Identity and Community

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The concepts of identity and community have recently been the subject of a good deal of debate in social philosophy, much of it focused on the ideas of writers like MacIntyre, Taylor, and Walzer. These philosophers are often referred to as "communitarians," though they do not constitute a united school and none of them identifies himself as such.[1] Nevertheless, there are good reasons for grouping them together, for they share some important elements of common ground. In their different ways, each develops a critique of liberal and individualist social theory and formulates a philosophy that recognizes the reality and value of community.

Specifically, they agree in rejecting the account of the individual and society that is at the basis of traditional liberal social philosophy in both its utilitarian and rights-based forms. In this philosophy the individual is portrayed as having a nature and an identity that exist prior to and independent of its social relations and social roles; and society is conceived as a mere aggregate of such individuals, each endowed with individual rights and pursuing its own conception of the good. By contrast, these writers insist, we are essentially social beings. All our distinctively human and moral characteristics are constituted socially and historically. Our desires and values, our ability to reason and choose, our very being and identity as human agents and moral selves are formed only in and through our social relations and roles. There is such a thing as society, and it is prior to and constitutive of the individual. What Taylor calls the "atomic" individual and Sandel the "unencumbered" self of liberal social theory is a myth.[2]

These ideas provide a compelling critique of the philosophical foundations of liberalism, and I take them as my starting point. They are not peculiar to communitarianism; they are shared by philosophers of other schools as well.[3] What does distinguish communitarianism, however, is the attempt to develop from them a distinctive communitarian moral perspective, by spelling out the sort of community required for the individual to develop a satisfactory and coherent identity, a morality that thus takes the form of an ethic of identity or authenticity.

Whether and, if so, how such an ethic can be developed from these premises is the topic of this article. It is an issue much in dispute, not least among communitarians themselves. On this question contemporary communitarians are drawn in two apparently opposite and contradictory directions. I criticize both in this article, but then go on to argue that this does not entail rejection of the communitarian project. Rather, it points toward a more consistently historical and critical understanding of it.

The Model of Traditional Community

Neither of the versions of communitarianism to which I have just referred is to be found in pure form in the writers mentioned, who tend rather to combine elements of both. Nevertheless, with that qualification, the first of them may be illustrated with reference to the work of MacIntyre. He begins from the premise that the self is socially constituted, and that its sense of meaning and value derives from a shared social order. "Goods and with them the only grounds for the authority of laws and virtues, can only be discovered by entering into those relationships which constitute communities whose central bond is a shared vision and understanding of goods."[4]

A traditional, premodern community, like the ancient Greek polis, involves such a shared vision. In a community of this kind, identity is inseparable from the individual's place in a rigid and hierarchical social structure and system of values. This place is not chosen by the individual; it is regarded as something naturally determined and unalterably given by birth. The lord is born a lord, the commoner a commoner: these are fixed and immutable identities. In such societies, "the individual is identified and constituted in and through certain of his or her roles. . . . I confront the world as a member of this family, this household, this clan, this tribe, this city, this nation, this kingdom. There is no 'I' apart from these."[5]

In modern society, these forms of identity and community have largely disappeared. The shared framework of beliefs and values that orders life and defines identity in traditional society has been lost. What we are now left with, MacIntyre argues, is a series of fragmentary survivals, but we lack the context that originally gave them their significance. "The language and appearances of morality persist even though the integral substance of morality has to a large degree been fragmented and then in part destroyed."[6] In this situation, there is no longer any way of resolving moral disputes and reaching a shared understanding; no longer any objective basis for the formation of individual identity. Modern society has thus dissolved into a mass of separate individuals each pursuing his or her own arbitrary and subjective ends.

This is the predicament of the modern self. According to MacIntyre, it is captured in stark and dramatic terms by modern moral theories like emotivism, with its view that values are mere arbitrary and nonrational preferences, and existentialism, with its picture of the self as isolated, "abandoned," and "condemned" to create its values entirely by and for itself. These conceptions of the self are particular incarnations of the "unencumbered" individual of liberal philosophy. These theories are thus, MacIntyre argues, in some important respects true: not as the accounts of universal, presocial human nature that they claim to be, but as accounts of the way we have actually become in modern society.[7]

MacIntyre uses this account not only to describe the condition of modernity, but also to criticize it. His outlook is explicitly antimodern: not postmodern but rather premodern. Only the traditional communal life of the ancient polis or the medieval monastery, and the Aristotelian

conception of the virtues, can provide the frameworks for a satisfactory identity. But such frameworks have been all but lost in the modern world, and there is no possibility of going back. The diagnosis is bleak: there are no "remedies for the condition of liberal modernity."[8]

The Necessity of Frameworks

The second version of communitarianism is quite different. It questions the way in which the version I have associated with MacIntyre contrasts traditional and modern society. This gives one-sided and exaggerated accounts both of the unity of traditional community and of the fragmentation of modern society. In particular, MacIntyre's picture of modern fragmentation does not sit easily with the social ontology from which it begins. If we are necessarily and essentially social beings, then modern society cannot be understood as the mere negation—fragmentation, destruction, loss —of community. If the idea of the unencumbered self is a mythical creation of false theory, it cannot at the same time give a true picture of the character of the self in contemporary society. Nor can a tenable communitarian ethic be developed on this basis.

These points are made by writers like Taylor and Walzer. The development of modern society, they argue, has not really led to the dissolution of all shared moral frameworks: it cannot possibly have done so. According to Taylor, having a moral framework of what he calls "strong evaluations" is constitutive of our selves as human agents and hence of our identities. "It is a form of self-delusion to think that we do not speak from a moral orientation which we take to be right. This is a condition of being a functioning self."[9] These "strong evaluations" are not, and cannot be, the purely subjective preferences described by emotivism and existentialism. On the contrary, they are constitutive of the self and its very ability to choose and have preferences.

Initially at least such "constitutive" values are given, not chosen. The individual is born into a particular family, a particular community, a particular culture, with no power of choice in the matter. The self is formed and develops within the frameworks of understandings and values, allegiances and identifications, which membership of these groups involves. Identity is created in and through such frameworks. The individual cannot reject them without in effect denying its own identity and turning itself against itself. In that sense such frameworks are inescapable. "Doing without frameworks is utterly impossible for us," says Taylor:

> [T]he portrait of an agent free from all frameworks . . . spells . . . a person in the grip of an appalling identity crisis. . . . If the person doesn't suffer this absence of frameworks as a lack, isn't in other words in a crisis at all, then one rather has the picture of frightening dissociation. In practice we should see such a person as deeply disturbed.[10]

The idea of the unencumbered, atomic, emotive self must thus be rejected; and so too MacIntyre's picture of modern fragmentation, which is,

in effect, only a critical, polemical inversion of it. In their place, the second version of communitarianism develops a historical account of identity and a distinctive account of communitarian values. I now deal with these aspects in turn.

The Making of the Modern Self

The historical account of identity is worked out most fully by Taylor. He agrees with MacIntyre that in the modern world the idea of a natural order and hierarchy has largely been lost. Identity is no longer fixed and given by social position. Nevertheless, Taylor maintains, the impact of modern society has not been purely fragmenting and destructive. The abandonment of traditional frameworks has been accomplished only through the creation of new and different, distinctively modern frameworks, and the formation of a distinctively modern identity. The modern self just as much as the traditional self is a specific and distinctive historical product, constituted in and through certain definite moral frameworks and social roles; it is not the result of their mere loss or absence.[11] The picture of the modern self suggested by MacIntyre fails "to take account of the degree to which the free individual with his own goals and aspirations . . . is himself only possible within a certain kind of civilization; that it took a long development of certain institutions and practices . . . to produce the modern individual."[12]

Taylor describes these developments at length in *Sources of the Self*, and traces what he calls in its subtitle "the making of the modern identity." He focuses particularly on what he argues to be new and specifically modern concerns for "everyday life," for "inwardness," and for a romantic "expressivism," as the distinctive frameworks within which the modern self is formed. The details of this account are not relevant here.[13] What is relevant is that, by contrast with MacIntyre, who portrays the transition to modernity as a process of philosophical "failure" and moral "loss," Taylor treats the modern self as a positive and distinctive product of specific social and historical structures. For the modern self is not merely disencumbered of its old attachments: it takes on new roles, new identities, new encumbrances. In the process, it develops a new and more autonomous identity: an identity relatively independent of family and social position.

Such historically developed and relative autonomy must not be confused with the absolute, "unencumbered" autonomy of liberal social theory. For the autonomy of the modern self is something that develops as a specific product of specific social conditions.[14] To borrow Marx's words, it is still "stamped with the birth marks" of its origins, and formed and limited by them.[15] Even in the most liberal societies, family, sex, class, race, and nation are formative of identity and still often, in effect, constitute social fates, with respect to which autonomy is developed only partially and to a degree.

Nevertheless, such partial and relative autonomy is a real and distinctive feature of the modern self.[16] Identity is no longer a simple social given; it must be fashioned and created. Identity thus becomes an issue for the modern individual in ways in which it was not previously. "In premodern

times," according to Taylor, "people didn't speak of 'identity' . . . not because people didn't have (what we call) identity . . . but rather because [it] was too unproblematic to be thematised as such."[17] The modern identity is such that its identity is a problem for it. For now the self must seek for itself the conditions in which it can develop a satisfactory identity.[18]

In this way, individual autonomy is both an achievement of the modern self, and at the same time the source of the issues of identity and authenticity for it. These issues are the concerns of what Taylor calls "the ethics authenticity." They are not the universal human concerns that both MacIntyre and the existentialists in their different ways describe; they are the products of particular social and historical conditions. They are "distinctive to modern culture," and inescapable for the modern self.[19]

The Problem of Relativism

Such an account is often thought to lead to a relativist position that is fatal to morality. For it seems to imply that traditional and modern values are merely successive and different, but to remove any basis on which one could judge between them. However, there is another way of viewing the matter. The transition to modernity, as Taylor emphasizes, is not a process of mere loss. The destruction of traditional social relations has occurred through their replacement by new, different, and more pluralistic ones. Likewise, the modern self is not merely disencumbered of its old attachments, but takes on new roles and new attachments. What MacIntyre treats as a process of mere loss also has a positive aspect: it involves the growth of the autonomy of the self and of an identity relatively independent of family and social position.

There is no transhistorical perspective from which it can be demonstrated that these changes should be valued positively, as "gains." Nevertheless, on balance, they are in fact very widely regarded and valued as such. Though one may, in many respects, regret its passing, few would wish to return to life in a traditional community and to the restraints that would entail for the individual, not just because, as MacIntyre stresses, such a return is impossible for us in practical terms, but because as selves who are in and of the modern world we would not want to return even if it were possible.

Our morality is and must be grounded in our actual situation. It starts, says Taylor, "from the kinds of goods and the kinds of common practices organized around these goods that people actually have in a given society. Ethical theory has to comprehend given practice; it cannot just abstract from it."[20] There is, indeed, an inescapable relativism in this, but it does not undermine the basis of values. On the contrary, Taylor insists, it provides the only possible ground on which they can stand.[21]

Community as Shared Understandings

A historical account of this sort has clear affinities with the ideas of Hegel and Marx. It provides the basis for a more satisfactory understanding of the

modern self than that given by the first form of communitarianism. What are its practical, evaluative implications? Like others in the Hegelian tradition, when Taylor and Walzer try to spell these out, their thinking is drawn in two opposite directions.

On the one hand, there is a conservative and what one might call "old Hegelian" tendency to their thought. As we have seen, they reject MacIntyre's portrait of modern fragmentation. Even in societies with long and deep traditions of individual rights and liberties, such as the United States and Britain, they maintain, there are "shared" understandings and values. The view that modern society is made up of a plurality of irreconcilable values and frameworks is "confused" and "mistaken," says Taylor.[22] The problem in liberal society is not that there are no shared frameworks. With the pervasive influence of the liberal idea of individual autonomy, however, our shared frameworks have been "debased," "distorted," and "suppressed": "covered over" in Heidegger's phrase.[23] The result is that we have lost sight of the understandings, commitments, and values that we do in fact share. Walzer makes a similar point when he writes,

> The deep structure even of liberal society is communitarian . . . We are in fact persons and . . . bound together. The liberal ideology of separation cannot take personhood and bondedness away from us. What it does is take away the *sense* of personhood and bondedness.[24]

To restore this sense, to overcome the atomism and alienation of liberal individualist society and reestablish a sense of identity, we must reject the whole picture of the self and society given both by MacIntyre and liberal social philosophy. We must "articulate" the shared values and frameworks that have been lost from view. We must undertake what Taylor calls a "work of retrieval" in order to recover our sense of the understandings and bonds we in fact share as members of a common community.

All this is highly questionable. No doubt, as members of a common society (whether at the level of family, community, or nation), we share certain common traditions—a common language, a common history—and hence certain understandings; for the result of modernity is not absolute fragmentation: Taylor and Walzer are quite right about that. At best, however, these provide only a general framework within which there exist fundamental differences and conflicts. Similarly, it is true that the self is constituted only in and through particular frameworks that are initially given rather than chosen, and that it can never relinquish all such frameworks and adopt the "view from nowhere." In that sense, frameworks *in general* are indeed "inescapable." However, the specific frameworks that are initially constitutive for a particular individual need not remain so.[25] The family, community, nation, or people into which we are born no longer determine inescapable identities for us. For modern society is relatively more fragmented—more plural and differentiated—than traditional community, and the "shared" understandings it involves are no longer of the kind from which it is possible to "retrieve" any specific values or determinate identity.

By attempting to invoke shared understandings as the basis for values, however, Taylor and Walzer in effect idealize modern society as a harmonious community. They thereby rob the communitarian philosophy of its critical force. For example, when Walzer says that only the "sense" of personhood and bondedness is missing, the suggestion appears to be that problems of identity are purely subjective and due only to mistaken understandings, with the implication that all that is needed to overcome them is a change in our understanding. Taylor's talk of "shared" understandings that have only been "lost sight of" and can be "retrieved" has similar implications.[26] The message seems to be: society is all right as it is, only our understanding is mistaken. It is liberal theory that is at fault, not liberal society.[27] We can find a satisfactory identity simply by accepting the "shared understandings" that have been constitutive of our identity and affirming the values they involve.

This is a familiar enough philosophy: it is the "old" Hegelian philosophy of "my station and its duties."[28] Though both Taylor and Walzer repudiate this interpretation of their views, at times it is difficult to read their words in any other way. For example, in response to the problem of family breakdown in contemporary society, Taylor deplores the increasing divorce rate and urges commitment to family life,[29] and in answer to alienation from political life he advocates a renewed affirmation of allegiance and patriotism.[30]

As a morality for the modern world this is absurd. For many people, the values of the traditional family are in irreconcilable conflict with fundamental aspects of their identities. Separation, divorce, and alternative forms of relationship are quite normal phenomena. Likewise, countless people feel no significant engagement in the political processes that govern their lives. It is not plausible to hold that all these people are simply confused and mistaken and that they can find fulfilment by a mere change in their understandings of the social world. The slogan of the 1960s had it right: "do not adjust your mind, the fault is in reality."

The Possibility of Criticism

In what sense is this the case? The point I have been making is that modern society is not a harmonious community from which, by a mere change in our understandings, we can recover a coherent set of values or a satisfactory identity. Rather, the individual in modern society finds him- or herself engaged in a plurality of conflicting roles and values.

Both Taylor and Walzer are aware of this (even if some of the things they say contradict it). In answer to the sorts of criticisms I have just been making, they argue for a different interpretation of the concept of "shared" understandings, an interpretation with distinct "young Hegelian" affinities. What we share as members of modern society is not a single and univocal set of understandings, but rather an open and developing tradition in which there is dialogue, debate, and disagreement. The understandings we share not only endorse existing practices but also criticize them. In short they embody contradictory values. The individual can thus find a

satisfactory identity in modern society without having to endorse the estab-
lished order and without recourse to values that transcend existing condi-
tions, by interpreting and articulating its shared *critical* understandings.

Walzer develops his account of social criticism on this basis.[31] He ques-
tions what he calls the "conventional" picture of the critic as a person who
achieves "critical distance" by "detaching" himself from his society and
appealing to universal values.[32] The social critic, he maintains, "does not
require either detachment or enmity, because he finds a warrant for criti-
cism in the idealism of the actually existing moral world."[33] This is the
"young Hegelian" approach. It does not attempt to portray society as a har-
monious unity.[34] The concepts of identity and community do not describe
the present state of things. Rather, they are ideals, grounded in the present,
that can be used to criticize present conditions. These ideas are memorably
expressed by the young Marx:

> Reason has always existed, but not always in a rational form. The critic
> can therefore start out from any form of theoretical and practical con-
> sciousness and from the forms *peculiar* to existing reality develop the
> true reality as its obligation and final goal. . . . We do not confront the
> world in a doctrinaire way with a new principle: Here is the truth,
> kneel down before it! We develop new principles for the world out of
> the world's own principles.[35]

The Formation of Identity

The concepts of identity and community can thus be interpreted as ide-
als with a critical content. In view of the way in which communitarianism is
often dismissed as inherently conservative, this is in itself an important
point to make. However, in conclusion I want to suggest that the line of
thought I have been developing implies a stronger view: critical notions of
identity and community are in some sense necessary for the modern self.

I started from the communitarian view that the self is a social product.
Following Taylor I argued that modern conditions of life create both a rela-
tively autonomous self and, at the same time, the aspiration for a coherent
identity and the ideal of community in its distinctively modern form. The
values of identity and community are thus social and historical products;
but that does not mean that they are only optional values, still less that they
are illusory and should be rejected, as many postmodernists suggest.

To see this it is illuminating to focus on the formation of the individual
self. As I have been arguing, this occurs through a social process. The child
is born into a particular family in a particular society. It acquires and
accepts the beliefs and values of its initial upbringing immediately and
unquestioningly, as simple givens. In MacIntyre's words, it learns "as an
apprentice learns."[36] But that is not to say that the child is a purely passive
being upon which beliefs and values are imposed externally.[37] From the
very outset, the child participates actively in its upbringing and education.
Hegel makes a profoundly important point when he observes that "the
need for an upbringing is present in children as their own feeling of

dissatisfaction with themselves at the way they are—as the drive to belong to the adult world, . . . as the desire to grow up."[38]

Even initially, in the family, the beliefs and values encountered by the growing child do not form a coherent and harmonious unity. Immediate family relations are riven with ambivalence and conflict, as Freud has made us aware. Then the child becomes involved in a wider life beyond the family. It goes to school. It enters into roles and relations with other children and adults, and encounters new ideas. It comes to experience understandings and values different from and in conflict with those it has so far acquired in the family and accepted unquestioningly.[39] Further widening of its social world brings still further experience of difference and disagreement.

Only in unusual circumstances does the growing child entirely reject these new and conflicting beliefs and values as external and alien and hold exclusively to the attitudes it originally acquired in the family. The pressures to do so are perhaps greatest when a family of one culture lives in the midst of another, or with the families of groups with very strong beliefs, such as fundamentalist religious sects.[40] Even so, beliefs and values from the wider world inevitably impinge on the growing child, and this leads to fundamental conflicts for it between the values of its upbringing and those of the surrounding world. For in most cases, the child wants to identify with the roles it enters into outside as well as inside the family; it wants to participate in its school and wider community and identify with the understandings and values they involve.

In and through the particular way in which the emerging self assumes and lives the different and conflicting roles which the surrounding world presents—affirming some, resisting others—its identity forms and develops. Just because these frameworks are contradictory, the developing self, striving to identify with them and form its own identity in relation to them, is forced to seek a resolution among the conflicting pressures they exert. In the process, it gradually develops the ability to reflect upon them and to exercise a degree of conscious choice and autonomy with respect to them.

Edmund Gosse gives an illuminating account of this process in *Father and Son*. Gosse was brought up in a family of strict Plymouth brethren in the middle years of the last century. Although he was sent to school as a weekly boarder with non-brethren, it was not so much their influence that led him to start questioning the beliefs and values of his family. Rather, it was through reading poetry, particularly Shakespeare, that he came first to experience another outlook, a different world, which, he says, "steep[ed] my horizon with all the colours of sunrise." Soon his "brain [was] full of strange discords," and he developed a growing need for "independence" and "emancipation," so that eventually he felt impelled to affirm his "individualism" and make a decisive break with his father, family, and the community of brethren.[41]

As I have stressed, and as Gosse's account illustrates, the growth of individual autonomy does not involve an escape from all frameworks; it is a *relative* autonomy, achieved only in and through identifications with a diversity of frameworks. Conflict and contradiction is essential to this

process. Without it we would never be more than mere clones of the frameworks that are constitutive of us. It is conflict and discord which drives the self out beyond itself to seek a new form of unity: an identity of its own.[42]

Thus the conflict and fragmentation inherent in modern life are not the purely negative phenomena that they are portrayed to be by MacIntyre nor the mere illusions that Taylor and Walzer, in their "old Hegelian" mode, suggest. On the contrary, they are a necessary condition for the development of an autonomous identity. However, this is not to say that they are good in themselves. Conflict and discord do not make for happiness; they are not conditions to rest in. Rather, it is conflict that leads the self to seek new forms of identity, new forms of unity.

This is neither an automatic nor an easy process in contemporary society. Some of the problems involved are portrayed with great sympathy and insight by R. D. Laing. In *The Divided Self*, he presents case histories of people who feel, in varying degrees, that they do not and cannot identify with the frameworks and roles in which they find themselves, and yet who can see no satisfactory alternatives on the basis of which they can begin to construct a different identity. Unlike with the young Gosse, there is no Shakespeare to point a way out. Instead, they detach themselves inwardly and distance themselves from their social roles and relations and the values and expectations these involve. They thus come to experience themselves as split into an inner, "true" self on the one hand, and a compliant, outer, "false" self on the other.[43]

Some measure of detachment and splitting of this sort is a normal and indeed necessary part of everyday life, but usually only as a temporary response to particular situations. However, it may be more extensive and systematic. The self then becomes more or less permanently divided, in schizoid fashion, into an inner, "true" self and an outward, "false" self or series of partial and fragmentary "false" selves. The more extreme this splitting becomes, the more likely is it to result in an identity crisis comparable to that of the self that Taylor imagines that tries to disencumber itself of all frameworks. For in such cases, the "true" self, the self with which the individual identifies, "is usually more or less unembodied. It is experienced as a mental entity. . . . The individual's actions are not felt as expressions of his self. . . . The self is not felt to participate in the doings of the false self . . . and all its . . . actions are felt to be increasingly false and futile."[44]

In short, the attempt to form an identity by detaching oneself from one's outward roles and relations is not satisfactory. For the self is essentially social, and the inner, "true" self formed by this detachment is no more the truth of the self than is the "false" self. The more it is separated and isolated from its real and outer attachments, the more it is revealed to be just as empty and false as the "false" self that it rejects. The truth is the whole: a satisfactory identity can be formed only if such splitting is minimized and the self is realized objectively and outwardly as well as subjectively and inwardly. For as Laing's cases show, we cannot form a satisfactory identity through a process that involves external compliance with all the demands made upon us; we must resist and reject some of them, and develop the

strength to become, outwardly and publicly, a determinate and distinctive presence of our own in the roles and relations in which we are involved.

The Ironic Self

These views are denied by a succession of recent poststructuralists and postmodernists, including Foucault, Lacan, Rorty, and their many followers. Running through this work is the view that the concept of a unitary and coherent self is an essentialist fiction, a Cartesian myth, a socially created illusion. In reality, there is no identity, no determinate self that can be authentically itself: the self is a "centerless" assemblage of fragmentary identities, partial and disjointed selves. The idea of a single unified identity should be abandoned. Instead, these writers argue, we should welcome the fragmentation of the self that modern society induces. We should revel in diversity and difference. We should reject the search for authenticity and adopt in its place an ironic, playful, and "aesthetic" attitude.[45]

These ideas, we are constantly told, are exciting, iconoclastic, liberating, and radical. No doubt, the detachment and refusal that these writers advocate is a more critical and radical reaction, and often a more honest and authentic one, than mere conformity and acceptance. It is an essential moment of autonomy and of the critical stance.[46] However, it is so only as long as there continues to be an ironic self: a self that can remain detached and playful. Assertions to the contrary notwithstanding, such a detached, ironic, playful, "true" self is implicitly presupposed in much of this literature. Once this sense of identity really begins to disappear, once the self really begins to dissolve without remainder into a series of fragmentary "false" selves, then the self is on the road to psychotic breakdown, which few of these writers seriously advocate.

Few but not none. At the radical extreme, Deleuze and Guattari really do reject any idea of a "true" self and glorify psychosis as true liberation.[47] This has the virtue of formal consistency at least, but as regards its content it is an untenable sort of romanticism. Few people, in fact, relish the fragmentation of their identity in which these writers revel. The psychotic feels increasingly false, futile, empty, and unreal, as Laing describes. Psychosis is a miserable and terrifying condition, and virtually all serious studies agree that "far from being a liberated state, the dissolution of selfhood characteristic of psychosis is deadeningly disempowering and frantically terrifying. . . . That way nothing lies."[48]

Authenticity and Community

It is common ground to both communitarians and postmodernists that there is no essential self. The self is a social product; the ideals of identity and community are historical creations. But that does not mean that they are illusory. They are real for all that; communitarianism is right to insist on this. However, neither of the versions of the communitarian philosophy that I have been discussing gives an adequate account of these values. For it is a mistake to believe that they can be realized either by a return to the

traditional community of the past, as MacIntyre implies, or that they can be retrieved through a changed way of understanding the present, as Taylor and Walzer maintain. Rather, they must be interpreted as critical ideals that point toward the future. For what the views that I have been outlining indicate is the need for new forms of common life that recognize the relatively autonomous self as a reality of the modern world that seeks to construct a community in which it can develop and be realized.

Notes

[1] Cf. Daniel Bell, *Communitarianism and Its Critics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 17. Alasdair MacIntyre explicitly repudiates the label in "The Spectre of Communitarianism," *Radical Philosophy* 70 (March/April 1995), p. 35.

[2] Charles Taylor, "Atomism," in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 187–210; Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[3] Richard Rorty's "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy" and "Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism," in *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), begin from this basis; and John Rawls now defends his theory of justice in a similar fashion, in what he calls "political not metaphysical" terms, in "Justice as Fairness: Political Not Metaphysical," in *Communitarianism and Individualism*, ed. S. Avineri and A. de-Shalit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 186–204.

[4] MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1981), p. 240.

[5] Ibid., pp. 160–61.

[6] Ibid., p. 5.

[7] Ibid., chap. 2. The classic version of this sort of critique of modern society is J.-J. Rousseau, *A Discourse on Inequality*, trans. Maurice Cranston (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1984).

[8] MacIntyre, "The Spectre of Communitarianism."

[9] Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 99; cf. Taylor, "What is Human Agency?" in *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 15–44.

[10] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 27, 31.

[11] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1979), makes this point in very different terms by insisting that the modern self is the product of a variety of disciplinary "regimes," not of their mere absence.

[12] Taylor, "The Nature and Scope of Distributive Justice," in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, p. 309.

[13] Except to note that Taylor, in his anxiety to avoid any suspicion of Marxism, repudiates attempts to explain the transition to modernity in materialist terms, and portrays these frameworks almost exclusively as systems of ideas. This has important consequences that I mention below.

[14] As well as in each individual from the specific conditions of his or her upbringing.

[15] Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in *Selected Works*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1958), p. 23.

[16] It is this notion to which Sandel is pointing when he writes, "while the contours of my identity will in some ways be open subject to revision, they are not wholly without shape." *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, p. 180.

[17] Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 48. However, it should be noted that the modern identity is something distinct and not merely the traditional identity made problematic. In Hegelian language, the development is from identity that exists only "implicitly" and "in itself" to one that exists also "explicitly" and "for itself."

[18] "Negatively the modern identity brings withering of community, positively the goal of fulfilment of my nature." Taylor, "Legitimation Crisis?" in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, p. 262.

[19] Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 25. See also Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), for an excellent earlier version of this sort of account.

[20] Taylor, "Justice after Virtue," in J. Horton and S. Mendus, eds., *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Cambridge, England: Polity, 1994), p. 31.

[21] Cf. Walzer: "[w]e have to start from where we are. Where we are, however, is always some place of value. . . . What we do when we argue is to give an account of the actually existing morality. That morality is authoritative for us because it is only by virtue of its existence that we exist as the moral beings we are." Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 17, 21.

[22] Cf. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 23.

[23] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 10; cf. *The Ethics of Authenticity*, chaps. 1–3.

[24] Walzer, "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism," *Political Theory* 18 (1990), p. 10 (emphasis in original).

[25] Cf. Will Kymlicka: "*No end or goal is exempt from possible re-examination*. . . . This doesn't require that I can ever perceive a self totally unencumbered by any ends. . . . There must always be some ends given with the self . . . but it doesn't follow that any *particular* ends must always be taken as given with the self." *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), pp. 52–53 (emphasis in original). Dostoevsky makes this point in a particularly effective, if sour, way in *Notes from Underground*, through the remarkable figure of the "underground man." See also M. Berman's illuminating discussion of this story in *All That Is Solid Melts in Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1983).

[26] The idealism of Taylor's account of the "making of the modern identity" mentioned in note 13 encourages this view.

[27] Cf. Walzer, "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism."

[28] F. H. Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), chap. 5.

[29] Daniel Bell even entertains the idea of reinstituting arranged marriages. *Communitarianism and Its Critics*, p. 180.

[30] Taylor, "Legitimation Crisis?" The question mark indicates Taylor's skepticism about the reality of such a crisis. See also Taylor, "Cross Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate," in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, ed. Nancy L. Rosenblum (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), and *The Ethics of Authenticity*, chaps. 9–10.

[31] Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*. See also his *The Company of Critics: Social Criticism and Political Commitment in the Twentieth Century* (London: Halban, 1989), and Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*.

[32] Not that Walzer denies the existence of such critics altogether. On the contrary, he cites Marx and Sartre as examples. Their indictments of their societies are radical and total; they write as "spectators," "outsiders," "strangers." In contrast, Walzer puts forward the model of the "connected critic" (e.g., Herzen, Gandhi, Orwell) who appeals to "local principles" and is "one of us."

However, Walzer cannot legitimately divide critics into "us" and "them" in this way. His philosophy, consistently thought through, rules out the very concept of

the "detached" critic. For the first principle of its social ontology is that the individual cannot relinquish all frameworks and adopt an entirely "detached" perspective. It follows that all values, even the most extreme, have their source in existing conditions. Walzer himself acknowledges this when he writes, "criticism *always* has a starting point inside the dominant culture," *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, pp. 41–42 (my emphasis). In other words, both the "detached" and the "connected" critic can claim to be "one of us"—it all depends on who "we" are. Even a philosophy like Marx's must be comprehended as the articulation of ideas and attitudes that were shared by certain groups in his society, and that arose from the social conditions of his time, as Marx himself well understood.

[33] Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, p. 61.

[34] This applies to traditional as well as modern society.

[35] Marx, Letter to Ruge (September 1843), in *Collected Works*, vol. 3 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), pp. 143–44 (emphasis in original). See also Sayers, "The Actual and the Rational," in *Hegel and Modern Philosophy*, ed. D. Lamb (Oxford: Croom Helm, 1987), pp. 143–60.

[36] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 240.

[37] Contrast Althusser's view that people are mere passive "supports" for social relations. L. Althusser and E. Balibar, *Reading Capital* (London: Verso, 1970), p. 112.

[38] G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, ed. A. W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 212, §175.

[39] I can still remember vividly my shock when I went to school and discovered that others did not share the moral and political outlook that up until then I had taken to be evident and indisputable.

[40] In these cases, however, the cultural group or sect to which the family belongs often constitutes a community beyond the family that helps to sustain the family in its ideas and values, even if that group or sect is not well represented at the school or in the surrounding community.

[41] Edmund Gosse, *Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1949), pp. 193–44, 206, 224.

[42] This line of thought is rightly associated with Hegel, but similar ideas are to be found in Kant, who writes that without discord, "man would live an Arcadian, pastoral existence of perfect concord, self-sufficiency and mutual love. But all human talents would remain hidden for ever in a dormant state. . . . Man wishes concord, but nature, knowing better what is good for his species, wishes discord." *Political Writings*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 45.

[43] "True" and "false" are intended here in a phenomenological sense.

[44] R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1965), pp. 73–74.

[45] See, e.g., Rorty, "Freud and Moral Reflection," in *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 143–63, for a clear and lively presentation of this line of thought.

[46] Cf. the notion of "critical distance," which Walzer interestingly explores in *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, chap. 2.

[47] G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (New York: Viking Press, 1977).

[48] S. Frosh, *Identity Crisis: Modernity, Psychoanalysis and the Self* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 180.