichomachean Ethics*. Critics of an earlier version of this paper view have pointed out that Aristotle argues that the soul rules the body despotically. While this is true, it really is grist for my mill. For Aristotle’s notion of the relationship between soul and body does not allow for the body to have ends independent of the soul. The soul is the form of the body. A careful reading of the *Ethics* suggests that even ends of the irrational parts of the soul are not independent of reason in that they are shaped by our view of the good. Another way to put this point is that, for Aristotle, there is no sharp break between the higher part of the non-rational half of the soul and the lower part of the rational part of the soul.

¹⁰ This is not to say that Aristotle and Plato do not recognize that our bodily desires can be a serious problem for us. Plato is certainly aware of that, as anyone who has read the *Symposium* knows well. But the importance of our bodily desires comes, I think, not because they are intrinsically powerful, but only because their satisfaction is very much tied to the satisfaction of other deeper, ends. Consider, for example, that in *The Republic*, the first city Socrates creates in speech, the city of pigs, is peaceful in large part because the only desires people have are bodily desires. And thus Socrates supposes that these bodily desires are not, by nature, expansive. By having the thymotic Glaucon condemn the city of pigs, Plato is showing us that the desire for luxuries comes from another part of our soul. Expansive bodily desires are, at least for some people, the product of a desire to distinguish ourselves from others or to live up to a certain self-image. That this is one important source of expansive bodily desires can be seen if we recognize that animals do not have such desires. It can also be seen by recognizing that womanizers are not primarily interested in physical pleasure but in the (self-)esteem that comes from conquest. (Given how uniquely different our sexual desires can be, one night stands are not the best way to seek physical pleasure.) This way of looking at the source of bodily desires become more evident in books eight and nine of *The Republic* and, even more so in *The Symposium* when it becomes evident that a general erotic desire underlies most human ends and that this erotic desire is not necessarily expressed—indeed Plato holds that it is not best expressed—as a desire for sexual pleasure. Plato, and Aristotle as well, were aware that eros is first expressed in bodily terms. And for some of us, it is never expressed in any other way. This is one of a number of factors that accounts for the great power of our bodily desires. The others include the powerful, if fleeting, pleasures that comes from bodily satisfaction; the initial difficulties in our pursuit of non-bodily forms of erotic pleasure, and the way in

A second importance difference between Augustinians and Aristotelians is that the latter do not seek to restore the deference to authority characteristic of traditional communities. Such deference, contemporary Aristotelians believe, can lead to the abuse of power. Moreover, under the conditions of modern life, commitment to the common good requires active participation in community affairs, not just the passive acceptance of traditional authorities. Life under liberal regimes demands autonomy and self-determination. And if that demand can not be met through communal activity, it will be met solely through the kinds of individual activity that undermine community. Moreover, only active participation in political and social gives people the experience, knowledge and trust in each other that can sustain communal life under the ever changing circumstances of modernity. Aristotelians are not opponents of authority. Liberationists threaten communitarian aims precisely because no form of communal life is possible without authority. But Aristotelians call for authoritative decisions to be made in a democratic and participatory manner.

Perhaps it would help make my characterization of these three political and moral views clear if I briefly give an example of how they lead to concrete political conclusions. Take, for example, the issue of homosexual marriage. Augustinians are, of course, resolutely opposed. While liberationists are likely to support the idea, they do not do so with any great enthusiasm. For many liberationists are dubious about the commitments and restraints entailed in any marriage, gay or straight. Not a few liberationists have agreed with Augustinians who claim that promiscuous sexuality is in some way central to the lives of gays. Aristotelians reject this claim. They are more likely to insist that, at least under contemporary circumstances, the intense and committed relationships of marriage is central to the good life of most men and women, gay or straight. Thus it is the Aristotelians who are most likely to support gay marriage.

Augustinians and Aristotelians are not different in all respects. Both reject liberationist views. And both uphold many of the same virtues and a commitment to the common good. That is one reason for thinking that Augustinians and Aristotelians might be able to put aside their differences and agree on some communitarian proposals. As we shall see below, however, they would first have to more consciously recognize just how much they have in common.

Liberal Egalitarians and Libertarians

I shall return to the first division between leftists and rights in a moment. Now, however, consider a second one, concerning government control over our economic life. Here two ideological tendencies, which I will call liberal egalitarianism and libertarianism, defines most contemporary political debate although, as we shall see in the next part of the paper, they do not exhaust all of the options open to us.

which the satisfaction of our bodily desires is tied to intimate relationships between human beings. That our bodily desires are, for these reasons, powerful, does cause trouble for us. Indeed, I am inclined to think that Plato saw us as in some ways fatally divided creatures who can not be entirely happy with any way of satisfying eros. But that was *not* because sexual and other bodily desires are simply impossible to control. Rather, I think, it was because—to oversimplify a great deal—we are torn between the powerful, overwhelming and yet fragile friendship of sexual lovers and the more enduring but limited and less powerful philosophic friendship of non-lovers.

I hope to develop this interpretation of Plato in a paper I am currently writing entitled “Civilization and its Contents: Plato on Eros.”

The conflict between liberal egalitarians and libertarians is familiar to us all. Liberal egalitarians believe that men and women have a moral claim either to a job that pays an appropriate wage or, if they are not able to work, to a decent minimum income. Thus they support the redistribution of income from the rich to the poor by means of both state provision of social welfare benefits and the organization of labor unions. Liberal egalitarians believe that both the common good and distributive justice is served when the state is active in providing particularly important goods and services and in regulating market relationships. Thus they favor governments that invest in education and infrastructure; create parks and public transportation; control pollution; protect the health and safety of consumers and workers; regulate or eliminate monopolies; and adopt other such policies.

To one degree or another, libertarians, reject all of these aims. They argue that both distributive justice and economic growth is served when governments refrain from interfering with the workings of the market. They hold that business enterprises can more efficiently provide most of the goods and services we get from government, not only because government monopolies tend to be wasteful, but also because high taxation distorts economic incentives and reduces economic growth.

Liberal egalitarians aim to complete the work of the New Deal while libertarians aim at rolling it back. Of course, relatively few people in the United States today are pure liberal egalitarians or pure libertarians. The opinion of most members of both the political elite and mass public tend to be a little to the left or to the right of center, although the elite tend to be more extreme than the public as a whole. The ideological advantage in the United States tends to be with the right, as the public has always been, and in recent years is increasingly, dubious about the efficacy of most government programs. Yet, except for AFDC and foreign aid, support for most specific government programs remains strong, as the Republicans who took their contract with America too seriously in 1995 found out in 1996.

III. COMMUNITARIANISM AND CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL CONFLICT

With this sketch of ideological debate in contemporary America before us, we can now turn to the question of to what extent, the concerns of communitarianism are congruent with any of these ideological positions. I will start with the human good and the virtues and then turn to political economy.

The Human Good and the Virtues

I imagine that it will come as no surprise that I find the Aristotelian view of human nature and the good community more plausible than either the Augustinian or libertarian views. Though the Augustinian (or counter-Augustinian) view is found in a wide range of political and moral thought, I do not believe that the empirical support for it is all that strong.¹¹ Despite my own reservations about the Augustinian conception, however, I believe that communitarians

¹¹ In addition, I stand with most Jews in rejecting the notion of original sin, which is central to Augustine's understanding of the human situation.

must welcome any and all efforts to restore the balance between responsibilities and rights. That means that Aristotelian communitarians should be supportive of the efforts of Augustinians to pursue their own vision of a good community. And, by the same token, Augustinians should respect the efforts of Aristotelians. How can we all be supportive of those visions of political and social life we call into question or reject? By welcoming a genuine pluralism, one that is open to a wide variety of local attempts to create a more communitarian form of life.

Communitarians should allow local communities—both local governments and the various intermediate associations and organizations, including business enterprises—the greatest leeway to adopt institutions, practices, and policies that reflect a specific, partisan and even religiously inspired vision of the virtues and the good community. That is to say, whether we are Augustinians or Aristotelians, we must allow local communities to teach doctrines we disagree with; to encourage or restrict certain kinds of action in ways we find questionable; and to adopt institutions and practices we think harmful. Of course, we must also insist that no local political community infringes upon the rights of those who disagree with the majority view. But, we will not have strong local communities if we do not allow them to reflect the aims and purposes of their members. And thus we must make sure that we do not expand rights so far as to overly limit what local communities can do.

Communitarians should also be willing to see public funds used for an immense variety of purposes. I shall argue in the section on political economy that intermediate associations must receive substantial support from the state. That means, however, that state aid will be provided to intermediate associations that pursue ends rejected by many, and perhaps a majority, of citizens. Moreover some of this aid will have to go, directly or indirectly, to the religious associations that have such a central importance in our civil society. This, too, will raise the hackles of many. But a communitarian civil society will have to be tolerant of the various ways in which its citizens try to meet their own ends and contribute to the common good and justice.

I am well aware that the last two paragraphs are open to the objection I raised against Sandel's work, that it is rather reticent about specifics. But, the acceptability of my proposal to most people will depend upon how it is implemented. Unfortunately I do not have the space to fill in many details. But let me give two examples of what I am talking about.

First, it seems to me that communitarians should place much more emphasis on the freedom of religion clause and much less on the establishment clause of the first amendment. I do not think that a greater emphasis on religion in the schools or in public celebrations is contrary to our fundamental human rights. And this is especially true in schools that serve students of overwhelmingly one religious tendency. Nor do I think that, rightly understood, the Constitution stands in the way of state aid to religious institutions that in various ways serve the common good or distributive justice. In particular, state aid to students who attend religious schools does not seem to me to be an establishment of religion.

Second, while I am a supporter of instituting marriage for homosexuals, I think it would be problematic if this were attained by judicial means.¹² Rather, I would hope that, over time,

¹² Preventing discrimination against homosexuals is, however, another matter. Marriage is not widely viewed—although it may well be—a fundamental moral right. And, even if it is a fundamental moral right, it may not be a fundamental constitutional right. But people do have a fundamental moral and constitutional right not to be discriminated against on irrelevant grounds. So homosexuals must have the same right to hold jobs or to gain

gays, lesbians and their supporters win the battle for homosexual marriage state by state. And, if this process takes some time to accomplish, I do not think that some diversity in state policies would be so horrible that the moral claims and sensibilities of people in different parts of this country should be overridden by the action of the courts. Nor will the effort to win tolerance for gays and lesbians be helped by judicial fiat. It is much more likely that tolerance will result from the long, tough process of debate and persuasion, of protest and legislation, of political give and take in one state after another. At the very least, when homosexual marriage is finally instituted by the representatives of the people of the several states, those who remain opposed will know that their view was listened to, yet rejected by the majority. And, by listening to those who fight for gay rights, perhaps some of the opponents will have heard the arguments that lead them to question their own prejudices.

There are, of course, many other specific questions that I would have to address to flesh out my proposal. Are we to have a great deal of state and local variation in laws governing abortion or pornography and obscenity? And what about institutions and practices that draw distinctions between the sexes? Would the pluralism I defend support the exclusion of women from the Citadel or the establishment of single sex elementary schools? Or, on these issues, do fundamental human and / or constitutional rights limit what state and local governments should do? I cannot answer these or other, similar, questions here. But, I think that the fundamental dividing line is fairly clear. Governments and local communities have the right to pursue their own vision of the common good by teaching and education, by encouragement and condemnation, by setting limits on what people do in the common spaces, and by using their own funds to support one rather than another set of policies and activities. But they do not have the right to prevent individuals from pursuing their own vision of the good in private. Nor can they discriminate against people for irrelevant reasons.¹³

There will, I know, be many objections to granting local communities, and especially governmental organizations, the right (and the funds) to pursue policies and activities that embody a particular vision of the common good and the virtues, especially where that vision is based in religious teachings. But, if we are serious about reviving communal life, we have to accept that some governments and intermediate associations will pursue ideals of community we find mistaken, disagreeable or wrong. When we take part in disputes in our communities, we should be prepared to fight for our views. When, for example, our local school system (or the private school to which we send our children) is debating a new curriculum about sex education,

housing as everyone else. The only exception is for those positions which are central to religious practices. A church has a right not to discriminate against a gay man seeking to become a priest. It does not have a right to discriminate against a gay man seeking to become a janitor.

¹³ Thus, my view rejects the understanding of liberalism that holds that a liberal state must be neutral with regard to different conceptions of the good. On my view, such neutrality is neither possible nor required by liberalism. Yet, at the same time, I would argue that individuals should have the greatest possible freedom of thought and action. And that goes for groups as well—we should not forget that freedom is for communities as well as individuals. I criticize those philosophies of liberalism that argue for government neutrality in a manuscript entitled *Discovery or Invention*. And I present a more abstract argument for combining government support for common goods with a broad view of individual freedom in *Reason, the Good and Human Rights*.

In calling for both (local) government support for particular conceptions of the human good and for broad individual freedoms, I am trying to find some basis for agreement on the part of both liberationists and Augustinians. I hope to say more about how we can temper this dispute in a longer work that elaborates on the argument of this paper.

we should make the best case we can for our own perspective, whether it is Augustinian or Aristotelian or something else entirely. But, if we take communitarianism seriously, then, for three reasons, we must be willing to accede to answers different than our own when that is the will of those legitimately entitled to decide.

First, if the goal of communitarianism is really so important, if we really do believe that the future of liberal democracy in the United States depends upon restoring a greater commitment to the common good, then we must be prepared to allow local communities to define and pursue their own conception of the common good. For reasons I will discuss in more detail in a moment, social solidarity and a commitment to the common good of the kind necessary to inculcate the civic virtues is only possible when the members of a community share a particular conception of the good. In a political community as multifarious as our own, there are always going to be different views about these matters. Sometimes these differences will not rest on fundamentally different views of human nature and the good polity and society. For we can share a general conception of the good life but want to see our own local community pursue a particular version of that overarching view. In other circumstances, the members of a local community may be deeply split about how they see human nature and the good polity and society. In either case, some people are bound to be disappointed with the direction of their local community. But, while those in a local majority should act with tact and consideration, making allowances where they can for various points of view, they should not forbear taking the actions necessary to the pursuit of the common good as they see it. Taking such action might, ultimately, lead to a permanent division in the community, as the minority members go off to find like minded people with which to form a new community. Despite the travail this involves, the result is likely to be to the good of all.

Second, the various issues between Augustinians and Aristotelians are still open. I have my own views on these matters. But I cannot say that I find the alternatives to my own views unreasonable. Indeed, to a very large extent, the difference between Augustinians and Aristotelians rests on some questions about what human beings are like and what will result from different forms of political and social life. I don't see how we can confidently address these issues unless we can examine the consequences of variation in political and social life. So some pluralism in the kinds of communities formed in states and localities will, in the phrase of Brandeis, be a laboratory in which we can test the claims of Augustinians and Aristotelians.

Third, if communitarianism is to have any impact on this country, it is very important that we temper the struggles between Augustinians and Aristotelians. These struggles divert us from the much more important task of rejecting liberationist views and limiting the impact of these views on our public and private lives. The conflict between Augustinians and Aristotelians has already done a great deal of damage. And both sides are guilty. Augustinians, by and large, do not take Aristotelian views of a good polity and society seriously. They are always quick to lump us with the liberationists. For example, any one who has read Andrew Sullivan's *Virtually Normal* should be able to see that the case for homosexual marriage rests on a rejection of the liberationist understanding of human nature. Yet Augustinians take the marriage of gays and lesbians to be as threatening to the ideal of heterosexual marriage as the bathhouses.¹⁴ Similarly,

¹⁴ In my view, neither homosexual marriage nor the bathhouses are a threat to the *practice* of heterosexual marriage. But the conception of the place of sexuality in human life implicit in the practices found at the bathhouses

Augustinians fail to see that one can legitimately support abortion as a right while, at the same time, recognizing that abortion is not the virtuous choice in many circumstance.

Aristotelians, for their part, often can see no difference between the public condemnation of pornography or the labeling of raunchy CDs, on the one hand, and the censorship of speech, on the other. We Aristotelians should support an expansive notion of civil liberty, and reject policies we find silly or pernicious. We should disagree with conservatives about whether pornography and obscenity should be illegal or about the usefulness of labeling gangsta rap albums. But we should not call our opponents fascists. Moreover, for reasons I have already suggested, we Aristotelians should give up our reliance on the courts and engage our opponents in the struggle of everyday legislative politics. For the Augustinians are right at least in this: On issue after issue liberationists, often with the tacit support of Aristotelians, have been hiding behind the Constitution, unwilling to take their case to the people. And they have been hypocritical in doing this. When the Augustinians want to label obscene albums or to insist that the NEA not fund offensive works of art, the liberationists, along with some Aristotelians, scream “censorship” and call for government neutrality about the good. But they forget about government neutrality when it comes to labeling cigarettes and food or requiring motorcyclists to wear helmets.

Political Economy

It is possible to finesse the disputes between Aristotelians and Augustinians by making room for a wide range of different conceptions of the human good and the virtues. But politico-economic issues are not so easy to finesse. Here, I think, communitarians must support institutions and policies that will, ultimately, radically change our political economy. And in doing so, communitarians will have to break with many of the most cherished ideas of the two dominant tendencies of thought on these issues.

That the basic principles of libertarianism have nothing to offer communitarians should be obvious. Indeed, the libertarian notion that we have no duty to serve the common good and help those who cannot help themselves is a pretty good summary of what communitarians most oppose. But to say that should reject libertarianism is not to say that they should embrace liberal egalitarianism.

Perhaps the best way to see why communitarians should have qualms about liberal egalitarianism is to consider a third, communitarian, view of the proper role of government in the economy. The conception I put forward here owes a great deal to two traditions of thought. The first tradition is especially prominent among theorists influenced by Catholic political and social thought and, in particular, by the doctrine of subsidiarity.¹⁵ It focuses on the importance of mediating—or as I prefer to call them, intermediate—associations in attaining a good and just form of political and social life. Those who hold this view hope that intermediate associations can do much of the work that now falls to the state. The second tradition that contributes to the

is such a threat. Note, however, that the identical conception is implicit in the practices found at the heterosexual equivalents to the bathhouses, not to mention those found at many fraternity houses.

¹⁵ See Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* and Michael Novak, *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*.

political economy I will defend can be called, for lack of a better term, social democracy. While those who call themselves social democrats (or democratic socialists or market socialists) have supported some liberal egalitarian ideas, they have also criticized this doctrine along lines that parallel those found in Catholic political and social thought.¹⁶ For many social democrats have worried about the way a large bureaucratic state escapes from democratic control and stifles other, more local, forms of political activity.

There are important differences between the two traditions of thought that contribute to the communitarian political economy I will sketch here. In particular, social democrats tends to be more worried about how the inequality of property—and the power that goes with it—undermines the common good and justice. I will say a bit more about this below. But we should not fail to recognize important parallels between these two traditions of thought. Taken together, they lead to harsh criticisms of many of the social welfare, public goods and regulatory programs favored by liberal egalitarians. For a communitarian political economy would hold that, in a number of different ways, these institutions, practices and policies undermine civic virtue and solidarity.

First, liberal egalitarianism undermines the sense of *responsibility* that characterizes citizens with civic virtue. It turns active citizens into passive consumers, who demand much from government but are unwilling to do their share in providing for the common good or the well being of their friends and neighbors or, in some cases, for themselves. Second, liberal egalitarianism undermines the *accountability* of government by vesting power in large, bureaucracies that are not only unresponsive to the citizenry but whose successes and failures are hard for citizens to recognize. Third, by insisting on a *uniformity* in public policy, these bureaucracies insure that government provided goods and services that do not meet the particular needs of different localities or citizens. Fourth, liberal egalitarianism limits public *participation* in government, undermining the prime source by which citizens come to understand their own political and social life. And fifth, because of these and other various failures, liberal egalitarian institutions, practices and policies undermine public *support* for the very ends they mean to serves

I cannot explore each of these problems in any depth here. But, if we are to understand these difficulties and the kinds of institutions, practices and policies that might ameliorate them, we must consider at least a few of the details of the communitarian case against liberal egalitarianism.

The critique of liberal egalitarian welfare social welfare policies is the most developed part of the communitarian alternative I wish to propose. It holds that large, bureaucratic social welfare programs undermine the responsibility of both the recipients of government aid and the citizenry at large. Indeed, these two effects are intertwined. Both arise because government sponsored social welfare programs undercut the efforts of the various intermediate associations—churches, ethnic associations, and local governments—that were once charged with the care of those who could not support themselves. Unlike government bureaucracies that

¹⁶ Long ago Michael Walzer presented a social democratic argument for the “hollowing out” of the welfare state and its replacement by local, participatory and voluntary organizations. See his “Dissatisfaction in the Welfare State.” But, while I have learned much from this essay, the views I defend below are, at some points, far from Walzer’s. In particular, Walzer has not had much complimentary to say about privatization and he has explicitly rejected voucher plans for education in *Spheres of Justice*.

follow uniform procedures, intermediate associations can tailor their aid to the particular situation and character of the people they serve. They can insure that the truly needy are aided in the proper way—with jobs or goods or money or medical treatment or counseling or other kinds of support—while resisting the demands of those who are unwilling to do what they can for themselves. Thus they can assist people who need help, without undermining their initiative and self-respect. Moreover, because these intermediate associations draw upon on the participation of the better off members of a local community, they educate them about the situation of the worse off. And, in so doing, they instill in the better off a sense of responsibility for ameliorating that situation. For this reason—and because they are seen to be careful not to waste money—the social welfare programs run by intermediate associations help to generate the broad public support they need to survive and flourish. Large, distant, and bureaucratic social welfare agencies have no such basis of support. That is why the first response to budgetary problems is always to cut aid for the poor.

The communitarian critique of the social welfare state can be extended to the liberal egalitarian approach to providing public goods and regulating economic activities. Liberal egalitarians have, by and large, been at the forefront of “rationalizing” the provision of public goods. They have looked to central governments rather than state and local government to provide these goods. They have tried to provide uniform goods and services. And they have instituted various professional or technocratic methods by which to organize the bureaucracies which provide these goods and services. Communitarians claim, however, that the results of all these efforts have not always been happy. Large government bureaucracies have a distressing tendency to escape from public accountability and to insist on an undesirable uniformity of the goods they provide.

Liberal egalitarians well know that government bureaucracies often come to serve their own interests, or the interests of those they regulate or provide services for. Indeed liberal egalitarians have a common explanation for these difficulties: They claim that the problem is the corruption of bureaucrats who are looking to find high paying jobs in the private sector, combined with the insufficient oversight by government officials, who may also be corrupted by the promise of campaign contributions. So liberal egalitarians say we must try harder. We must reform the bureaucracies, add more inspectors and watchdogs, place limits on the revolving door between government service and business enterprises and limit campaign contributions. Communitarians point out, however, that these are rarely more than temporary palliatives that become less effective as the attention of government officials and the press turns to other matters. Moreover, some of these reforms—such as the addition of new checks on what bureaucrats can do—simply adds to the inefficiency of public enterprises.

The real problem is that while government bureaucracies are very good at some things—such as distributing money to individuals and other government agencies—they are very bad at other things—such as providing specialized goods and services. It is often very difficult to determine whether a bureaucratic agency is doing a good job of providing such goods and services. And those who have the responsibility to oversee such agencies—high government officials, the press and the citizenry—do not have the time or incentives to carry out this task on a continuing basis. At best, they devote themselves to avoiding scandals of various sorts. On the other hand, those who have a financial interest in the activities of government agencies do pay attention and use various means to bend these agencies to serve their own interests. Liberal

egalitarian reforms cut off some of these means of corruption. But it is unlikely that they can ever eliminate all of them.

One way to make the oversight of government agencies easier is to insist that government agencies follow uniform procedures and provide uniform goods and services. Of course, uniformity is sometimes quite desirable. We expect the IRS to treat us all uniformly. And most of us want our schools to give students a more or less uniform civic education. In other cases, however, uniformity leads, at best, to frustration on the part of those who receive government goods and services and, at worst, to inefficiency and mediocrity. The uniformity of government provided goods and services can be very frustrating, especially when people are divided about what public or individual goods and services they desire.

Consider, for example, the public schools. In a country as divided as our own about what moral education means, there is no hope that any program of real substance can be adopted. Much the same is true with regard to academic programs. Parents who seek a demanding and challenging education for their children are bound to be disappointed. For all our talk about the importance of education, many Americans are reluctant to see elementary or high school children work very hard. As a result, elementary and high school teachers (not to mention teachers at all but the best public and private universities) are under constant pressure to make their courses less demanding. But, at the same time, parents insist that their children must learn what they need to know to function as citizens and workers.

In the first case, where different groups of parents want different things from the schools, there is no way in which public schools, as presently designed, can satisfy everyone, except by doing as little as possible. In the second case, where the very same parents make contradictory demands on the schools, schools should respond by making parents see that their demands are contradictory. But, in large part because of the monopoly position held by the public schools, they find it easier to evade accountability by creating a pretense of teaching and learning. And that explains why most Americans are happy with the schools their children attend at the same time that, by most other measures, the quality of education in America is pitiful.

A final problem with large public bureaucracies is that support for the provision of common goods is undermined because most citizens are unaware of the real magnitude of what they receive from the government. For example, students at public universities at which I have taught have no conception of just how much of their education is subsidized by taxpayers. They typically think that they or their parents are paying for 90% of the costs of their education when, in fact, they are paying for no more than 10%.¹⁷ This disjunction between what people think they receive and what they do receive from government goes far to explain why Americans think *both* that they should receive more from government *and* that they pay too much in taxes.

On my view, there is no way to overcome the disabilities that accompanies the provision of public goods and services by large bureaucratic agencies. So communitarians should call for the radical decentralization of the provision of these goods and services. One way to do this is by devolving power and funds to lower levels of government and to non-governmental agencies and associations. Devolving power to lower levels of government in large cities means creating neighborhood councils that have control over a range of important government goods and

¹⁷ This was true when I taught in North Carolina. At Temple, the split is closer to 80-20 in the other direction.

services.¹⁸ Another way to decentralize government enterprises is to privatize government, perhaps in conjunction with the creation of a voucher system to help individuals pay for important public goods and services. Decentralization has been offered as a remedy for the provision of such things as public parks, police services and education. And privatization has been held up as a possible solution for other services such as sanitation, or, in conjunction with vouchers, education and health care. Decentralizing and privatizing the provision of public goods and services are not cure alls. But they are plausible means of reversing the problems created by large, bureaucratic government programs.¹⁹

Since privatization is likely to be more controversial among communitarians, let me focus on the consequences of a voucher system for the public schools. A strong case can be made, I believe, that the public good would be better served by allowing people with broadly different conceptions of the good of education to pursue their own aims, provided that we also insure that they can come to see the consequences of their choices. Uniformity would be a thing of the past, as a variety of schools would provide different kinds of moral and academic education, suited to the aims and values of different parents and students. Of course, governments would have to insist that students are taught basic skills, and more importantly, civic ideals. But a testing scheme could certainly be devised to insure that this was accomplished in all schools.²⁰ Done properly, these minimal expectations would not prevent the development of a wide range of experimental and alternative schools. Some of these schools might well remain mediocre. But because alternatives would be available and their consequences more open to view, parents will themselves be educated about what kinds of schools are best for their children. They will have to, and will be more able to, accept responsibility for their children's education. At the same time, principals and teachers will be more accountable for the kinds of education they provide.

Not only would schools that are focused on a particular vision of education—and that are smaller than many public schools today—be more responsible and accountable, they would also

¹⁸ In most cases, it is probably important for these neighborhood councils to have a broad rather than a narrow mandate. That is, they should play a role in many policy areas, such as governing local public schools, police protections, sanitation, planning and so forth. The difficulty of political bodies with narrow mandates is that they are often neglected by many citizens who are not particularly concerned with one area of public policy. This leads to neighborhood councils being dominated by a faction in the community with a very particular interest. This has been one of the main problems making for the ineffectiveness of community control of the elementary schools in New York City. School board elections tend to be dominated by the teacher's union or by local political machines interested mainly in patronage. Another difficulty in New York is that the central Board of Education has been unwilling to give up much control about matters *other* than patronage.

¹⁹ But this is not true if vouchers are used to undermine labor unions. While labor unions do sometimes impose work rules that lead to inefficiency, in many other circumstances they improve the quality of public services by raising the standards for and wages of public employees and by seeking some professional independence for them. Strong labor unions are not incompatible with either contracting out or voucher systems. To make this work, labor unions will have to give up their role in assigning employees to specific positions, such as schools, or in creating detailed work rules. But they will not have to give up a role in setting wages or basic work rules such as limits on hours, over time pay, and so forth.

²⁰ Since the aim would be to test schools, not students, a series of intensive tests could be given to randomly selected students or all of the students at certain grade levels rather than to an entire student body. Thus there would be no reason for these tests to consist solely of multiple choice questions. Of course, it might be useful to allow, if not require, all parents to have their children take these tests.

encourage a much greater level of parent involvement and participation.²¹ Liberal egalitarians often doubt that this will occur, for they think that when markets allow people to exit from institutions they dislike, their incentive to voice their complaints by means of democratic participation is diminished.²² But participation is encouraged when people believe that taking part can make a difference. This is much more likely to be the case when schools are small, and the aims of the different parents and students who attend them are more congruent. Under these conditions, parents can have a greater impact when acting by themselves. And, parents will have an easier time finding other, like minded, parents with whom to work in both contributing to and changing the schools their children attend. In addition, market forces will encourage principals and teachers not only to meet the demands of parents, but also to draw them into the schools as a way of winning support for their own approach to education.

A final good consequence of a voucher system is that parents would, for the first time, truly recognize just how expensive public education is and how much they receive from government. This might strengthen support for the education spending. Many well-off parents would supplement public funds in order to send their children to more expensive schools. But given the “savage inequalities” that characterize public schools today, the inequality in the resources used for the education of each student would probably be much less under a voucher system than it is today.²³ Indeed, given that there are diminishing returns to money spent on education, a high universal voucher would greatly reduce such inequality. And a universal program of vouchers, like other such universal programs such as social security, would generate a powerful demand for higher levels of education spending on the part of all parents, rich and poor. Moreover, there are many public and private ways to insure that economic inequality does not stand in the way of the opportunities of those who qualify for the best education. One could make a plausible case for the proposition that today, public and private scholarships give the children of poor parents more opportunity to receive an excellent, private college education than they have of receiving an excellent public high school education.

Much more could be said about how privatization and decentralization will improve the quality of not just schools, but other common goods well. And even more could be said about how they might deal with the problems of responsibility, accountability, diversity, participation and support I discussed above. But that will have to wait for another time. Instead, let me point out how the communitarian critique of liberal egalitarianism can also be extended from the provision of public goods to the regulatory functions of the state. Most communitarians recognize that the common good requires business enterprises to take such matters as the control of pollution or the safety and health of workers and consumers into account. But they also ask whether heavy handed government regulation is the best way to force business enterprises to

²¹ As we shall see in the next section, my views about political economy links up with a powerful argument for pluralism, that is, for allowing different local communities to pursue their particular vision of the human good and the virtues.

²² This analysis and the terms “exit” and “voice” are drawn from Albert Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*.

²³ Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities*. At this point liberal egalitarians often say that, rather than a voucher system, we need a political movement to equalize school spending. Given how invisible state and local budgetary decisions are to most people, and how much more politically connected upper income households are than lower income households, there is simply no prospect of such a movement arising or being successful in most states and cities.

meet their obligations to the rest of us. For these regulations tend to fail in one of two ways. Either they are so uniform as to create gross inefficiencies and injustices. Or they are applied in so flexible a way as to be easily corrupted.

One alternative to government regulation is, once again, to use market mechanisms. For example, pollution might be more efficiently controlled, if instead of telling business enterprises when and how to reduce their effluents, government taxed pollution. Then individual business enterprises could make their own determination of where and when it made sense to adjust production processes to reduce pollution. Similar market mechanisms are conceivable for consumer and worker health and safety regulation.²⁴ While concerns for efficiency drive the proponents of these policies, other, more communitarian considerations can be advanced for them as well. For one thing, unfair and ineffective bureaucratic regulation poisons the view that businessmen, and other citizens, have of government and of public activity in general. Having once managed a family business and dealt with idiotic, incompetent, inconsistent, unfair and corrupt health department inspectors, I can assure you that the regulatory process leads more people to become libertarians than the collected works of Ayn Rand and Robert Nozick.²⁵ In addition, because the regulatory process presumes that businessmen are unwilling to take the health and safety of their workers into account, it over-utilizes adversarial procedures that help create this attitude where it had not previously existed. Moreover, market mechanisms encourage the managers of corporations to focus their attention on actually controlling pollution rather than meeting government regulations. It would be best if these managers were motivated by morality rather than money to look for ways to control pollution. Often, however, actions taken in response to egoistic incentives lead to the formation of moral habits.

It may seem that, in calling for decentralization and privatization, the communitarian political economy I have been defending is making common cause with libertarianism. That is not the case. Communitarians can learn something from the libertarian critique of liberal egalitarianism. But, they can accept much of that critique without calling into question liberal egalitarian ends. And communitarians are, by and large, not questioning these ends. Rather their complaint is with the means adopted by liberal egalitarians. Moreover, for communitarians, the most serious problem with these means is not, as it is for many libertarians, that they are grossly inefficient. Rather, the problem is that liberal egalitarian institutions, practices and policies undermine the civic virtue and solidarity of liberal democratic citizens. Moreover, as communitarians see it, the problem of government inefficiency goes far beyond the problem of wasting money. Government inefficiency undermines citizen support for the important tasks of public life. And that problem is made even worse by the myths about government inefficiency.

²⁴ Indeed such mechanisms have for many years played a part in consumer and worker health and safety policy. For the threat of tort actions is one consideration that leads business enterprises to be concerned with the health and safety of workers and consumers. And, if I am not mistaken, state workmen's compensation programs take the rate of workplace accidents into account in apportioning the costs of the programs to businesses. It is certainly possible to think of ways in which these kinds of policies can be made so much more effective that they largely replace direct regulation. Curiously, however, Republicans in Congress today are trying to undermine the ability of workers and consumers to recover tort damages. There are undoubtedly abuses in some of the huge jury awards that have gone to undeserving claimants. But the proposals many Republicans have advanced go far beyond rectifying these abuses. Special interests and their campaign contributions, not ideology, are driving Republican proposals for tort reform—as they are the Democratic opposition to such reform.

²⁵ A good example is the former Republican Majority Leader of the House of Representatives Tom Armev who was radicalized—there is no other word for it—by his dealing with government regulators..

These myths are very much worse than reality—which, however, is bad enough. But myths of this sort easily take on a life of their own when citizens lack involvement in and knowledge of public affairs.

Not only should communitarians support the ends of liberal egalitarians, but they should recognize that a communitarian political economy cannot dispense with a substantial central government. While communitarians admire local government, intermediate associations, voluntary organizations, market based regulations and the like, they must recognize that a high level of public funding will be needed to make these alternatives work. For, as social democrats have particularly emphasized, public funding is necessary to overcome five problems that afflict the provision of any common goods.

The first difficulty is the free rider problem. Even virtuous citizens will balk at contributing to those organizations and associations that provide common goods when they believe that many, if not most, of their fellow citizens are not doing their share. It may be a good thing to rely on intermediate associations to provide welfare services or health care research. But we cannot expect them to raise all of the necessary money by means of voluntary contributions.

A second difficulty analogous to the free rider problem is that the political and social benefits of individual efforts are often greater than the benefits to the individuals themselves. Individuals get only part of the benefit of the education they received. For the whole community benefits as well. Thus, from a political and social perspective, investment in education would be much too low if parents had to pay for schooling wholly out of their own pocket.

Third, because of their competition for economic development and jobs, state and local governments have difficulty raising taxes to support the provision of common goods either directly or by means of aiding intermediate associations. To force them to rely wholly on their own resources, then, would set off a “race to the bottom” as states and localities seek to become low tax havens for new business development.

Fourth, given the legacy of inequality and discrimination, members of oppressed classes, ethnic groups and races have very different levels of resources. And thus the intermediate associations that work on their behalf—and on the behalf of equality for women—have proportionately fewer resources. While some kinds of affirmative action are undoubtedly open to question, there seems to be overwhelming justification for government support for the organizations and associations—such as historically black colleges—that aim to help African Americans. Similar arguments could be given for government giving special aid to the organizations and associations that help other disadvantaged groups.

Fifth, inner city governments are very much hampered by their inability to tax the suburbanites whose economic success would be inconceivable apart from the goods and services provided by city governments, and the large population of skilled and unskilled workers who live in these cities. In an ideal world, boundaries between city and suburbs would be broken down at the same time that a great deal of political authority is decentralized. But, in the real world, we will probably have to make do with mechanisms for the redistribution of funds from suburbs to urban areas. Nothing less would be efficient or just.

Communitarians, then, should support substantial central government support for a variety of intermediate associations and organizations, including local government. This support might be provided in many ways. Special purpose or block grants are the common alternatives.

Another possibility, however, is for government to offer large, refundable tax credits, perhaps with matching grants, for individual contributions to intermediate associations and organizations that can plausibly claim to serve the common good or distributive justice.²⁶ This would diminish the hold of central government on intermediate associations and allow for indirect government support for a variety of ideas about how to attain the common good and justice. At the same time, this program might encourage active involvement in these intermediate associations.

Communitarians should also support government aid to individuals. For they must recognize that without substantial government funding, the distribution of goods like education and health care would be grossly unjust. Moreover, unfettered market relationships lead to huge inequalities in income. And there are good communitarian reasons to reduce them. Gross disparities in income divide cut the poor off from participation in the mainstream of community life. And they create pockets of wealth filled with people who have no grasp on how the other 98% lives. Communitarians then, should support redistributive policies such as income supplements for low paid workers and publicly supported jobs. The latter might be best be provided by intermediate associations and organizations that use federal funds to hire hard to place workers. Finally, while intermediate associations would provide a wide range of goods and services to those who are needy under communitarianism, a central government would have to provide a minimum income to those who are sick and disabled or who are too young or old to join the workforce. The costs of such support might be much less under a communitarian regime than in the present. But to expect intermediate associations and organizations to provide a minimal income would leave them with few resources either to provide goods and services to people with special problems or to encourage widespread civic participation in this effort.

The communitarian political economy I have sketched to this point would require important changes in our institutions, practices and policies. But we have not yet come to the most dramatic reforms communitarians should propose. For I believe that all communitarians should support what I would call the politicization and moralization of business enterprises. Communitarians must recognize that business enterprises as essentially political entities. They have a tremendous effect on the common lives of those who work within them and on the communities in which they are located. Second communitarians must therefore insist that these business enterprises be governed by people committed not just to profit but to serving the ends of the workers of the corporation and the broader community. There are five reasons that communitarians should call for new forms of governance in large corporations.

First, in so far as communitarians are concerned with reducing the extreme and growing inequality of income found in the contemporary liberal democracies, they have reason to worry about the disparity in the economic rewards received by those at the top and bottom of corporate hierarchies, disparities that serves no useful economic purpose.²⁷ New forms of corporate governance life are necessary to correct this problem.

Second, communitarians must be concerned with the consequences of business enterprises devastating communities by moving in search of cheap labor. If those who govern

²⁶ A proposal along these lines was made in a op-ed piece in *The New York Times* by Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis in 1995. I am still tracking the detailed reference down.

²⁷ A good discussion of this issue can be found in Robert H. Frank and Philip J. Cook. *The Winner-Take-All-Society*.

our business enterprises took a larger, and more responsible view of their task, then other aims might at times take precedence over the pursuit of cheap labor and profit. And there would be no need for burdensome and inefficient regulation to accomplish this result. Of course, they will also have to bear the economic consequences of these decisions. Thus when lower wages is the only way for a business to stay competitive, workers might be forced to reduce their own wages in order to save their jobs and communities.²⁸

Third, some of the regulatory ideas of communitarians are likely to be utterly ineffective if business enterprises do not resist the pressure to cut costs by ignoring the health and safety of workers. If the heads of business enterprises were more responsive to the good of those who work within them, there would be much less need for government health and safety regulations.

Fourth, communitarians have vigorously criticized the way in which contemporary economic life has undermined the family.²⁹ Careerism on the part of both men and women, and the every increasing pressure to keep up with rapidly living standards among professionals and managers has lead to a dramatic decline in parental interaction with and supervision of children.³⁰ Stagnant wages have had the same effect among members of the working class. Day care has replaced the intense parent-infant bond. Television has become the universal baby sitter. The consequences of these trends are likely to be unpleasant both for individuals and for the community as a whole. However, cheer leading for family values will not reverse these trends. For, as currently governed, corporate American is extremely resistant to the changes in that would help restore the balance between work and family. Part time work is still very difficult to come by for professional and managerial men and women. And the costs of working part time—in terms not just of income and benefits but, more importantly, of career prospects—is far greater than a family friendly political community should allow.³¹ If business enterprises were guided by enlightened leaders, these policies would be changed. When business enterprises fight even so minor a reform as the Family Leave Act, there is no reason to expect them to make the more dramatic changes required to diminish the burden on family life. These changes will only come about if workers are given a greater say in the conditions of work life.

Fifth, and most importantly, work is one of the most important forces shaping our lives and character. If we seek human beings who are committed to the common good, we must create forms of political and social life in which men and women can take part in collective efforts to secure a common good. They must be able to exercise civic virtue, take pride in their common life and reap the rewards of their efforts. Work plays a central role in our lives and is a collective effort par excellence. We simply cannot expect men and women to exhibit the civic virtues if much of their lives takes place in circumstances that are antithetical to the inculcation of such virtue. That, however, is an accurate description of life within most business enterprises today.

²⁸ But can we afford such policies in a global economy in which our wages are influenced by the, by our standards, abysmally low wages in third world countries? In large part, the answer is yes, partly because much of our economy, and especially business and personal services, is insulated from foreign competition; partly because businesses that are also moral communities tend to be more efficient; and partly because American based companies still have large leads in most technologies.

²⁹ Amitai Etzioni has a particularly good discussion of this in *The Spirit of Community*, chapter 2.

³⁰ Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community*, pp. 62-67.

³¹ An excellent analysis of these problems can be found in Juliet B. Schor, *The Overworked American*.

There are, roughly speaking, two ways in business enterprises could be politicized and moralized. Since they reflect the two different views of human nature and virtue we considered above, we might as well call them the Aristotelian and Augustinian approaches.

Aristotelians call for the democratization and decentralization of work. They argue that work is the arena in which men and women have the most direct and constant experience of politics in Aristotle's sense: ruling and being ruled in turn. Most of us, however, are ruled a great deal more than we rule. Oligarchy at work keeps people from the experience of making difficult judgments about the common good and justice. But it is precisely in deliberations of this sort that civic virtue is learned, developed and exercised. We cannot expect men and women who work in an oligarchy eight hours a day to develop the knowledge, skills, experience and self-assurance necessary to taking part in democratic self-government during the other eight hours they are awake. Nor can we expect them to develop the generosity of spirit and commitment to the common good that characterizes those with civic virtue.

Those who adopt an Augustinian view of human nature will take a different view of the proper way in which business enterprises are to be governed. An Augustinian might argue for more hierarchical and paternalistic forms of government in business enterprises. The aim of such institutions and practices would be to encourage all who work in a business enterprise to accept certain goals as well as the authority of the elite that guides the corporation in attaining these goals. Such a business enterprise might not be democratically structured. But the governance of that enterprise will be based upon consent, not contract. Consent will often take the form of deference on the part of low and mid-level workers to the upper-level elite that makes the fundamental decisions about corporate policy. But this deference will presuppose the paternalistic concern of the elite for the well being of all of those who work in the corporation. Moreover, in so far as a business enterprise seeks to motivate men and women by means of inculcating respect for certain core values, it will also encourage workers to take a great deal of initiative in devising ways to meet corporate goals. Workers who are guided by a strong corporate culture can be freed from the kind of pettifogging regulation or narrow market incentives typically found in American corporations. And any sensible business enterprise will free them in order to welcome their ideas and innovations. That means that many decisions about how to attain the agreed goals of a business enterprise will be made in a more or less decentralized and consultative, if not democratic fashion.

Whether an Aristotelian or Augustinian approach to creating communitarian business enterprises is to be preferred is an open question. Each one might be appropriate in different circumstances. My sketch of the Augustinian approach is, of course, modeled on Japanese management techniques in which hierarchy and strong corporate cultures are combined with decentralization and broad consultation. Whether such a form of business enterprise can be adopted in very different circumstances depends in large part on why it has been successful in Japan. Some writers point to the distinctive way in which capitalism is organized in Japan, in particular, the reciprocal and interlocking ownership of corporations by each other and the dominance of investment banks over the stock market as a source of capital. These arrangements are said to free business managers from focusing on short-term profits, thereby giving space for the manifestation of the civic virtue of Japanese managers and workers. Other analysts hold that the relatively closed and homogeneous character of Japan has allowed for the preservation and adaptation of what we in the West tend to think of a pre-modern ethos.

On any account, it is hard to see how the distinctively Japanese form of corporate governance can be adopted in the United States without a great deal of modification. It would not be impossible to change the institutional, and especially financial framework within which our business enterprises operate. But it is not likely that the Augustinian pattern of paternalism and deference can be instituted here, given our open, individualist culture and our long history of intensely conflictual labor-management relationships. Thus I am inclined to think that our business enterprises can be transformed into real communities only if we adopt the Aristotelian strategy. That means we must be prepared to adopt the radical measure of giving workers a greater say in the decisions that shape their work process and work place. This strategy also requires decentralizing power within business enterprises.

How we should decentralize and democratize business enterprises is open to debate. But, in response to changes in technology and consumer demand, corporations are already decentralizing. They are turning more authority over to their various divisions, creating internal capital markets and spinning off parts of themselves off entirely. Removing layers of bureaucracy cost many people jobs. But over time, decentralization will not only bring economic benefits will also allow for greater democratization.

There are many paths to democratization in the corporation. We might strengthen labor unions or move directly to instituting democratic procedures at work. If we choose the latter route, we can start at the bottom, with the work process and move up. Or we can start at the top and move down. Or we can start at once at both levels. In any case, democratic decision-making can be implemented in a enormous variety of ways. All of the questions that arise when we discuss the proper form of democratic government will be come to the fore along with a movement toward greater worker's control. Debates will take place about the proper sphere for direct and representative democracy; about geographic versus functional representation; about how much independent authority the managers of a corporation or a factory or a production line should have; about whether some form of checks and balances is necessary in corporate government; and about the independence of the "judicial" branch within corporations. Decisions about these and many other matters will reflect the particular circumstances of different business enterprises and the workers within them, and the importance they give to the variety of desires that men and women can seek to satisfy in work. And they will also be guided by decisions made by central governments concerned with protection the rights of property owners and securing sufficient levels of investment.

I do not mean to endorse any particular answer to these questions here. Nor do I think that, even if a political movement could be formed in support of democratizing the corporation, we should rapidly move to transform our political economy. There are many intermediate steps between the weak labor unions we have today and a full fledged system of worker's control. Thus there is room for experiment and a gradual transition to a new kind of political economy. I do not know where we should end up on this continuum or even whether all large business enterprises should end up at the same place. But I would insist that we do know a good deal about how the experience of work under oligarchy impoverishes our individual and common lives today. And there have been enough positive results from experiments with various forms

of worker's control to take these ideas seriously and begin to implement them in a more sustained way.³²

For some communitarians, this brief for worker's control of corporations might seem to come, as it were, out of left field. But there is a close fit between the communitarian perspective I have developed and the recognition of the political and moral character of business enterprises. Communitarians aim is to invigorate intermediate associations and to decentralize a great deal of political and moral responsibility for distributive justice and the provision of common goods to these associations. We can best do this, however, if we can rely on the functional associations, such as business enterprises and churches, that have a reason for being other than to take on these responsibilities. For it is precisely such functional organizations that have the money, the large and continuing membership, and the organizational structure and resources to take on added tasks. Or they can use their own assets to support and subsidize other intermediate associations. Business enterprises already play this role. Health care and a great deal of training in the United States is provided by corporations. Some business enterprises also provide a wide range of counseling services for their workers. And, while the day of the company town is largely a thing of the past, business enterprises once played an important role in providing housing and supporting community life. Given the resources available to corporations and how central work is to most of us, it makes eminent sense for these and other tasks to be taken on by corporations. And greater corporate responsibility for the well being of workers and their families as well as the life of a large community is one way to break down the division between work and the other parts of our lives. However all this will only happen—and only happen in a way that benefits *all* who work in a business enterprise—if our corporations are, in one way or another, politicized and moralized.

The goal of decentralizing and democratizing business enterprises has ties to another aspect of communitarianism, its critique of bureaucratic forms of political and social life. For this critique can, and should, be directed against bureaucracy in the private as well as the public sphere. Nothing in America resembles the lumbering, sclerotic Soviet economy as much as IBM's early, and hapless, attempts to adjust to the world of personal computers. Markets and democratic procedures are the two means by which the power of large, unresponsive

³² There are some theoretical reasons to accept, and some empirical evidence to support, the notion that socially controlled enterprises are more productive than either privately or publicly owned enterprises. Among many other works which discuss this question see Paul Blumenberg, *Industrial Democracy: The Sociology of Participation*; Jaroslav Vanek, *The Participatory Economy*, ch. 3, 4, and 8 and *General Theory of Labor-Managed Market Economies*; John F. Witte, *Democracy, Authority and Alienation in Work*; Christopher Eaton Gunn, *Worker's Self-Management in the United States* pp. 103, 106.; Renis Likert, *New Patterns of Management and The Human Organization*; Victor Vroom, *Work and Motivation*, chs. 6-8; John R. Cable and Felix R. Fitzroy, "Cooperation and Productivity: Some Evidence from West German Experience" and "Productivity, Efficiency, Incentives and Employee Participation: Some Preliminary Results from West German;" Derek C. Jones and David K. Backus, "British Producer Cooperatives in the Footwear Industry: An Empirical Evaluation of the Theory of Finance;" Derek C. Jones, "Producer Cooperatives in Industrialized Western Economies" and "American Producer Cooperatives and Employer Owned Firms: An Evaluation;" Robert Jackall and Henry M. Levin, eds. *Worker Cooperatives in America*; Derek C. Jones and Jan Svejnar, eds. *Participatory and Self-Managed Firms: Evaluating Economic Performance*; Juan G. Espinosa and Andrew S. Zimbalist, *Economic Democracy: Workers' Participation in Chilean Industry, 1970-1973*; Seymour Melman "Industrial Efficiency under Managerial versus Cooperative Decision Making;" Keith Bradley and Alan Gelb "The Mondragon Cooperatives: Guidelines for a Cooperative Economy" among many other works.

bureaucracies can be reduced. Communitarians should bring them bear on, not just the liberal egalitarian state, but the large bureaucratic corporation as well.

The political agenda I have proposed for communitarianism is, in some ways, quite radical in nature. Communitarianism does not and should not challenge the fundamental presuppositions of liberal polities and societies or the basic institutions and practices that define them. It recognizes the importance of human rights, constitutional government, civil liberties, the separation of powers and checks and balances and markets. But communitarianism should call into question many of the ideals of contemporary leftists and rightists. It should also point out the flaws in the institutions and practices of contemporary liberal democracies. And it should suggest new and even radical alternatives. It is not necessary to adopt the most radical alternatives immediately in order to start transforming our political and social life in a more communitarian direction. Indeed, given the uncertainties of human life, it would be foolhardy to do this. On the other hand, if we take the communitarian critique of liberalism seriously, we must begin thinking about and experimenting with some radically different ways of proceeding. The problems communitarians seek to address will not be solved just by reinvigorating bowling leagues or by reviving Memorial Day parades.

IV. COMMUNITARIANISM, PLURALISM AND MULTICULTURALISM

Some communitarians will, I think, be very dissatisfied with my emphasis on local pluralism in the last part of this paper. For many communitarians implicitly or explicitly suggest that we have too much pluralism already. They worry about the disintegration of the political and social life in the nation as a whole. When they look at our politics today, they focus on the baneful effects of what has become known as multiculturalism.

The Threat of Multiculturalism

A multicultural politics is one in which human beings are divided into identity groups that define themselves in a special way. Those within the group are said to have a shared identity, one starkly different from those outside it. This identity shapes the way members of the group look at the world and themselves. It is the fundamental source of the distinctive ends of the members of the group. Multicultural politics consists largely in each identity group demanding recognition of these distinctive ends in one or more ways. All groups insist that no one should call their own view of life into question. Many groups demand control over certain institutions or organizations. And, sometimes, identity groups claim special privileges, perhaps on the basis of their previous oppression.

To this point, the claims made by identity groups, and by the defenders of multiculturalism on their behalf, are somewhat problematic, although not entirely to be dismissed. It is by no means wrong to say that some group identity—whether it is based upon our race and ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual preference or social class—can, and often does, play a central role in defining who we are. Communitarians should agree with the multiculturalists that human beings often live, and can sometimes only live well, in groups that share a vision of how life should go. These groups can form around many different kinds of

distinctions between people. Sometimes, the impetus for their formation comes from within. Sometimes it comes from without, from the experience of oppression. And, most often, these two factors are intertwined. In order to make their way in the world, identity groups often do have to make claims for recognition, for power and for recompense. And, quite often, these claims are just.

Multiculturalism becomes troubling when a single group identity comes to be seen as exclusive of other ways of understanding the world or of defining oneself. Group identity becomes exclusive in a first way when each group claims to have a privileged understanding of all matters concerning itself, one that cannot be questioned by those outside the group. This claim has startling ramifications, for identity groups also claim that their view of everything else in the world is shaped by their own identity or perspective, that is by their understanding of themselves. Taken seriously, these two claims lead to the conclusion that there is no possibility of rational debate, or even serious communication, between the members of different identity groups. And this applies to all matters—politics and philosophy, art and religion, sport and science. But if our view of the world around us is fully determined by the experience or ideology of our identity group, and there is no possibility of rational discussing, let alone reaching agreement about what is or what should be, what are identity groups doing when they present arguments justifying their claims for recognition from other groups? The only plausible conclusion is that that what sounds like argument is merely sophistry, the attempt to win power over others by fraud, rather than force. This extreme consequence of multiculturalism is deeply disturbing. For it holds that that the relationships between identity groups can only be one of conflict, whether open or hidden. It denies the possibility that, whatever their differences, the citizens of a pluralistic regime can truly have a shared, rationally justifiable view of what a good polity and society would be like, in general and for themselves here and now.

Multiculturalism also defends a second kind of exclusivity. While defenders of multiculturalism insist on the distinctiveness of different identity groups, they often deny any possibility of legitimate differences among the individuals within each group. There is only one authentic perspective for each identity group. Three terrible outcomes result from this second kind of exclusivity.

First, identity politics quickly degenerates into dogmatism. Politics within the group focuses on charges of apostasy and heresy. It becomes difficult for those who disagree with the reigning orthodoxy to express themselves without fear of isolation and abandonment. Tyranny of the majority has arrived, even if it is only tyranny of the majority of the minority over the minority of the minority.

Second, identity politics leads to the fragmentation of all groups. For, even if we accept the notion that our ends and view of the world is shaped by some identity group, we have to recognize that in our pluralistic world—and perhaps in any plausible political and social world—we can claim, or be claimed by, more than one identity group. And, more importantly, we can, as individuals, also transcend the perspective of all such groups. If there is no possibility of discussion among those with ties to more than one identity group and with those who try to stand, at least in part, beyond any of these groups, then the political and social world will be characterized by splitting, by the ever finer division of the citizenry into exclusive identities. That, however, is a recipe for political impotence and frustration. For democratic politics is the art of combination, of compromise and of coalition building.

When the group in question is already an oppressed minority, there is a third troubling outcome of multicultural politics. The tyranny of identity groups can limit the opportunities for individuals to gain the experience and knowledge necessary to make their way in the political community as a whole. And, as the claims and counter claims of groups that can no longer talk to each other multiply, so will mutual distrust and resentment. It then becomes ever hard to reduce discrimination against oppressed minorities.

I can well understand why someone who is worried about these extreme outcomes of multiculturalism would find many of the claims of this paper problematic. For will not the many diverse, and strong, local communities I call for understand themselves in one or both of these exclusive way? If, for example, we adopt a voucher program for schools, won't many of these schools teach or preach a form of identity politics? Will we all be better off if most Americans go to schools run by the most extreme supporters of Afro-centrism, or Christian fundamentalism or other such views? How will such schools teach students to live, work and politic with those who have very different ideas and ways of life? And how will they prepare students to enter the mainstream of political and social life—assuming such a mainstream continues to exist.

These are real concerns. Let me respond first by saying something more about why the aims of communitarians requires us to make room for a diversity of views of the common good and the virtues. Then I will try to show why the kind of communitarianism I defend is not likely to lead to the kind of multiculturalism we are right to worry about.

Exclusivity, Solidarity and Moral Education

One of the unsatisfactory features of much communitarian political thought is that it fails to specify the exact location at which we are to hope for or try to create a more communal form of political and social life. Too often, communitarians assume that what we should aim at is a greater sense of solidarity at all levels of our political and social life, from the neighborhood to the country as a whole, or even beyond. And they expect that communities at each level will encompass and meld together the incredible diversity of people in the United States today. The vision of diversity and solidarity everywhere is appealing. But, for two reasons, it cannot be attained. First, as we have seen, the political and social life of our country is already too divided between Augustinians, Aristotelians and Liberationists for a moral consensus to come about without the most severe repression. And, second, the notion that diversity can easily be combined with solidarity flies in the face of everything we know about what real, strong communities look like. One of the oldest lessons of political theory—one taught by Plato and Aristotle as well as Rousseau and Toqueville—is that the most intensely solidaristic communities are also the most exclusive. Commitment to the common good is only possible when men and women act together in pursuit of a good they cannot attain on their own. But this requires that they hold some ends in common and look at things more or less in the same way. Moreover, civic virtue is impossible without a very impressive degree of mutual knowledge and trust. And this cannot be created when men and women have widely divergent ends. Indeed, we cannot even formulate an account of the virtues specific enough to serve as a basis for socialization apart from a concrete vision of a political community with common ends. Take any virtue from one of the standard lists, say, courage. While we can give an account of courage in general, courage in one kind of political and social setting will be different from courage in

another. And the aim of moral education is to teach young people not just to act courageously in general but to recognize what is courageous in a specific setting. Of course, we also want people to be able to go beyond that setting and recognize what courage is in other situations. But education in courage, and the other virtues, goes best when young people have repeated opportunities to act courageously and to have their actions corrected when they go astray. The kind of repetition necessary to moral education in education can best take place in a particular setting, in which the meaning of courage is, at least initially, more or less narrowly defined and stable.

So if we want to encourage civic virtue, a commitment to the pursuit of common goods and to those with whom we pursue these goods, we must take part in, and raise our children in, communities that are constituted by a particular vision of the good. Moreover, we have reason to think that this kind of community is necessary even if our only own aim is encourage people to live within the minimal moral constraints of liberal democracy. Liberal critics of communitarianism often ask why liberal morality is not sufficient, why we cannot just raise our children to respect the rights of others. The difficulty with this standard, however, is that it is so thin as to be inadequate to the process of socialization when taken by itself.

Liberalism supposes that human beings can be motivated to obey liberal moral principles for their own sake. And thus moral education will consist in teaching children these principles. I do think that we can act on the basis of moral principles for their own sake. However, if acting morally is not intrinsically tied to taking part in a fulfilling communal life, we are likely to suffer from weakness of will or self-deception when trying to obey the principles of liberal morality. Or we might come to reject them entirely. For the morality of liberalism is so thin that it does not by itself define a satisfactory way of life. To be able to respect others and themselves, children need to be taught to meet a thicker standard, one that is intrinsically tied to a particular way of life. A child will lack self-esteem if she has no sense of what is important in life and, thus, what kind of life she should lead. A child will be detached from others if she does not take part in communal activities in which everyone must live up to some ideal way of acting. A child will not have the kind of self-control necessary to a moral life if he is never asked to do more than obey the rights of others. And a child will feel entitled to more than he deserves, if his desires are always satisfied but nothing is asked of him.

Even if they are taught to respect the rights of others, adults who have been brought up in this way are not likely to do so all the time. Because they lack self-esteem, they will be determined to gain recognition from others, perhaps by seeking, in any way possible, those instrumental goods—money, prestige and power—that are widely regarded. Because they cannot control themselves, they will fail to live up to their own expectations or those of others. And they will respond to the ensuing frustrations in explosive ways. Because they are entitled, they will frequently see themselves as being treated unfairly. Because they are detached from others, their own good will be divorced from the good of others. Thus adults who have been raised outside of the setting of a real community are likely to find that respecting the rights of others does not contribute to their happiness. And even worse, respecting those rights will be a barrier to satisfying their desires. Those who think they can get away with it will be tempted to violate the rights of others in pursuit of money, status and power.

So the minimal moral standards of liberalism do not, by themselves, support the kind of socialization that produces adults who are likely to meet those standards. But, even if people

raised in this way remain, at first, committed to the moral standards of liberalism, a political and social life regulated by the morality of liberalism and nothing else would still work to undermine that commitment. A world in which people are inclined to do anything to satisfy their own desires, so long as they do not violate the rights of others, is not likely to be a world in which these rights will long be respected. There is much nastiness and evil we can do to others in pursuit of our own well being without violating anyone's rights. Common decencies will no longer be common if we are reduced to liberal morality alone. Both children and adults will find such a world a hostile and unpleasant place. They will eventually, and with good reason, wonder why they should respect the rights of people who treat them badly. Soon enough, first a few, and then even more, people will begin to cut corners when it comes to the rights of others. We cannot count on people not to lie, cheat or steal in order to get ahead when they expect little in the way of support and much in the way of rabid competition from their fellow human beings.

If this understanding of what makes for a moral community is correct, then the only way to meet the problems that motivate communitarian thought is to ensure that a significant part of our lives is spent with others who have similar aims and purposes. And that is why, in a pluralistic community like our own, communitarians must welcome and encourage a great diversity of strong local communities with their own distinctive view of the common good and the virtues. That means we will have to take the risk that some of these local communities will have the exclusivist form welcomed by multiculturalists and feared by true democrats. But, there are good reasons to think that most of us will not look for or find ourselves in exclusivist communities. Nor will we adopt the multiculturalist ideology that strengthens such exclusive identity groups. For strong communities can also be what I will call partial and contested communities.

Partial and Contested Communities

Even if we try to live a large part of our lives in the kinds of communities I have recommended, that does not mean that we will live our whole lives in enclaves of like minded people. For in the pluralist world of liberal democracy, there are all kinds of overlapping communities. Among others, there are communities based in a certain territory, a workplace, a profession, a racial, ethnic or national group, a sexual identity, a mutual concern, a recreational interest or an ideological affinity.³³ Some of these communities involve face to face interaction while others are largely virtual in nature. Moreover, almost all of us are members of more than one such community. These local communities are, by and large, made up of people who share certain ends and a point of view. They are exclusive, but only within a certain sphere of life. They are strong, but partial communities. They do require their members to be committed to certain broadly defined ends. But these ends do not, by themselves, define each individual member of the community. For, most of the members of each community are members of others as well.

Communitarians have sometimes expressed concern about the existence of overlapping communities to which we commit only a part of ourselves. These partial communities seem to

³³ The importance of recreational communities should not be overlooked. They play an important role in the lives of many people. I once made this point to Michael Walzer about downhill skiing. He asked whether there were any magazines devoted to skiing. I responded that yes there were two, which, of course, differed in their ideological persuasion.

some communitarians to be a pale reflection of the intense, and thus exclusive, communities of civic republican lore. And, make no mistake, they are very different from the Spartan model. But communitarians should not be hankering after Sparta. For, if we value freedom and democracy, we have every good reason for fleeing the civic republican model. The two kinds of exclusivity I criticized when discussing contemporary identity politics is exactly what characterizes Sparta and most of the other golden ages for which civic republicans pine. Such exclusive communities are incompatible with diversity, freedom and democracy. On the other hand, the aims of communitarians can be attained within partial communities. For these communities are often places in which the civic virtues can be taught. And this is true even for partial communities which seem far from the civic republican ideal. Versions of the virtues are taught in religious, ethnic and ideological communities. But they can also be, and are taught, in professional associations and even in recreational communities. There is a hacker's ethic and a skier's ethic. And, in each, one can find a particular understanding of the traditional virtues.

Many strong local communities will not only be partial, but contested. The members of a local community will, of necessity, be committed to certain ends. But there will also be important divisions about how this end is to be understood or interpreted and how it is to be realized or made concrete. Indeed, much of the vitality of a particular community, whether full or partial, will be found in the internal debates and struggles that characterize it. A vital community will come together when challenged by outsiders. But it will also be open to discussions about how best to meet that, and other challenges. Hackers are, by and large, united against the threats of government censorship of the Internet. But there are disagreement about how to meet that threat (as well as the usual religious differences, such as those between Macintosh and PC users.)

Given the pluralism of American political and social life, and the continuing importance of the many overlapping and partial local communities, there is little reason to worry about the, admittedly scary, ideas of extreme multiculturalists. Consider, for example, what would be the likely result of the widespread adoption of a voucher system for the support of independent schools. Many such schools would be based upon religious and ethnic identity. There will be Jewish and Catholics schools as well as schools supported by both mainstream and fundamentalist Protestants. There will be Afrocentric schools and schools that aim to serve the members of other ethnic groups. But not all of the students and teachers in these schools will be drawn from a particular identity group. And even those who are drawn from one group will differ in many ways and, perhaps especially, in the extent of their commitment to a more or less exclusivist view of that group. There will also be many other kinds of schools. There will traditional and progressive schools. There will be science and math academies and schools devoted to the humanities or performing arts or athletics. Some schools will have a strong component of public service. Others will stress personal development and reflection. These schools will certainly draw on a population that is, in many ways, diverse. We can also expect that, most of all, there will be neighborhood schools that draw upon a local population. Indeed, most of the more specialized schools will be diverse precisely because they also function as neighborhoods schools for a local residential community.

There is no need to worry that too many of these schools will be exclusivist in orientation. For one thing, it is simply wrong to assume that students who are taught to follow a particular, moral or religious view of a good life will become close minded bigots. Most people with strong religious and moral views reject the exclusivist view of reasoning characteristic of

multiculturalism. They are confident in their ability defend their views against all comers. Moreover, people with strong moral and religious commitments are often committed to questioning their own views and searching for good reasons to hold or reject them. It is precisely because they take morality and religion seriously that they are drawn to explore alternatives to their own ideas, if only to better understand what they have been taught. After ten years of teaching in the South, I have come to recognize that among the students who are most willing to grapple with the ideas of the political philosophers I teach are those brought up with a strong religious faith. They are much closer to the spirit of true inquiry than the amiable and aimless students who, in their willingness to let everyone go their own way, never take any alternatives to their own views seriously.

Another reason not to worry is that the more outlandish forms of identity politics are unlikely to influence many parents. Identity politics is easy for academics, who are free to play with ideas and who can win fame and fortune by making outlandish claims. It is a great deal harder for parents, who are concerned primarily about the moral, civic, and academic education of their children. Such parents will recognize that their children will have to get on with people very different from themselves. And they will act accordingly. No doubt some parents will come under the sway of one or another silly ideological or pedagogical notion. But it is hard to believe that most parents will not soon recognize such ideas for what they are. And, besides, schools already come under the sway of nutty ideas. But, today, parents have a hard time freeing their children from the influence of administrators with those ideas.³⁴

It is possible that, even though most schools will remain pluralistic in many respects, there will be some tendency to more uniformity, if not exclusivity, in some schools. This cuts against the old idea that the public school should provide the training ground for pluralist democracy. There is something to this idea. If politics is to go well, people must learn to deal with those different from themselves. They must be able to tolerate and, more importantly, listen to other points of view and recognize the legitimacy of the claims made by groups other than their own. If the central problem of American life today truly were the inability of the members of different groups to understand and work with one another, I might have second thoughts about the kind of education program I have endorsed. But, in most places in America today, our situation is far different from that found earlier in this century. We do not have to worry about how to create citizens out of children who have been raised in a diverse set of strong communities with distinctive and powerful commitments of their own. Rather, our difficulty is to overcome the apathy, withdrawal and cynicism that too frequently characterizes the culture of our country as a whole. And these features of our culture are, in part, a product of not just the national media but also, of past efforts to melt the distinctive features of strong local communities and particular cultures into a bland and undistinguished stew.

³⁴ There will, no doubt, also continue to be some exclusivist schools that prepare students to live in an exclusivist local community such as Amish and Hassidic Jewish schools. As they have done in the past, debates will continue about the extent to which these schools prepare their students for a life outside these communities. But these exclusivist communities are never likely to attract more than a few. And, unless we are prepared to sacrifice the freedom of people to live lives very different from that of the majority, we cannot stand in the way of parents creating schools that reflect their distinctive traditions. Nor do we have much reason to worry about what will happen when the products of these schools leave their exclusivist community. Leaving is often difficult and traumatic, but those who do leave seem to be well enough prepared for life outside.

Nor should we worry if committed and engaged students do not interact with every type and kind of person in their school yard. For, if we have strong local communities, the diversity of America will be very hard to miss. We will find it one place or another—if not in our own schools then in interscholastic events; if not on our local street than downtown or at the mall; if not in the books we find at home, that at the library, the movie theater or on television. And young people who are encouraged to think beyond themselves and look to the common good will find the diversity of America in its most important place, in the political life of towns and cities that encompass more than one strong community and in their participation in state and Federal politics as well.

Federal and State Politics Under Communitarianism

What, on the pluralistic communitarian view I am presenting will political and social life be in the country as a whole? The hope of some communitarians to give people a strong sense of solidarity with the country as a whole is, I believe, forlorn. Indeed, the stronger local communities become, the less important a broader identity is likely to be. Communitarians, then, should follow the path of Horace Kallen who rejected the demands of assimilationists that immigrants give up their distinctive identities.³⁵ America is now a nation of nations, of sects, of associations, of groups and of interests. It will be even more so if, by adopting communitarian institutions, practices and policies, we encourage people to identify with their strong, if partial, local communities.

But will there then be nothing that unites all Americans? There is, I think, no reason to worry that, under a pluralistic, communitarian form of life, there will be nothing it means to be an American. Americans will still share political and moral ideals that remain distinctive in giving us our broader identity, even if we also recommend their universal adoption. We will be united in our respect for human rights and our Constitution as well as in our respect for the diversity of local communities. And there will be some partial communities that have large numbers of members. Many of us will follow the national pastime or talk about the latest movie or television show or about what we heard on the nightly news.³⁶ There will be no one partial community to which one must belong in order to be a part of the American nation. But there will be an overlapping series of communities to which many American will belong. Most of these large communities will play a rather small and less intense part in our lives. Our attention to them will be sporadic. We will only pay close attention when, say, the home team is on a winning streak or the playoffs have begun. But they will still help cement our identification with our city and country as a whole.

One of these broad communities is focused on the politics of the Federal government. What will *it* be like, when the communitarian utopia is attained? In some respects it will not be much different than it is today. That is to say, it won't be very utopian at all. Federal politics will continue to have extremely important consequences for all of us. But given our individual ends—and one hopes, our commitments to strong local communities—most of us will give it attention only from time to time. The various organized communities, associations, and

³⁵ Horace Kallen, *Culture and American Democracy*

³⁶ The national pastime is basketball, isn't it?

organizations to which we belong will pay attention to Federal politics, of course. Thus, to the extent that we are members of local communities that are democratically governed, we will be drawn from a concern with our own community to the politics of the country as a whole. This has important consequences, to which we will return in a moment. But, we can probably expect that most of us, most of the time, will be more concerned with the decisions made in our local community than with the decisions made by Congress.

Federal politics will, undoubtedly, remain conflict ridden as different interests, and the proponents of various ideologies, struggle with one another. Communitarianism will not eliminate such struggles. Indeed, it may make them worse when the engaged—or enraged—citizens of strong local communities consider the actions of the Federal government. For when committed, virtuous citizens turn their attention from local to broader matters, they will bring with them their passion for the common good as well as their belief that they know where the common good lies. That passion and belief is likely to be strong, precisely because it will be shared by the other, equally passionate members of a local community. And, because these communities are already organized locally, and because many of them will already have representatives in their state capitol or Washington as well, it is much easier for people to overcome the difficulties of initiating collective action.

So how will we deal with these conflicts? In large part, by the same means we employ today. Most Americans will remain committed to the rules that constrain our political conflicts: to the rule of law, to civil liberty and tolerance, and to the procedures of government found in the Constitution. This respect for the formalities of our politics will continue to be coupled with a fundamental moderation in ideology. Political leaders, and many of their followers, will continue to recognize the need to compromise in order to form the coalitions that make for effectiveness in what will remain a largely pluralist form of politics. Communitarian institutions, practices and policies will not fundamentally change these features of our politics. We can hope, however, that the moral education provided in strong communities will strengthen our commitment to them. That, by itself, could dramatically improve the quality of our political and social life, if only by reducing the crime rate, both in and out of politics. And we can also hope that respect for our central government will increase once the liberal egalitarian state is reduced in stature and people come to welcome Federal subsidies for their own local communities.

Many communitarians have higher expectations of how a revival of community at the local level could elevate the politics of our country as a whole. It is possible that civic virtue will, to some extent, spill over from local communities to the life of the country as a whole. People might come to state and Federal politics, not just with demands but, also, with the hope of contributing to the good of the country as a whole. They might be more willing to trust the members of other communities. This could make it easier to secure those common goods that can only be attained if we all give a little. A commitment to the common good and trust in others could be the consequence of the broader knowledge of, and experience in, political life gained by members of participatory local communities. Our knowledge about political life would also be enhanced if I am right to think that, under the kind of communitarianism I have defended, people would recognize just what they get from government. A willingness to do our share might also come about because of the enhanced sense of security people have in strong communities. For the members of such communities would not be facing a large powerful state on their own. Instead, they would be associated with a local community that they could expect to protect their interests. Moreover, the decentralization of political power would, at least to some extent,

diminish the reliance of the members of these communities on the Federal government. That could reduce political conflict and, at the same time, make interest groups more willing to sacrifice their own good for the good of all. With a more virtuous, knowledgeable, trusting, and secure citizenry we might even find that the quality of electioneering would be dramatically improved. The slogans and proposals of candidates might not be quite as oversimplified and free with the truth as they are today.

I share the hopes of communitarians who look to civic virtue and a sense of solidarity to improve our politics. And I think that, for the reasons I have just presented, these hopes could be met. But I have also suggested some reasons to worry that the conflicts between strong communities might be much more passionate. Knowledgeable and committed citizens are more likely to discuss and debate political issues. But they are also more likely to demonstrate and protest. Indeed, as Michael Walzer has pointed out, their riots are likely to be more organized and focused.³⁷ So strong political communities might make people less willing to trust or compromise with others. On the other hand, as Walzer has also pointed out, drawing upon an argument with a long tradition, political conflict can be a source of strength, as it sometimes enables the contestants to recognize their overarching commitment to the common good.

I expect that, as a whole, a pluralistic, communitarian politics at the local level would improve the politics of the country as a whole. But we cannot be entirely sure. And, indeed, the strength of the various factors I have mentioned leading to and away from an attractive Federal politics might change over time. So it seems to me that we should move toward a more communitarian regime with both eyes open. We should not over-hype what we expect from communitarianism, particularly in state and Federal politics. And we should be aware of the dangers. If a more communitarian political community created strong local communities and people with civic virtue and a commitment to these communities throughout the land, we could be confident that human life would be more fulfilling and the basic institutions of liberal democracy would be more secure. Any improvement in politics at the Federal and State level beyond this is gravy.

V. A POLITICAL STRATEGY FOR COMMUNITARIANS

If this paper contains an accurate account of the institutions, practices and policies that communitarians should support, then there is no wonder that communitarians are reticent about setting their ideas down in detail. The clearer we get about what communitarians should be for, the more cloudy our vision becomes of who will be for communitarianism. For the answer to the question posed by the title of this paper is “some, but not much.” Communitarianism draws upon, but transcends, the ideas of both the left and the right.

As everyone who has given it five minutes of thought knows, politics in American is ideologically incoherent.³⁸ Speaking broadly, the Republican Party is controlled, at the grass roots, by Augustinians and, in Washington, by libertarians. The Democratic Party is dominated, in Washington, by liberal egalitarians and liberationists and, at the grass roots, by the various

³⁷ Michael Walzer, “Civility and Civic Virtue” p. 89.

³⁸ But, as the old saying goes, thinking is hard and five minutes is a long time.

interests who can't live without government largesse and by whatever remains of the labor movement. The Republicans in Washington remain the party of business. They reject taxation for the sake of redistribution and the regulation of business enterprises. Yet, at the same time, they call for the restoration of traditional morality and family values. How they can coherently do this is unclear, especially in the face of business enterprises that neglect the health and safety of workers and consumers; that insist on their workers putting their jobs ahead of their families; that are willing to ruin communities for the sake of cheap labor; that will not pass up a chance to profit by serving the lowest tastes; and that are responsible for an ever increasing inequality of income and wealth.³⁹ Many Democrats, on the other hand, reject restraints on the pursuit of our individual happiness. They reject the claim that, along with rights, we have duties to our community. And they reject limits on what we can expect government to do for us. Yet, they wonder why public support is ebbing for the Democratic demand that citizens pay taxes to sustain people who do not seem to be doing their share—and I mean not just recipients of welfare but also the employees of large, unresponsive government bureaucracies. The Republicans want to get the government off our backs, and onto our fronts. The Democrats prefer the opposite. Neither party seems inclined to support institutions, practices and policies that would help us stand up, and go forward, together.⁴⁰

³⁹ The Republican answer is that, by making individuals wholly responsible for their economic well being, libertarian economic policies strengthen the traditional virtues. There is some, but not a lot of, truth to this claim. For, there is only so much for which we can ask people to be responsible. Beyond a certain point, the demand for initiative and responsibility on the part of the disabled or the poor is simply cruel. Moreover, as I suggest in this paragraph, many actions of business enterprises very much undermine traditional moral values.

⁴⁰ Given the philosophical incoherence of the stands taken by the parties, it is interesting to ask why they have adopted their particular combination of ideological positions on economic and non-economic issues. To some extent, this is a matter of political strategy. Defenders of libertarian economic policies have long tried to divide the working class opposition by raising what political scientists call the social or moral issues. But there are some political philosophical justifications for the combination of libertarianism and Augustinianism on the one hand and liberationism and social democracy, on the other. To some extent, the debate between the parties can be seen as one between supporters and opponents of a stronger role for, not government in general, but specifically the Federal government. Liberationists and liberal egalitarians are in favor, Augustinians and libertarians against the expansion of Federal power. For, in the last 40 years the Federal government has, by and large, been used to redistribute income and to force Americans to live up to the promise of the Bill of Rights. Thus, even though Augustinians favor moral regulation by government, they have found that, in practice, the Federal government has acted to undermine such regulation at the state and local level. Note, however, that this point of agreement is likely to come undone if the Republicans ever hold the Presidency and Congress at the same time. For, if Republicans begin to carry out the Augustinian program at the Federal level, they will undermine this basis of unity as they incur the wrath of those Republicans who are not only libertarians but liberationists.

Another way to understand why the parties adopt their particular stands on economic and social issues is to see the Democrats as consistently favoring the outsiders, the weak, the poor, and the less powerful while the Republicans favor the established, the strong the rich and the more powerful. Democrats have, by and large used the Federal government to serve immigrants, the working class and minorities. In doing so, they have fought the battle for redistribution, for liberation from those Protestant moral authorities that sought to regulate the life of Catholic and Jewish immigrants at the beginning of this century, and for immigration itself. Republicans have resisted their efforts. While I no longer think that all virtue is to be found on the side of the underdogs, this remains a good reason to be a Democrat. On the other hand, as the Democratic party has come to serve government bureaucracies as much as the weak, and as its labor allies retreat from social legislation that benefits everyone to saving their own jobs at any cost, it loses the moral claim that comes from supporting the underdogs. Adopting the communitarian program would be a good way to restore that claim.

What, in the face of this incoherence, is a communitarian to do? Where are we going to find support for a genuine pluralism of local communities, each of which pursues its own conception of the good and the virtues? Where are we going to find support for the transformations in our political economy that would make such communities possible?

The short answer is that, for the present, we are not going to find a great deal of support from the leadership of the established political parties. A somewhat longer, and perhaps more promising answer, begins with the recognition that there are good people within both of the parties who resist the extreme views I have discussed here. And there are even more people, in the country as a whole, who are disaffected from politics as it is currently practiced and might be responsive to the communitarian proposals I have outlined.

How do we reach these people? If we lived in a parliamentary regime, then I would say it is time to start a new political party. But, given our form of government and electoral system, that is not a plausible option. It might be a plausible option if one of the political parties were close to collapse, as the Whigs were in the 1850s. Then we could follow the Republican strategy of that time and try to replace one of the major parties. But, while both parties are divided, neither one is on the verge of collapse. And, so long as the Federal pot of gold awaits the winner of the Democratic and Republican presidential nomination, neither party is likely to go the way of the Whigs.

If one of the parties seemed more responsible to the communitarian agenda than the other, I would say that communitarians should focus our efforts on taking it over. We should, in other words, act like the leaders of the Populists in the 1890s, who brought many of their followers into a Democratic party that accepted some—though by no means all—Populist ideas. Given my own ancestral ties to the Democratic Party, I would like to believe that one of our parties *is* more inclined to communitarian ideas than the other. But, this is by no means obvious. Democrats are more inclined to favor greater equality and participation. But Republicans are more inclined to favor decentralized governmental institutions, practices and policies. I doubt that we have good reason to think that the Republican tendency to adopt libertarian ideas is any worse than the Democratic tendency to adopt liberationist ideas. And so long as the left wing of the Democratic party remains committed to old-style liberal egalitarianism—as in the call for single payer national health insurance and make work jobs programs—or retreat in the face of economic challenges from abroad—as in the opposition to Nafta and the WTO—it is hard to believe that communitarianism can or will become a dominant presence there. If neither party is going to be more or less supportive of the communitarian agenda, we communitarians will have to choose our party affiliation on other grounds. I do not find that a hard choice. For, whatever its flaws, the Democratic party remains the only place for those of us concerned about the gross economic inequalities that plague America and who find prefer the Aristotelian to the Augustinian view of civic virtue. But, it may be useful if some people attracted communitarianism remain in the Republican Party on other grounds. For there is another alternative, and another historical analogy, for communitarians to follow aside from the ones we have already canvassed.

In the early part of this century there was a progressive party—or, actually, more than one such party. But progressives of many different strains were found in both the Democratic and Republican parties. Some of the major reforms of that era were accomplished by politicians who were willing to cross the aisle and join with progressives of the other party. Moreover,

many of the most important progressive era reforms were put in place by the men and women who created a vast new range of political and social institutions in state and local government and outside of the government, as well. Some of the central institutions of our civil society—the managerial form of business enterprise, the professional association, labor unions, neighborhood and ethnic association—were created or dramatically expanded by progressives in the years leading up to what we now call the progressive era.

Perhaps, then, communitarians should follow the progressive model. Not that we should present ideas for political and social change modeled on the progressives. If anything, the time is ripe to rethink the overly hierarchical, centralized and technocratic view of politics bequeathed to us by progressives. Rather, we should adopt the progressive model of a political and social movement. We should look for, and encourage support for, communitarian ideas among politicians in both political parties. We should appeal to the people on all sides who would like to turn away from the extreme, and extremely individualistic, ideals the parties present today. Perhaps, by doing so, we can help forge compromises between those communitarian Democrats who are favor egalitarianism but have doubts about the liberal state and those communitarian Republicans who favor decentralization and markets but worry about the inequality to which they might lead. We can help forge these compromises by focusing our attention on proposing and working for specific reforms in a wide range of governmental and non-governmental settings. We should begin remodeling state and local government and the institutions of civil society on communitarian lines. And, in doing all this, we should be open to radical ideas, uncertain experiments, and a diversity of approaches.

VI. CONCLUSION

When I began this paper, I was not yet sure whether I should or could call myself a communitarian. I was uncertain about what a communitarian believes and supports. And I did not know how communitarianism could play a positive role in reviving our political and social life. As I went along, however, I became more and more comfortable saying “we” when I talked about what communitarians should think or do. Of course, this is in large part because, in this paper, I get to say what communitarians should think and do. And, anyway, writing a paper that suggests a positive path to follow is always a dangerous thing. One’s own ideas for political and social transformation can create a peculiar kind of auto-intoxication, especially when contain a hint of optimism. That is, I suppose, why academics—who are supposed to be self-critical above all else—prefer to be restrained and pessimistic, dour and, these days on the left, sour as well.

The main point of this paper, however, is that there may well be a reasonable set of ideas about restoring virtue and community to our politics, ideas that would help us avoid the name calling and sterility of so much contemporary political debate. I do not know whether most of those who call themselves communitarians would agree with the proposals I have made here. But communitarianism sounds like a good name for these ideas. It is a banner under which many of us might just be willing to, if not march, then walk, more or less together.

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