

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Liberals who think the case for rights should be neutral toward substantive moral and religious doctrines and communitarians who think rights should rest on prevailing social values make a similar mistake."

-- Michael Sandel (1998, xi)

As the communitarian-liberal debates of the 1980s subsided, the 1990s saw an increasing tendency to incorporate communitarian ideas into liberalism. It often seemed that the most innovative political theorists did little but breed and nurture communitarian-liberal hybrids. To mention only the work of Chandran Kukatahas, Will Kymlicka, Steve Macedo, David Miller, John Rawls (in Political Liberalism), Joseph Raz, and Yael Tamir is to give an idea of the extent of the communitarian-liberal merger. Virtue theorists, multicultural liberals, group-rights theorists, liberal practitioners of "the politics of identity," and "political, not metaphysical" liberals alike bear the distinctive marks of the liberal confrontation with communitarianism--whose initial violence may, in retrospect, be seen as the ritualistic prelude to mating.

For all the inroads communitarianism has made, however, we do not really understand it--and, therefore, we may not really know what we are doing as we groom and care for its growing brood of offspring. There is, to be sure, a vast critical literature, mostly generated in the first years after communitarianism came onto the scene, that catalogues the ambiguities and contradictions of communitarianism; and

there are textbook-style summaries of the "pros and cons" of various communitarian arguments. But listing a doctrine's defects does not explain them, or it; and too close an engagement with communitarian statements may obscure the assumptions underlying them.

In order to see both the forest and the trees, we need to know why communitarians advanced ideas that committed them to the rather obvious mistakes pointed out in the critical literature. Why did they compromise their position with blatant self-contradictions? Why, despite these problems, might less-radical versions of communitarianism continue to appeal to political theorists? Is there a pattern in communitarian arguments--and errors--from which we might learn something useful about contemporary political theory?¹

This study maintains that there is such a pattern; that this pattern explains both the problems with, and the appeal of, communitarianism; and, most importantly, that this pattern is explained by features that communitarianism shares with liberalism.

I will argue that communitarianism as we know it, "really existing communitarianism," was the attempt to achieve liberal normative ends by using particularist, rather than universalist, means. In part, the contemporary liberal-communitarian convergence was made possible by the two schools' shared normative objectives. Additionally, however, it was enabled by an underlying metaethics, common to both liberal "universalism" and communitarian particularism.

Let me say immediately that my association of the term liberalism with the normative goal of communitarianism does not presume to establish some liberal "essence." I merely mean to point out that

communitarians share with non-consequentialist liberals an overriding commitment to "individual liberty as the paramount political value" (Williams 1997, 1; cf. Raz 1982, 89). I would insert in this definition of the liberal normative goal only the word equal before individual. Equal individual freedom, or as close to it as it may be possible to come, is the ideal toward which communitarians directed their particularistic metaphysics (i.e., their particularistic ontologies and moral epistemologies).

Even communitarian particularism, however, turns out to parallel (non-consequentialist) liberalism. The latter, I will maintain, is actually as particularistic as communitarianism, differing only in privileging the particularities of individuals rather than those of communities. This is because of the nature of the two doctrines' shared metaethics.

To understand communitarianism, then, we need to focus less on the different "positions" of liberals and communitarians and more on the overarching similarities. By identifying these similarities and pinpointing their role in producing the defects of communitarianism, we can resolve a host of puzzles that, while pointed out during the course of the initial liberal-communitarian encounter, were largely left unexplained. These puzzles were, as the liberal critics who underscored them realized, tokens of an underlying incoherence, but the exact nature of the problem never became a topic of research.

Most crucially, focusing on communitarian/liberal similarities allows us to specify how and why the communitarians undermined their own recognition of key problems in liberalism, such as its at-least-

arguable tendency toward value relativism. Once we strip away the communitarians' misdiagnosis of liberal problems, as well as the underargued and unsound communitarian alternative to which this diagnosis committed them, we will be led toward metaethical conclusions that are surprising and significant in their implications for liberalism: namely, that value monism is a logical presupposition of decision making under free will (rather than being, as in one commonplace view, merely a feeling that we commonly have about our values); and that for similar reasons, freedom of action, the liberal ideal, can have no intrinsic value.

I. Communitarianism as Political, Not Metaphysical

A standard liberal argument against communitarianism held the latter to be antithetical to liberalism because communitarianism endorses whatever the community values, no matter how oppressive such values might be to the individual. Thus, in response to Alasdair MacIntyre's apotheosis of communally defined virtues, Stephen Holmes (1993, 114) asked whether "we want to call 'virtues' those traits that enable a Mafia hit-man to act as a Mafia hit-man is supposed to act." In like vein, Nancy Rosenblum (1987, 54; cf. Gutmann 1983, 319) pointed out that a community can easily impose relationships "that may be experienced as suffocating rather than embracing." Ian Shapiro (1990, 146) made a different but congruent point about MacIntyre's communitarianism: that it is too indeterminate to be of any use in making moral judgments. Adolf Eichmann participated in the practices and displayed the virtues endorsed by the Nazi community; MacIntyre,

Shapiro argued, has no principled grounds for distinguishing such practices and virtues from more acceptable ones. If there is no way of discriminating between good and bad communities, anything goes. Holmes (1993, 105, 110) drew the logical conclusion from this indeterminacy, equating communitarianism with "sociological relativism" or "cultural relativism"--even while noting (as Shapiro did) that "relativism is not what MacIntyre has in mind" (ibid., 110).

The charges of immorality, indeterminacy, relativism, and--taking note of Holmes's caveat about MacIntyre's intentions--inconsistency were among the most damaging indictments of communitarianism, but they did not (either as a matter of subsequent history, or as a matter of logical consequence) establish any real distance between communitarianism and liberalism. For by integrating these four charges into a more comprehensive picture of communitarianism than can be found in the critical literature, we can locate traces of common ground between the two doctrines. It is on this common ground that the liberal-communitarian convergence later took place.

We might most readily begin by linking the charge of relativism with that of immorality. If communitarianism embraces all communities' practices, whatever their content, it is not hard to see how this may mean sanctioning immoral practices--depending on the community in question, and depending on one's standard of morality. To charge communitarianism with relativism is also to indict it for endorsing community practices that, from a nonrelativistic perspective, are immoral.

The charge of inconsistency, too, can be related to relativism

and immorality. Holmes (1993, 88; cf. Buchanan 1989, 872), noting that communitarians "malign liberalism verbally, but when faced with practical choices, reveal a surprising fondness for liberal protections and freedoms," attributed the inconsistency between bold and timid versions of communitarianism to communitarians' fear of the immoral consequences of their doctrine--immoral from a liberal perspective. Similarly, Simon Caney (1992, 275) pointed out that communitarians "oscillate" between the view that "individuals are wholly shaped by their community and cannot distance themselves from any feature of their cultural context," on the one hand, and, on the other, the less controversial, more timid claim that "individuals are partly shaped by their community but can distance themselves from certain features of their cultural context." Will Kymlicka (1989, 55) showed that when Michael Sandel puts forward his version of timid communitarianism, he concedes so much to liberalism that "it's not clear whether the whole distinction between the two views doesn't collapse entirely." "MacIntyre's argument," Kymlicka continued, "suffers from a similar ambiguity," such that if one takes the timid version of MacIntyre's doctrine seriously, "it's not clear how MacIntyre's view is any different from the liberal individualist one he claims to reject" (ibid., 56, 57).²

Perhaps communitarians weakened their doctrine to the point of inconsistency so as to avoid the immoral communal practices that bolder, more relativist versions of communitarianism would sanction. As Amy Gutmann (1985, 319) put the point, communitarians "want us to live in Salem, but not to believe in witches": they want to endorse

community authority, but not its unsavory moral consequences.

By conjoining the critics' accusations of communitarian inconsistency, relativism, and immorality, then, we can arrive at the following hypothesis. There is a core communitarian doctrine that is, indeed, distinct from liberalism; but that this doctrine is so relativistic, and would therefore ratify such illiberal practices, that communitarians don't have the stomach to adhere to it consistently. The inconsistencies in communitarian thought noted by so many critics are, in this view, a sort of defense mechanism against the immoral consequences of communal relativism.

The indeterminacy noted by Shapiro may also be apposite here--not only in that, as noted above, it connects communitarian relativism and immorality, but as a phenomenon in its own right. Virtually every critic noted that communitarians grew "nebulous" when it comes to specifying "the good" produced by community, and that they were correspondingly "hazy" as to how a communitarian society would differ, if at all, from a liberal one (Holmes 1993, 178; Herzog 1986, 473 [and passim]; cf. Gutmann 1983, 318; Larmore 1987, 122; Stout 1988, 223). One reads the key communitarian texts with a gnawing feeling that a positive alternative to liberalism will never be revealed, and this premonition is too often borne out: on the few occasions when a discrete proposal seems imminent, expectations are almost always disappointed.

MacIntyre, for instance, vacuously concluded that "the good life for man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man" (1984a, 219). Sandel wrote of "deliberating with fellow citizens about the

common good" (1996, 5), but he never specified how we are to know what the common good consists of. Perhaps communitarians shied away from specifying the good because had they tried to specify it, they would then have had to come to grips with the illiberal content of the good suggested by bold, relativistic communitarianism.

Piecing these hypotheses together, the critical literature allows us to paint the following picture. Communitarians shared liberal values that conflicted with the collectivist metaphysics they defended. This may explain why they vacillated about how radically we are to interpret their claim for the priority of the community over the individual; why they avoided discussing the concrete, let alone the practical, ramifications of this claim; and, why, in the end, they retreated from it, making so many concessions that communitarianism easily turned into a new form of liberalism--one that is preoccupied not with any specifiable "good," but with personal "identity," and with the cultural grounding that is needed to produce a liberal identity that would sustain tolerant citizens; or, for perfectionist liberals, truly autonomous choosers. In short, communitarians were actually liberals in disguise, so they pulled the radical, relativistic teeth of their metaphysics so they might forestall its illiberal implications.

I accept this view of communitarianism as accurate, but radically incomplete. The most obvious unanswered question it raises is why closet liberals would have promoted such a potentially illiberal doctrine in the first place. Why equate the moral subject, or the good itself, with the communal, only to end up retreating from the obviously relativistic and illiberal consequences of taking such an equation

seriously?

Two possible explanations come to mind.

The first explanation is that communitarians had independent commitments to doctrines about the communal constitution of the subject or of the good, and that these commitments ran afoul of their conflicting devotion to liberal ideals. Let us call this the metaphysical explanation for communitarian inconsistency, indeterminacy, relativism, and immorality.

According to this explanation, the communitarians' skittishness about their metaphysics was a contingent matter. It happened to be the case that really existing communitarians were "good social democrats" (Beiner 1992, 20) who did not have the courage to go along with the radically relativistic and, therefore, potentially immoral implications of their metaphysical claims;³ so they weakened and obscured these implications, leading to inconsistency and indeterminacy. But--the metaphysical explanation continues--inconsistency and indeterminacy are not inherent in communitarianism (although relativism and immorality may well be).

Thus, we can imagine in contrast an ideal type of the bold, pure communitarian who would have stuck with her metaphysics to the bitter end. Such a communitarian would have eschewed timid versions of communitarianism, and would not have been afraid to spell out the pure doctrine's potentially oppressive implications. According to the metaphysical explanation, then, the liberal normative commitments of the really existing communitarians may explain the weaknesses in their presentation of the doctrine; but liberal norms are irrelevant to the

heart of that doctrine.

The dichotomy between pure and really existing communitarianism will play an important part in the detailed analysis of Sandel, Taylor, Walzer, and MacIntyre undertaken in Part I. But that analysis will also show the metaphysical explanation to be insufficient, because in truth, each of the communitarians relied not on metaphysical but on political arguments--to vindicate their metaphysics. In various ways, the communitarians claimed that communitarian ontology and epistemology--which I have been lumping together under the rubric of "metaphysics"⁴--are desirable precisely because they protect liberal norms.

Liberal normative commitments, therefore, served not only to weaken communitarian metaphysics, but to call forth the implicit ideal type of the bold communitarianism that constitutes one of the poles between which communitarians vacillate. Thus, the central claim of Part I is that both the pure and the impure elements of really existing communitarianism are "motivated," loosely speaking, by liberal normative goals. That is, regardless of whether these goals provided psychological motivation for really existing communitarians--regardless, that is, of whether communitarian writers were fully aware of what they are doing--liberal norms provide the chief logical grounds that communitarians gave for supporting their metaphysics.

In the few instances in which communitarians provided non-normative arguments for their metaphysics, we will find that these arguments patently begged the question against individualist metaphysics. But by and large, the communitarians did not even attempt

to demonstrate that communitarianism is sound. Instead, they made two claims that, while suggesting that individualism is politically harmful and even metaphysically false, do not at all show that communitarianism, however politically salutary, is metaphysically true.

The first claim is that if we would accept communitarian metaphysics as true, whether in theory or in practice—if we would believe it to be true—this belief would lead to desirable political consequences, from a tacitly liberal perspective. Namely, this belief would secure a social order more protective of equal individual freedom than we can achieve as long as we believe in individualist metaphysics. Communitarian metaphysics, in short, is strategically valuable because belief in it leads to institutions that better secure liberal ends.

Thus, Michael Walzer contended that distributing goods in accordance with a culture's "shared understandings" of their social meanings is an effective strategy for preventing the tyranny that occurs when some people can transform their dominant position in one good into a monopoly over all goods, and thus into unchecked power over their fellows. But Walzer did not even try to show that shared understandings are accurate.

Charles Taylor, too, made a strategic argument; he sought to replace atomistic modes of Western thought with a belief in the soundness of republicanism, for if we came to see patriotic political participation as good in itself, we would be more willing to do what is necessary to secure our (equal individual) freedom. Again, though, Taylor did not demonstrate, or even attempt to demonstrate, that patriotic political participation is good in itself.

Taylor's student, Sandel, also tried to revive republican ideology, primarily in order to enhance our atrophying sense of interpersonal obligation. But he did not, any more than Taylor, show that republicanism is true, i.e., that we have the interpersonal obligations that a republican sense of identity, or even an intersubjective ontology, might ground.

The least predictable (and most radical) communitarian was MacIntyre. But despite his constantly changing positions on many points, great and small; and despite his dissent from the social democracy that Walzer, Taylor, and Sandel defended; his Catholicism; and even his anti-modernism, a careful reading of his work from its beginnings through After Virtue shows that he, too, was always deeply and unequivocally dedicated to the ideal of equal freedom.

In MacIntyre's canonical view, the advantage of a community, in which individuals are inducted into ongoing traditions by being trained in traditionally sanctioned social "practices," is that this would give them a common scale of values--the "virtues" internal to the practices --that would spare them the need to bend each other to their individual wills as each pursued unshared, incompatible ends. The point of training in social practices, then, is to produce a society of free and equal people--by pre-empting the need for interpersonal coercion and manipulation that occurs in individualistic cultures like our own, where people imbibe unshared ends. But MacIntyre did not argue that shared ends are actually true. He argued only that if we thought they were, we would stop mistreating each other--in the sense of forcibly subordinating each other to unshared ends.

It is fitting that these writers' ideas have come to be known as "communitarian." Although the term was repudiated by MacIntyre and, to an extent, by Sandel,⁵ it captures what is distinctive about their alternative to liberalism: collectivist metaphysics. Yet the truth of this metaphysics gains no support from the claim that belief in it, or in institutions based upon it, would produce desirable results (when judged, as beliefs and practices are in the communitarians' work, against liberal normative standards). To say that communitarian ontology and communitarian moral epistemology are politically useful is not to demonstrate that these are valid philosophical approaches.

II. The Metaethical Similarities of Communitarianism and Liberalism:

A Plague on Both Houses

The second communitarian claim looks more promising for the truth-value of communitarianism. This is the contention that liberal individualism validates arbitrary and subjective preferences. This claim leads to the most familiar communitarian accusation: that liberalism is guilty of subordinating "the good" to "the right."

Thus, Sandel (1982, 1) described deontological liberalism as the view that "society, being composed of a plurality of persons, each with his own aims, interests, and conceptions of the good," should be governed according to "the concept of right, a moral category given prior to the good and independent of it." It is an upshot of deontology, Sandel maintained, that "deliberation about ends can only be an exercise in arbitrariness." For the ends pursued by individual subjects reflect nothing more than "an arbitrary collection of desires

accidentally embodied in some particular human being" (ibid., 167).

This renders the individual's selection of ends nothing more than what Rawls calls a "'purely preferential choice,' which means the ends we seek, being mired in contingency, 'are not relevant from a moral standpoint'" (ibid., 180). (That's why, according to Sandel, it would be preferable for the community to stamp liberal ends as relevant from a moral standpoint by labeling them "good.")

As MacIntyre (1988, 133) put it, in the liberal view "the multifarious and conflicting desires which individuals develop provide in themselves no grounds for choosing which of such desires to develop and be guided by and which to inhibit and frustrate." We who live in liberal societies "possess no unassailable criteria," according to MacIntyre, "by means of which we may convince our opponents" about moral issues over which we disagree. "It follows," he argued, "that in the process of making up our own minds we can have made no appeal to such criteria or such reasons" (1984a, 8). (That's why we have to use coercion, not persuasion, to gain each other's cooperation.)

As my parenthetical insertions are designed to show, the communitarians' claim that individualism is subjectivistic is not incompatible with their claim that it is politically pernicious. Indeed, although I will isolate the two claims from each other so as to exhibit their logical defects, they are invariably presented hand in hand: because of their subjectivist individualism, according to the communitarians, liberals are unable to defend liberal values as objectively true (Sandel), or to treat people in an egalitarian, noncoercive manner (MacIntyre). Chapters 2-6 will demonstrate that

Sandel and MacIntyre make these particular arguments, and that Taylor and Walzer make similar ones.

In Chapter 8, I will contend that liberal subjectivism and arbitrariness are real problems, problems that are severe enough to render the most popular versions of liberalism invalid. The communitarians were right about this, and it is important. But the communitarians misdiagnosed the source of these problems and, therefore, prescribed a patently invalid remedy.

The communitarians erroneously attributed these problems, which boil down to value relativism, to individualistic ontology and epistemology. This is the best explanation we have (albeit the only explanation, to my knowledge) of why they clung to communitarian alternatives that were themselves so defective that they had to be hedged in to the point of nullity. For (the communitarians seem to have thought) if individualism is fatally flawed by value relativism; if this flaw undermines the norm--equal freedom--to which they (like liberals) were committed; and if the opposite of individualism is communitarianism; then (it might seem to follow that) communitarianism is not only politically salutary, but true. That this is how it seemed to the communitarians would also explain their otherwise incongruous assumption that their critiques of liberalism as politically undesirable had the same philosophical standing as their critiques of it as relativistic, and their inference that communitarianism is not. Turning from the explication of communitarianism to the critique of it, however, I will argue that vindicating communitarian metaphysics requires more than showing that individualism is unsound. The

communitarians assume that theirs is the only alternative to individualist metaphysics, but it does not follow that if individualism is false, communitarianism must be true. They might both be false. That this is the case is suggested by the fact that "pure" communitarianism itself relativistically sanctions arbitrary values--the arbitrary values of the community--in direct parallel to the manner in which, as communitarians justly point out, liberalism sanctions the arbitrary values of the individual. But because the communitarians were convinced that liberal relativism flows from metaphysical individualism, they concluded that the solution must be found in some form of metaphysical community, as if the arbitrariness of individually sanctioned values somehow renders communally sanctioned values nonarbitrary. Hence the basic communitarian error: the assumption that, if the apotheosis of individual preferences produces arbitrariness and value relativism, then the apotheosis of communally sanctioned values will produce objectively true values.

That this assumption is unwarranted is the gravamen of Chapters 2-6. For now, let us briefly consider one example.

Taylor's Sources of the Self opens with a magisterial call for an ethics based on "discriminations of right or wrong, better or worse, higher or lower, which are not rendered valid by our own desires, inclinations, or choices, but rather stand independent of these and offer standards by which they can be judged" (1989, 4). In defense of such independent criteria of the good, Taylor notes that "in following one's immediate wishes and desires," one may sometimes "take a wrong turn" (ibid., 14). The concept of taking a wrong turn demands a

criterion of what is wrong, or bad; and consequently of what is right, or good. Such a criterion presupposes that certain "ends or goods stand independent of our own desires, inclinations, or choices" (ibid., 20). But, Taylor points out, the indiscriminating endorsement of any and all individual ends relativizes the good, and entails arbitrarily embracing as good whatever the individual desires.

Since Taylor attributes this problem to the liberal apotheosis of the individual, however, he turns to communitarian metaphysics as the alternative. This leads to his advocacy of civic republicanism and, as I will argue in Chapter 4, nationalism: remedies, in his view, for atomistic individualism. Yet Taylor endorses only forms of nationalism that are not tyrannical. This endorsement is, from a pure-communitarian perspective, both under- and overinclusive.

It is underinclusive because the tyrannical nationalist regimes of which Taylor disapproves are just as faithful to communitarian metaphysics as are republican ones. Taylor endorses a democratic, non-imperialist, and liberal republican nationalism because it would put social identity before the individual rights that he holds responsible for value subjectivism; but social identity is put before individual rights all the more so if the nation-state is externally ruthless in its pursuit of collective goals; and if individual rights are not part of the social identity the nation-state pursues internally. Taylor's restriction of his endorsement of nationalism to its nontyrannical forms unjustifiably constrains the pure-communitarian implications of his critique of individualist relativism--diluting communitarianism in the interest, apparently, of avoiding what Taylor considers

unacceptable political consequences.

Yet even Taylor's watered-down version of nationalism (and of communitarianism) is also overinclusive, according to his own standard of opposition to value relativism. For Taylor fails to discriminate right from wrong, better from worse, higher from lower conceptions of the good pursued by different nontyrannical republics--just as atomistic individuals, in his view, fail to make such distinctions among their conceptions of the good. Indeed, in reality, much of the nationalist sentiment promoted by the republican nation-states Taylor endorses is based on pernicious falsehoods; but he no more screens nationalisms for their mendacity than liberals vet the accuracy of the various individual conceptions of the good protected by pluralist societies. Taylor's communitarianism, then, appears to fall victim to something very much like the arbitrariness regarding ends that he condemns in liberalism--albeit a non-individualist species of arbitrariness.

If so--and if, as I shall maintain in the following chapters, the same is true of Walzer's, Sandel's, and MacIntyre's communitarianisms--then it would appear that the liberal critics got it right: communitarianism substitutes relativism between communities for relativism between individuals. Communitarianism exchanges, for the liberal inability to discriminate among arbitrarily chosen individual goods, an inability to discriminate among arbitrarily chosen communally constituted goods. Communitarianism does not get us any closer to an objective good than liberalism does.

Although liberal critics of communitarian relativism were

justified in pointing this out, however, there were no resources in contemporary versions of liberalism with which to explain this communitarian failing. Why is (pure) communitarianism so plainly relativistic? Contemporary liberals cannot help us answer this question (which may be why, instead of asking it, they have often dropped their objections to communitarianism entirely), because liberalism shares the same metaethics that causes communitarianism to be indeterminate and relativistic.

I call this metaethics voluntarism. This is intended not only so as to acknowledge Sandel's splendid attacks on liberal "voluntarism," but the similarity of both liberal and communitarian metaethics to the original voluntarism: the late-medieval theological doctrine exemplified in Ockham's metaethics.

Theological voluntarists held (or were thought to hold) that whatever God wills is, ipso facto, good. To impose on God prevenient moral standards, voluntarists believed, would detract from His dignity. Similarly, non-consequentialist liberalism holds, or so I will argue in Chapter 8, that whatever the individual wills is, ipso facto, good (as long as it does not violate the boundaries between individuals--which protect each individual's authority to determine the good). And (pure) communitarianism likewise holds that whatever one's constitutive community "wills" is, ipso facto, good.

Liberals and (pure) communitarians both accept voluntarist metaethics. They differ only over the locus of moral authority: the agent whose decision determines what is good. Is it the community or the individual?⁶ This Sophoclean question leads to the conflation of

normative philosophy and metaphysics, and thus to the preoccupation of communitarians with the nature or "identity" of "the subject."

It also leads to formalism and apriorism. The presupposition of disputes over the metaphysics of morals is that it is up to the winner of the dispute--be the winner God, the individual, or the community--to decide what is good. It would therefore violate the metaethical premises of theological voluntarism, liberal voluntarism, and communitarian voluntarism to specify what the good is. For specifying the good would negate the authority of God, the community, or the individual to "decide" what is good. Communitarianism is, just as much as liberalism, merely a formal procedure for determining the good, without reference to its content.

III. Voluntarism and the Intrinsic Worthlessness of Freedom

A number of Renaissance and early modern philosophers wrote powerful rebuttals to theological voluntarism. The most effective of these polemics, published at the dawn of the Enlightenment by Leibniz, provides the basis for an alternative, nonvoluntarist metaethics. This is the subject of chapter 7.

Leibniz showed that God (and, I would add, every agent with free will), makes, with every free choice, an absolute (albeit, in the case of human agents, fallible) assertion of the goodness of the end chosen. In Leibniz's view, the will is merely instrumental to the end served by a free decision; and to value the freedom of the will, as voluntarists do, on intrinsic rather than instrumental grounds would be inconsistent with the instrumentalist presupposition of the exercise of that

freedom.

Why does the exercise of free will presuppose its instrumentality toward a good end? Because without a good end toward which the action following from a decision pointed, the free agent would be unable to decide what to will: every option open to her would be equally sanctionable by her own authority. She would be in the position of Buridan's Ass, and any actual decision she made could only, therefore, of necessity, be heteronomously determined, not freely willed. Thus, to maintain that freedom is an end in itself flies in the face of the nature of freedom, which is exercised only by extinguishing itself in an action that precludes all other possible choices of action. The chosen action is merely a means to some other end (the putative good).

In Chapter 8, I consider whether, in fact, contemporary liberalism does place intrinsic value on individual freedom. Despite the denials of some liberals, I suggest that in most cases this is exactly what contemporary liberalism does.

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The question facing beings with free will is: What is good? Both liberalism and communitarianism avoid this question by delegating the power to answer it to some authority, transforming questions of practical reason into questions of power. This makes political philosophy both easier (no matter how technically difficult it becomes) and less important. Political philosophy comes to focus on formal distributions of decisional authority rather than on the question

always facing those with the power of decision: How should they exercise it?

In short, political philosophy--and politics--come to be about the right rather than the good. In place of the truly difficult matter of how to exercise choice, political philosophers face the relatively easy task of deciding who should have the authority to choose.

Communitarianism, and most forms of liberalism, are equally nebulous about the good because they counsel that the good is whatever the community or the individual, respectively, takes to be good. In place of arbitrary individual preferences, (pure) communitarians put not some end or set of ends, but the arbitrary authority of one's community to set one's ends. Communitarians therefore cannot be said to accord any more priority to "the good" than liberals do. Communitarians merely replace the individualist version of "the right" with a collective version, labeling as "the good" the values privileged by a collective source of moral authority. Or, to put the matter differently, (pure) communitarianism tries to be just as neutral between competing conceptions of the good as Rawlsian liberalism tried to be--as long as these conceptions are communally sanctioned.

Neutrality has the advantage of forestalling the need to identify one way of life as superior to others--a task so daunting that it would be well worth avoiding, if only this were possible. The catch is that it is not possible. Neutrality toward different communities' or individuals' conceptions of the good therefore amounts to an endorsement not of none but of all of them. Hence the value relativism common, I will maintain, to communitarianism and liberalism alike.

NOTES

1. I am aware of only two attempts to "explain" communitarian philosophy in anything like the sense proposed in the text: Michael Walzer's article, "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism"; and the chapter on MacIntyre in Stephen Holmes's The Anatomy of Antiliberalism. Both of these attempts, in my view, are inadequate.

Walzer divides communitarianism into two camps, one of which attacks liberal practice, the other liberal theory (cf. Yack 1988). Implicitly placing himself, Sandel, and Taylor in the second category, he offers a justification of attacks on liberal theory but (legitimately, if his justification is sound) not an explanation of them. On the other hand, Walzer places MacIntyre in the first category and does offer an explanation of his form of communitarianism.

Essentially, Walzer contends that MacIntyre's opposition to liberal practice is prompted by concern over sociological atomization, as if MacIntyre thinks "the incoherence of modern intellectual and cultural life and the loss of narrative capacity" are evils in themselves. In this view, "the triumph of private caprice" is bad merely because it robs "our choices...of cohesion and consecutiveness" (Walzer 1990, 8)--rather than the problem being, as I will maintain in Chapter 7, that the lack of cohesion and consecutiveness produce the triumph of private caprice. Holmes, similarly, attributes to MacIntyre concern for the psychological damage caused by uncertainty stemming from lack of narrative cohesion.

In truth, however, MacIntyre is no psychologist of what Holmes calls "the bitter loneliness of 'modern man'" (Holmes 1993, 92). MacIntyre never bemoans, as objectionable in itself, the "terrifying lack of certainty" that follows from "disagreement and doubt" (ibid.). Therefore he does not propose "narrative unity" as something good in itself (see Chapter 6). Disagreement and doubt are, for MacIntyre, markers for the absence of objective--i.e., communally determined--values; and that lack of objectivity, in turn, is undesirable because it is the breeding ground for "emotivist" interpersonal manipulation. Once one notices that MacIntyre (1984a, 23) expressly opposes emotivism on Kantian normative grounds--that is, because emotivism allows people to use each other as means to their personal ends--it becomes difficult to follow Holmes in placing MacIntyre in the "antiliberal" camp (see Chapter 2 below), and impossible to posit a psychological or sociological motivation for MacIntyre's communitarianism.

Moreover, when Holmes turns from MacIntyre's supposedly psychological arguments to his philosophical claims, his explanations of the puzzles to which I have pointed in this chapter are so bereft of interpretive charity that they do not really explain anything. We come away with a picture of MacIntyre as a philosopher who "waffles uncontrollably"; who makes "obscure" arguments that occupy entire chapters, even though they are but "side-line[s]"; whose thought is "rack[ed] and vitiate[d]" by a conflict between "half-concealed theological commitments" and communitarian ones, and which "bubbles over with other contradictions, large and small"; who strives "to keep readers off balance"; who "masochistically" highlights "his own self-

refutation"; etc. (Holmes 1993, 90, 98, 98, 103, 103, 103, 115, 108).

But why would MacIntyre commit these sins? Although Holmes makes many telling criticisms of the validity of MacIntyre's arguments, he does not explain why such an obviously talented philosopher would produce such "patent[ly] feebl[e]" work (ibid., 99).

2. Although Caney and Kymlicka might accept my speculation that what moves communitarians to weaken their doctrine is the fear that, undiluted, it would sanction undesirable normative consequences, they both couch their discussions of timid versions of communitarianism in terms of the plausibility of bold versions of communitarian metaphysics, such that the reason for communitarian vacillation appears to be doubt about the soundness of undiluted communitarian accounts of the self or of moral epistemology. Kymlicka's discussion of this question in chapter 4 of Liberalism, Community, and Culture is unsurpassed. But approaching communitarianism as if it were a series of metaphysical claims produces little but a catalogue of communitarian errors. If our goal is to understand why such an erroneous doctrine emerged and still exercises great appeal, I think we need to shift toward a political explanation of communitarianism.

3. Beiner distinguishes between social-democratic communitarians and MacIntyre, as will I in calling Sandel, Taylor, and Walzer "optimistic" communitarians and MacIntyre a "pessimist"; and in emphasizing the Marxist roots of MacIntyre's version of communitarianism. Nonetheless, MacIntyre's Marxism is motivated by the same liberal norm that animates

the optimistic, social-democratic communitarians: equal individual freedom. See Chapter 6.

4. Why it should be convenient to group subject ontologies and moral epistemology under the rubric of "metaphysics" is something that should become clear in the course of the discussion, in Chapter 6, of the communitarians' attempt to get around the distinction between facts and values.

5. See MacIntyre 1991b and Sandel 1998, Preface to the 2nd Edition.

6. To be sure, even the purest ontological communitarian need not believe in the literal existence of a collective being with a will; and liberals need not explicitly maintain that it is the individual's decision alone that produces the goodness of the end toward which this decision points. See, respectively, Chapters 7 and 8.