

Individuality, autonomy, and community.

an essay in mediation

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Liberal individualism is under fire. Critics denounce the doctrine as dehumanising, and the kind of society that it informs as alienating. It rests, they say, on a model of man that is descriptively inadequate and morally defective, and the quasi-contractual theories of human association that derive from it are invalidated by their faulty foundations. Sheldon S. Wolin brings together a variety of such criticisms, in Chapter X of Politics and Vision, to illustrate "one of the dominant themes of modern thought, the revival of social solidarity." Sociology and psychology, he claims, "have agreed that modern man is desperately in need of 'integration'. His need to 'belong' and to experience satisfying relations with others can be fulfilled if he is able to 'identify' himself with an adequate group, one which will provide him with membership; that is, a defined role and assured expectations." Ours is "an organizational age which longs for community."¹

Many of the critics want to replace the individualist model with one not merely of social but of sociable man, whose 'species-being' is realised in closely-integrating communitarian relations, characterised by mutual concern and 'caring'. Few of them appear, however, to reject the ideals of self-determination and self-development, which, were thought by paradigm liberals, such as J S. Mill, T.H. Green, L.T. Hobhouse, Gladstone and Lloyd George to be at the heart of

liberalism. Bourgeois society is found wanting by many of its critics just because they believe that it frustrates these ideals. Judson Jerome says of the 'communalist' ideal that it is 'of a mode of human association which combines maximum self-actualization and individuality with maximum co-operation and commitment to the welfare of others, in which selfishness is transmuted into self-fulfilment and dependency into love.'²

This essay is not intended to provide a description or interpretation of bourgeois society, nor to defend it from its critics, nor to add new attacks to theirs. Neither is it meant to describe any actual communitarian alternatives, save perhaps by way of illustration; the reader may challenge any such description without shaking the argument. I shall be concerned, rather, with models, ideal types, or paradigms, in terms of which people conceptualise their own societies and possible ideal alternatives. Such models include certain propositions about the nature of man, and are informed by certain values and principles. This essay is about the structure and coherence of such models, in particular with the coherence and flexibility of liberal ideals. For suppose a liberal could be rationally persuaded by a communitarian that the models of man and society to which he is attached are defective in the ways the communitarian says they are. The liberal would be conceding either that his was only a qualified or partial liberalism, or that liberalism was thus far incoherent; for any reason that could convince him would necessarily invoke principles or criteria of relevance that the liberal already acknowledged as his own; other-

wise the communitarian's reasons would get no purchase on him. My object is to find out which of the classical liberal positions a liberal would be required and can afford to give up, in order to accommodate criticisms of liberalism invoking the social nature of man and the moral claims of 'community', and how much of the communitarian ideal he could be brought to accept, while yet remaining uncompromisingly true to the core liberal values of individuality and autonomy. The point of the essay is thus philosophical; it enters only incidentally the fields of sociology and the history of ideas.

I.

The model of the natural person presupposed by liberalism is that of a self-governing chooser, satisfying certain minimal conditions of rationality in belief and action, including a capacity to review his beliefs and his goals in the light of reasons, to make appropriate decisions and to act on them, and thereby to influence intentionally the way the world goes.³ Such a person is responsible both for what he does to others and for what he makes of himself. Locke attributed to him natural rights, which one might interpret as normative capacities that a person enjoys by virtue of his natural capacity as a chooser, and on account of his commitment to making his own way, pursuing his own enterprise, in a fluid and contractual society.

The classical economists employed a basically similar model, of a rational agent ready equipped with individually-conceived goals, selecting from a range of available strategies the one that would do best, i.e. that would

maximise utility or satisfaction from the standpoint of those goals. Such agents, associated in a market economy, would both collaborate and compete. When the outcome of a collaborative strategy would provide everyone with more of whatever he happened to want than he could hope for by going it alone, everyone would have a reason for collaborating. Collaboration depends on the parties' valuing collaboration not for itself, or for anything intrinsic to the collaborative activity, but only for what each believes he would get out of it, including any enjoyment of his own part in the activity, as a footballer might enjoy running and kicking, or the glory of being one of the winning team. He would have no reason for collaborating if he could find no positive answer to the question: What is there in it for me?

The surplus earned by collaborative over non-collaborative action might be shared out in various ways, so long as each one's share amounted to more, in terms of his individually-conceived ends and values, than he would get by staying out of the coalition. So beyond the collaborative there is also a competitive element in the association, in which each seeks to maximise his own gains at the expense of the others'.⁴ This may be true, of course, even in a team game: a Man of the Match award encourages players to compete to shine, while yet requiring that they collaborate to win.

Hobbes supplied a theory of political association to match the competitive-collaborative model. What made political society possible was the fundamental equality of men - that no one had power enough to secure himself against the rest. By threats of punishment, governments

could provide everyone with a selective incentive to practise forbearance in his relations with everyone else, establishing thereby the minimal conditions for collaboration.

One can see in Kant's moral philosophy certain analogies with Hobbes's model of man, even though their doctrines differ fundamentally. Each supposes a self-contained individual chooser; each issues in a kind of stand-off relationship between persons. For Hobbes, the fundamental feature of civil - and moral - association leading to stand-off is equality of power; for Kant, it is the recognition by each person of every other as of equal moral standing, as a potentially rational and free will, a member of 'the kingdom of ends'.

A person, for Kant, is a moral legislator, with the capacity to apprehend the Moral Law by the exercise of reason, and to adopt it for that reason as his own nomos, the rule guiding his life. Because this acceptance is free and rational, rather than a submission to authority or a compulsion of appetite, the rational will is also autonomous. The principle ordering relations between natural persons is that of respect. 'Respect', says Kant, 'is properly the conception of a worth which thwarts my self-love'. To see someone as an object of respect is to recognise in him the subject of a morally significant enterprise that counts as a reason for not treating him as an instrument or as an obstacle to one's own inclinations, as if he had no view of his own that deserved consideration. It is a reason, though not perhaps a conclusive reason, for not interfering with his enterprise uninvited, whether for

one's own advantage or for his Respect, so understood, is not the same as deference, it is not what is shown by someone who recognises another as a superior, or as more than ordinarily worthy; it is rather the acknowledgment of someone as one's equal, having the same standing and therefore of no less account than oneself.

Whereas for Kant autonomy was a logical consequence of a person's rationality, for J.S. Mill it was an ideal, a character trait to be developed, by virtue of which a person would be admirable. Mill was far too sensible, of course, to believe in the austere romantic hero, 'captain of his fate and master of his soul'; but he was very conscious, too, of social pressures to conform, and believed that nobility of character demanded a bold, independent, and inquiring intellect, never closed to argument and experiment, of firm convictions and possessed of moral courage in action. Such a person would be self-determining, self-developing, and autonomous.

The association of 'economic liberalism' with business ethics, particularly in the United States, has tended to muddy the popular understanding of the human ideal that the liberal tradition has cherished. Business corporations (so goes the argument) stand for unrestrained commercial practices and small government, and these are tenets of economic liberalism; corporate business awards its prizes to conformist 'organisation men'; therefore (the argument invalidly concludes) liberalism favours heteronomous conformity to the business ethic. Corporate business, while adoptin

(if somewhat selectively) some of the economic tenets of classical liberalism, has very little else in common with that tradition, least of all its human ideal.

The individualist model of man and society outlined so far could properly be criticised as lacking in humanity. Respect for persons is, as I have said, a stand-off principle, not to be confused with concern. To respect someone as a person is to acknowledge that he is a subject of certain fundamental rights, to be dealt with justly, and accorded a certain basic equality of moral status with all other natural persons, oneself included. One can respect an enemy, while wishing him ill. By contrast, if one has a concern for someone, one wishes him well; his necessities and his sufferings strike one as reasons for acting to alleviate them if one can.⁵

In its earliest versions, the liberal individualist model of man, and its corresponding associative model, did indeed have very little satisfactory to say about the concern people have, or ought to have, for one another. Before the Reformation, care for the sick and the needy had been seen as a religious duty, organized by religious orders, and sustained by charitable offerings. Post-Reformation England, deprived of its monasteries, was forced into some secular provision; but it was scanty and grudging. A society that had learned to respect persons as independent and self-responsible, expected them to be provident, too, and hardly knew what to make of the unfortunate, the misfits, and the drop-outs. Concern for others was properly structured within the family, or at the most within a rural community. Otherwise it was to be expressed in more or less formal religious observances.

If nineteenth-century industrialism generated the tough-minded individualism of the 1834 Poor Law Commissioners, it awoke, too, the humanitarianism of Lord Shaftesbury, and prompted numerous private and secular charity organisations, as well as societies to provide education for poor children, and hospitals for needy patients. The competitive-collaborative model clearly did not fit these developments, any more than it fitted the monasteries of the middle ages. Certainly, the members of such organisations collaborated, but to benefit others, who were not members, and any competition between members would have been accidental, not something required by the nature of the enterprise. And though their clients may have been in competition for handouts, they were not in any associative relation amongst themselves.

II.

The welfare organisation is best treated, perhaps, as a special case of a form of association I call a transcendent collective enterprise, which arises from a common concern for some valued endeavour or worthwhile activity, which must be pursued collectively. I have in mind organisations like orchestras, scientific research institutes, religious orders, revolutionary parties, where the telos of the association is either the activity itself, or some ideal state to which it is directed (like a communist society or ecological stability), rather than the interests of the members of the enterprise.

Every member of an orchestra may be interested in music, in the sense that they all have a concern for music; music-making gives a consistent direction to their activities, as love of God gives direction to the activities of the monks. But to say that one is interested in music-making is not to say that music-making is in one's interest, i.e. conducive to one's well-being. Though we would commonly think ourselves better-off for being able to do what interests us, there is nothing absurd in saying of someone both that he sacrificed himself for a cause in which he was interested, and that he put the cause before his own interests or well-being. Now in a transcendent collective enterprise each participant's concern alike for his own well-being and for that of each of the others, is subordinated to a concern for the activity, or for an ideal to which it is directed, which is the telos of the association. (By the telos of the association, I mean whatever it is about it that for those involved in it seems to make it worthwhile going on with it or sustaining it. I do not mean to imply that it has been devised consciously and deliberately, as an instrument for some premeditated purpose.)

Now though the classical liberal individualist theories of society took little account of such enterprises, we can extend the theories to cover them without distorting their core values. The relations between members of such enterprises are consistent with mutual respect, and though a collective enterprise transcends the private ends of any individual, freely associating participants will see it

as realising, not as overriding, their own enterprises. Consequently they need not surrender their autonomy. An autonomous musician need not be a soloist. If he adopts as an enterprise the making of music in orchestras, he accepts collaboration as a necessary condition for doing so, sees that his own role must fit the total conception, and accepts ability to collaborate as a criterion of proficiency and success in the activity. He may autonomously subordinate himself, too, to the authority of the conductor, disagreeing perhaps with his interpretation, but freely conforming, all the same, to the role of second flute as the conductor understands it; for this is of the nature of collaborative orchestral performance. Something similar may be said of a scientific research establishment. Of all activities we are inclined to regard science as the one that most depends on the right of independent judgment. Yet it is surely rational for someone participating in team research to accept the leadership of a research director, who allocates research projects, decides which theories to follow-up as likely to be the most fruitful, and so on. Of course, the autonomous flautist or scientist doesn't surrender judgment unconditionally. Because his commitment to the organisation derives from his primary commitment to the activity - to the telos - he cannot consistently avoid monitoring that commitment in the light of the telos. If he finds the conductor's interpretations are always boring, or the research directors' hunches perverse or his attachment to theories merely obstinate, he'll join another orchestra if he can, or look for a job in a different laboratory.

These examples highlight the distinction between autonomous and heteronomous participation in such enterprises. A heteronomous person is one who accepts the roles society thrusts on him, uncritically internalising the received mores and acting on the cues they provide. He has no independent resources, against which to test particular demands made upon him. By contrast, the autonomous person of the liberal model is committed to a critical and creative search for rational coherence, appraising one aspect of a received tradition by critical canons derived from another. So where the autonomous scientist's or instrumentalist's commitment to a given laboratory or orchestra will always be conditional, and derive from his own standards of what constitutes worthwhile performance, the heteronomous one's commitment will follow only where the rest of the orchestra leads him. Of course, there is room for heteronomous, as well as autonomous members. Indeed, there may be something to be said for having in the laboratory a proportion of heteronomous workers who can be relied upon to work assiduously at the tasks assigned to them, without looking too critically at the point of doing them. But it would be a pretty unproductive laboratory if they were all like that. And the music made by a wholly heteronomous orchestra might be rather dull. Transcendent collective enterprises need some autonomous participants, if they are not to go stale. But they won't necessarily be the worse for a few heteronomous ones too.

I may be taken to task, perhaps, for introducing into an account of a liberal view of autonomous activity an alien

reference to traditions of behaviour. Liberals are prone to think of traditionalists as heteronomous. The use I want to make of this notion is, however, not only consistent with the liberal position but, I believe, logically necessary to it. A person is autonomous if he lives by a nomos, a set of standards or principles, that are his own, or, as Rousseau put it, if he lives obedient to a law he prescribes to himself. Now it might be objected that none of us is free of his social environment; that the fundamental weakness of the individualist model of man is that it imagines him equipped with individually-conceived goals, whereas our ends and values inevitably reflect those of our culture. People don't join orchestras or science labs because, by a process of independent creative imagination, they come up with science or music as ends, and then seek collaborators with similar ends. Science and music are traditions into which we are inducted from childhood; science is a culturally-formulated and culturally-transmitted end. So we delude ourselves (the critic may argue) when we talk of engaging autonomously in such activities.

I do not think this objection strikes at anything that the individualist cannot readily give up. While insisting that the rational person was his own moral legislator, Kant also resisted the idea that he imposed the moral law upon himself, precisely because he thought it out of place to speak of the moral law being imposed at all: for there were reasons for deciding to live by it. By an analogous reasoning, because the tradition that values autonomy is also a rationalist tradition, it cannot require that an autonomous person conjure a nomos

out of thin air, adopting it by a kind of random fancy, kicking aside the nomoi of his culture, his traditions, as so much clutter. If adopting a nomos as one's own is to be the act of a rational person, one must have reasons for adopting it, and such reasons can derive only from normative elements already built into his conception of the world. This must have come initially and in some form from those about him, as conceptual resources made available to him by the particular cluster of sub-cultures that combined to make him what he is. He can receive something from an alien culture only if there is something already in his own to which he can assimilate it. Autonomy is not so much an end-state as a disposition to sustain a certain sort of process for which a necessary initial condition is a conflict or incoherence that characteristically exists within a more or less plural tradition, or where a fairly monistic culture is confronted by competing ones. Socrates's Athens, a commercial, sea-going culture, was a case of this, as was Erasmus's Holland.

An autonomous person labours to resolve such incoherences in his own way, thereby making himself, albeit not ex nihilo. His rational creativity necessarily includes a certain kind of self-assessment. This supervenes upon his assessment of his particular projects and his objective creations. Among the products of his creativeness therefore, is his own personality, something uniquely his own, what he has made from the raw material of notions, beliefs, principles and ideals supplied by his plural tradition. Unlike the heteronomous person, he is not merely an instantiation of a cultural mould or form. The difference between them lies, then, in their manner of dealing with their cultural

inheritance, not in whether or not they possess one or draw on its resources. So in a scientific or a musical culture, there will be people whose grasp of the activity is rooted in the traditions of that culture, who appreciate that it makes collaborative demands, and who are prepared, for the sake of the activity itself, to accept the constraints that that puts upon their merely wilful creativity. But they may be capable also of creatively extending the tradition, drawing on resources that are also available to their collaborators, innovating, therefore, in ways which can be significant for them, too.

III.

I suggested above that welfare organizations could be regarded as a special class of transcendent collective enterprises. Their peculiarity is that their telos lies not in the practice of an activity like science, valued irrespective of the welfare of persons, but precisely in promoting welfare. But because the beneficiaries of the organisation are not also members of it, the concern for well-being is curiously impersonal, quite different from the concern that might be felt, for instance, by members of the family for one another; it is essentially a one-way flow. One of the criticisms made, indeed, of charitable organisations by pioneers of the welfare state was that they denied to the client the respect due to him as a person, and consequently deprived him of self-respect, fostering dependence and heteronomy.

The emergence of the welfare state after World War II can be seen as a response to this criticism; a needy person could now demand social security payments as a matter of right and social justice, without feeling the need to cringe, or to rely on anyone's concern. This transformation of needs into rights, impersonally administered, is completely consistent with the liberal tradition, which, committed now to a notion of 'positive freedom' congenial enough to Fabian socialists, too, steered firmly away from communitarian ideals. For though in the welfare state the recipients can claim to be members, and not just clients, as they were of charitable organisations, nevertheless their well-being is provided for bureaucratically:⁶ that is, they are qualified members of a beneficiary class, receiving appropriate assistance as of right from others who are in the differentiated role of official helpers. The helpers might, on another occasion, themselves be qualified beneficiaries, but this would represent a change of role.

Membership of the association, the welfare state, is not a logically necessary condition for qualifying as an object of concern - one can conceive, for instance, of the British National Health Service being extended or not to foreign visitors, without its character being essentially changed either way. And this certainly betokens a difference between this and communitarian

relationships; for, as will shortly emerge, it is essential to the ideal of a community that differences between the treatment of a member and a non-member, and differences in the attitudes of members to one another and to non-members, are substantively related to the criteria of membership; they couldn't be changed by an arbitrary ruling that this or that person shall now be considered qualified; nor can the qualifying conditions themselves easily be changed by administrative fiat.

I treat welfare organisations, then, whether charitable or state, as transcendent collective enterprises of a special kind rather than as instances of community, because, in the first place, relations between the helpers and the helped are not reciprocal. The telos of the organisation is not in the relations between members, but in promoting a general principle, of welfare or of social justice, such as: 'Everyone has a right to the satisfaction of his basic needs'. The social worker's involvement with his clients is thus impersonal; each client's deprivation is relevant only as an instantiation of a general evil that the organisation exists to remove. This is different, not merely from the stand-off of competitive-collaborative relations, but also from the sympathetic bonds and the personal involvement with the needs and sufferings of one another to which communitarian critics of individualism attach such great importance. The dedication of the professional social worker is much more like the dedication of the musician, to a telos transcending his own attachments. I do not mean that welfare workers are never humane, nor that they treat their clients as 'cases', if that means with no respect for them as persons.

Let in another sense they must always be 'cases', i.e. instances of a generally defined role. For the relationship lacks reciprocity - there is no presumption that the roles might be reversed, that the concern evoked by the client's plight might be evoked in the client himself in precisely the same way by the plight, if not of this 'other', then of some other equally entitled to call upon it.

IV.

Communitarian ideals, then, seem to require more than a concern for welfare, for that too can be impersonal. They call for sympathetic concern, a caring for the other 'as if it were oneself', for some measure of identification with the fate of the other. Though one cannot literally 'feel his sorrows', his sorrows can give occasion for sorrowing that he sorrows; the injuries he suffers excite indignation and resentment on his behalf; one rejoices in his triumphs, and preens oneself vicariously on account of them. Knowing that others feel for them in these ways is part at least of the mutual support that members of a community are said to give to one another. But it may be a great deal more. Knowing, for instance, that one's opinions and judgments are shared by others, one feels that the responsibility for holding them is shared too: it isn't only that being in a minority of one, confidence in one's own judgment is liable to ooze away; it is also that even if one turned out to be wrong, one would have the comfort of knowing that it was on account of nothing singularly defective about one's judgment. It may be easier to stand by one's standards against the mass, if

one has others one trusts in support.

It would be a mistake to assume, however, that community necessarily strengthens autonomy. Someone leaning on community support may be embracing a ready-made group nomos as a substitute for making a nomos of his own. On the other hand, for someone lacking personality integration, struggling painfully towards autonomy, support of this kind is essential if he is not to disintegrate into anomy or worse. The greater the achievement, however, the less the need; much as Socrates valued community, he needed support from no one in confronting his accusers.

The kind of mutual concern I have just sketched is arrived at and mediated only through a pretty complete commitment to the whole group. In a very illuminating study of Utopian communes, entitled Commitment and Community,⁷ R.M. Kanter finds in the notion of commitment the core of the communitarian ideal. She sees commitment to a community as:

'a reciprocal relation, in which both what is given to the group and what is received from it are seen by the person as expressing his true nature and as supporting his concept of self A person is committed to a group or to a relationship when he himself is fully invested in it, so that the maintenance of his own internal being requires behaviour that supports the social order. A committed person ... has a sense of belonging, a feeling that the group is an extension of himself and he is an extension of the group. (p.66)

Commitment thus refers to the willingness of people to do what will help to maintain the group because it provides what they need

A person is committed to a relationship or to a group to the extent that he sees it as expressing or fulfilling some fundamental part of himself . . . that he perceives no conflict between its requirements and his own needs. (p.66)

It is by virtue of their membership, of their own commitment to the group, that the 'significant others' evoke this special concern from the committed member; by virtue of their common commitment to sustaining this pattern of relations, that they know one another as comrades and brothers. Mutual support, sympathy, and understanding flow to those who are known not merely to value the common enterprise, but to have invested their personalities in the same venture.

Liberal individualists shy away from this kind of thing when it is offered to them in the context of political theory. Yet it is by no means necessarily antithetic to moral and social attitudes that many liberals would freely acknowledge in respect of friendship, marriage, and family. A good deal depends, however, on how one understands 'commitment', and on what one takes to be its object, for this will be reflected in the precise pattern of relations regarded as ideal. I shall distinguish three communitarian models. One, which I call 'total community', has had a good deal of influence on political thought; it must surely be unacceptable to anyone unwilling to surrender the values of individuality and autonomy that I have taken to be

central to the liberal tradition. The second, which I call 'mutuality', so far from repudiating these values, seems unattainable except by people who take these values very seriously indeed; it is, however, largely irrelevant to political organisation. The third, which I call 'comradeship', is something of a halfway house between the other two. I shall suggest that any instance large enough to be politically relevant would be inherently unstable, liable to move towards total community, or to break down into competitive-collaborative association.

(a) Total community

Kanter quotes Charles Horton Cooley³:

In so far as one identifies himself with a whole, loyalty to that whole is loyalty to himself; it is self-realization One is never more human, and as a rule happier, than when he is sacrificing his narrow and merely private interest to the higher call of the congenial group'.

The city of The Social Contract is a paradigm model of this type of community. Ancient Sparta, the peasant communes of Mao's China, and Oneida, the nineteenth century Perfectionist commune founded by John Humphrey Noyes in 1848, all seem to have been informed by such an idea. The characteristic common to them all is that the solidarity of the group is the touchstone by which all other claims are to be judged. Just as Rousseau deplored the existence of 'partial general wills', so in Oneida social arrangements, such as

a very complex set of mating arrangements, were designed to discourage the formation of any special, personal attachments, whether sexual or parental, that might estrange the member from the central love in the community. A similar idea, of course, is to be found in Book V of The Republic. This kind of community borders on the 'transcendent collective enterprise' in that its telos is the sustaining of a set of idealized relations, almost a depersonalization of the members, despite the heavy stress laid on their mutual sympathy, concern, and support. For the individual is required to surrender his personal or idiosyncratic self-image for the sake of the love he earns by becoming a loyal and committed participant. A person making a commitment to the community, says Kanter,

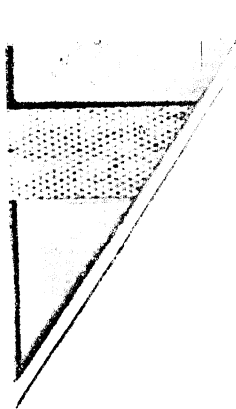
'should see himself as carrying out the dictates of a higher system, which orders and gives meaning to his life. He internalizes community standards and values and accepts its control, because it provides him with something transcendent. This commitment requires, first, that the person reformulate and re-evaluate his identity in terms of meeting the ideals set by the community. (p.73.)

So the community requires of him both self-criticism and the ordeals of public criticism, and what Kanter calls 'mortification' 'the submission of private states to social control, the exchanging of a former identity for one defined and formulated by the community' (p.74). Each, as Rousseau says, gives himself entirely to the community.⁹

Total community is totally incompatible with autonomy.

The condition for 'healthy' membership, as specified by such a community's own standard of health, is a heteronomous and unconditional commitment to the commune's standards and a willing reliance on its support. Independence of judgment in the face of public criticism within the community is not, for a total communitarian, a virtue, but a defect to be censured by the withdrawal of the community's loving concern.

But why couldn't someone autonomously choose an unconditional commitment to a total community, deciding that, for the future, he will use the community rule as his own decision-procedure? Is this not obedience to a law one prescribes to oneself? The hero of Luke Reinhart's novel, The Dice-man committed himself to decide on a throw of the dice between all the options that at any moment appealed to the disparate sides of his personality, giving each its chance of expression. The Dice-man, too, might claim to live according to a law he had prescribed to himself. But notice: "he had prescribed to himself". If one makes an absolute commitment - whether to the dice, to the priest, or to the total community - one puts aside, as irrelevant from then on, whatever considerations initially led one to make the commitment. The question whether there really were - and still are - good enough reasons for making the commitment is not to be reopened. So though the rule is one's own, in the sense that one originally prescribed it to oneself, it now confronts one as a kind of brute external fact. It dictates what is to be done as much as if one read it



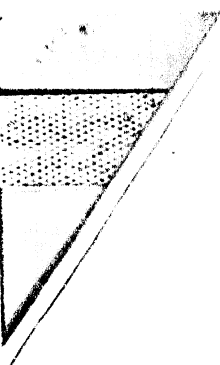
on a daily orders board. It is as much an alienation of self as a stone idol that one carves to venerate. Unless the nomos can be said to be continuously re-affirmed because one sees reasons for sustaining it, it ceases to be one's own. An absolute commitment gives up the right to ask whether to go on with the procedure. Contrast this with a conditional commitment, which one must continuously monitor to assess whether the considerations originally thought to warrant it still do so in the light of longer and broader experience.

The incoherence of an absolute autonomous commitment goes deeper than this, however. No one makes an alien rule his own simply by deciding to be guided by it. It must be an authentic expression of his nature and social being, a principle he comes to understand as already informing and giving coherence to his attitudes and judgments. Self-knowledge, the congruence of action, judgment, and principle, and a concern that these features be maintained by a vigilant, critical moral consciousness - these conditions are necessary to autonomy. Someone who chose to surrender this concern would be surrendering autonomy, something an autonomous person could rationally do only if he had

an overriding reason, making the pursuit of an ideal of another sort even more important to him. Moreover, this would be to invest in the final autonomous act of abdication of autonomy a degree of assurance out of keeping with his critical nature. For it entails abjuring the practice of criticism and any further review of the rightness of this total commitment. I do not say that no one could rationally make such a choice - 'absolute autonomous commitment' is not logically incoherent. It is, however pragmatically incoherent unless the stakes that warrant the gamble are very high indeed.

There is one sense, perhaps, in which an absolute abdication of autonomous judgment is impossible: however one might try to commit oneself totally to a non-rational decision procedure, it is always logically possible to change one's mind. As a proposition in normative logic, this may be true. But as a matter of fact, someone making the act of abdication may thereafter school himself to obedience, constantly reinforcing the psychological barriers in the way of autonomous recantation.

It is remarkable, perhaps, that commitments of this kind should so often be referred to in the communitarian literature as 'liberating', and conducive to personal growth. The reason, perhaps, is that, for a near-anomic person, acceptance of the community's rule provides a kind of integration, and therefore a sense of purpose and



effective willing which he lacked before - even if the willing is in pursuance of a nomos uncritically received. But it is a mistake to confuse integration and autonomy; though an autonomous personality will be an integrated personality, integration alone may well be heteronomous. Similarly, the security and the firm identification with the group that comes with membership may well liberate the natural springs of trust and affection that had formerly been blocked, or could find no proper, safe, object. But while this may be a happier condition, even perhaps an emotionally healthier one, than anomy, it isn't autonomy; and only in the sense that feelings are less inhibited can it be called 'liberated'.

(b) Mutuality

There is, however, a second kind of relationship, resembling total community in that it calls just as much for a deep commitment, but which depends on a high degree of autonomy for its full realization. Such a relationship may be instantiated in some friendships, marriages, even in some families. I shall call this 'mutuality'. The telos of this relation is to be found, as with the other, in the quality of the relation itself. But unlike the other, the relation is to be seen as in process of creation and development; and the participants themselves are somewhat like artists working on material constituted by their perceptions of one another and their mutual concern.

It is of the essence of this relation that it is fully participatory. Each respects and values every other as a full partner, and exerts his own effort in the expectation and trust that the other will do likewise. Moreover, if

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one of the partners adopted a heteronomous role, seeking cues from others rather than exercising an independent perception and judgment of the relation, the enterprise would to that extent fail. For its particular nature is its mutuality, the extent to which each is sensitive to the others' response to his own effort, is prepared to monitor his own attitudes to his partners and to the partnership, and to adjust to changes in the interest, tastes, values, and personalities of the others.

Unlike the total community, the object here is not to preserve an ideal pattern of unchanging relations; on the contrary, the enterprise is to keep the partnership moving, to make it a vehicle through which the personalities of the partners can develop autonomously, without destroying it; this is their joint enterprise, as authors collaborating in writing a book find their ideas changing and developing as a direct outcome of the collaboration. But the difference is that the authors need have no concern for each other except in relation to their specific and specialised enterprise, whereas mutual concern for the other as a person is a necessary constituent of the mutuality enterprise. Moreover, it is no more necessary to good authorial collaboration than to a research establishment that all the authors be autonomous; whereas a mutuality will flourish the more, the more autonomous the partners. There are friendships and marriages, of course, where one partner dominates and another responds to cues. Such partners may live happily enough. But theirs is an enterprise with a somewhat different telos, less ambitious perhaps, and less demanding. In a mutuality relationship, a heteronomous partner is parasitic.

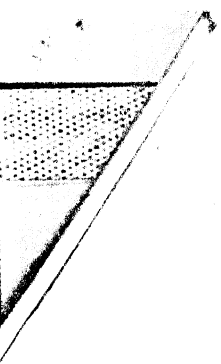
I have pitched the requirements of this kind of community pretty high - so high, indeed, that it could hardly be attained except in intimate face-to face relations, where knowledge of the others can be pretty complete, and the monitoring of the relation pretty continuous. Some of the numerous small communes of anything from a half-dozen to a dozen and a half people, which have sprung up in North America and elsewhere seem to entertain some ideal such as this (though a great many seem to fall short of it in practice). The larger the group, the more difficult it becomes for each partner to process all the relevant information about the others, to remain sensitive to nuances in their responses to his initiatives, and to make the effort to sustain the personalized concern for each. That is why it is an inappropriate model for political organization. Yet I suspect that the total community ideal is often found attractive because it is confounded with this one. Of course, a political system may structure a society that includes mutualities, just as the Australian national state structures a society comprised largely of nuclear families. If communitarian ideals spread, and mutualities become common, no doubt political attitudes and structures would change too. But an association of mutualities would not be a mutuality writ large, any more than the nineteenth century British state was a Victorian family writ large.

Martin Buber's Paths in Utopia, London, 1949, which underpins the faith of many utopian communalists, seems to me to fall into such an error. The book is concerned with 're-structuring' society, "through a renewal of its cell-tissue" (p.1). Stressing the value of close personal

relations in community, Buber concludes that "a nation is a community to the degree that it is a community of communities" (p.136). But the model of contractual society can be extended in this way, as a federal association of associations, only because the first order association can be treated, for organisational and institutional purposes, as a bearer of roles, rights, and obligations in the greater association analogous to the natural person in the lesser. Community, however, is not a matter of roles and powers alone, but of reciprocal sympathies and concerns which people feel for one another. A federation of communities may be a transcendant collective enterprise or a collaborative association; I do not see how it could be a mutuality.

(c) Comradeship

Comradeship qualifies as community because it involves a high degree of inter-personal concern. But it leaves more room for autonomy than the total community, while yet demanding less as a creative endeavour than relations of mutuality. Each participant has a concern for every other which is different in quality and degree from any concern he has for non-participants, and different just because that person is a participant. The relation is not personalized, however, in the way that reciprocal concern is personalized in the mutuality relationship. For partners in a mutuality are strictly speaking irreplaceable. The gap left by the death of a spouse or a friend can't be filled by recruiting a similar and fully qualified replacement. Each departure impoverishes the enterprise; and though a



new recruit may enrich it, it will be by making of it something different and sui generis. This is because mutuality relations have a necessarily historical dimension; each set is therefore unique. What the partnership has been shapes the partners' perception of what it is now, and so enters essentially into its present character. So no newcomer could share it fully. The history of its growth is a defining part of the relationship, not a merely genetic and contingent fact about it.

But in a comradely community - say a moderately-large kibbutz, an extended family, even a regiment - there can be recognition of concern for anyone fulfilling the necessary conditions for being a member, including, for instance, someone who has recently married or enlisted into it. And this would extend beyond, for instance, the welfare administrator's concern for qualified beneficiaries. Being a member, and recognising another as a comrade, one is led to care 'as if it were oneself' for his vicissitudes. This doesn't amount to a generalised altruism, for that would extend to anyone, participant or otherwise. What makes comradeship a kind of community is that the criteria for membership are also criteria for sharing a common fate. Perhaps something of this exists between compatriots, at any rate in times of crisis: certainly, the awareness of sharing a common fate in 1940 had a great deal to do with British solidarity and with the readiness of people to supplement their more usual 'stand-off' attitudes of minimal respect, with a concern for and involvement with others' well-being.

The problem with a community of this kind is to sustain the sense among its members that being a member is a

centrally important feature of their lives. Religious communities, or ideological ones, like kibbutzim, cohere because the ideology assigns overriding importance to being a member, and it is through this consciousness of self and others that mutual concern is mediated. Similarly patriotism, a far looser and generally weaker group awareness, becomes an effective cement when, as in war, the criteria for membership of the nation are patently also the qualifying conditions for sharing a common fate. But sustaining so heightened an awareness of belonging demands in ordinary times an insistence on ideological conformity that consorts ill with autonomy.

V.

A crucial factor in settling the compatibility of autonomy and community may well be size. I suggested earlier that the sheer impossibility of processing the amount of information necessary to keep a mutuality relation flourishing beyond a mere handful of people makes this a politically inappropriate model. As the group increases in size, there comes a choice between aiming either to keep all its members involved with one another in all their main interests or concerns, but at the cost of their being committed to a more intense ideological consensus, or to relax the demand for completeness, looking for mutual trust, support, and concern among members in only a restricted range of their activities. So members of a profession may exhibit reciprocal concern in matters that touch their common professional culture, but be relatively indifferent to one another outside that area.

One's membership of a mutuality is consistent with - indeed, demands - autonomy, because one is immediately active and self-determining in creating the partnership. So there is no occasion to demand that the member submit to the group. As the group expands, however, its coherence comes to depend increasingly on individuals' readiness to submit to standards that for any given person have an objective existence independent of his own. Increasingly the group insists on the difference between itself and the world beyond, and therefore on the importance of ideological purity. And so it moves in the direction of total community.¹⁰ Otherwise, it must contract its scope, conceding that in some aspects of their lives, its members must look outside for meaningful relations, condoning their adoption of some values at any rate that other members will not share. So a member may form deep and far reaching attachments to the Labour Party, to a university, to the Catholic Church - or to all at once. For none of these, not even the Church, makes in reality demands as total and exclusive as, say, Oneida, or some fundamentalist religious sects. But if the members of a comradely community came severally to form diverse attachments of this kind outside it, it is hard to see what bonds would continue to hold it together. A mutuality, with its close personal involvements and mutual respect for persons, might be able to absorb such diversities. Each member could have a vicarious interest in and concern for the spiritual progress of every other, even in directions he could not directly follow. But the looser and more impersonal texture of comradeship seems to have no corresponding way of accommodating outward-looking diversity without dissolving into competitive collaboration.

I have not considered the retreat communes of the '70s - to which people withdraw from the world of imposed roles, living simply, relaxed and undemandingly together, everyone let be to do his own thing. I doubt whether these are instances, properly speaking, of communitarianism, since the survival of these arrangements generally depends on participants' willingness not to become involved with one another, except perhaps at the most superficial level of sharing chores. Even so, the mortality rate of such communities is generally very high; participants move in and out very freely, often moving on from one to another, making no commitments of any sort. This is not a prescription for autonomy but for anomy: for this is living without direction or purpose, with no nomos. At their best, such retreats may provide an unharrassed breathing space, for people needing time to decide what to do with their lives. They don't add another to the already existing options between which the person has to decide.

VI.

I have shown no reasons in this paper for valuing individuality and autonomy.¹¹ In as much as it centres on the problems of a liberal confronted by communitarian criticisms, these core values of liberalism are presupposed. Neither have I tried to demonstrate the value of community, this is introduced hypothetically: Suppose there is some conception of community that is valuable, could a liberal, with his prior value commitments, accept it? Or would he have to choose between competing values? Total community seems to be an ideal he could not embrace, without

surrendering his liberalism. The value of mutuality is consistent with his liberalism; but of course, that is not a sufficient reason for a liberal to adopt it as an ideal, let alone to seek out opportunities for realising it. I make no claim - at least, not here - that there is any one all-embracing value, nor any hierarchy of values such that one necessarily overrides another, nor that anyone who fails to acknowledge something as a value is thereby defective, insensitive, or even just mistaken. I have tried to exhibit what a person's commitments would be, supposing him to subscribe to certain beliefs and ideals that seem to be fairly widely held in our own culture, and to explore what scope there might be for extension and development in the light of others that are frequently held to be antithetical to them. In the course of the argument I have proposed a typology of forms of association that may throw light not only on this but on related debates but that would be a bonus.

FOOTNOTES

1. Politics and Vision, Boston, 1960, p 357. Wolff "collects under a single roof" nostalgic conservatives like de Maistre and Bonald, radical utopians like Rousseau and Fourier, sociologists and social psychologists like Durkheim, Elton Mayo, and Fromm, and revolutionary ideologists like Marx, Proudhon, and Lenin. See also Robert A. Nisbet, The Quest for Community, London, 1953, Chapter 10; R.P. Wolff, The Poverty of Liberalism, Boston, 1968.
2. Judson Jerome: Families of Eden, London, 1975, p.ix
3. For an elaboration of this notion, and of the treatment of respect for persons and autonomy that follows, see my 'Freedom, autonomy, and the concept of a person', Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, LXXVI, 1976 pp.109-130.
4. Students of game-theory, and other kinds of rational choice theory in political science, international relations, strategic studies, as well as in economic will be familiar with modern applications of the model. See S.I. Benn and G.W. Mortimore (eds.), Rationality and the Social Sciences, London, 1976, Chaps 7-10, for discussions of such theories. See also W. Riker, The Theory of Political Coalition, New Haven, 1965, and Robert Goodin, The Politics of Rational Man, London, 1976, for typical instances.
5. For an elaboration of the distinction between respect and concern, see my 'Personal freedom and environmental ethics: the moral inequality of species' in Gray Dorsey (ed.) Equality and Freedom: International and Comparative Jurisprudence, New York, 1977, Vol II, pp.401-424.

6. Herbert Marcuse recognises that the welfare state is "capable of raising the standard of administered living" "of making the administered life secure and comfortable", but at the expense of the spontaneous, unrepressed life he values. One Dimensional Man, London, 1968, pp.52-7. Marcuse makes more, however, of libidinal self-expression, albeit aesthetically sublimated through transcendent collective enterprises, and of 'solidarity', a sentiment that members of such enterprises (e.g. of a revolutionary movement) might share, than of the reciprocal concern of persons for one another in communities. His Eros and Civilisation has remarkably little to say about love!
7. Harvard U.P., Cambridge, Mass. 1972.
8. C.H. Cooley: Social Organization: A study of the larger mind, N.Y. 1962, quoted in R.M. Kanter, op. cit. p.32.
9. Cf. Leopold Sédar Senghor, On African Socialism, trans., Mercer Cook, London 1964, where a professed aim is 'to attempt to define an ideal society that will integrate the contributions of European socialism with our traditional values.' Senghor claims that 'collectivist European society ... is an assembly of individuals. The collectivist society inevitably places the emphasis on the individual, on his original activity and his needs Negro-African society puts more stress on the group than on the individual, more on solidarity than on the activity and needs of the individual, more on the communion of persons than on their autonomy. Ours is a community society The individual is,

in Europe, the man who distinguishes himself from the other and claims his autonomy to affirm himself in his basic originality. The member of the community society also claims his autonomy to affirm himself as a being. But he feels, he thinks that he can develop his potential his originality, only in and by society, in unison with all other men - indeed, with all other beings in the universe: God, animal, tree, or pebble', pp.93-4. Also Sekou Touré, quoted by EHUD Springzak, 'African traditional socialism', in Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 11, 1973: 'our solidarity, better known under its aspects of social fraternity, the pre-eminence of group interests over the personal interest, the sense of common responsibilities, the practice of a formal democracy which rules and governs village life ... that is what forms what we call our commun-aucratic realities', p.637.

10. Jay and Heather Ogilvie make a distinction between monistic and pluralistic communes analogous to mine between total community and comradeship. Because the latter recruit people who are 'attracted more by the idea of living with a group of people than by the idea of joining a cadre for a cause', they have 'no raison d'etre other than the processes of personal development. A pluralistic commune has, in consequence, a 'Half-life nature', for when "those processes have run their course ... (it) should dissolve itself". "A pluralistic commune may attempt to increase the sense of community (however) by creating some common task which will help to define the in-group positively rather than negatively

in short, a pluralistic commune may try to become monistic (They) may find the best way of remaining together to be as a monistic commune united by an agreed upon task." 'Commune and the reconstruction of reality' in Sallie Teselle (ed.) The Family, Communes, and Utopian Societies, New York, 1972, pp.90, 96-7, 98.

11. In 'Freedom, autonomy, and the concept of a person', loc cit., however, I have suggested reasons, deriving from the character of one's self-awareness as a natural person in a world of persons, for accepting respect for persons as a moral principle, and autonomy as one (though not the only) personality ideal.