

PART II

THE EMPTINESS OF COMMUNITARIANISM--AND LIBERALISM

CHAPTER 7

VOLUNTARISM AND COMMUNITARIANISM

"It is an oddity of communitarian thought that it is something philosophers may believe although it is not what particularistic communitarians of actual communities believe. The latter do not believe that what communities establish is therefore right. Rather, they believe their views are right, even to the point of justifying the suppression of others."

-- Russell Hardin (1995, 24)

"Rational people in the real world care about their beliefs not because their beliefs are theirs, but rather because their beliefs are (they suppose) true."

-- Robert P. George (1993, 134)

Part I portrayed the communitarian philosophers as torn between their liberal normative convictions and the particularistic means that, they insist, better achieve these convictions than universalist

individualism does. Sandel's, Taylor's, and Walzer's critiques of liberalism, although intended to secure equal individual freedom--and democratic nation-states--against individualist erosion, inadvertently undermine this goal by validating the norms of all communities, including those that are unfree and inegalitarian. For, in suggesting that pure communitarianism protects the objectively good against the relativizing subjectivity of individualism, these writers move from strategic claims for the political expediency of their metaphysical views in securing equal freedom to the claim that these views are true.

This truth-claim is required if individualist liberalism is to be portrayed not only as ineffective, but invalid. But if the communitarian truth-claim is valid, then whatever the community values is, ipso facto, true, and communitarianism is no longer a politically effective means of securing equal freedom, since the community may value hierarchy or coercion. By the same token, MacIntyre's more pessimistic critique of emotivism is intended to lead to a society of noncoercive, nonmanipulative interpersonal relationships--a society enacting a more radical version of equal freedom. But by blaming emotivism on individualism, and by suggesting further that his communitarian remedy achieves not only interpersonal agreement but objectivity, MacIntyre is propelled toward the apotheosis of all traditions as objective, regardless of the actual ends they inculcate as "the good."

All four communitarians, then, find themselves supporting metaphysical claims that undermine the political goals that, in the absence of convincing metaphysical arguments, should be seen as

"motivating" them in the philosophical sense. This dilemma leads each of them retreat from pure communitarianism and its politically unsavory consequences. Thus, in reaction against the immorality that would be sanctioned by a philosophy modelled on pure, "heroic" communitarianism, MacIntyre endorses standards of justice that would limit communal authority and communize the distribution of communal resources; he sanctions individual freedom to decide "tragic" value choices; and he proposes criteria of intertraditional rationality that would dignify the tradition he maintains would lead to communism as superior to other traditions. Similarly, Sandel, Taylor, and Walzer attach provisos to their communitarianisms that function as roadblocks to the legitimation of undesirable--illiberal--communities. But these various constraints amount to community-transcending, universalistic norms. Their upshot is to make the impure communitarianisms of our authors virtually indistinguishable, in practice, from the liberalism they so vociferously denounce.

The self-contradictory dynamic, and the baroque structure, of communitarianism are due to its advocates' refusal to rest their case on strategic grounds alone. By insisting on the truth-value of communitarian ontology and epistemology, communitarians conflate what MacIntyre calls "social facts"--the given norms and practices of a community--with values.

Social facts appear, to the individual, as givens: they are the normative stances her peers have already taken (Sandel, Taylor, Walzer) or those that are already contained in their practices (MacIntyre). What is supposed to bridge the is-ought gap is the authorization of

these givens by the community. This is-ought bridge is the source of pure-communitarian open-endedness, and thus of the tension between the liberal normative ends communitarianism is intended to achieve and the endorsement of illiberal community ends against which the various constraints are deployed. For if the mere fact that a community favors something is sufficient to make it good, then whatever a community favors must be good--contrary to the political intentions of all four communitarians.

A pure communitarian could correctly point out that the illiberal results of communitarianism do not constitute an argument against it. For such an argument would beg the question: if communitarianism is sound, then illiberal norms are good as long as they are sanctioned by a community. Merely to decry the illiberal consequences of pure communitarianism, then, constitutes a liberal form of strategic and political, rather than philosophical, argumentation. An alethic (rather than strategic) argument against communitarianism cannot be premised on liberal value judgments that would be rendered false if communitarianism is true.

Thus, the fact that communitarianism would sanction, say, Nazi communities would cut no ice with a pure communitarian. If a community adheres to Nazism, then Nazism must be the good for members of that community, and it must therefore be incumbent on them to be faithful Nazis. Only a strategic communitarian--such as the really existing communitarians with whom Part I dealt--would be bothered by the liberal's claim as to the alleged immorality of such a result, since the political purpose of the really existing communitarians is

precisely to avoid immorality--immorality as defined by the liberal norm of equal freedom. To avoid the defeat of their political project at the hands of the pure communitarianism implied by their critique of individualism, MacIntyre, Sandel, Taylor, and Walzer end up compromising the pure doctrine almost beyond recognition, effectively rendering themselves liberals (or radicals).

If any form of communitarianism is to pose a real philosophical challenge to liberalism, it is pure, not constrained communitarianism. One purpose of Part I was to show that--despite the constraining superstructure with which really existing communitarians have burdened themselves so as to remain true to their liberal goals--the only thing that is distinctive and, thus, potentially challenging about their doctrine is its pure base.

This is not to suggest, however, that pure communitarianism is sound. The point is simply that the liberal argument from immorality, captured by the Nazi reductio, does not show that pure communitarianism is unsound. Pure communitarianism is protected from this liberal argument by the truth-claim that distinguishes it from both liberalism and, in the end, from watered-down, strategic communitarianism.

Why should anyone should find the pure communitarian truth-claim interesting when even "really existing" communitarians, in the end, reject it? Because, I will argue, it echoes the truth-claim most contemporary forms of liberalism make about the moral authority of the individual. Where pure communitarianism transforms social facts into values, liberalism does the same thing with what might be dubbed "individual facts": personal tastes and preferences, subjective choices

of the good. This is what the communitarians recognize when they criticize the arbitrariness of the liberal individual's choice of ends (MacIntyre, Sandel), the individual's simple weighing of preferences (Taylor), and the philosopher's subjectivity (Walzer). But as Part I was intended to demonstrate, critiques of liberal subjectivism, at least insofar as they have been undertaken by Sandel, Taylor, Walzer, and MacIntyre, do not logically culminate in communitarianism. In place of any but the most perfunctory arguments (MacIntyre's) for the truth-value of communitarianism, we find arguments only for its political expediency (MacIntyre, Walzer, Taylor, Sandel).

In this chapter I will contend that sound arguments that move from condemning liberal relativism (subjectivism) to affirming communitarianism are absent because it is not individualism--the metaphysical antipode of communitarianism--that is responsible for the apotheosis of "individual facts." In assuming that the source of liberal relativism is individualist ontology or epistemology, communitarians box themselves into assuming that the alternative to subjectivism must be a collectivist ontology or epistemology: the apotheosis of social facts. This is how communitarianism winds up reproducing, at the level of the community's "preferences," the emptiness that MacIntyre, Sandel, Taylor, and Walzer justly attack when it occurs at the level of the individual.

Usually, given the underargued nature of the communitarians' truth-claims, the move from critiques of individualism (1) to validations of communitarianism (~1) are only implicit. In Sandel's work, for example, each time the argument switches gears from the

subjectivity of liberal understandings of the good, the objectivity of communitarian understandings is simply assumed. (Only Sandel's claims for the political superiority of an intersubjective ontology are buttressed by arguments: arguments, for example, about the need to rescue the difference principle from Nozickian objections.)

Occasionally, however, the communitarians edge toward actually enunciating the assumption that if the priority of the individualistic right subjectivizes the good, then the conferral of moral authority on the community "objectivizes" it. MacIntyre (1994, 233) writes, for example, that "the types of practice within which moral thinking is put to the relevant practical tests and achieves objectivity" are "marginalized by the self-aggrandizing and self-protective attitudes and activities characteristic of developing capitalism"--i.e., individualistic attitudes. A little bit more directly, Taylor (1994, 24) opposes "an ethic of rules [against] an ethic whose more basic concept is the good"; and he equates these two ethics with two views that he calls "the universalist and communitarian, respectively." Moreover, he equates universalism with individualist liberalism (*ibid.*, 23), and he associates this political philosophy with "the fact/value split" (*ibid.*).

Why, then, does Taylor think that communitarianism heals this split and re-prioritizes the good? Historically, he suggests, the good had been assumed to inhere in the teleological order of the universe, until in the thirteenth century theological voluntarism repudiated such an order as "incompatible with the sovereignty of God" (*ibid.*, 18). If, as the voluntarists held, God's free will could not be constrained

by any natural teleology, then the universe must be "utterly neutral"-- a world of facts, not values (ibid.). "Later," Taylor maintains, "something of this conception of freedom is transferred on to man....The [fact-value] split has to be seen as part of a new understanding of freedom and moral agency....Neutrality is the property [man] ought to perceive in the world, if he is to realize his potentiality as the free agent of dignity and rational control"--just as the voluntarists had insisted on the moral neutrality of the world if God were to realize His potentiality as the free agent of dignity and rational control (ibid., 18, 20, 20). So, according to Taylor, modern liberals substitute the sovereign individual for the voluntarist God as the source of the good in a morally neutral natural world; but in so doing, liberals disguise what they really take to be the substantive good--individual freedom--behind the mask of proceduralist neutrality, which has no official place for "substantive notions of ethics" (ibid., 27).

If only Taylor would have rigorously spelled out the communitarian half of the equation--the claim to find the good in the morally non-neutral facts of the social world--its invalid nature would be clear, for neither Taylor nor any other communitarian explains what it is about the social world that confers on its facts--i.e., the shared opinions of the members of a society--the authority of objective values. Instead, Taylor appeals to the fact that "we" liberals already accept individual freedom as the good, as if this makes freedom good. Then, having linked individualism with the opposition to any such derivation of values from facts, it follows (circularly) that Taylor

can derive the goodness of freedom from the fact that we collectively believe in its goodness. Any non-circular statement of his reasoning, however, begs the question: (1) individualist universalism (2) neutralizes (3) the good--individual freedom--because it divorces value from natural facts; therefore, (~1) communitarian particularism must, by having recourse to (~2) what MacIntyre (1984a, 123, emphasis added) calls "social facts," revalorize (~3) the communally valued end of individual freedom. What is absent from this argument is any reason to think that social facts--particularistic ends--are valid; all it establishes, arguendo, is that they are facts, i.e., that they are valued. But the factual existence of a certain norm in a particular community is no more of a reason to consider it valuable than the existence of a certain desire in an individual is a reason to consider it desirable.

Perhaps nothing more is at work here (aside from complacency about the goodness of individual freedom) than a misuse of the history of philosophy: if the universalist subordination of the good to the individual is what devalorized (natural) facts, Taylor seems to assume, then the particularist subordination of the good to the community would revalorize (social) facts. But this logic, in turn, rests on a conflation of individualist subjectivism with universalism. This conflation makes communal values seem, by contrast, objective because of their particularism. But the contrast is illusory, since communitarianism is no less universalistic than individualism: both communitarians and individualists think their view is true, hence universally applicable. More importantly, individualism is no less

particularistic than communitarianism: both reduce values to particular opinions, whether those of the individual or of the community.

At bottom, we may have a simple verbal confusion. The association of unsubstantive, empty proceduralism--unconstrained by any "objective" good--with the "subjectivist" willfulness of the voluntarists' God and the liberals' individual makes any "factual" basis of norms that transcends individual or theological will seem objective--whether this basis is a telos inherent in nature or one inherent in the trans-individual community. But a retelling of Taylor's story that does not rest on superficial verbal contrasts would locate, in the absence of any argument for the objectivity of social as compared to individual facts, a third step in the spread of voluntarist metaethics. The second step was the extension of a proceduralist metaethics from God to the individual. The third step is the extension of this metaethics from the individual to the community, by virtue of nothing more than the assumption that whatever is extra-individual is more "objective" than individual subjectivity. The alacrity with which Taylor et al. accept this assumption without even identifying it, let alone defending it, suggests that they are trapped by the very metaethics Taylor is trying to transcend.

One reason this metaethics is so hegemonic may be that what it seems to supersede, naturalism, is also proceduralist. If communitarians equate the good with communal facts (shared opinions), and non-consequentialist liberals equate the good with individual facts (individual opinions), and theological voluntarists equate the good with divine facts (God's will), is it not also the case that classical

philosophers, and the Platonist and Aristotelian versions of Christianity that were challenged by theological voluntarism, equated the good with natural facts? This equation is just as proceduralist, unsubstantive, empty, arbitrary, and--I will argue--relativistic as the equation of the good with individual or social facts. Only the unitary nature of the universe obscures the structural similarities between naturalism, theological voluntarism, liberal individualism, and communitarianism. But if there were only one community, or one individual, would its or her decisions about the good become, ipso facto, objectively good? No--no more than the unitary nature of God renders His decisions automatically good.

The first step in the progression Taylor recounts, then, is the transfer of moral authority from whatever is natural to whatever God wills. The second and third steps transfer moral authority, respectively, from whatever God wills to whatever the individual chooses, and from whatever the individual chooses to whatever the community values. All four of these derivations of value are proceduralist, empty, and relativistic--as indicated by the "whatever." None of them are substantive; whatever is substantively good is left, as it were, to the facts of nature, of God's will, of individual choice, or of communal "identity."

This is not intended to be a historically substantiated genealogy of the rise of either theological voluntarism or of nonconsequentialist liberalism. I hope, first, merely to have extended backwards (to naturalism) and forwards (to communitarianism) Taylor's own suggestion of a logical progression from theological voluntarism to liberalism, a

progression that historical investigation might well find to be unrelated to the causal forces at work. But in the reasoning, or lack of it, provided by communitarians--in their substitution of complacent political assumptions for any reason to equate what a community already "thinks" good with what is good--I hope to have also provided at least a prima facie historical case that the last step in the logical progression, the move from liberalism to communitarianism, can be causally explained as an unintentional extension of naturalist/voluntarist/individualist metaethics.

In the remainder of this chapter I will try to show that, far from the fact-value distinction being the source of subjective emptiness, it is the attempt to overcome this distinction that generates normative emptiness of all kinds. Proceduralism inheres in the idea that the sanction of some empirical "source"--the individual, the community, God, nature, or anything else--could render norms valid.

Following Taylor (and Sandel), I will call this idea--the metaethical background to both communitarian and liberal attempts to bridge the is-ought gap--voluntarism, because I intend to direct against it the critique of theological voluntarism that Leibniz produced in his Theodicy. My exposition of Leibniz's critique of theological voluntarism is designed establish the presumption that any voluntarist doctrine is not only normatively empty, but that it is invalid: not because it undermines some pregiven political value, but because it necessarily leads to incoherent value-relativism. It should then be a relatively simple matter to establish that pure communitarianism is "voluntaristic" and therefore incoherent. The task

of the final chapter will be to demonstrate that the same is true of most variants of modern liberalism.

God's Will and the Good

Theological voluntarism was a product of the crisis in thirteenth-century theology precipitated by Latin Averroism. The Latin Averroists were philosophers at the University of Paris who, in the 1260s and 1270s, seemed, at least to their critics, to abandon the Scholastic attempt to reconcile the newly translated texts of Aristotle with the dictates of Christian orthodoxy. Thomism had exemplified this attempt. Although MacIntyre (1990) soft-pedals the possibility that Aristotle and Christianity are incompatible, the fact is that Aristotle's understanding of man and nature confronted Christian theology with a series of potentially fatal problems.

Among these was a threat to the autonomy of God. As Gordon Leff (1976, 25) has put it, "instead of God as the immediate creator and conserver of the universe, who had freely brought it into existence and governed it by his providence...God became merely an indirect first mover who did no more than set in motion an eternal procession of cause and effect." Francis Oakley (1984, 80, emphasis added) notes that while Aquinas was therefore able "to regard the whole of being...as in its own fashion subject to the dictates of the same [eternal] law," one consequence of this view was "that subjection to law could well be seen to extend to God himself, thus threatening his freedom and omnipotence,

since the eternal law is nothing other than one aspect of the divine reason, and in God reason is prior to will." Aristotelianized Christianity, in short, threatened to subordinate God to universal law, rendering Him unnecessary except at Creation and constraining His actions thereafter.

Non-Averroist Scholasticism in general, and Thomism in particular, dealt with the threats posed by Aristotle by resubordinating philosophy to theology. Rather than achieving a genuine synthesis of these antithetical approaches to knowledge (as MacIntyre suggests), Scholasticism yoked reason to the task of confirming what was already known through revelation. By contrast, the Latin Averroists departed from Scholasticism by teaching an Aristotle untamed by Christian glosses; but they were faithful to the Scholastic tradition in a deeper sense. The practice of the schools--the immense energy they devoted to rationalizing Christianity--implied that philosophy was independently important, even while the official conclusions of Scholasticism refused to allow philosophy an independent role. The Averroists took the philosophical spirit of Scholasticism more seriously than the theological letter.

The pope reacted to these unbridled philosophers through the agency of the Bishop of Paris, Etienne Tempier, who in the year 1277 issued a proclamation condemning 219 "obvious and loathsome errors" derived from "the accursed pagans" (quoted in Hyman and Walsh 1973, 584). The lasting effect of the condemnations of 1277 was to turn Christian theology decisively against the notion that reason could elucidate matters of faith (again, a matter MacIntyre underplays).

Within a few decades of 1277, the greatest late-medieval theologian, William of Ockham, had canonized this semi-irrationalist via moderna by sharply distinguishing between theology and philosophy. What united all aspects of Ockham's thought was a repudiation of the idea that the philosopher can discern the ways of God.

Doctrinally, the via moderna held "that to describe God in terms of a first cause was to regulate His actions; that to attribute to Him a constant mode of operation impaired His absolute sovereignty. Accordingly, emphasis was coming to be placed upon the infinite freedom of His will which defied analysis or explanation" (Leff 1958, 258). This is what gave rise to theological voluntarism. Against Aristotelian "determinism," which portrayed the universe as a stable order with dependable, epistemically accessible natural laws (laws that bind even God), voluntarism endorsed supernatural willfulness and unpredictability: the ongoing possibility that God might have created or might recreate the world in such a way that its laws, including its moral laws, would be entirely different from those we know. To free God from pagan subjection to human principles, it had to be true that the content of any particular set of laws is not what makes them good; rather, they are good solely by virtue of their inscrutable origins in divine command. Voluntarism was thus a crucial part of the late-medieval effort to build an unbreachable wall between what reason can know and what must be taken on faith, an effort that culminated in the Reformation.

Voluntarism expresses one pole of a fundamental contradiction in Christianity: the conflict between God's absolute omnipotence and His

absolute goodness. Long before the advent of Christianity, however, Plato (1941, 41) had outlined the basic problem in the Euthyphro: "Is what is holy holy because the gods approve it," Socrates asks, "or do they approve it because it is holy?" If what the gods approve is holy only by virtue of their approval--if there is no standard of holiness independent of the fact that something has been commended (or commanded) from above--then "holiness" does not mean "good" in the traditional sense so much as it means "willed by the gods." Socrates' opposed view, though, which subordinates divine will to a transcendent standard of holiness, is equally troubling for Christians, since God's omnipotence is as much a part of Christian dogma as His goodness. If, as Socrates argued, the quality of holiness, or goodness, is independent of divine approval, then God would seem to have no choice but to will the good, which suggests a constraint on His power. Yet if God is omnipotent, no limits on His power would seem to be acceptable.

That was the conclusion theologians reached after 1277. The Socratic view, which would have subordinated God's omnipotence to His goodness by ruling out the possibility that He could will something that is (independently defined as) evil, had been foreclosed, in effect, by the Bishop of Paris. For this view would have imposed upon God the standards of good and evil known to mere human reason. Thus, it came increasingly to be accepted that whatever God willed was, ipso facto, good.¹

In the service of voluntarism, Duns Scotus, the first great theologian of the decades following 1277, revived the doctrine of God's two powers, which had been devised by Peter Damian more than 200 years

earlier. God's ordained power, according to Damian, stands behind the laws governing creation, including the ordered universe and the moral laws we know, such as the Decalogue. But God's absolute power includes the power to overturn these laws; this power is restricted, Scotus now maintained, only by the law of non-contradiction. Paul Tillich (1967, 490) characterizes God's absolute power this way: God, as "sheer will...can do what he wants. He has within himself no intellectual limits....God can withdraw both the natural and the moral orders. If he wanted, he could make murder good, and love bad."²

"In making God's will the sole arbiter of good and bad by reference only to what he wills," Leff points out, "Duns effectively subsumed ethics under logic and began the slide to ethical relativism: something is good because God as good wills it rather than it is willed by him because it is good, and since he can will whatever is not self-contradictory, the only thing he cannot will is hate of himself as the highest good" (1976, 54). However, Scotus's most brilliant follower and critic, Ockham, while continuing to accept that God could not will what is self-contradictory, denied that His power has any other limits:

The hatred of God, theft, adultery, and actions similar to these according to the common law...can be performed by God without any evil condition annexed; and they can even be performed meritoriously by an earthly pilgrim if they should come under a divine precept, just as now the opposite of these in fact fall under a divine command.

(Ibid., 56-57.)

Because God wills something, it is therefore good. (Ibid., 65.)

The analogy between pure theological voluntarism, the doctrine that God's will is what makes something good, and pure communitarianism is obvious. One need only substitute "the community" for "God" in the passages just cited. What is right, just, or good is, for the theological voluntarist, established by the moral authority of God; for the pure communitarian, by the moral authority of the community. The structural assumption at work in both cases is that morality does not inhere in the content of an action or a value, but in the positive evaluation of an action, or a value, by some moral authority.

Given this similarity, perhaps we can derive a critique of pure communitarianism from some of the arguments that have been made against theological voluntarism.

The Argument from Immorality

First, let us consider the charge that voluntarism would sanction immorality.³ This argument is of interest because it anticipates the liberal argument against the immorality of communitarianism.

Among those who made the argument against theological-voluntarist immorality were the Cambridge Platonists Ralph Cudworth and Nathanael Culverwel. Taking up the specific question Scotus and Ockham had

raised, Culverwel (1971, 174) contended that

there are some evils so excessively evil, so intolerably bad, as that they cannot but be forbidden; I shall only name this one; Odium Dei, for a Being to hate the Creatour and cause of its being....That to hate God should not be sin, does involve a whole heap of contradictions; so that this evill is so full of evill, as that it cannot but be forbidden; and therefore is an evil in order of Nature before the Prohibition of it.

Culverwel's argument begs the question. He presupposes the immorality of hating God, regardless of God's decree; but the voluntarists are contesting just this assumption by claiming that no act that God decrees can be immoral. Ockham (1962, 56-57), for example, writes that actions that we consider criminal, if

done by an earthly pilgrim meritoriously...would not be called or named "theft," "adultery," "hatred," etc.; because these names signify such acts not absolutely, but with the connotation or understanding that one who performs such actions is obligated by a divine precept to do the opposite....If, however, the acts in question fell under a divine command, then someone who performed them would not be obligated to do the opposite; and consequently, they would not then

be named "theft," "adultery," etc.

Theological voluntarists claim that what makes something good or just is its approval by God. It will not do, then, for the opponent of voluntarism merely to adduce an example of an "obviously" immoral act that might be sanctioned by God, since the voluntarist claim is that whatever God approves of is, ipso facto, not immoral.

The same can be said of a more subtle version of the argument from immorality that we might derive from G. E. Moore. Moore points out that, were voluntarism correct, then "if God did not exist, nothing would be wrong" (1965, 65). A tough-minded voluntarist would simply agree.

The problem with arguments from divine immorality is that they are unresponsive to those who are truly determined to defend God's power from the hubristic incursions of human reason.⁴ Similarly with liberal arguments from communitarian immorality. Only if we presuppose the transcendent goodness of our own (liberal) community's (non-Nazi) values does the possibility of sanctioning a Nazi community become an argument against pure communitarianism. But the issue raised by pure communitarianism is whether, in fact, any community's values are transcendentally good. By the same token, the question raised by theological voluntarism is whether the goodness of, say, the Decalogue transcends its authorship by God.

The argument from immorality fails because it proceeds at the wrong level. If voluntarist metaethics is valid, this legitimizes whatever ethics are promulgated by the designated moral authority (in

this case, God); such norms, therefore, cannot be the basis for challenging voluntarism. Leibniz avoids this problem by criticizing voluntarism at the metaethical (i.e., the metanormative) level, not the normative one.⁵

Leibniz on the Nature of Choice

Leibniz is well known for his monadology and, more popularly, as the model for Voltaire's Dr. Pangloss, who was so effectively satirized in Candide. But for our purposes, what is interesting about Leibniz is why he was driven to "gloss over all" of the evils of the world.

Like the Scholastics, Leibniz tried to reconcile the principles of God's goodness and His omnipotence. But Leibniz answered the voluntarists (who in his day were primarily Cartesian in inspiration) by reversing the Scholastic subordination of reason to faith. Although he tried to accept the premises of orthodox Christianity, Leibniz tamed God's power with His goodness. This is what led Leibniz to claim that ours is the best of all possible worlds. In line with their conviction that we cannot independently judge God's work as good, the voluntarists held that our world and its laws could justly be reversed by divine fiat. Against this position, Leibniz made the following essential point: "If there were not the best (optimum) among all possible worlds, God would not have produced any" (1951, 128, sec. 8). Tied together in this brief statement are both Leibniz's Panglossian conclusion and a profound insight about the nature of morality. Let me see if the

latter can be rescued from the former.

Leibniz begins, crucially, by assuming that God seeks the good. And since "a lesser good is a kind of evil if it stands in the way of a greater good," he reasons, "there would be something to correct in the actions of God if it were possible to do better" (1951, 128, sec. 8). But since, ex hypothesi, God is omnipotent, it could not be the case that He fails to do what is best. If God seeks the good, He must, being all-powerful, succeed in finding it. Therefore, the world God has created must be the best world possible. Otherwise God, being both omnipotent and benevolent, wouldn't have created it.

Leibniz is committed by this argument to explain away all the enormities of earthly existence. For the most part, his strategy is to assert that we are aware of only part of a vast universe, and that what seems evil in our corner of the world must in some way be necessary to the best overall order. For instance, "since [God] has permitted vice, it must be that that order of the universe which was found preferable to every other required it. One must believe that it is not permitted to do otherwise, since it is not possible to do better" (ibid., 197, sec. 124).

This is the type of speculation Voltaire found so odious. But Leibniz's Panglossianism only follows from combining his metaethics with the premise that the Christian God, omniscient and omnipotent, exists. Remove this premise, extract the philosophy from the theology, and Leibniz provides a decisive rebuttal of all forms of voluntarism, free of the paradoxes of theodicy. Leibniz's rebuttal of voluntarism is contained in his recognition that, granting the existence of a

creator God, He would not have created any world but the best one. God, Leibniz claims, "always wills what is most to be desired" (1951, 323, sec. 327). Only when Leibniz goes on to assume that God not only wills but knows and achieves what is best (e.g., *ibid.*, 428) can he conclude that the world God created must be the best one possible. I am not interested in defending these theological assumptions. But the assumption that God--if He existed--would always will what is best is a different matter.

This assumption is, of course, just as much a Christian dogma, and therefore as much a given in any Christian theodicy, as are the doctrines of God's omniscience and omnipotence (not to mention His existence). But Leibniz suggests that the assumption of good will also stands on its own as a description of all choosing agents. "Taking it in the general sense, one may say that will consists in the inclination to do something in proportion to the good it contains" (*ibid.*, 136, sec. 22). Leibniz's reasoning is simple: "Every will supposes some reason for willing, and...this reason is naturally anterior to the will" (Leibniz 1953, 5). Any act of will presupposes an antecedent, justifying reason. This reason is the desire to do whatever is "best." Why else would an agent perform an action but because she thinks that--according to whatever criterion of goodness she is employing--this action is best, or will lead to the most good?

Leibniz's argument tautologizes "the good": by definition, whatever one finds good (including one's self-interest) is what provides the motivating reason for one's will. This is to say nothing more than that Leibniz's is a metaethical argument, one that brackets

the content of morality in order to investigate the nature of moral choice per se.

Leibniz's metaethics rests on the observation that choice requires some motivation, some desire to achieve whatever is thought to be good. This motivation is what differentiates willed action from involuntary action. Accordingly, Leibniz distinguishes the anterior "determination" of an action by means of the agent's conception of the good--"moral" determination (Leibniz 1951, 236, sec. 174; 345, sec. 367)--from the anterior determination of an action by means of unwilled physical or metaphysical causes. Actions of the latter sort have causes but not reasons behind them. Willed or voluntary actions, however, are caused by the agent's reasons, and therefore presuppose some criterion of goodness that defines what is, in the agent's opinion, "the best."

A very clear recognition of the best determines the will; but it does not necessitate it, properly speaking. One must always distinguish between the necessary and the certain or infallible...and distinguish metaphysical from moral necessity. (1951, 313, sec. 310, emphasis original.)

Modern philosophers have improved upon the opinions of the Schoolmen by showing that, according to the laws of corporeal nature, a body can only be set in motion by the movement of another body propelling it. Even so we

must believe that our souls (by virtue of the laws of spiritual nature) can only be moved by some reason of good or evil. (Ibid., 407, sec. 3, emphasis added.)

Objects do not act upon intelligent substances as efficient and physical causes, but as final and moral causes. (Ibid., 427, sec. 20.)

Thus, while Leibniz, like Aristotle, "determines" the will by positing its necessary motivation by an antecedent criterion of goodness (a final cause), this does not mean that the will is determined by "metaphysical" or logical necessity (which Leibniz also calls "geometrical" necessity; *ibid.*, 299, sec. 282; cf. *ibid.*, 236, sec. 174, and 345, sec. 367) or by the efficient causes that affect, say, the position of a planet (which I will call "mechanical" necessity).

In the case of Creation, for example, "another sequence of things" could have been chosen than the order of our universe; therefore, God's will was neither mechanically nor logically necessitated (1951, 148, sec. 45; cf. Adams 1994, 33). But precisely because God's will is free of such strict determination, it is subject to moral "determination" instead: determination (that is, choice) according to God's understanding of the good. Since God's understanding is, ex hypothesi, infallible, God's actions are "determined only by the preponderating goodness of the object" (Leibniz 1951, 148, sec. 45). He does what is "best and therefore necessary, but...with a necessity that takes nothing away from freedom because it

takes nothing away from the will and the use of reason" (quoted, Adams 1994, 10-11). For in order "to preserve the privilege of free will" of any choosing agent (including God), it is enough that "we have been so placed at a fork in the road of life, that we can do only what we will, and can will only what we believe to be good" (quoted, *ibid.*, 11).

Having described the will as being morally determined precisely by virtue of its freedom (i.e., its freedom from strict, involuntary, or mechanical determination), Leibniz argues for the incoherence of the voluntarist understanding of God's will. Once we agree with Leibniz that willing presupposes some morally determinative criterion of the good or the "best," independent of and anterior to the agent's will, then we can see how God reaches a decision about which action to will: He evaluates the possible courses of action available to Him by judging them against just such a criterion. In the voluntarist understanding of God's will, by contrast, where the act of will is the criterion of goodness rather than being presupposed by it logically, God has neither grounds for a decision nor for an action.

This is why Leibniz maintains that "if there were not the best (optimum) among all possible worlds, God would not have produced any" (1951, 128, sec. 8). Had God lacked a reason (its optimality) for choosing our world over other possible worlds, He would not have been capable of deciding to create any world at all. The only thing that can motivate a decision, a choice, a volitional action, is the agent's belief that this decision is, according to whatever criterion of goodness the agent adheres to, the best action possible to her under the circumstances. All voluntary actions must be motivated by such an

antecedent belief. Only unmotivated actions--actions caused by true necessity rather than free choice--are bereft of moral determination.

The only immediately apparent objections to this view of choice are, first, that the will can choose evilly, that is, in defiance of the agent's criterion of goodness, as when an agent experiences weakness of the will; and, second, that the will can choose arbitrarily, unmotivated by any antecedent criterion of goodness, as when an agent is completely indifferent to the choice facing her. Let us consider these objections in turn.

Leibniz and Akrasia

Leibniz's understanding of choice implies that, by definition, there can be no weakness of a free will. A free will always embodies the agent's antecedent choice criterion, its assessment of final causes; whatever actions a free agent takes that are not determined mechanically are determined instead by an anterior criterion of the good. So it does not make sense to say that one's free will is weak: what it means to act freely is to have motivated one's action by some allegedly good final end.

What we commonly think of as weakness of the will is, of course, a real psychological phenomenon, but it can be redescribed from a Leibnizian perspective as manifesting either the agent's mechanical determination by appetites (and thus as an expression of an unfree will); or her free deliberation about, or wrestling over, which competing criterion of goodness is best. Considering only the latter

cases, Leibnizian metaethics implies that among the candidate anterior criteria of the good that may confront a given free agent are not only the elevated principles that are usually equated with morality, but such "immoral" or "amoral" considerations as impulses and appetites. When an agent, no matter how tempted by impulsive or appetitive desires, retains free will, such that these temptations do not amount to mechanical determinants of her choice, then there is no reason the agent could not consider the satisfaction of her desires to be good. (It was presumably Kant's failure to recognize this that led him to collapse metaethics into ethics, singling out a certain class of motives--"autonomous" ones --as being incumbent upon truly free agents.)

Whether it is legitimate for an agent to consider impulses and appetites as possible criteria of goodness is, of course, a different question, to be answered on a different level. I am simply describing in the terms of Leibniz's metaethics what does, in fact, occur in someone who is said to be akratic; I am not making an "ethical," i.e., normative, evaluation of akrasia. In a case of so-called akrasia, either the agent is mechanically determined, or an appetitive criterion of the good (or some other criterion whose presence the agent is loath to admit) ends up motivating her action, despite her felt conviction that other, perhaps more stringent or socially accepted, criteria are "good" or "right." By virtue of her appetitive action, the agent demonstrates that at the moment of decision, either her will is unfree or, if her will is free, that she actually finds the appetitive criterion to be better than its competitors, no matter what she says to

herself or to others. For in such a case she is in effect saying: "I scorn the judgements of my reason simply from considerations of my own good pleasure[;] it pleases me to behave thus" (Leibniz 1951, 316, sec. 314). She acts as if appetite were her express criterion of goodness, regardless of what she feels or says, for "it must be borne in mind that when I say, 'that pleases me', it is as though I were saying, 'I find it good'. Thus it is the ideal goodness of the object which pleases, and which makes me choose it among many others which do not please or which please less, that is to say, which contain less of that goodness which moves me" (ibid., 183, sec. 110, emphasis added).

Leibniz's view, although (like the competing metaethics of voluntarism) tautological, nonetheless (unlike voluntarism) accurately describes the situation that choosing agents face. All free choices must, to be free, be analyzable as being motivated (in a logical, not necessarily a psychological sense) by anterior reasons--by definition. A free agent who, if asked, would profess to believe that feeding her starving neighbor is more important than treating herself to a movie is in some sense mistaken about this belief if, in the event, she does the latter instead of the former. Obviously the sense in which she is mistaken cannot be psychological, since, being free, the mechanical determination of her action (for instance, by unconscious drives) is ruled out by definition. So her feelings or even her beliefs about her choice criterion cannot properly be what Leibniz is discussing. What matters are the agent's actions, from which the operative motivational criterion can be inferred. Her mistake is logical; she is fooling herself if, being free, she thinks that she finds charity better than

self-indulgence.

Leibniz admits that one may act "under the influence of inclination or passion [rather] than of judgement"; but he insists that even so, one cannot "come to a decision without cause" (1951, 316, sec. 314)--either mechanical/passionate or moral/judgmental. The perspective at work in Leibnizian metaethics is logical and the conclusion is tautological. Yet only this analysis captures free agents' psychological experience of wondering what ends to pursue. This is what might be called "the metaethical experience," and although, being psychological rather than logical, it is not required for Leibniz's metaethics to work, it does illustrate what Leibniz means. The familiar experience of doubt corresponds to something logically inescapable about an agent with free will: her need for some "good" or "right" end to motivate her action, and the difficulty--at least in circumstances in which the individual is aware of her free will--in determining which candidate end is truly good or right.

Leibniz and Pluralism

Rebutting the argument from akrasia was not one of the concerns of Leibniz's Theodicy, since the notion that God has a weak or an evil will was too heretical to warrant much attention (cf. Leibniz 1951, 59; *ibid.*, 237, sec. 177). By contrast, the notion of free action that is not motivated by an antecedent criterion of the good was one of Leibniz's central targets, because it is entailed by theological

voluntarism. If (ex hypothesi) God has a free will, and if Leibniz's account is false, such that God is not constrained by an antecedent criterion of the good, then how does He decide what to do? The voluntarist answer has to be that God can will things arbitrarily or indifferently--that is, that He can will them without either mechanical or moral determination.

Leibniz's answer to the idea of an "indifference of equipoise" (1951, 148, sec. 46) is not that it is undesirable--say, because it has immoral consequences. His answer is, instead, that it is "impossible" (ibid., 143, sec. 35; ibid., 316, sec. 314; ibid., 319, sec. 320).

Like his assertion that the will is logically determined by some criterion of goodness, Leibniz's denial of the possibility of arbitrary, random, or indifferent free choice rests on the principle of sufficient reason (e.g., Leibniz 1951, 419, sec. 14; ibid., 147, sec. 44). Every action has a cause. God's actions must be caused either by (a) a metaphysical or mechanical force, in which case He would not be omnipotent; or by (b) His own free will. But by the principle of sufficient reason, free will, even God's free will, does not escape causality; it is simply subject to causality of a different type than that affecting concepts or physical objects: an internal form of causality in which a criterion of goodness (a final cause) takes the place of an external force (an efficient cause). The impossibility of indifferent choice is grounded, then, not in God's nature, but in the nature of will. Since "a cause cannot act without having a disposition toward action" (ibid., 149, sec. 46), the notion that a free agent is "capable of acting without any inclining reason" is an "absurdity [of

which] no example will ever be found" (ibid., 148, sec. 45).

In order to distinguish efficient causality from the final causality that determines a free will, Leibniz calls a morally determined action one that "originates from a prevailing reason which inclines without necessitating" (1951, 419, sec. 14, emphasis added). This allows him to affirm both that "there is always a prevailing reason," the inclination, "which prompts the will to its choice"; and that "the choice is free and independent of necessity, because it is made between several possibles" (ibid., 148, sec. 45).

The free substance is self-determining and that according to the motive of good perceived by the understanding, which inclines it without compelling it; and all the conditions of freedom are comprised in these few words....The infallible determination that is involved in our contingency [destroys] neither freedom nor contingency. (Ibid., 303, sec. 288.)

By contrast, the claim that God's action can be free yet unmotivated by the good comes down to the assertion that, like Buridan's Ass (ibid., 150, sec. 49; cf. ibid., 311, sec. 305), God's will is confronted with plural alternatives that neither determine nor incline; but that, unlike the legendary animal, who starved because unable to choose between two identical piles of hay, God can somehow use His will to leverage Himself out of this indifference. By arguing to the contrary

that, without a morally determining reason, God would have had no motive for creating one world instead of another, Leibniz recognizes that any agent equally disposed, or indisposed, toward all the possibilities open to her would be unable to make a choice between them--unable, that is, to act. At a stroke, Leibniz renders value pluralism incoherent for agents with free will.

"An indifference of equipoise" among plural alternatives, Leibniz argues, entails "that, until the will has determined itself, there would be no reason for its determination, either in him who chooses or in the object; and one would not choose what pleases, but in choosing without reason one would cause what one chooses to be pleasing" (ibid., 406, sec. 1). But this would make choosing itself impossible, because prior to the choice, we would find none of the options pleasing. If we could choose without moral determination, therefore, it would mean that any "choices" that actually got made would have to be determined by mechanical causes, not free will. We would be automatons.

This concludes Leibniz's argument, for he has shown that theological voluntarism rests on a view of choice that violates the presumption of God's freedom. In their attempt to end the threat to God's autonomy posed by independent, universally valid Aristotelian criteria of the good, the theological voluntarists have actually deprived God of autonomy, since only such criteria of the good could motivate choices that are free from mechanical determination. Since an indifference of equipoise could not motivate action, if God is not subject to criteria of goodness that are antecedent to His will, His actions could stem only from mechanical compulsion.

In refuting theological voluntarism, Leibniz paints the following picture of choice even by fallible human agents. All actions are determined, whether through metaphysical or mechanical necessity, or through the application, by a free agent's reason, of an anterior moral criterion. If one has free will, one needs such a criterion to govern one's action. This criterion is the "good" to which one's action is directed; one acts as one does because of one's perception that this action will produce "the best," according to the criterial standard. An agent's criterion of (putative) good is what determines how she uses her freedom in a given instance; it determines the content of her will. Therefore, the notion that goodness could follow from a free agent's decision, rather than logically preceding and determining it, must be erroneous. For it is incoherent to imagine an action that is both free and undetermined by a criterion of goodness. The will that took such an action would, in fact, either be unfree--determined by mechanical necessity, rather than by moral reasoning--or, like Buridan's Ass, it would be incapable of action, since it would lack determination by either moral or mechanical causes.

Thus, while an agent might temporarily be indifferent among hypothetical options (a concession that, to my knowledge, Leibniz does not make), such equipoise can last only until the agent must exercise one of those options; that is to say, only until the agent makes a choice and takes one action or another. This action could flow only from an external, efficient cause or an internal, final cause. Final causes govern choices made by agents with free will. God must either be determined by temporally anterior efficient causes--mechanical

causes

--or by logically anterior final causes--independent standards of goodness. Either way, theological voluntarism is false; and so, too, are secular versions of voluntarism.

Reconstructing the Argument from Immorality

Leibniz's metaethics provides what is lacking in the arguments against theological-voluntarist immorality. These arguments, we will recall, beg the question asked by voluntarists: whether there can be standards of morality that are independent of God's will.

Consider first the version of the argument from immorality I drew from Moore. Moore points out that if the presupposition of theological voluntarism were correct--that is, if morality were determined by God's commands--then, in the absence of God, there would be no morality (and no immorality). The inference could be drawn that since some specific things are "obviously" moral (say, helping those in need) while others (say, murder) are just as clearly immoral--regardless of the existence of God--then plainly, theological voluntarism must be false.⁶ Such a conclusion begs the question against theological voluntarists, though, since the more rigorous among them, at least, will retort that nothing is, in fact, either moral or immoral without a divine command.

If Leibniz's view is correct, this retort cannot be right: some ends or others are moral, others immoral, not because of God's choices, but because of the precondition of those and all other choices: free

will. Morality is called into being not by divine fiat, but by the fact that God (if He exists), and all other free agents (if there are any), must make choices. Free choices necessarily distinguish the putatively good (that which is chosen) from the putatively bad (that which is not chosen). Free will entails normativity: the condition of having to make choices requires evaluative criteria with which to make them. Thus, assuming that human beings have free will, the "existence" of morality and immorality is a logical necessity. We could not dispense with morality, even if God did not exist--any more than God could dispense with anterior criteria of the good by achieving an "indifference of equipoise"--because like God, we must take actions by choice, actions that require normative criteria if they are to have any motivation.

The question-begging feature of the Moorean version of the argument from immorality lies in its assumption that theological voluntarism is incorrect because of the continuing validity of specific normative criteria whose violation voluntarism would sanction (in the absence of God). According to the voluntarist view, though, there can be no such criteria in the first place, so the Moorean argument relies for its validity on what is at issue. A Leibnizian argument against voluntarist immorality, in contrast, does not beg the question because it claims not that certain things (such as altruism or murder) are obviously right or wrong, even without God; but that for beings with free will, some things or other have to be right or good and others, wrong or bad. Thus, voluntarism would condone immorality/badness in the absence of God not because it would license the pursuit of some

particular end or the commission of some particular type of act whose immorality is assumed to be obvious, but because, as agents with free will, we must proceed as if some ends or actions (i.e., those that do not conform to our criteria of goodness, whatever their content may be) are bad, regardless of what God may say about it. The Moorean version of the argument from immorality is important because it raises the question of whether morality would be possible without God; and the Leibnizian answer must be Yes, since morality can have nothing to do with God in the first place--if human beings have free will.

However, even in the less radical form in which the argument from immorality was formulated by the Cambridge Platonists, where God's role in establishing morality went unquestioned, the Leibnizian alternative remains important. For Leibniz shows that even God's absolute (as opposed to ordained) decisions would presuppose some anterior normative criteria. These criteria, whatever their content, would, in being independent of God's will, have the effect of tagging their opposites as immoral. Therefore God could not legitimately reverse those of His

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absolute decisions that He made at T --i.e., His ordained laws--since this would mean that the criteria embodied in the absolute decrees at

T would contradict the criteria embodied in the laws ordained at T ;
and not even God's absolute power can coherently contradict itself.

By the same token, the problem with pure communitarianism is that
1 2 3 N

it sanctions the claims of all communities, C₁ , C₂ , C₃ ...C_N ; but this
means that, if any two communities' values contradict each other, both
are, somehow, right. This is the prima facie incoherence that renders
communitarian value relativism invalid. It also renders communitarian
value relativism incoherent as an account of choice among communities.

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For just as God could not motivate His action at T without the
implicit claim that the anterior criterion of this action is

universally good--the source of the contradiction with T --one cannot
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freely adhere to community C 's practices without making the implicit
claim that the anterior criteria of the good embodied in those
practices are universally valid (for people similarly situated in all
relevant respects), and hence that the contradictory criteria of
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community C are invalid (for such people). If one held to the pure
communitarian view, one would be unable to motivate one's membership in
one community rather than another; for this motivation is incoherent if
all communities' norms are equally valid. The pure communitarian tries
to sustain a position of indifferent equipoise; different community
values are, to her, like the bales of hay confronting Buridan's Ass.
If we have free will, however, this position is incoherent, for it

would make choice among the values in question, and thus action, impossible. The only way around this problem is for communitarians to treat one's community membership as a given, reducing people to mechanically determined agents rather than beings with free will.

Conversely, along with Leibniz's metaethics goes universalism, for a free agent's anterior criterion of action is, of necessity, a motive that, to the extent that it is valid, holds good for any relevantly situated agent. Along with voluntarist metaethics goes particularism, for what distinguishes the good of one person from that of another is, in the voluntarist view, the accident of whether the relevant moral authority--be it God or the community--happens to have willed that particular good.

Having again broached the issue of universalism, it is important to be clear about what it does and does not mean in this context. It does not necessarily mean that there is a set of rules that applies to every person in every culture. There are all sorts of imaginable universalist views that can allow for variations in obligation according to time, place, culture, or personality. For example, if one takes the ultimate criterion of the good to be human happiness, and if the empirical evidence suggests that there is a wide variation in the conditions that make particular people happy, then there should be an equally wide variation in what is considered obligatory. Such variations do not produce relativistic value conflicts because the various agents are not similarly situated. The utilitarian holds that all agents should be (logically, not necessarily psychologically) governed, in the end, by the criterion of happiness; but this criterion

will produce different prescriptions according to the particular factors that impinge on different people's happiness.

Among these factors may well be community membership. If agent
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A has grown up speaking the language and practicing the customs of
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community C , then it may be good, according to the happiness criterion
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that (putatively) holds across all communities, for A to do different
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things than A , raised in community C , should do. Universalism does

not necessarily mean uniformity. For as long as diversity is justified by a universal anterior criterion of the good, it does not present us with the relativistic picture inherent in the notion that the conflicting criteria chosen by different moral authorities--such as God

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at T versus God at T , or community C versus community C --are somehow equally valid. Nor need it necessarily portray agents as either incoherently indifferent as to which communities and ends they value, or as deterministically motivated in these allegiances (although, speaking empirically, many people are, of course, deterministically motivated in their communal and normative allegiances).

By contrast, voluntarism entails relativism because of its particularist understanding of morality. Theological voluntarism embodies a temporally particularistic view of God's will. The doctrine of God's absolute power means that all of His actions over time are good even though, expressing nothing more than His will at particular moments, unconstrained by temporally transcendent, universal standards, the principles of these actions may contradict each other, such that either side of the contradiction is both good (since it is sanctified by the moral authority of God) and bad (in the light of its antithetical, but equally sanctified, principle). Either God will act

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immorally at T₁ , when measured against the norms governing His actions
 at T₁

at T₂ ; or He acted immorally at T₂ , when measured against the norms of
 at T₂

T₁ . Since, according to voluntarism, God's moral authority renders both norms valid, one of these norms must be both valid and invalid. This is the contradiction entailed by value relativism. Its applicability to the contradictory values of communities is too obvious to require laboring.

Having identified particularism as the source of communitarian relativism, we can now reconstruct the argument against communitarian immorality in a manner that does not beg the question, as the liberal forms of this argument do. Liberal arguments against, say, the possibility that communitarianism would condone Nazi communities rely

on specific ethical judgments of a sort that (pure) communitarianism eschews, begging the question as surely as do non-Leibnizian arguments against the voluntarist God's immorality. But by adapting Leibniz's critique of theological voluntarism to do service against communitarianism, we recast what were question-begging arguments against communitarianism into necessary truths of metaethics. Even granting the pure-communitarian premise that, say, Nazism is good if it expresses the German community's particular identity, Nazism cannot coherently be defended on such grounds--because no ethics can be coherently defended on particularist grounds, if we have free will. It is in the nature of free will to be evaluative, and of evaluation to be universalistic. In logically preceding the action of a particular will, a criterion of goodness transcends that particularity, constituting a claim of universal applicability to all agents situated in like relevant circumstances--relevance being something that is determined by the criterion, not the choosing agent.

Instances, such as Nazism, of (pure) communitarian immorality are direct consequences of the communitarian version of particularism, which guarantees the possibility that what one particular community pronounces good may be countermanded by the authority of another community. By the standards of some of the communal authorities it may endorse, communitarianism must, in principle, sanction immorality. This is because communitarianism is voluntaristic, and the voluntaristic conception of morality, being particularistic, is incompatible with the criterion-bound nature of free choice. Moral criteria could not motivate free action if they did not purport to

universal validity: validity that transcends any particular agent's authority by logically anteceding it.

It would appear, then, that if we are free agents, we must reject not only theological and communitarian voluntarism, but any voluntarist metaethics, because all such metaethics are particularistic. We would engage in something like a performative contradiction if we affirmed in our philosophizing what, whenever we make a free choice, we must act as if we believe is false: namely, that the criteria of our actions are merely the arbitrary products of contingent communal norms or divine commands that have no more validity than the particular norms of the next given community or the divine whim of the next particular moment. We cannot act as if we believe this, because the nature of our situation--our need to make choices--does not permit us to do so. If we really thought there were no universal criteria to govern our choices (criteria, that is to say, that transcended our agency), we could take no actions; and mechanically underdetermined inaction is itself a choice, hence a form of action. To act in a manner that is consistent with particularism is impossible for the same reason that acting consistently with voluntarism is impossible: voluntarism's relativistic assignment of moral authority to the contradictory values that may be endorsed by particular moral authorities is incoherent as an account of what could motivate any free agent's will (including the wills of the authorities). If we have free will, it is just as unimaginable, to us, that particularism, hence relativism, is true as that a square circle could exist.

It may not be possible to act as if we believe in particularism.

But is it possible genuinely to believe (mistakenly) in it? Rather than tackling this question--the question of whether belief in voluntarism is "impossible"--it is sufficient to conclude that belief in it is "untenable": impossible to act upon, a performative contradiction as a description of free action, and internally contradictory in its relativism. (I also leave aside the more familiar and direct performative contradiction involved in believing in the nonrelative truth of the claim that there is no nonrelative truth).

Communitarian Determinism

The preceding discussion has assumed that a straightforward comparison can be made between theological voluntarism and pure communitarianism. This assumption allows one to apply Leibniz's argument from the nature of choice to communitarianism, condemning the communitarians for taking--in their pure-communitarian moments--a metaethical position that leads to relativism, immorality, and incoherence. In brief, the argument is that if all of God's possible decisions were equally right, He would have no way of making a choice between them; and that if all communities' values were equally right, choice between them, too, would be impossible.

But whose choice? No modern communitarian attributes a God-like will to the community. Even Sandel's "intersubjective being" is a metaphor, presumably, for a collection of socially constituted but volitionally separate individuals. So it is not literally true that

communitarians want to see the "will" of the community stand in for that of God. To make the comparison between theological and pure communitarian voluntarism work, therefore, I have had to point to contradictions between pure communitarianism and the nature, not of the community's "will," but that of the will of the reader choosing between communities: the reader in her philosophical--deliberative--capacity. Human beings free to choose their membership in communities, I have maintained, would be unable to decide between particular communities' norms without a criterion of normative goodness that is independent of determination by those communities.

The pure communitarian could reply, however, that by replacing the dictates of a communal will with the will of a "philosopher" choosing between communities, I have begged the question against communitarianism. What else, after all, is a philosopher who steps back from all particularity if not an atomistic, unencumbered individual allegedly capable of adducing considerations "anterior to" her communal constitution? All four communitarian philosophers consider the idea that one can (or should) engage in such individualistic (hence universalistic) choice to be illusory (or immoral).

In its place, they contend, is (or should be) an ethics based not on the arbitrary decisions of a nonexistent communal will, but on what MacIntyre (1984a, 24, emphasis added; cf. idem 1988, 339) calls "impersonal criteria." These criteria are considered objective because they flow not from the will of any individual subject, but from the American (Sandel), Western (Taylor), or Thomistic (MacIntyre) tradition

--or from whatever culture one finds oneself within (Walzer). In comparison to this intersubjective understanding of communitarianism, Leibnizian metaethics may itself seem voluntaristic, in the literal sense that it is grounded in the nature of a free individual "will" that plays no role in justifying communitarianism. Indeed, part of the appeal of communitarianism undoubtedly lies in its appearance, at least, of antivoluntarism--and thus, it might appear, antirelativism.

Yet Part I, in demonstrating the relativistic consequences of pure communitarianism, suggests that the communitarian alternative to individualism is just as voluntaristic as its target. My task in this section is to sustain this suggestion by showing that the absence from pure communitarianism of a literal equivalent to God's will does not absolve the doctrine of the flaws of voluntarism. Since MacIntyre comes the closest of the four communitarians to directly criticizing the notion of the will in liberal thought, I will focus on him.

According to MacIntyre, it is characteristic of "modern liberal culture," and thus of liberal individualism, that practical reasoning is open-ended in a way that was previously impossible. In the practical syllogism of the modern individual, action is preceded by choice, such that "between the rehearsal of the premises and the ensuing action there characteristically has to intervene a decision"--an act of will. MacIntyre contrasts this modern reasoner against "someone who affirms the premises of an Aristotelian practical syllogism." Were an Aristotelian agent to fail to perform "the action which should have been the conclusion of that syllogism," she would lapse into "the unintelligibility of blank inconsistency" (MacIntyre

1988, 341). In seeking to eradicate the element of decision from practical reasoning, MacIntyre is attacking the concept of the free will (cf. MacIntyre 1990, 155), since it is by this faculty that "decisions" are said to be made.

The gap between the premises and the conclusion of a practical syllogism is, in MacIntyre's opinion, what leads to the "continuously unresolved disputes" of modernity (1988, 334). Where such dissensus prevails, "nonrational persuasion displaces rational argument" (ibid., 343); ungrounded individual "preferences" reign supreme (ibid., 345); and "power lies with those who are able to determine what the alternatives are to be between which choices will be available....The range of possible alternatives is controlled by an elite" (ibid.). These passages, drawn from Which Justice? Whose Rationality?, recapitulate essentially the story told in After Virtue. (1) Modern, individualist normative epistemology (2) valorizes incommensurable individual preferences, and therefore leads to (3) relationships of manipulation and domination.

The solution lies in the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition, for the Aristotelian individual reasons "qua citizen." The Thomist individual reasons "qua inquirer into his or her own good and the good of his or her community" (MacIntyre 1988, 339). For him or her, there is no pause between impersonal, communal, "rational criteria for evaluation" (1984a, 31) and action: the latter follows from the former as a matter of "immediacy and necessity" (1988, 340). Where there is no room for hesitation, disagreement, or arbitrariness, there is no opportunity for manipulation or coercion, and equal freedom is achieved.

MacIntyre's "rational criteria for evaluation" are like Leibniz's normative criteria in being anterior to action. But in MacIntyre's case the criteria are not anterior to a decision; no decision, he maintains, is necessary. MacIntyre's criteria are the impersonal norms, the "internal goods," to which agents have been induced to conform by their socialization in the practices validated by a community's tradition. "Shared moral precepts or rules using this type of 'ought' depend therefore for their authority upon there being a set of shared beliefs" (MacIntyre 1990, 19). Instead of the logical determination of the agent's choice among ends, as in Leibniz's view, there is a psychological determination of the agent's "identity."

This difference between Leibniz's and MacIntyre's anterior criteria leads to the disappearance, in MacIntyre's schema, of the will --at least as something of which the individual is conscious.

MacIntyre (1988, 341) repeats Robert Audi's antivoluntarist observation that unlike the Aristotelian or the Thomist reasoner, the modern individual may (like Ockham's God, we might observe), in the space of decision, "'chang[e] his mind.'" The space of decision is where, or when, the will can reverse itself. Reasoning in accord with (MacIntyre's interpretation of) the Aristotelian-Thomist practical syllogism, by contrast, is unreflective and therefore constant.

"Necessity" in the sense of temporal and phenomenological "immediacy"--action that is decisive because it is unhindered by doubt--is what is gained by replacing mediation through a decision made by a person's will with unmediated, impersonal, communally generated norms. The doubt that is vanquished by MacIntyre's reading of the Aristotelian

practical syllogism is not, as in Holmes's interpretation (1993, 20), a psychological state that threatens the individual's emotional equilibrium. It is a logical state that threatens the community's moral equilibrium. For in the space created by the will, the individual may question the validity of norms that would otherwise be held in common and would therefore serve as the basis for uncoerced, nonmanipulative interpersonal relationships. MacIntyre's Aristotle would remedy this problem by conferring on a person's actions the "certitude" that stems from unquestioning adherence to the socially given (MacIntyre 1984a, 127). In challenging the will, MacIntyre is challenging free will, or our awareness of it.

The certitude created by inculcation in the shared practices of a community (~1) is not an end in itself, nor is it instrumental to psychological well-being; it is instrumental to MacIntyre's stated political purpose, (~3) the reduction of interpersonal manipulation. For certitude is produced only "within the context of the kind of systematic activity" from which the premises of an Aristotelian or Thomist practical syllogism "derive their peculiar force"; that is, it is produced only within socially given practices (MacIntyre 1988, 341). Socially given practices create moral certitude by producing moral uniformity among similarly socialized individuals, thereby diminishing interpersonal antagonisms born of conflicting ends. The result is a society free of manipulation by the "elite." The modern problem of inter-individual relativism, and thus of interpersonal immorality, is solved by depriving persons of the ability to wonder whether the impersonal virtues internal to the social practices with which they are

familiar might be bad.

MacIntyre's antivoluntarism thus turns out to be very different from Leibniz's. Where Leibniz would bind the will with anterior criteria, MacIntyre would replace the will with the virtues internal to the practices of an anterior community. Or, more precisely: the Aristotelian practical syllogism as MacIntyre understands it would substitute, for the moral determination of willed actions by the individual's putatively universalistic anterior norms, the mechanical determination of unwilled actions by the community's particularistic anterior norms.

It is paradoxical, then, that in opposing the Nietzschean fragmentation of personality that is possible if the individual can "change his mind," MacIntyre defends something quite like the ability of the voluntarist deity to reverse His decisions over time. MacIntyre's alternative to the Nietzschean view is his theory of narrative unity, which was incorporated into Thomism, he maintains, as an adaptation of the medieval notion of a quest. Narrative unity remedies the modern individual's lack of a "rational history in its transitions from one state of moral commitment to another." This deficiency makes "inner conflicts...necessarily au fond the confrontation of one contingent arbitrariness by another." The self subjected to such conflicts "is a self with no given continuities," because it lacks "any necessary social identity." Its lack of unification by a given social identity is what makes the modern self "criterionless" (MacIntyre 1984a, 33, emphasis added)--not, we should note, "disturbed," "anxious," or even "alienated." It is all too easy

to read MacIntyre as an analyst of the unhappiness of modern humanity, cut off from comforting sources of certainty. But it is not comfort that MacIntyre seeks in the extinction of individual will; it is interpersonal freedom.

MacIntyre's alternative path to freedom preserves what is relativistic about voluntarism. This is not the decision maker's ability to change her mind per se--an ability MacIntyre abolishes by transferring moral decisionmaking from individual minds with wills to a collective source of authority that, being impersonal, has no literal mind and no literal will--but the particularism inherent in making the decision maker the arbiter of the good. In voluntaristic forms of liberalism, the decision maker is the individual. By focusing on the psychology of individual willfulness, MacIntyre misconstrues the task of overcoming liberal relativism as that of smothering our consciousness of free will rather than as that of gaining a clearer understanding of what free will entails.

"In many pre-modern, traditional societies," MacIntyre writes, one "find[s] oneself placed at a certain point on a journey with set goals; to move through life is to make progress--or to fail to make progress--toward a given end" (1984a, 33-34, emphases added). The "certitude which this absence of choice provides" stems from the fact that the ends toward which premodern individuals move are "social facts" (ibid., 123). Thus, for example, the characters portrayed by Homer have "no way...to view their own culture and society as if from the outside" (ibid., 127, 125). Where Leibniz would constrain the free will of the (divine) decision maker over time by means of the

antecedent normative criteria in effect at any given moment, MacIntyre abolishes the (individual) decision maker's ability to change her mind over time by making her think herself incapable of achieving the community-transcending perspective from which the ends given to her by her community could be seen as invalid.

Like the Leibnizian perspective, then, MacIntyre's view seeks to address both the synchronic and the diachronic relativism that can be produced by individualistic forms of voluntarism. However, MacIntyre's alternative to individualism precludes exactly what Leibniz bases his alternative upon: universalism. This is because the will MacIntyre would erase is the site of the doubt caused precisely by the need of a free agent to act according to universally valid criteria. MacIntyre's point is that if people would unhesitatingly accept the dictates of their particular communities, social cooperation would replace the manipulation that must occur in the absence of agreement on ends. MacIntyre feels justified in substituting communal for individual voluntarism because the communal version, precisely in being (~2) "impersonal"--precisely in being premised on no actual will, only a metaphorical one--eradicates the space for personal doubt. But there are only two ways for this to happen. One is if we are, in fact, mechanically determined, such that our feeling of free will is illusory. The other is if we are, in fact, free, but can be conditioned by our immersion in social practices to believe otherwise. We must either be automatons or think of ourselves as if we were.

Sandel, Taylor, and Walzer have somewhat different reasons to oppose Leibnizian free will than MacIntyre does. Their critiques of,

respectively, the unsituated self, atomism, and "philosophy" imply the need to suppress not doubt itself--the psychological corollary of self-aware free will--but one possible reaction to this doubt: individual withdrawal from social obligations. This is what is at stake in the debates over the ontology of "the self," and it explains the peculiarly strategic character of these debates, which turn on the persuasiveness that could accrue to egalitarian obligations (according to the communitarians) if these were reconciled with the given traditions of one's community. Such a reconciliation, to be persuasive, would require individuals to accept that if "these are our values," the values that constitute "our identity," then these (egalitarian) values are, ipso facto, valid. And this requires people to act as if they are not free to be governed by competing, inegalitarian values if their own community's values are egalitarian.

As in MacIntyre, then, the pure communitarian moments in Sandel, Taylor, and Walzer require suppressing the individual perception of free will, leading to a picture of the individual as mechanically determined by her community. This tends to confirm a Leibnizian diagnosis of what has gone wrong with all of these attempts to root out liberal voluntarism. Since they fix the responsibility for voluntarism not on the very concept of moral authority, with its inherent particularism, but instead on its locus in the individual, the communitarians have no choice but to repudiate the individual's free will. And since the individual's free will is the site of her moral determination by anterior norms, its eradication leaves her subjected to mechanical determination by communal norms. (In calling individual

determination by anterior norms "moral," I am not suggesting that whatever the individual chooses is good. That is the liberal voluntarist position that I, along with the communitarians, reject. I am merely using Leibniz's terminology to remind the reader that the only alternative to mechanical determination by anterior physical causes is "moral" determination by anterior, putatively universal norms.)

It may be useful at this point to compare pure communitarian and Hobbesian attitudes toward freedom of the will. In Hobbes's determinism, it is not the community's norms but the individual's appetites that determine what is good, and empirical agreement among individuals--"compact"--determines what is right. Hobbesian individuals operate exactly as does the voluntarist deity: their wills are the source of value, both personal and political; but these wills cannot be free, lest they be unable to act because of their lack of motivation. Therefore, they must be determined mechanically, by their empirically given desires--what might be called "individual facts." The will as a logical category is, for Hobbes, externally determined by efficient causes; and as a psychological faculty, the will is obviated entirely: appetite displaces doubt in preceding action. A will that one experiences as a feeling of doubt would be worse than superfluous, for it would open the door to nonappetitive (e.g., religious or vainglorious) motives that could impede the project of tying all loyalty to Leviathan, the guarantor of self-preservation and desire satisfaction.

Similarly, the logical category, the is-ought bridge, for which

MacIntyre searched during the two decades between "Voices from the Moral Wilderness" and the composition of After Virtue ended up being the Wittgensteinian language community's empirically given norms (see Chapter 6). "Evaluative questions are," as it turned out, "questions of social fact" (MacIntyre 1984a, 123, emphasis original). The psychological function of this is-ought bridge is, as it were, Hobbesian:

Homer speaks always of knowledge of what to do and how to judge. Nor are such questions difficult to answer, except in exceptional cases. For the given rules which assign men their place in the social order and with it their identity also prescribe what they owe and what is owed to them and how they are to be treated and regarded if they fail and how they are to treat and regard others if those others fail. (Ibid.)

The will as a logical faculty is, for MacIntyre, mechanically determined by social norms. An epiphenomenon of this logical determination of the will is the cessation of psychological doubt. As with Hobbes, the psychological faculty of free will is, with MacIntyre, worse than superfluous, because it opens the door to hesitation about the validity of communal norms. But while the individual is thus stripped of free will by MacIntyre as by Hobbes, in MacIntyre it is the community, not the individual, that consequently functions as does the voluntarist deity. The community's "decisions" validate its given

values, even though--bereft of anterior criteria of the good, since such criteria would undermine its authority--"it" could have no more basis for motivating such decisions than could Hobbes's appetitive individual. What, then, mechanically determines the MacIntyrean community, as the appetites mechanically determine the Hobbesian individual? Its tradition.

In Part I, I pointed out that despite its objections to liberal proceduralism, pure communitarianism encourages not substantive theories of the good but formal assignments of abstract authority to metaphysical communities, because according to pure communitarianism, one knows what is good by "identifying" which community one "authentically" belongs to. This requires a metaphysical quest, MacIntyre's "life spent in seeking for the good life for man" (1984a, 219), that culminates in a grant of moral authority to the community (in which such a quest can only occur) to determine the good. This determination is quite literal (i.e., mechanical), since it presupposes will-lessness--the absence of a faculty that could be governed by its perceptions of independent substantive criteria of the good--on the part of the individual subordinated to the authority in question.

But will-lessness does not absolve communitarianism of the problem plaguing voluntarism: value relativism. Replacing the faculty of personal will with a substitute moral authority--whether Hobbes's appetites or MacIntyre's traditions--does not eliminate the particularism that is the source of the trouble. (Pure) communitarianism precludes commitment to any substantive good because it entails that all particular communities are equally good, leaving it

impossible to determine which community's standard of goodness one should universalistically accept--if one had free will. By particularizing the good, communitarianism, like theological voluntarism, deprives the good of any motivating force, except for those who are literally compelled by their "identity" to do whatever their community judges to be good. This renders communitarianism incoherent to an agent who is mechanically underdetermined, setting the communitarian on a collision course with our perception of our free will.

Thus, while I have followed Leibniz in speaking of the existence of "the will" and its "freedom" and "choices," it should by now be evident that the value of this terminology is strictly heuristic, and that it risks certain misunderstandings because of the logical/psychological ambiguity. "Freedom" and "choice" capture the feeling of indecision that connotes mechanical underdetermination; "the will" captures our sense of stepping into the resulting vacuum and determining our actions by means of a final cause. But logically, to say that one has a choice is to say merely that one's action is mechanically underdetermined; to say that one exercises free will in making the choice is to say nothing more. Leibnizian free will is reducible to the presence of choice; the presence of choice, to the possibility of more than one course of action. And just as the presence of free will is inferred from an agent's mechanical underdetermination rather than from her psychological perception of this freedom in the form of feelings of doubt, the criterion of choice that governs her action is inferred from the action she takes rather

than from her perceptions of her own norms. While, by definition, an anterior normative criterion governs mechanically underdetermined action, it is not necessarily perceived clearly, or at all, by the agent.

That criteria of goodness are logical inferences suggests that the psychological categories that often correspond to them need not always do so. These categories can help us relate Leibniz's logical analysis of free agency to everyday Western experience, but if we become too attached to them, we may be led into a number of mistakes. When we seem to experience akrasia, for instance, the logic and the psychology of action diverge: we think we are being untrue to our criterion of goodness, but if we retain free will, that is logically impossible: instead, we have mistaken what our actual (i.e., effective) criterion of action is.

Conversely, universalism is not necessarily a matter of psychological liberation from social particularity or appetitive heteronomy, as it has often been portrayed. Universalism is a logical quality of all mechanically underdetermined action, no matter how traditionalistic or base its aim: universality is logically derived from the premise that no mechanically underdetermined action could be motivated without an inferential normative criterion that would, if valid, justify the action on a nonparticularist basis. A particularist normative criterion could not motivate free action, because, being mechanically underdetermined, free action requires the logical corollary of what we feel the need for when we consciously make a choice: a positive evaluation of the chosen course compared to the

unchosen ones. The particularist would have to say, "This action is what I or we must do simply because I or we do that around here, or because the particular moral authority in power around here requires it; it is not necessarily the best course of action by some standard that transcends me or us or our governing authority"--for if it were the best course of action, that fact, rather than its particularity, would be its justification. (As Christine Korsgaard [1996, 11] puts it, "when you think an action is right, you think you ought to do it.") All that I mean by universalism is the antithesis of such particularism.

Universalism characterizes a judgment, tacit or overt, that what is chosen is better than all the known alternatives. (In Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry, MacIntyre errs in supposing that universalism-cum-"encyclopedism" requires universal assent to such a judgment, rather than its universal applicability to relevantly situated agents, regardless of whether they agree with it.) Universalism is, according to Leibnizian metaethics, an inescapable attribute of the decisions made by beings with free will, lest they be unable to motivate their actions. Actions determined by particularist choice criteria, then, must be unfree actions, which is why MacIntyre is right to think that particularism entails repudiating not only the will, but the is/ought dichotomy. For unfree action is precisely the type that is determined, mechanically, by particular facts--whether "social" or individual--rather than by universal moral principles. In a case of mechanical determination, an "is"--the external force of surdly given beliefs about the good that are not supposed to apply

across the particular individuals or communities that hold these beliefs--determines what the objects under its influence "ought" to do. If the mechanically determined object is a person, she is no longer a "subject" in the sense of being an originating agent of action. Hence the dual nature, noted by several commentators (e.g., Yack 1988), of the communitarian metaphysical claim: it is both a claim about how things ought to be and a claim about how things are. If the legitimate source of moral authority is a particular community, this means that the individual should follow its dictates. But this prescription presupposes a determinist description: if individuals should be subjected to mechanical determination by a particular community rather than by a putatively universal moral criterion, it can only be because they are not, in fact, free agents: for free agents must, as a matter of fact, determine their actions by universalistic criteria. A mechanically free (underdetermined) individual would require universalist value claims to motivate her decisions, and these claims could contradict the particular claims of a community.

Here I would like to restate more precisely my explanation for why the communitarians manage to be such adamant critics of liberal relativism, even while their alternative is vulnerable to precisely the type of indictments they lodge against liberalism. To justify communal authority, the communitarians must portray the individual as mechanically determined. This is just the way liberals inadvertently tend to picture the individual (as MacIntyre, Taylor, and Sandel recognize). Many liberals consider the individual's authority and dignity--ironically, her freedom--to be denigrated if she is morally

determined by criteria of the good that originate anywhere but within the individual. If, on the contrary, the individual is governed by anterior criteria of the good, then her decisions would be incorrect if these criteria are invalid, and this would call into question the value of her freedom. The possibility that the individual will make mistakes about the good threatens her dignity, her authority, and her freedom of action, for it is not obvious why that freedom might not legitimately be curbed if the action she would take is bad.

For the same reason, theological voluntarists cannot countenance subjecting God to anterior moral determination, since this would diminish His authority, His dignity, and His freedom of action by opening up the possibility that God might be wrong at any particular moment about what is good. In order to block the threat to God's authority posed by this possibility, theological voluntarists were driven to the paradoxical conclusion that God's decisions must be arbitrary from the perspective of any intertemporal, universalistic criterion of the good. Similarly, to close the door against the coercion of individuals who make bad choices, voluntaristic liberals often end up depicting the individual's decisions as arbitrary, either in the sense that they originate in a condition of God-like indifference--such as the individual is held to experience when choosing a flavor of ice cream; or in the sense that they originate in what, in the final analysis, indifference must be reduced to, if it is to be capable of motivating action: the heteronomous determination of one's actions by morally arbitrary preferences (or "tastes"). In short, because the moral determination of actions by universal criteria

of the good opens the door to the coercive correction of bad actions, liberal voluntarists unintentionally replace the individual's moral determination with her mechanical determination.

This is a most congenial picture for communitarian voluntarists to attack, since (in their pure-communitarian moments) they see individual free will as the source of value subjectivism and thus, politically, as the source of threats to the objective value of equal freedom. Consequently, in the interest, in effect, of subjecting the individual to mechanical determination by the "objective" norms of the community, the communitarians emphasize the way that liberalism already implies the mechanical determination of the individual by "subjective" desires. This allows them to suggest that the only question is whether the individual should be mechanically determined by arbitrary personal preferences or by (putatively) more objective, second-order collective identities.

Why Voluntarism Seems Plausible

The communitarians' insight--that liberalism tends to portray the individual as mechanically determined--is explored more fully in the next chapter, as part of the argument that liberalism tends toward individual-level voluntarism. If this argument is correct, then--given their own commitment to liberal norms--it is understandable why communitarians would import into their alternative to liberalism an equally voluntaristic metaethics, albeit one that shifts the locus of

authority from individual will to communal ethos. But why is voluntarism plausible to begin with? Why, for example, despite communitarian objections to the liberal subordination of the good to the right, do they continue, in practice, to accept the Western dichotomy between the question of "the good" life and the question of who or what

--nature, God, the community, or the individual--has "the right" to render one way of life good?

The ultimate explanation may be that a metaethics such as Leibniz's is not free from an unnerving "indeterminacy," against which voluntarism seems to offer a solid alternative.

In Leibniz's view, the individual's universalist claim to goodness may be correct or it may not be, but this is not a question that can be decided at the metaethical level. The logical space accorded to "will" and "choice" by Leibnizian metaethics is nothing but the recognition that metaethics is not ethics, and is therefore free--empty--of normative content. No particular agent, short of God, can guarantee that its perception of the good, i.e., its selection of the best of all possible normative criteria, is accurate. If an agent's "belief" in the goodness of her chosen criterion were self-validating, the criterion would not be logically anterior to the choice. And even God's choices are, in Leibniz's view, always good not because they are self-validating, but because of the dogma that God's antecedent cognition of the independent good is unerring, and that His will conforms to His cognition. Thus, "when God makes a choice, it is through his knowledge of the best; when man does so, he will choose the

alternative that seems to be best" (Leibniz quoted in Hostler 1975, 31, emphasis added). But how can fallible human beings know if what seems best really is? That is, of course, the sticking point.

Communitarian voluntarism⁷ tries to answer this question--the central question of ethics or morality--by turning it into what I have been calling a "metaphysical" question: a question of who authorizes (the self as radically unsituated, or as communally constituted?) or how one authorizes (epistemological individualism, or epistemological collectivism?) the good. The way we determine which of the possible substantive criteria of choice is good is to consult the designated normative authority--the collective agent or proxy for an agent--who has the right to decide upon the best criterion by fiat. Since this agent's own decision is criterionless, voluntarism fails to do justice to the situation in which such agents are logically placed by having free will.

But that situation itself has something seemingly relativistic or even nihilistic about it. By compelling the agent to act according to a normative criterion, Leibnizian free will calls into being the superiority of one criterion of goodness above all the others: this superiority becomes a logical necessity for a choosing agent. The free agent must act as if she believes that her action is justified. But if neither her choice nor anyone else's justifies her action, what does? Who is she to say what is good, or how is she to determine what is good? It is all very well to say that without an anterior normative criterion we could not act; but how do we arrive at such a criterion, if not by making a putatively self-validating decision to view it as

"the good"? When we descend from metaethics to ethics and consider the difficulty of actually determining what is good, we appear to wind up in just the existentialist predicament of criterionless choice that Leibniz attacks.

There can be no infinite regress of normative criteria. One's action must stem ultimately from an axiomatic claim for the inherent goodness of the goal toward which it is directed. As Max Weber writes, "Only on the assumption of belief in the validity of values is the attempt to espouse value-judgments meaningful. However, to judge the validity of such values is a matter of faith" (Weber 1949, 55, *emphases original*). Beyond the point of axiomatic assertion, there can be no argument; there can only be dissensus among those who place their faith in different normative criteria. Someone who disagrees with my end is, in my view, simply wrong--and may conceivably have to be coerced or manipulated into doing what is right. No wonder, then, that Weber is, as much as Nietzsche, MacIntyre's bete noir.

Regardless of the inadequacy of his own alternative, MacIntyre does seem to have his finger on a real problem when he writes that "since every chain of reasoning must be finite, such a process of justificatory reasoning must always terminate with the assertion of some rule or principle for which no further reason can be given" (1984a, 20). "Conflict between rival values cannot be rationally settled. Instead one must simply choose: between parties, classes, nations, causes, ideals" (*ibid.*, 26). MacIntyre is here criticizing what he takes to be the ultimate consequence of emotivism: "choice unguided by criteria" (*ibid.*, 20). Our description of the Leibnizian

chooser as needing to rely on axiomatic assertions of anterior value would, in MacIntyre's eyes, indicate that Leibniz's own system is a form of voluntarism, just as he considers Weber's to be.

Weber (1949, 55), however, also offers the closest thing there is to a way out of this predicament when he writes that "even the knowledge of the most certain propositions of our theoretical sciences--e.g., the exact natural sciences or mathematics--is, like the cultivation and refinement of the conscience, a product of culture." Therefore, he seems to suggest, it would be a mistake to conclude either that values are equally valid or that the choice between them is arbitrary; for surely that is not the case with the axioms of mathematics or natural science. A matter of faith may nonetheless be true:

The fruit of the tree of knowledge, which is distasteful to the complacent but which is, nonetheless, inescapable, consists in the insight that every single important activity and ultimately life as a whole, if it is not to be permitted to run on as an event in nature but is instead to be consciously guided, is a series of ultimate decisions through which the soul--as in Plato--chooses its own fate, i.e., the meaning of its own activity and existence. Probably the crudest misunderstanding which the representatives of this point of view constantly encounter is to be found in the claim that this standpoint is "relativistic." (Ibid., 18, emphasis added.)

If human life were to run on as an event in nature--that is, if it were mechanically determined, to the exclusion of free will--we could escape the uncomfortable knowledge of the human sources of antecedent criteria of value, and the consequent realization that whatever values we pursue may be wrong. But the very fact that they may be wrong presupposes that they may be right: the universal value claims implicated in free agents' actions can--indeed, must--therefore be judged as good or evil. This is what "faith" is: faith in the objective goodness of what one believes, i.e., faith in its universal validity. Knowledge of our freedom, then, gives rise not to relativism but to its opposite.

Leibniz, too, compares the axiomatic nature of morality with mathematics and reaches a conclusion similar to Weber's:

It seems that every will supposes some reason for willing, and that this reason is naturally anterior to the will. That is why I also find altogether strange the expression of certain other philosophers who say that the eternal truths of metaphysics and of geometry and consequently also the rules of goodness, of justice and of perfection, are only effects of God's will, whereas it seems to me that they are only consequences of his understanding, which assuredly no more depends on his will than does his essence. (1953, 5.)

If the axiomatic nature of mathematics does not bother us, why should we find the axiomatic nature of morality so troubling?

Leibniz and Weber point us beyond existential despair by seeing moral axioms as necessary aspects of the situation facing beings with free will, rather than as being dependent on any contingent, external authority. A naturalized form of Leibniz's or Weber's metaethics might go on to portray human beings as having evolved the capacity--or the ineluctable belief in the capacity--to transcend mechanical and instinctual determination, at least in some instances. In these cases it is incumbent upon us to choose; when we have free will, or when we are convinced that we do, the only choice we do not have is not to choose. But if the efficient cause of our final ends is not an external God or community, it must be internal: we ourselves impose final causes upon our actions. In this sense we are now very close to individualist voluntarism, as MacIntyre, Sandel, and Taylor are keenly aware. As a matter of efficient causation, each free individual could be described as criterionlessly "choosing" her final causes. But if we believed, or behaved as if we believed, that it is the act of so choosing that legitimates these ends, this would deprive the ends of anything more than efficient causation; they would then become posterior to our choices and dependent upon our wills. But since an indifference of equipoise is not possible, our wills would be unable to choose.

We are so situated, therefore, that we do originate our values, as a matter of mechanical causation; but it is a logically necessary aspect of originating a value that serves the motivating purpose

necessitated by free will that its originator act as if she believes that it truly is (universally) valuable, regardless of its (particularist) human origins. This is what makes it necessary to view one normative axiom or another (say, the intrinsic desirability of happiness, truth, or beauty) as being better than its competitors. But what it means to necessarily believe in the greater intrinsic value of some axiomatic end or another is that one of them must be truly good, for beings like us: convinced of our free will, we literally cannot act as if we believe otherwise. This is the central metaethical truth; it explains why particularist metaethics is incoherent and why value relativism is impossible for agents with free will, who must act upon some value that is thought to be truly decisive.

Put differently, it is incumbent upon us to act as if we view final ends as anterior to our wills--logically prior to the positivistic observer's detection of efficient sociological or psychological causes in attaching a given person's will (even the observer's own) to this or that final cause. While there is no necessity to one's belief that some particular end is valuable, whatever end one does find valuable has to be viewed, from the actor's perspective, as being more than merely "relative" to whatever particular, mechanical causes might have preceded its selection. For although, to an observer of someone's action (including the actor herself, before or after the moment of action), it may look as if her will, controlled in turn by other efficient causes, is what motivates her action, she cannot believe, at the moment of action, that this voluntarist picture is coherent, for that would make her action

unmotivated and thus impossible. The criterion of the good mandating the chosen action has to be better than the alternatives, in her eyes, if it is to move her will--if it is to induce her to choose, as she has no choice but to do. This "better than" is universalism, since it indicates the need to pick out one particular end as superior to the alternatives.

This account would seem to justify anxiety about the validity of our axiomatic belief in the "objective" merit of whatever intrinsic end we have "faith" in, since it allows full scope to reductionist accounts of the efficient causes of the criteria antecedent to our actions. But the very idea that the mechanical origin of value axioms makes their validity suspect holds true only if there could be some more "objective" alternative--some external source that could validate our "faith." Leibniz shows, however, that such a source would, itself, be subject to the same "subjectivity." Even God would have to perceive a criterion of the good anterior to His decisions; so for us to bemoan our inability to appeal to His authority, or that of our community, is to engage in needless regret at our inability to extend the regress of decision indefinitely. The only thing about God that could make His authority worth following is His omniscience, and that is but a dogma. (In Three Rival Versions MacIntyre professes his allegiance to this dogma, but he justifies it through a selective reading of the philosophical, as opposed to supernatural, side of the Thomist "tradition"; the tradition justifies the dogma, putting the tradition's community in the position of God--but without any reason to believe in its omniscience.) Stripped of the illusion of omniscience, as any

community certainly should be, an external authority is no more authoritative than an individual's own, fallible perceptions of the good.

The difference between an action being choiceworthy because one chooses it simpliciter (individualist voluntarism) and its being choiceworthy because one has no choice but to believe that, despite one's own efficient causation of it, it serves an end that is truly and independently valuable is, to say the least, subtle. Indeed, when we turn from metaethics to morality, it will usually make no difference at all. The criteria of choice that issue from an axiomatic "faith," understood in terms of Leibnizian metaethics, may well be identical to the criteria that issue from a voluntarist morality, depending upon what it is that the voluntarist authority decides upon. Thus, one might posit the Decalogue axiomatically rather than attempting to derive it from God's revealed will; and as mentioned, one might defer to some particular communal identity on the ground that it is good, according to an independent standard such as that of happiness, the better to allow people to live in ways that give them what Russell Hardin (1995, 217 and passim) calls the particularist "comforts of home."

The difference Leibnizian metaethics makes is to show that we cannot coherently give carte blanche to the particular decisions of God or the community, deferring to whatever they choose (even after imposing the caveat that their choices must be consistent with the right of other communities, or of God at other moments, to enact whatever ends they choose). Giving a blank check to some locus of

moral authority would clear the way to endorsing contradictory antecedent criteria of the good, if the authorities happen to disagree among themselves. And in that case, our metaethics would have come to stand in the way of the goal of ethics: to motivate voluntary action, and to do so according to consistent criteria. Despite the fact that, from an observer's perspective, there is no difference between any given choice justified on voluntarist or on nonvoluntarist grounds, Leibniz's metaethics serves to bar not only theological and pure-communitarian voluntarism as tenable justificatory (as opposed to explanatory) accounts of any decision; it bars individualist voluntarism as well. Something can no more be good because an individual chose it than because God or the community did.

Since individualist voluntarism is implicit in all forms of liberalism that place intrinsic, rather than instrumental, value on the moral authority, and thus the freedom of action, of the individual, Leibniz's critique of voluntarism has profound implications for most contemporary variants of liberalism. While the critique of voluntarism does not preclude reaching any particular liberal conclusion, it does preclude basing such a conclusion on the right of the individual to determine the good.

NOTES

1. One might, however, dispute the radical implications of theological voluntarism by emphasizing that, for all of their insistence on God's omnipotence, voluntarists also denied that God's will was arbitrary. "In the thesis that God is the first rule of all justice," Heiko Oberman writes, "it is not the lawlessness of the set order which is expressed, but man's inability to discover the motives and causes of God's actions" (1962, 98).

This objection to equating voluntarism with arbitrariness or nihilism relies on what we might call (without any pejorative intent) an obscurantist view of God's will. According to this view, we can reconcile God's goodness with His omnipotence, but only by recognizing our inability to understand His ways. Thus Luther's argument:

Why then does He not alter those evil wills which He moves? This question touches on the secrets of His Majesty, where 'His judgments are past finding out' (cf. Rom. 11.33). It is not for us to inquire into these mysteries, but to adore them. (Luther 1957, 208.)

It is true that theological voluntarism originally employed, and was compatible with, the traditional, obscurantist formulas for reconciling God's power with His goodness. But it is also true that these formulas masked a contradiction, and that the masking was successful only so long as the destructive implications of God's

omnipotence for His benevolence, and vice versa, went unexplored. Each of these two dogmas had the capacity to overwhelm the other if not kept in a balance so delicate as to preclude understanding. One needed only to think through the implications of God's unalloyed goodness to deal a lethal blow to the idea of His untrammelled will. After 1277, the old obscurantist formulas lost the haziness that was essential to their effectiveness. Now, clearly, they implied either the subsumption of God's goodness by His will (as in Protestantism), or vice versa (as in Leibniz).

2. In the following passage, Scotus broaches these antinomian implications:

From the fact that something is suitable to the divine will, it is right; and whatever action God could perform, is right absolutely. But anything that does not involve a [logical] contradiction is not completely incompatible with the divine will; therefore, whatever God may bring about, or may do, will be right and just....Therefore, he can do nothing but what is in accordance with justice, whether He damns someone who is just or whether He damns someone who is unjust. (Scotus 1891, 54.)

Ockham repudiates Scotus's limitations on God's power as follows:

The created will is obligated by a divine command to love

God....But there is no act which God is obligated to bring about; therefore He can bring about any act as such without any wrongdoing, as well as its contrary. And therefore, just as He can totally cause the act of loving without moral goodness or evil, because "moral goodness" and "moral evil" connote that the agent is obligated to perform that act or its opposite; so he can, for the same reason, totally cause the act of hating God without any moral evil, because there is not any act which He is obligated to bring about. (Ockham 1962, 57.)

The opinions of Jean Gerson (1363-1429), Gabriel Biel (c.1410-1495), Martin Luther, and John Calvin suggest the tremendous influence Ockhamite voluntarism had on Protestantism and its predecessors:

God surely does not will exterior things to be made for the reason that they are good, as the human will is moved by the presentation of real or apparent good; it is rather the contrary, that therefore exterior things are good because God wills them to be such. So true is this, that if He willed them either not to be or to be of a different nature, this too would now be good.

(Gerson 1960, 68.)

It is not because something is right or just, that God wills it; rather, because God wills it, it is therefore

just and right. (Biel 1965, 70.)

If any rule or standard, or cause or ground, existed for [God's will], it could no longer be the will of God. What God wills is not right because He ought, or was bound, so to will; on the contrary, what takes place must be right, because He so wills it. (Luther 1957, 208, 209.)

The will of God is the supreme rule of righteousness, so that everything which he wills must be held to be righteous by the mere fact of his willing it. (Calvin 1962, 101.)

3. A second question-begging argument is that voluntarism ignores the eternal nature of moral precepts. Richard Price makes this claim, arguing that

Right and wrong, it appears, denote what actions are. Now whatever any thing is, that it is, not by will, or decree, or power, but by nature and necessity. Whatever a triangle or a circle is, that it is unchangeably and eternally. It depends upon no will or power.... (1974, 209).

Cudworth, too, maintained that the moral order is "eternal and

immutable" (1838, 169). And Francisco Suarez contended that although "God is the efficient cause and the teacher (as it were) of the natural law," He is not "its legislator, for the natural law does not reveal God issuing commands, but [simply] indicates what is in itself good or evil, just as the sight of a certain object reveals it as being white or black" (1944, 75). These claims assume what voluntarists challenge: that there is an independent normative standard, here identified with "nature" or "reality," that sets limits to the moral authority of God. This is precisely the view that was at issue, the view that thirteenth-century Catholic and sixteenth-century Protestant theologians found incompatible with God's omnipotence. (Something very close to this view, however, is, I argue below, plausible if it is derived not from the extrahuman origin of eternal standards, but from the logical necessity of acting as if there are some valid standards--despite their efficient origination in the situation with which our free will confronts us.)

4. Moore seems to recognize this; his argument is offered as a transcendent critique of voluntarism, not an immanent one. His point is merely that voluntarism violates "the principle which we are considering" (1965, 65), namely, that if two actions have precisely the same effects, the two actions are either both right or both wrong (ibid., 57). This principle is one way of parsing universalism; the theological voluntarism Moore contrasts to it is a species of particularism.

It may seem inconsistent for me to criticize proponents of the

arguments from immorality and circularity for failing to provide immanent arguments against voluntarism, even while criticizing communitarians such as Sandel for demanding that an argument be immanently plausible to a member of a given community. If immanence is not good enough when the communitarians demand it, why should it be demanded of the opponents of voluntarism?

The difficulty here is an ambiguity in the term "immanence." The term has a particularist meaning, derived from the recognition that one can only be persuaded of something that one's community already accepts as true on some level--the point of Taylor's quotation of Tugendhat, extracted at the end of Chapter 4. But my argument is that all members of all communities, as agents with free will, must already (antecedently) accept as true that they are making transcommunal, universalist truth claims, as Hardin notes in the epigraph to this chapter. This is, in effect, what Leibniz demonstrates. If his argument is correct, then transcendence is universally immanent. Thus, against the communitarians, my point is that it is impossible to accept a community's moral claims without elevating them to transcendent, universally applicable status. The relativistic incoherence of pure communitarianism is a function of its inconsistency with the inherently transcendent nature of moral choice.

The question-begging nature of the usual formulations of the argument from immorality seems to me to confirm this point. For from a communitarian perspective, in which voluntarists constitute one community, antivoluntarists another, neither community is making claims that can transcend its boundaries. Thus, were the anti-voluntarists'

argument against voluntarism to remain at the question-begging, non-"immanent" level of their usual formulation, they would be doing what I maintain is impossible: making particularist claims, claims that members of the voluntarist community could simply sidestep. But in fact, the antivoluntarists are claiming that voluntarism is universally wrong. What they usually lack, however, is a transcendent basis for making good this claim. By invoking Leibniz's understanding of the nature of choice, I am attempting to remedy this deficiency. If I am successful, then the argument will transcend the boundaries between antivoluntarist and voluntarist communities, becoming "immanent" for voluntarists in the sense that it shows that their own community's self-understanding is erroneous because incoherent: no community can coherently claim justification for its beliefs or practices as against those of other communities without making a universalist claim for their goodness, antecedent to their selection by the community; all communities, including the communitarian community, make transcendent truth claims, lest they be unable to motivate acting upon the norms of their community vis-a-vis those of other communities.

5. Liberal voluntarism is responsible for the distinction sometimes drawn between "ethics" as dealing with norms of interpersonal obligation (matters often associated with the "right/"wrong" dichotomy), and "morality" as dealing with norms of self-regarding personal conviction about what is "good" or "bad." So as not to sanction this distinction, I will usually avoid using the terms ethical, moral, right, wrong, moral, immoral, good, and bad, in favor

of the more neutral terms values, norms, and normative, except where this is impossible or inconvenient--as in the contrast between "ethics" and "metaethics." In such cases, and wherever I use the term metaethics, for which there is no elegant synonym, I am not restricting the terms' application in the way the ethical/moral dichotomy might suggest. By "metaethics" I mean analysis of the nature of all normative decision making, interpersonal or otherwise; and indeed, as will emerge, analysis of the nature of all voluntary decision making about ends. In contrasting metaethics to "ethics," I mean to contrast claims about the nature of normativity with claims about the content of norms--all norms, interpersonal or otherwise.

6. As noted in n4, Moore did not explicitly draw this inference.

7. It seems likely that Leibniz's metaethics could improve upon the reasons Moore offered in Principia Ethica for seeing ethical naturalism as fallacious. The problem with naturalism would not be, in the Leibnizian view, its identification of nature with goodness, or more generally of facts with values, under all circumstances. Such an identification could constitute one candidate morality, i.e., one possible criterion of goodness, on the ethical level: just as one might judge happiness, truth, or beauty to be good, one might judge what is natural to be good. The problem occurs when naturalists identify facts and values on the metaethical level: that is, when they go beyond asserting that what is natural (or supernatural) is good axiomatically to asserting that morality is, by its very definition, the elucidation

of nature (or divinity). Once their metaphysics puts this metaethical spin on their ethics, naturalists give a blank ethical check to whatever it is that nature (or God) "decides." Were they to make solely an ethical-level naturalist claim, the indeterminacy of "the natural" would become apparent; this is somewhat obscured if we are convinced that moral judgment is the elucidation of "the natural," since then we have no alternative but to try to figure out what is authentically natural.