

Liberal Virtue / Communitarian Virtue

Marc Stier

Intellectual Heritage Program
Temple University
6714 Wissahickon Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19119
(215) 844-4101
MarcStier@stier.net
www.stier.net

Prepared for presentation at the 2002 meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, August 30, 2002.

Liberal Virtue / Communitarian Virtue

Marc Stier

I. THE COMMUNITARIAN CRITIQUE OF LIBERALISM

Central to the communitarian critique of liberalism is the claim that communal affairs have come to play only a marginal role in the lives of liberal citizens.¹ We liberal citizens do not take part in communal activities. And communal goods contribute little to our well being. The consequences for our both our political and our individual lives are, communitarians claim, disastrous.

There may be some reasons, to which we will return, for thinking that the communitarian critique of liberalism is overstated. But signs of a rampant and pernicious individualism in our political community do abound. In the last forty year, knowledge of, interest in, competence at serving, and commitment to the common good appears to have declined in the United States.² The political process is ever more in the hands of paid professionals rather than committed citizens. The only interest groups and voluntary associations that do not face a declining membership are those that demand nothing but a credit

This paper is a companion piece to my “How Much of Communitarianism is Left (and Right)?” in Peter Augustine Lawler and Dale McConkey, eds. *Community and Political Thought Today* (Praeger, 1998). A longer version of this essay can also be found on my web site. I have tried to make the argument more or less independent of that found in the earlier piece. This is a draft and a very early one at that. Comments are very much welcome.

This initial impetus to this paper came from a comment Amitai Etzioni made on the earlier paper. In that paper I held that, if we want to sustain civic virtues, we must create strong local communities. While I suggested that there was some possibility of a spillover of virtue from local settings to politics in state and Federal governments, I downplayed the likelihood, and importance, of this occurring. And I said very little about how and why it might occur. Professor Etzioni suggested that this was a serious lacunae in the view of communitarianism put forward in my paper. I quickly conclude that he was correct. Even if it is difficult to create, civic virtue is something we should encourage in the polity as a whole. Thus it is important to think about the kinds of virtues that are found in strong local communities and how they might relate to the, possibly different, virtues that are important in the broader politics of liberal regimes. At about the same time I was thinking about this issue, I read the arguments of Macedo and Galston to the effect that there are distinct liberal virtues. These arguments were meant to be a liberal rebuttal to the communitarian critique. It was immediately evident to me that they were not a sufficient rebuttal. But it also struck me that the notion of liberal virtues would help me talk about the kinds of virtue that communitarian seek in the polity as a whole. And, it also seemed that, if I could clearly explain why the notion of liberal virtues did not provide a satisfactory rebuttal to the communitarian critique of liberalism, I would have at least the beginning of an answer to the questions raised for me by Professor Etzioni: how are local virtues different from national (or, for that matter, global) virtues and by what means would the political and social conditions that produced the former virtues help to produce the latter as well.

The reader will have to judge whether I have done justice to the ideas that inspired this paper. There should be no doubt, however, of the enormous contribution of Diane Gottlieb and Katja Gottlieb-Stier to my work. And, since I practice as well as preach communitarian politics, I should also thank my fellow volunteers at West Mt. Airy Neighbors, whose work has been, for the last three years, my prime model of civic virtue.

¹ There are, by now, many works that set out the central themes of communitarianism. The best place to start is certainly the work of Amitai Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993) and Etzioni, ed. *New Communitarian Thinking*. Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 1995. The work that most stimulated political theorists to think about liberalism’s inadequate understanding of virtue and the common good is Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). See also his *Democracy’s Discontent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996) for his further thoughts on these issues and a persuasive account of the development of republican and liberal ideas in American politics.

² See, for example, Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

card number from their members. Public institutions of all sorts—schools, parks, roads and bridges, railroads and subways, museums and orchestras—are starved for a lack of public funding. And not only have public institutions and practices suffered, but individuals are ever more likely to treat both putatively cooperative enterprises and other people as means to their own ends. Though it has declined in recent years, crime rates are still uncomfortably high. The decencies of everyday life are less and less common. Corruption in all walks of life, from the college classroom to the board room seems to be increasing. Formerly collegial institutions from universities to law firms to hospitals have been rocked as individual stars move from place to place demanding a greater share of the resources from, and contributing less to, the common enterprise.

Communitarians present two reasons to worry about what I shall call this communitarian deficit. The first is that the achievements of liberal regimes are endangered by the decline of community. Liberal regimes have, on this view, been living on the moral capital inherited from earlier forms of political and social life. It is a pre-liberal devotion to the common good that has led liberal citizens to make the commitments that are necessary to the survival of liberalism. Liberal citizens willingly pay their taxes, fight in war, and compromise with one another for the sake of the common good because of sentiments and virtues that the continuing advance of liberal forms of life and thought have done much to dissolve. Moreover, the communitarian deficit grows like a budget deficit: Unless dramatic action is taken, each year it is likely to grow larger. Just as deficits today lead to greater expenditure on interest payments in the future and thus every larger deficits, people who become less interested and involved in communal activities, and less concerned with common goods, are unlikely to have the virtues that support these communal endeavors. Common activities and the common provision of goods thus become even less important in our lives. And the communitarian deficit deepens. On the other hand, just as surpluses today reduce budget outlays in the future, the greater the role of community in our lives today, the more likely we are to appreciate what we receive from common efforts. And, because everyone receives common goods, when they play a large role in our lives the tensions that undermine the life of a community are mitigated. Communal goods and activities support the virtues that are necessary if men and women are to continue to uphold common endeavors.

There is a second reason for worrying about the communitarian deficit, the possibility that it is a serious barrier to human fulfillment. On this view, human beings outside of strong communities are bound to be frustrated. This line of thought comes in a number of versions. Some theorists hold that a sense of solidarity with other human beings is a prerequisite for human well being and that this cannot be attained if community is not central to our lives. Others argue that participation in communal affairs is necessary because, without it, human beings cannot fully develop and exercise their faculties and capacities. Still others make an Aristotelian claim that a life devoted to the virtues central to the practices of excellence makes for human happiness and that this is only possible in a strong community.

Despite their differences, both lines of communitarian thought claim that liberalism is deficient because it offers us no moral ideal, no conception of the moral virtues, and no view of a life well lived. Communitarians argue that liberalism has an empty center. As a result, liberal political life makes a genuine sense of community impossible. A true community requires a shared view of the good life and of the virtues that sustain such a life. Without such a conception, it is impossible for men and women to find their happiness in common activities and goods. Without it, there are no grounds upon which to ask people to sacrifice for the common good. Without it, political and social life degenerates into atomism and anomie.

Against this view, political theorists such as William Galston, Rogers Smith, and, most notably, Stephen Macedo, have argued that liberalism does have a distinctive moral ideal and an accompanying set of liberal virtues.³ Liberal regimes, they say, inculcate a particular, and demanding, set of virtues.

³ Galston, William A. *Liberal Purposes*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Rogers M. Smith, *Liberalism and American Constitutional Law* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Stephen

Liberalism insists that citizens be tolerant and that they be principled, reasonable, and active participants in their political life. Liberalism, for these virtue liberals, is not lacking in a conception of a life well lived. While it does not endorse any particular set of goals or aims, the procedures by which liberals should live and make decisions with one another rest upon a particular conception of the virtues and the good life, one that can both sustain a sense of community and the self-esteem of the members of that community. The communitarian deficit can best be reduced, on this view, if we uphold the liberal, procedural virtues and thereby encourage men and women to be devoted to their common, liberal life.

This essay aims to find some balance between the claims of liberals and communitarians, in the hope of showing that a liberal communitarian political community is no oxymoron. I will suggest that the argument of the virtue liberals is largely mistaken. While the liberal virtues are both attractive and necessary to a good political community (section II), they are not sufficient in themselves (section III). We cannot reduce the communitarian deficit by reliance on the liberal, procedural virtues themselves. However attractive the liberal virtues are, there is no reason to believe that, if they were the only virtues, many people in liberal regimes would live by them. The reason is that, if we think of them as standing alone, there is no essential connection between the liberal virtues and human happiness. Thus, if we wish to encourage communal involvement, we have to further what I shall call substantive or communitarian virtues (sections IV and V). However, in a liberal political community, the substantive or communitarian virtues are very different from similar virtues in a non-liberal community. As result, substantive virtues are insufficient as well. We need higher level virtues—virtues that are close in spirit to the liberal virtues—in order to find a balance between the different kinds of communal goods and communities open to us in a liberal regime. And we need these higher level virtues to create the conditions for the communitarian virtues themselves. Ultimately, many of us will we need the liberal virtues if we are to live a life devoted to the communitarian virtues. (Section V).

II. LIBERAL VIRTUES

Critics of the communitarian challenge to liberalism reject the claim that liberalism has an empty center. Liberalism, they say, is a political doctrine that is meant to address human beings who disagree about the human good—about the virtues; about the good life for humankind; and about the best form of political community. The disagreements liberals expect in their political and social lives are deep, profound, and potentially the source of conflict and war. Liberalism hopes to find moral principles that can contain and constrain these disagreements without eliminating them.⁴ Liberal political and moral principles seek to stand above many of our conflicts about the human good. Yet the very solution liberalism proposes to these conflicts itself proposes a vision of the good life and the good community, albeit one that is rather more general and abstract than the visions of the good it seeks to regulate.

Liberalism recognizes that reasonable people can disagree about the human good. Thus liberalism asks, what moral principles will reasonable people accept, knowing that they cannot expect agreement on any substantive account of the human good? Among the principles that liberals say reasonable people will accept are:

- **Freedom:** Liberalism is broadly tolerant of the various aims, goals, and purposes human beings might pursue, except in so far as they conflict with freedom itself.

Macedo, *Liberal Virtues: Citizenship, Virtue, and Community in Liberal Constitutionalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁴ Among the works that defend such a view of liberalism are John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) and J. Donald Moon, *Constructing Community Moral Pluralism and Tragic Conflicts*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

- **Democracy:** Liberalism insists on some form of democratic rule as a means of settling disputes.
- **Public Reason:** Liberalism expects that citizens will seek to resolve their disagreements by recourse to publicly affirmed political and moral principles.

Liberalism seeks political institutions and public policies that are neutral to different conceptions of the human good in that are not based upon and do not directly attempt to further a particular view of human well being. Yet the institutions and practices of liberalism themselves may legitimately favor some views of the human good rather than others. And, even more importantly, there is a kind of liberal character that is an ideal embedded in the whole liberal project. The liberal virtues are the distinctive traits of liberal characters.

Liberal political communities do not require their citizens to exemplify the ideal liberal character. Yet the teachings of liberals and, even more, the practical way of life in the world of liberalism, encourages the liberal virtues, much to the chagrin of those who defend doctrines and ways of life that, however tolerated under liberalism, are discouraged by the liberal ideal.

The liberal ideal is a person—most definitely not only a man—who is capable of choosing his own path in life while furthering the institutions and practices of liberalism.

In pursuit of their own good, good liberals must be:

- Open to critical reflection on the beliefs and ideals with which they have been raised.
- Sympathetic to a wide range of traditional and experimental ways of life.
- Capable of choosing on the basis of independent examination of the paths open to her

In defense of the liberal way of life, liberals must be

- Devoted to the principles of a liberal polity.
- Respectful for and tolerant of the widest range of human visions of the good, consistent with the fundamental principles of liberalism
- Committed to following impartial laws and fair procedures for making them.
- Informed about political and social life.
- Dedicated to engaging in debate about the institutions, practices, and policies by which a liberal community is governed
- Loathe to use coercion rather than persuasion against those with whom they disagree, except in defense of liberal principles.
- Moderate in their pursuit of their own vision of the good and open to reasonable compromises with others.
- Willing to do their share to bear the burdens of liberal regimes, from paying taxes, to accepting the costs of freedom, participating in politics, and fighting and dieing for their country.

The liberal character I have briefly sketched here does, at first, seem to be an adequate response to the communitarian complaint. It is be an ideal to live by. It provides a sound basis of self-esteem. And it also provides the grounds for a variety of public policies aimed at furthering this vision of a liberal character. The liberal ideal justifies not just civic education in liberal principles, but a democratic education in the characteristics of mind and heart that enable one to choose one's own path in life while defending the political and moral framework of liberalism. The liberal ideal can justify building statutes

to the political, civic, religious, and intellectual heroes of liberalism. It is an ideal that can sustain public spaces—both physical and virtual—within which discussion and debate about the common good and human rights can take place. It is an ideal that can inspire devotion and encourage men and women to sacrifice for the common good

III. THE TROUBLE WITH LIBERAL VIRTUE

I confess that this vision of a good liberal character still has the power to make my heart beat just a little faster. Yet, as inspiring as it is, the liberal way of life I have just summarized is, in important ways, inadequate. In the rest of this essay, I shall argue that the liberal virtues, and the view of liberalism that emphasizes these virtues, cannot by themselves define a satisfactory form of communal life. For these virtues, like most moral theories of liberalism, are largely procedural in nature. They tell us, in general, how to conduct our common life. But they do not tell us what ends we should seek together. Without common ends, however, human beings will often have little reason to actively exercise any virtues, including the liberal ones. A failure to exercise liberal virtues, however, will ultimately lead to their atrophy. This will result, in part, from simple disuse. The deeper problem, however, is that the individualism of life in the liberal democracies often rewards liberal vices rather than liberal virtues. Unless we temper that individualism by encouraging men and women to find at least part of their own good in common ends, the virtue of our citizens will always be threatened. To live a life devoted to some common good is to accept not only procedural virtues but substantive or communitarian virtues, virtues that are necessary to the life of a community that aims at particular ends.

I do not mean to deny that the ideal liberal character is inspiring and or that liberal virtues are to be encouraged. Indeed, one aim of this essay is to set out the political circumstances and philosophical presuppositions needed to sustain this ideal. But it is my contention that the liberal ideal wither and die if it stands alone. The liberal virtues are parasitic on other, more substantive virtues and cannot survive by themselves. As a result, the substantive virtues are increasingly ignored, or actively attacked, in contemporary liberal regimes. If that worrisome trend continues, then not just substantive virtues but the liberal virtues themselves will come to seem quaint and old-fashioned relics of a genteel and distant past. And the hopes of those who expect the communitarian deficit to be overcome by a devotion to liberal virtue will be dashed. To support and restore both the substantive and the liberal virtues, however, liberal regimes will have to adopt new institutions and practices of a kind that sits uneasily with most liberals, including most virtue liberals.

This is a large set of claims. I can only hope to sketch a plausible defense of them here. I can best begin that sketch by asking a simple question, why would anyone live up to the liberal ideal? What would lead a citizen of a liberal regime to find the liberal virtues attractive? For, it should be obvious that most of our fellow citizens, not to say our political leaders, fall terribly short when judged by the standards of the liberal virtues. And, even more strikingly, it should also be evident that *we* do not judge or condemn ourselves or our fellow citizens by the standard of the liberal virtues. In most cases, we have a more relaxed standard, one that we might call liberal minimalism.

A minimal liberal abides by the basic elements of liberal citizenship. A minimal liberal obeys the law and pays his or her taxes. A minimal liberal refrains from violating the rights of others and is willing to tolerate those who are different. Beyond this, minimal liberals do not go. They may or may not have further, more particular commitments to people or ideals. But a minimal liberal adopts no special critical stance to his or her own life and accepts no further commitments to the public order as a whole. Minimal liberals are not especially critical of their own ways of life or particularly sympathetic to that of others. They live as they have been brought up to live or as those around them live. Minimal liberals are willing to grant freedom to those who differ from them. But they do not respect such people enough to engage with them either in a supportive or critical manner. (Both forms of engagement are expressions of respect, albeit different kinds of respect.) They obey the law. But it rarely occurs to them that a good law is

anything but a law that serves their own interests. They avoid political engagements of all kinds, and try to avoid arguments and debates about anything but the local sports teams. Indeed they pay little attention to politics, except when it comes to seek benefits from or avoiding burdens of the government. Politics, for the minimal liberal, gets in the way of the work, recreation, and family activities that are of primary importance in his life.

No doubt virtue liberals are right that men and women in liberal regimes can be moved by liberal ideals and seek to exemplify the liberal virtues in their lives. But men and women in liberal political communities today are as or more likely to be minimal liberals. And it is not at all obvious what it is in liberal regimes that might encourage people to be more than minimal liberals—or to try to help their friends, neighbors, and children be more than minimal liberals.

One answer might be that minimal liberalism is inherently unstable because it quickly generates a communitarian deficit. For minimal liberals look very much like the atomized individuals so bemoaned by the communitarians. A liberal political regime peopled by minimal liberals might survive for a long time. Yet, when put under stress or strain, such a political community is subject to collapse. A prolonged economic crisis or a difficult war might lead minimal liberals to accept another kind of government, one that promises a quick solution to difficult problems. And a prolonged economic crisis or difficult war might be the product of a political community that cannot count on men and women to sacrifice their own well being for the common good.

As we saw at the head of the paper, the instability of a political community composed of minimal liberals is one of the central concerns that lead to the communitarian critique of liberalism. So we can accept that the virtue liberals do have the beginnings of a satisfactory reply to that critique. A liberal polity composed of ideal liberals would not suffer from the kinds of instability that communitarians fear. But we still have the difficulty of explaining why men and women would adopt the liberal ideal. While the instability of a world of minimal liberals might give us reason to wish that our fellow citizens upheld the liberal virtues, it does not give each of us a reason be virtuous in this way. While it is collectively rational for us all to exemplify the liberal virtues, it is not obviously rational for us minimal liberals to be born again as ideal liberals. Or, to put the point another way, for a minimal liberal to embrace the liberal virtues for the sake of the common good, he or she would already have to accept the liberal virtues.

So, we are left with the question, why would anyone embrace these virtues and be an ideal liberal? Put on the spot in this way, a defender of the liberal virtues might respond by simply dismissing the question. He might claim that a political theory of liberalism has no obligation to explain what motivates people to act virtuously. The conditions under which people live up to the liberal ideal might, in other words, be considered a question for psychology or sociology. Political and moral theory, on the other hand, can take it for granted that men and women can live up to a political ideal because it is right for them to do so.⁵ That is all the reason anyone needs—and political and moral theory can supply—to act virtuously. Whether people are motivated to do as they ought, is a psychological or sociological issue. When it comes to making men and women good liberals, the political theorist could simply say that this practical question should be left in the hands of preachers, teachers, and parents.

In rejecting the question, “Why would men and women live up to liberal ideals?” liberals are distancing themselves from the Aristotelian view of the relationship between virtue and human well being. In the Aristotelian tradition, moral virtue is the core of a life of eudemonia or happiness. The moral virtues, on this view, are central to a certain way of life, one that both unites a political community and gives each person a secure sense of his place in it. So, it is central to the task of an Aristotelian political theorist to show that there is an intrinsic connection between the virtues and a good life.

⁵ Or, following the approach of Rawls, a virtue liberal might argue that the sole concern of political theory is whether liberal ideals demand more than can be expected of most men or women.

Most liberal political and moral theories have denied that the moral precepts of liberalism are intrinsically part of a good life. In both the social contract tradition of Locke and Kant and the utilitarian tradition of Bentham and James Mill, we have an instrumental interest in respecting the rights of others. But that is because, by doing so, we avoid the punishments handed down in the courts of public opinion, the civil magistrate, or God. Unless we have a particular and possibly unusual set of desires, however, a moral life does not contribute to our good in any more direct way. Indeed, the rules of liberal morality are constraints on our pursuit of happiness. If we could violate the rights of others with impunity—if we had something like Plato’s ring of Gyges—we would have no reason to live up to liberal ideals.

Some liberals have tried to find a deeper connection between virtue and our nature. For some, infractions against the rules of liberalism are also punished by a guilty conscience. But, if the cheapest cure for a guilty conscience is psychotherapy rather than obeying liberal morality, cost-benefit analysis surely would recommend the former path. Kant, on the other hand, did hold that we have a reason to act morally. But the pure practical reason that leads us to uphold the categorical imperative, is utterly separate from the impure practical reason that leads us to follow hypothetical imperatives that connection actions to the satisfaction of our desires.⁶ Kantian reasons for acting morally are independent of the reasons rooted in a concern for our well being.

Liberals, then, have by and large rejected the Aristotelian notion that morality serves human happiness. Liberals have taught men and women to live by liberal moral principles. But it has not pretended that our own happiness requires us to follow the precepts of liberal morality. To those for whom moral instruction in liberal principles seems insufficient, liberals have pointed to the good, prudential reasons for respecting the rights of others, reasons that are backed up by the immense power of the liberal state.

The key point I have been sidling up to is that virtue liberals cannot take the same stand towards the morality as is found in the liberal tradition. If virtue liberalism is to be an adequate response to the communitarian critique of liberalism, it is not enough for it to say that pure practical reason will lead us to practice the liberal virtues. It is not enough to say that the fear of punishment will lead us to follow the liberal ideal. Nor is it enough to say that preachers, teachers, and parents will encourage devotion to the liberal virtues. Those might be sufficient responses if all we ask of people is that they be minimal liberals. But they are not sufficient for a virtue liberal.

If a political and moral theory asks relatively little from people, then it need not show why living up to that theory serves the good of human beings. Liberalism has traditionally not asked very much from men and women. It has offered them a great deal of freedom and opportunity and merely asked that they respect the freedom and opportunity of others. But the liberal virtues are quite demanding. They ask men and women to question their own ideals. They ask them to appreciate the variety of ways of life in their political communities. They ask them to put aside their own interests and to think of the common good. They ask them to participate in self-government in an engaged and reflective manner. These are strenuous demands. Many people in liberal regimes find self-reflection difficult, troubling, or even incapacitating. They would find it easier to attain whatever goals they have by a way of life that did not raise troubling questions. Many people in liberal regimes lack much interest in or appreciation of ways of life different from their own. Their own self-esteem is, in fact, served by their belief in the superiority of their own way of life. Many people in liberal regimes never call into question the claims they make on other people or on government. They find it easier to press these claims precisely because they never worry about the justice of what they demand. Many people in liberal regimes pay little or no attention to politics or community

⁶ Interestingly enough, Kant is one who saw the difficulty I have been concerned with here, as one can see from an examination of his moral thought as a whole. But his solution has not recommended itself to contemporary liberals who take Kant to be the ancestor of the deontological liberalism that rejects the demand that virtue should serve the good of human beings.

life. They see no reason to concern themselves with any matters that would distract themselves from their own work or recreation or family.

These demands of liberal virtue, then, are likely to interfere with the aims and goals of many people in a liberal regime. Those who, for whatever reason, take an active part in community affairs or whose work leads to them take part in politics, broadly defined, might find the liberal virtues of some importance to them. But the proportion of people to whom this applies is not all that large. And, even for them, the liberal virtues are problematic. It is by no means obvious that adherence to the liberal virtues is the best path to high position in public or community life or in the public or private bureaucracies that govern us day to day. Critical, reflective, and open thought does not, after all, characterize what passes for the discussion and debate found in our elections these days. Impartial devotion to the common good is not the first thing one sees among the heads of our polities or our great corporations.

If the liberal virtues come into conflict with our own goals and aspirations, why should we sacrifice them for the sake of an ideal way of life that so far exceeds the minimum that liberalism has always demanded? It seems odd that liberalism, which holds up individual freedom as the highest political ideal, should insist that men and women devote themselves to a way of life that conflicts with their own ends.

The demand that men and women practice the liberal virtues is thus contrary to the both the interests of many men and women and to the individualism of liberal political and moral thought. As a result, the liberal virtues, standing alone cannot serve as the basis for self-esteem in a liberal political community. Self-esteem is based upon two beliefs. First, we must believe that the ideals and aspirations that animate our life will enable us to live well. And, second, we must believe that we are capable of living up to our ideals and attaining our goals. The liberal virtues meet the second criteria. But, for many people in a liberal regime, they do not meet the first one. A set of virtues that are disconnected from the everyday pursuits of men and women simply cannot provide us with the ideals and aspirations by which we evaluate ourselves.

It seems, then, that if defenders of the liberal virtues are unable to show us how virtue serves human happiness, they cannot consistently recommend those virtues to us. Nor can those virtues serve as the basis of self-esteem. And, the further consequence is that virtue liberalism, by itself, has no real answer to the communitarian critique of liberalism. For the central theme of the communitarian challenge to liberalism is that liberal political regimes undermine the commitment of men and women to the common good. Communitarians argue that such commitment can only be sustained in political communities of a certain kind, in which common affairs, and the virtues that sustain them, are central to a good life for human beings. Liberal institutions and practices, on the other hand, drive people to focus on their individual lives.

Now, if these arguments—which I will discuss further in a moment—are correct, then the defenders of the liberal virtues do not have a satisfactory answer to the communitarians. For the difficulty to which the communitarians point is not primarily theoretical. Or, perhaps better, the difficulty is one that transcends the liberal way of distinguishing between the theory and practice of moral virtue. The communitarian deficit of contemporary life can hardly be blamed on liberal thought alone. It is not just that, until recently, there has been no satisfactory account of liberal virtues. If we can point to a relatively recent growth in the communitarian deficit, then it should be obvious that more communal forms of life are capable of surviving in liberal regimes for a long time. And the communitarians themselves tell us that this is true, for they say that liberal ways of thought make it difficult for us to properly appreciate the extent to which many of us still live lives that are centered on common ideals and goods. Communitarians do point out that the distorted picture of our lives created by liberalism can have a corrosive effect on our common lives. Precisely because it points us away from the centrality of communal affairs in our lives, liberalism leads us to neglect those institutions and practices that sustain our common life. Still, while this is one source of the communitarian deficit, it cannot be the only one. For the appeal of liberal

individualism is not just theoretical. Sad to say, we political theorists may be unacknowledged but we are not the legislators of the world of liberalism. Some changes in the way we live have made it harder for men and women to find sustenance in their common lives and easier for them to focus on finding satisfaction in their individual activities and accomplishments. Other changes will be necessary if we are to revive our common life and the virtues that go along with it.

The difficulties to which communitarians point, then, do not arise, as some communitarians have argued, because liberals have no conception of the virtues. Rather the problem is that the liberal virtues have no basis of support in liberal political and social institutions and practices. Or, to put the point another way, a satisfactory answer to the communitarians must be Aristotelian in nature. It must show how a liberal political regime can encourage people to be committed to the common good. And to do this, it must show us why liberal (and other) virtues are part of a good life for human beings.

III. THE NATURE OF THE VIRTUES

The liberal virtues, then, are not, by themselves, going to reduce the communitarian deficit. If we want men and women to be committed to the common good, then they we will have to create forms of life in which virtue is central to the good of human beings. If we are to understand how to restore the virtues, and a commitment to the common good, to our political life, then we must have a clear view of the place of the virtues in a good human life. I cannot present a full account of the virtues here. But it might be helpful if I make some remarks, drawing upon Alasdair MacIntyre's recent work, on the Aristotelian understanding of the virtues and their centrality to a good life.

We can most usefully understand the virtues if we see them as necessary to attaining the goods internal to practices of excellences. The best account of practices of excellence has been provided by MacIntyre:

By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods intrinsic to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved are systematically extended.⁷

Following MacIntyre, I would argue that practices of excellence form a three leveled hierarchy. At the bottom are what I would call the narrow practices of excellence that make up a very wide range of human activities, from playing a musical instrument to writing a computer program. At the next level is the practice of individual deliberation. It consists in an individual deliberating about and choosing to live a good life of a particular kind, which includes a variety of practices of excellence involving relationships with a variety of people. At the highest level is the practice of political deliberation. It consists in the efforts of a group of people to create and maintain a form of political community that allow them to pursue a good life. The central task of the two broader practices of excellence is to determine the relative importance of the narrower practices of excellence in the life of a particular person and of a political community.

The pursuit of the internal goods of the practices of excellence sometimes conflict with and sometimes require us to attain other goods. This conflict is especially serious with regard to the external goods of money, honor, and power. For money, honor or recognition, and power are often needed to

7. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* second edition with postscript (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

sustain the lives of those who take part in practices of excellence as well as the institutions that support these practices. Yet if we turn a practice of excellence into a means of making money or winning honors, we run the danger of subverting our efforts to meet the standards of excellence that define that practice.

A central role of the virtues, on Macintyre's account, is to enable human beings to choose well in balancing internal and external goods. Courage, the first virtue on many lists, is necessary because various risks are always undertaken in the pursuit of the internal goods of practices of excellence. The risk of death in defense of one's political community is the most important but by no means the only occasion in which courage is important.

Generosity is the virtue involving the getting and spending of money. Seeking a mean with regard to generosity recognizes, on the one hand, that financial resources are usually necessary for the pursuit of practices of excellence. On the other hand, lack of concern for the financial well being of others and too much concern for one's own income and wealth can undercut and corrupt practices of excellence.

Honor and recognition are also important external goods for Aristotle. Too much concern for honor undermines the practices of excellence because it can lead us to neglect the standards of excellence intrinsic to a practice. Seeking too little honor and recognition is problematic as well, because honor is, after all, a resource that enables us to take part in important communal activities. Moreover, not to seek any recognition of our attainments, is not to bring our accomplishments before our fellow participants in a practice of excellence. This has two bad consequences. On the one hand, we do not get the benefit of the criticism of our attainments that can only be provided by those competent to fairly evaluate them. And, on the other hand, by withholding our accomplishments, we do not make as great a contribution to the good of others as we could. A virtuous person seeks the right kind of honor, that is, recognition from those who are virtuous and share a commitment to the standards of excellence intrinsic to the practice in which he or she takes part.⁸

Justice is important to the internal goods of practices in many ways. To fail to give each his or her due within one of the narrower practices of excellence, is to fail to recognize the claims of the goods pursued in that practice. Thus, for an editor to publish the articles of his friends, undermines the internal purpose of his journal. Justice in the political community as a whole involves two elements. It requires that the members of the political community reach some agreement about the importance of various goods within it. And then it demands that scarce resources be used in a way that allow these goods to be attained.

The virtue of moderation keeps check on our desire for bodily goods. Immoderation can threaten our health. And it can also undermine our relationships with others in many practices of excellence—as the recent concern with sexual harassment has reminded us. Immoderation can also undermine a practice of excellence central to many of us, creating and sustaining a family. Immoderate bodily desires can also be costly and thus make more dependent upon the external goods of wealth and income.

Finally, most practices of excellence are communal activities. Men and women work together to produce certain goods in practices of excellence. (However, this communal activity is sometimes at a distance, as in the products of intellectual activity, in which people in widely varying times and places can

8. Why are there two virtues associated with money and honor? Clearly Aristotle draws some distinctions between generosity and magnificence and, also, between the nameless virtue concerned with small honors and magnanimity. But surely one could have drawn further distinctions with regard to some of the other virtues as well. It has occurred to me that Aristotle recognizes that the goods of money and honor function in two different ways. Honor is both an instrumental good, in that it brings us support from others, and a good that contributes directly to one of our wants, self-esteem. Perhaps the virtue associated with small honors is more concerned with the former role and magnanimity more concerned with the latter. Similarly, money and wealth are instrumental goods that gives us control over material goods and a means of attaining recognition. Perhaps generosity focuses on the first role and magnificence on the second.

think of themselves as engaged in the same communal activity.) So a number of virtues regulate and encourage the kinds of friendships that center on a common engagement in some practice of excellence. As Aristotle points out, friends are the most important external good. It is impossible to achieve internal goods if we are not willing to express our views about the standards of excellence in each practice and the extent to which we and others have met or failed to meet them. We must also be willing to listen to the opinions of others. Thus honesty or truthfulness is a prerequisite for attaining the internal goods of practices. Communal activities are encouraged where men and women are friendly with one another as opposed, on one side, to being grumpy and grouchy and. But efforts to promote communal sentiments can sometimes undermine our efforts to attain the excellence we seek, so flattery is, on the other side, also interferes with the pursuit of internal goods. Similarly, a sense of humor contributes to communal activities and helps us deal with our failings to reach the standards we set for ourselves. So Aristotle recognizes a vice in a lack of wit, while warning against the buffoonery that calls into question the seriousness of purpose necessary in a practice of excellence.

There is certainly much more to be said about the importance of virtues to sustaining the proper balance between external goods and the internal goods of practices of excellence. But the general form of the argument I am presenting should be fairly clear. With this argument, in mind, we can think more clearly about how to create and sustain virtue in liberal political communities.

IV. ALL VIRTUE IS LOCAL

Virtues, then, are the dispositions of character we need to attain the internal goods of practices of excellence. Practices of excellence, however, are essentially communal activities. And the internal goods of these practices of excellence are communal goods. They can only be attained by taking part in an activity with other human beings. The standards of excellence of any practice are defined by the acknowledged masters of that practice. Participation in these practices requires a, possibly lengthy, education that is conducted by those who partake in the practice. And at each level of mastery, interchange with colleagues, including both collaborators and adversaries, is necessary.

The communities that sustain practices of excellence extend far and wide both in space and time. The community of political philosophers covers most of the globe and stretches back in time to Socrates. But, however spread out these communities can be, in most cases, they will also be rooted in particular places and times. Like politics itself, all virtue is, especially at the beginning, local. This is true for two reasons.

Practices of excellence—and especially the narrow ones at the bottom level of the hierarchy—are impossible without a community that inculcates virtues in beginners. That can only occur in local settings in which a master inducts a number of apprentices into the practice of excellence. If this process is to be successful, it must engender a great deal of mutual trust in those who are engaged in the practice. Men and women will not devote themselves to a practice of excellence if they cannot trust that others will do the same. Nor will they put the pursuit of external goods to one side if they do not expect others to do so as well. Trust presupposes a shared commitment to a particular practice of excellence and the goods that it provides. Once that trust exists, however, we can expect that men and women will be willing to sacrifice their own individual (internal and external) goods in order to attain the common goods that are internal to a particular practice of excellence.

Consider, for example, the career of a basketball player. Basketball players are part of a practice of excellence that now extends throughout the globe. The heroes of that practice are among the best known men. There are numerous books of instruction on playing basketball as well as video tapes of all kinds from which players can learn. And yet few can learn to play basketball without a coach of some kind, if only an older player who offers some instruction. And learning to be a basketball player involves playing on a team. For among the central skills of being a basketball player is learning to play with others.

One cannot learn team offense and defense by oneself. And a team cannot learn these things either, unless its members are willing to trust one another to do their share, to play their assigned role, and to sacrifice individual heroics (and statistics) for the good of the team.

This view of the basis of virtue and community is one of the oldest lessons of political theory— one taught by Plato and Aristotle as well as Rousseau and Toqueville. All of them held that the most intensely solidaristic communities are also the most exclusive. Commitment to the common good is only possible when men and women act together in pursuit of a good they cannot attain on their own. But this requires that they hold some ends in common and look at things more or less in the same way. Practices of excellence do not require unanimity. The practices of excellence that are most fulfilling are often those in which there is dispute and debate about the very standards of excellence that define the practice. But, even here, there must be some common aims or standards of excellence if we are to say that there is a debate *within* one practice of excellence.

All virtue is local for a second reason: education in the virtues always begins as education in a particular understanding of the virtues. And the precise nature of the virtues will vary from one community to another, even when the two communities support more or less the same practice of excellence. We cannot even formulate an account of the virtues specific enough to serve as a basis for socialization apart from a concrete vision of a political community with common ends. Take any virtue from one of the standard lists, say, courage. While we can give an account of courage in general, courage in one setting will be different from courage in another. The kind of courage one needs in one practice of excellence is different from that in another. And the aim of moral education is to teach young people not just to act courageously in general but to recognize what is courageous in a specific setting. Of course, we also want people to be able to go beyond that setting and recognize what courage is in other situations. But education in courage, and the other virtues, goes best when young people have repeated opportunities to act courageously and to have their actions corrected when they go astray. The kind of repetition necessary to moral education in education can best take place in a particular setting, in which the meaning of courage is, at least initially, more or less narrowly defined and stable.

It is for this second reason that I have said that communitarian virtues are substantive rather than, like the liberal virtues, procedural in nature. The lists of virtues provided by philosophers since Aristotle is likely to be misleading in this regard. Virtues such as courage, moderation, generosity, honesty, and justice certainly seem to be quite general in nature. They seem to be dispositions of character that can be applied everywhere, to all sorts of political and social circumstances. In a sense this is true—and it is this truth that, we shall see, can help lead us from substantive, communitarian virtues, to liberal, procedural virtues. But, while the same virtues may be important in different circumstances, the precise content of the virtues will vary widely. The kinds of action that are courageous and generous and the way in which these virtues are important will differ from one practice of excellence to another. For the virtues play varying roles in contributing to the internal goods of different practices of excellence. Now, to some extent, this is true of the liberal, procedural virtues as well. The kind of tolerance for others, impartiality, or willingness to engage in discussion and debate required in one liberal political community may well be different than that found in another. There is, however, an important difference. The liberal, procedural virtues have no other end but the preservation of a liberal political community. But substantive, communitarian virtues are always in service of some other end, the ends that define the practices of excellence of which they are a part.

So, if we wish to encourage virtue and a sense of community in liberal regimes, we must create strong, local communities that are devoted to particular practices of excellence. The kinds of shared human ends necessary to the creation of virtuous citizens are not likely to be found in a liberal political community as a whole. Those who seek to restore civic virtue in America and the other liberal democracies must look, instead, to a revival and expansion of local, participatory communities in which

men and women work together in pursuit of common ends.⁹ Civic virtue can, and will only, be created in local organizations of all kinds: religious, ethno-national, vocational, and recreational as well as political associations. Civic virtues are likely to be impossible to sustain if the workplace does not become one of these strong local communities, in which people can participate in the governance of the workplace and in which there is devotion to some common end besides maximizing one's income. These strong local communities will teach particular understanding of both substantive and procedural virtues.

V. AN EXPANDING VIRTUOUS CIRCLE

The Aristotelian account of the relationship between the virtues and the human good has a long history. As MacIntyre reminds us, it has played a role in very different kinds of communities. It is a flexible doctrine, not least because, as we have just seen, the Aristotelian virtues must be given a particular interpretation in every time and place and in pursuit of the internal goods of each practice of excellence. It will need to be even more flexible if it is to play an important role in liberal regimes, however. For, if we are to have a liberal regime that also seeks to reduce the communitarian deficit, then the Aristotelian conception of community will have to be adapted to fit the pluralism characteristic of liberalism.

Liberal regimes are pluralistic for many reasons. Economic growth and differentiation plays a role, as do population movements of an unprecedented scale and, of course, the freedom that liberal regimes allow for the development of new ideas and, especially of new forms of religious expression. To the extent that liberal regimes seek to enhance what I have called communitarian virtue, they will become more pluralistic still. For, as we have just seen, a commitment to the common good and adherence to the virtues is most likely in strong local communities. If these strong local communities were ever to become more common, then the pluralism of liberalism will become even more pronounced.

Strong local communities will thus enhance the very pluralism that makes them possible. At the same time, however, the pluralism of liberal regimes necessarily transforms the nature of the practices of excellence and the virtues with which they are associated. In ancient and medieval times, Aristotelians were found in political communities that, in their most basic ideals and aspirations, were closer to monism than pluralism. That is not to say that there was only a single way of life in traditional political communities. If we take the notion of narrow practices of excellence seriously it will be obvious that any political community of some complexity will have a variety of practices of excellence, at least one associated with each of the goods produced in that community. Yet in traditional communities, the variety of practices of excellence is restricted, especially as compared to contemporary liberal regimes. The range of goods found in such communities were fairly narrow. There were relatively few goods in which there was extensive competition between closely related practices of excellence. One does not find, for example, a multitude of religious traditions in medieval Europe. Most importantly, one does not find people who were torn between or participants in more than a limited number of practices of excellence. People who had the opportunity to do so typically made a commitment to one practice early in their lives and lived within in the community that supported that practice until their deaths.

⁹ They must, to some extent, be participatory communities because liberalism offers men and women an opportunity to determine the individual goods they pursue and how they pursue them. Given our great control over our individual lives, and our relatively minimal control over our common affairs, it is no wonder that men and women pay much more attention to individual than common goods. We can only right this balance if people have the same opportunity to control the communal goods that are (or could be) of importance to them.

I have discussed the kinds of strong local communities that would sustain a more communitarian form of liberalism in "How Much of Communitarianism is Left (and Right)?" in Peter Augustine Lawler and Dale McConkey, eds. *Community and Political Thought Today* (Praeger, 1998).

All this has changed. In the pluralist world of liberal democracy, there are all kinds of overlapping communities. Among others, there are communities based in a certain territory, a workplace, a profession, a racial, ethnic or national group, a sexual identity, a mutual concern, a recreational interest or an ideological affinity.¹⁰ Some of these communities involve face to face interaction while others are largely virtual in nature.

In liberal regimes, almost all of us are members of more than one local community. Even at a young age, we are participants in more than one practice of excellence. Think, for example of the endless lessons that middle class children attend today. The local communities within which we live are, by and large, made up of people who share certain ends and a point of view. They are exclusive, but only within a certain sphere of life. They are strong, but partial communities. They do require us, their members, to be committed to certain broadly defined ends. But these ends do not, by themselves, define each of us as individuals. For, if we are lucky, most of us are members of a variety of strong local communities. Thus we must learn to balance our various commitments to different practices of excellence.

At the same time, none of our commitments are permanent. And our communal identities are more often chosen than inherited. We devote ourselves to one practice at one point in our lives, but feel free to change direction later. Sometimes we switch to the close competitors of a practice of excellence as when we give up one religion to practice another. Other time, however, we change our lives in more radical ways. We may give up religion altogether and take up the making of pottery which we pursue with religious fervor. And, when we do change direction in dramatic ways, the possibilities open to us are, for most practical purposes, endless.

The pluralism of liberal democracies creates various tensions in our lives that were far less common in previous eras. There is, first, the tensions that arise between our various commitments to the local communities that embody our practices of excellence. There is, second, the tensions that arise from the new choices available to us. Participation in a practice of excellence requires a commitment to pursue particular goods within a local community. Yet the possibility of leaving one community and entering another can cause us to have doubts about some or all of our commitments.

These tensions in our lives also give us opportunities. The pluralism of liberal regimes make it possible for us to have a much greater degree of autonomy than has ever existed. For central to autonomy is the capacity to choose between difference valuable practices of excellence.¹¹ However, if we are to exercise this autonomy in a way that enables us to live well, then we must have developed certain capacities that were much less necessary in earlier times. The second level of practices of excellence—that devoted to balancing the various internal goods in our lives—must be especially well developed in the citizens of liberal political communities.

In all times and places virtuous men and women must have the capacity to balance the various goods in their lives. But, in liberal regimes, we must be able to take in a wider range of practices of excellence. And we must be able to critically examine both these practices and ourselves in order to determine the best path to follow. That means that early education in virtue in a liberal regime must be different from that found in earlier times. For reasons I have suggested, if we are to learn to be virtuous, we must be educated in particular practices of excellence. But, if we are to be prepared for the opportunities open to us, and the changes we shall make in our lives, we must be given an education that enables us to critically assess the various practices of excellence and our place among them.

¹⁰ The importance of recreational communities should not be overlooked. They play an important role in the lives of many people. I once made this point to Michael Walzer about downhill skiing. He asked whether there were any magazines devoted to skiing. I responded that yes there were two, which, of course, differed in their ideological persuasion.

¹¹ This is a theme central to the work of Joseph Raz. See *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

There is room for debate about the proper balance between an education in particular practices of excellence and a critical education. And, no doubt, there will be a plurality of reasonable choices to be made here. However, I am inclined to think that, in general, we give more emphasis to critical reflection than we should, especially in early education. Too often we teach our children to be critical of all else we are teaching them before we have in fact taught them very much. For reasons we have seen, that is not the best way to encourage virtue and a sense of community. It makes more sense to encourage these virtues, and the commitment to a certain way of life first and then, later, teach our children to critically reflect on the world and their place within it. Those who take the opposite view think that passionate commitment to one or another view of the virtues is incompatible with the capacity to reflectively examine our own commitments. No doubt this can occur if early education is too exclusively devoted to one set of practices. But there is a danger from an education that is too critical too soon: the inability to make any commitments to a set of virtues or a community that engages in a practice of excellence. And that inability carries over to the practice of critical reflection itself. Criticism—and more importantly, self-criticism—is impossible if one thinks that there can be no good reason for living one way or another. Relativism may be a doctrine that encourages toleration. But it does not encourage either a commitment to a particular way of life or critical reflection on the various opportunities open to us.¹²

The capacity to critically examine a variety of ways of life is not just important to our individual lives. It has an important political and social dimension as well. For the pluralism of liberal regimes means that each strong local community must interact with others. At a minimum, strong local communities must be tolerant of others, especially when they have a different view of what practices of excellence are valuable.¹³ Liberal regimes also require strong local communities to work with one another. For most practices of excellence require some kind of support from the government, if only the provision of justice. Other practices of excellence require even more support. Certain art forms, such as classical music, flourish today only because of substantial government subsidy.

As the members of strong local communities enter the larger world of politics, they will have to develop the virtues that are part of the highest level practice of excellence, that which enables us to create good political communities. But, once again, this practice of excellence is different in a pluralist community than it is in a traditional one. Politics in a traditional setting aims to realize the goods and ideals that constitute a particular form of political and social life. Politics in a pluralist community is, however, a very different thing. It is a matter of coalition and compromise. It requires an ability to understand the point of view of others as well as oneself. It cannot work without the capacity for impartial judgment. It can only be successful if we are willing to moderate our claims when others are prepared to do so as well. It requires us to put aside (some of) our particular goods in order to pursue more general goods that appeal to a variety of strong local communities. And, most importantly, it requires us to preserve the liberal political and social institutions that make our strong local communities possible.

¹² I came to this view after ten years of teaching in the South. I found that my students who had been raised in a strong religious tradition were much more open to serious thought about political and moral matters, including alternatives to the tradition they had been taught, than were the rather aimless students who, in their tolerance and willingness to live and let live, could not take moral reflection seriously at all.

¹³ Some strong local communities will undoubtedly arise that reject modern views of all kinds. These local communities will often be tied to larger, anti-modern, and, at times, intolerant political and social movements. But the distinctive features of the substantive virtues found in a liberal community, together with the necessity of forming broad coalitions in a pluralistic polity, will favor the emergence of substantive political and social ideals that recognize the intrinsic value of the liberal, procedural virtues. Moreover, the stronger local communities are, the less likely it will be that intolerant movements arise. Intolerance is sometimes the product of inertia. But, in contemporary times, is much more often the product of a sense of insecurity or even inferiority. Confident political and social movements may seek converts, but they are not threatened by heretics. This kind of confidence is more likely to be found in a strong local community in which people can find sufficient numbers of like minded people.

As the reader has no doubt long since recognized, in a pluralist setting, the substantive, communitarian virtues leads us to the liberal, procedural virtues. The defenders of the liberal virtues are thus quite right: If they are to be successful, liberal regimes require that people come to hold the liberal virtues. But, as we have seen, the virtue liberals cannot show us show why people would be willing to live by the liberal virtues. This is the problem to which I think I have offered a solution. Liberal virtue cannot stand alone. But under the conditions of contemporary life, people committed to substantive, communitarian virtues will, of necessity develop the liberal virtues. For they will come to recognize that their own good depends upon a critical examination of the place of various goods in their own lives. And they will further recognize that the strong local communities of which they are members must work with other such communities in the furtherance of both their particular aims and, even more importantly, of the liberal political community that protects and serves their our own way of life.

VI. A LIBERAL CRITIQUE—AND A RESPONSE

Defenders of liberal virtue have a likely and plausible response to respond to the argument of this essay. I should like to briefly consider it, as it points to a further difficulty with the liberal virtues taken by themselves.

I have tried in this paper to show that communitarianism and liberalism are in fact complementary. Now one liberal response to this claim is to say that liberals have always known this.¹⁴ After all, liberals have frequently responded to the communitarian critique by claiming that liberalism has never stood in the way of the creation of strong local communities. Liberalism, on this view, is a doctrine about the ends of politics and the necessary limits on the power of the state. Within the liberal state, however, individuals are free to form whatever kinds of communities they wish. If they prefer what I have called strong local communities, then they can have them. If they prefer to live an atomistic and anomic life, that that is an option, too. So, the liberal claims, there is nothing to the argument of this paper except the notion that communal, substantive virtues lead people to liberal, substantive virtues. And this, they will say, liberals already knew and already encouraged.

The kicker, of course, is in the last two words. Liberalism, on the most common conceptions of that doctrine, cannot encourage substantive, communitarian virtue. The liberal position is stated earlier in the last paragraph, in which it is said that people can choose for themselves whether to seek strong local communities or to seek an atomistic and anomic life. Liberalism, or at least the liberalism that is committed in so far as possible to creating a state that is neutral to different conceptions of the human good, cannot justify public policies aimed at encouraging the communitarian, substantive virtues that make liberal virtue possible. By most accounts, a neutral state cannot legitimately subsidize the arts, or help religious organizations provide social services or education, or honor those who exemplify civic virtue or create worker's controlled corporation.¹⁵

That liberal regimes should encourage communitarian, substantive virtues is the key political recommendation of communitarians. That they should do so is obvious if communitarians (and some virtue liberals) are correct in claiming that liberalism cannot survive without the liberal virtues. For, if the argument of this paper is correct, we will not have liberal virtues all by themselves. That liberal regimes

¹⁴ One can find this response to communitarianism in Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) and *Contemporary Political Philosophy: an Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁵ Of course liberal regimes do all these things. My point is that, by the standards of liberals, such as Rawls, who invoke the neutral liberal state, such action is wrong. That liberal regimes pay no attention to the strictures imposed by some liberal theories is one indicate that these theories are fundamentally mistaken. They do not pass the reflective equilibrium test suggested by Rawls. They do not fit with our considered judgments about the role of politics in our lives.

should encourage communitarian, substantive virtues also follows if we think that human happiness is most likely to be found when men and women live in strong local communities that encourage them to live virtuous lives.

That liberal regime are justified in encouraging communitarian, substantive virtues is another issue, one that I cannot take up here in any detail. The general argument for such a claim is, however, utterly straightforward. It is this: The development of liberal regimes have set off political and social transformations that have undermined the traditional virtue of the past and replaced it with, at best minimal liberalism. How this has happened is not entirely clear. While there are many good works on the subject, we are still waiting on the definitive, theoretical account of the growth of the communitarian deficit. That we suffer to some extent from this deficit is, I think beyond question although there is room for disagreement about how great our suffering is. As I have implicitly suggested along the way, strong local communities remain in most liberal regimes. Yet there is perhaps reason to think that they are in decline. And if that is so, then for those of us who worry about the communitarian deficit, there is no alternative but to use the liberal state to support strong local communities. The exact manner in which this program is to be carried out is, again, open to dispute.¹⁶ And so is the question of how to justify the central tenets of liberalism in a way that does not require the state neutrality that would rule such efforts out.¹⁷ These are questions for another time. All I mean to argue here is that the most likely liberal response to the argument of this paper is inadequate. If liberal virtues are the solution to the communitarian deficit, then liberals must work to strengthen strong liberal communities. They cannot leave the liberal virtues to the individual choice of liberal citizens.

VIII. CONCLUSION

A pluralistic liberal political community broadly committed to the liberal virtues and composed of strong local communities committed to substantive virtues will, itself, realize a liberal ideal. It will be a community that is, in the words of Rawls, a social union of social unions. This ideal goes back to the work of von Humboldt and Mill. It holds that a liberal community composed of strong local communities can, at its best, encourage both individuality and community, both tradition and innovation, both engagement in one's own way of life and an appreciation for other ways as well, both procedural and (a variety of) substantive virtues. This ideal is the one truly common end of liberalism. But it is not an ideal at which we can directly aim. The task of the liberal state is to create the political and social conditions under which a plurality of strong local communities can flourish. It is these communities, and the interaction between them, that can sustain both the communitarian and liberal virtues, both the narrow ends of each group and the broader ends of a liberal way of life.

¹⁶ I have sketched such a program in "How Much of Communitarianism is Left (and Right)?"

¹⁷ For two arguments along these lines see William A. Galston, *Liberal Purposes* and Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*. I have developed another argument for this conclusion in a book manuscript entitled *The Trouble with Liberalism*.