

In this essay I will expand on existing liberal theory to suggest a promising direction we might follow to improve our society. I will first lay the groundwork for my suggestions by exploring the potential conflict between two tenets of liberalism, autonomy and diversity. To effectively explore this conflict I will investigate the history of these tenets and their manifestation in modern society. From this analysis I will then extract a general theory on the reconciliation of autonomy and diversity in liberal society. Finally I will reflect on this theory to suggest how we might expand on it to our society's benefit.

To understand the preeminence of autonomy in liberal thought it can be helpful to entertain Galston's concept of the Enlightenment Project. The Enlightenment Project can be summarized as the "historical impulse" to challenge tradition and faith using reason (Galston, 525). This liberal project empowers individuals to trust their own reasoning abilities above all else. In doing so, it's only natural that the development and protection of individuals' reasoning abilities attains preeminence.

To understand the significance of liberal diversity we can again turn to Galston for his concept of the Reformation Project. The Reformation Project describes the collective efforts to handle the political difficulties that resulted from the "divisions within Christendom" (Galston, 525). Many initial attempts to alleviate political difficulties aimed at fostering political homogeneity. These attempts included continual political division, coerced homogeneity, and rationalization of a single "true" doctrine. However, these methods were largely unsuccessful. What proved most effective was the cultivation of mutual toleration (Galston, 526). Given the

difficulty in tolerating other beliefs when one is deeply convinced of their own, we can see the significance of the Reformation project on liberal diversity.

Outside the historical context of the Enlightenment and Reformation projects we might naively assume that autonomy and diversity dovetail nicely. After all, it seems plausible that the promotion of free choice allows for a wide range of interesting belief systems. By the same token, the existence of diversity might seem to imply autonomy (Galston 521). However, as we've seen, these two liberal tenets most likely arose from independent movements with different goals. On further inspection these projects reflect a core conflict between autonomy and diversity - toleration. As Galston argues, the act of "plac[ing] an ideal of autonomous choice... at the core of liberalism is in fact to narrow the range of possibilities available" (523). Simply put, the Enlightenment's intolerance toward faith is in direct conflict with the Reformation project's tolerance towards "other" belief systems.

To deepen our understanding of the conflict between the Enlightenment and Reformation projects it will also be helpful to analyze a prominent court case in modern liberal society, *Wisconsin v. Yoder*. In this case, the state of Wisconsin continues the Enlightenment project through its enforcement of education through age sixteen. In opposition, the Amish community furthers the Reformation project through its religion-based resistance to state education past age fourteen. The courts originally side with Wisconsin, but on appeal the Supreme court sides with the Amish. I will explore the Supreme Court Justices' opinions to justify the relevance of the Enlightenment/Reformation conflict, extrapolate their general theory, and suggest a direction for improvement.

I will preface my analysis of *Wisconsin v. Yoder* with what I believe to be an important contextual observation. The judicial process aims at perfect rationality which is the pride of Enlightenment. Therefore, in this framework, it wouldn't be unreasonable to default to Enlightenment ideals. I believe this context plays an important role in the court's decisions.

In *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, despite ceding to the Amish, the court defends state-mandated education. Their defense rests on two main arguments. The first argument is that some amount of education is required to prolong society's freedom (*Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 3). Since society already prizes autonomy, prolonging it might seem to infringe on diversity. However, the argument doesn't specify the method for sustaining free society, making it compatible with diversity. In fact, this concept closely resembles Galston's concept of "social rationality," a cornerstone in his conception of the "Liberal State" (Galston, 525). On the other hand, the second argument is that education is necessary for citizens to be "self-sufficient participants in society" (*Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 3). This argument derives from the Enlightenment Project's impulse for individuals to cultivate their own reasoning abilities. Although the court lifts the two year education mandate, they argue that Amish children who desert their faith will likely require "formal training" in the future. The court's opinions suggest that it's only because they believe deserters will be able to "acquire new academic skills later" that they concede (*Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 4-5). Isn't it possible that some might desert to pursue livelihoods that don't require more education? The courts conditional acceptance implies a blindness to this possibility. Therefore it appears that on the principle of autonomy, the court doesn't actually concede anything.

The court's defense of the Amish also reveals potentially surprising interplay between the Reformation and Enlightenment projects. For this defense, the justices cite two main observations. Their first observation is that the Amish's opposition is "firmly grounded in [their]

central religious concepts” (*Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 1). They reinforce this claim with the fact that worldly rejection has constituted Amish religion since the sixteenth century. Therefore, in defending the Amish’s right to religious beliefs, the justices naturally draw from the Reformation project. Their second observation is that the Amish are productive, law-abiding citizens who reject welfare (*Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 3). This defense of Amish “productivity” and self-reliance focuses on autonomy, which merely appeases the Enlightenment project. It seemed natural to defend education with a similar argument, but we might expect an Amish defense to draw more from the Reformation project. I believe this surprise prompts a few questions. For example, must a person or group be “productive” in order for their beliefs to be valid? Was this case a victory for the Reformation project or was it actually decided based on Amish autonomy? I believe these questions lead us to the court’s general theory on the Enlightenment/Reformation conflict.

Based on my analysis, the court’s general theory is to protect and enforce autonomy until a person/group demonstrates an established, productive, religious opposition. Simply put, the Enlightenment project takes precedence until a few important conditions are satisfied. I touched on this prioritization from multiple perspectives. The court conceded a few years of school, but it didn’t budge on its pursuit of reason. Similarly, it defended the Amish against claims of ignorance, but only because of their self-reliance and industry. Moreover, when diverse expression emerged victorious, it was only expression “rooted in religious belief.” This expression also seemed to require long standing traditions (*Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 2). Despite my seemingly pessimistic view of this theory, I’m actually optimistic about it.

I’m optimistic about the court’s theory because in it I see a clear direction for improvement. This direction relates to the theory’s diversity expansion requirements. Although religion sparked the Reformation Project, the project has extended to the pursuit of diversity

more broadly. Thus, if we expand the court's theory beyond religious groups, we can further increase diversity. Since the theory still rests on an enlightened foundation, this won't degrade autonomy. How might we do this in practice? I don't have a definitive answer, but I'll propose a possible solution rooted in the court's original theory.

I see promise in the requirement that belief systems demonstrate long standing conviction. This requirement seems promising for two reasons. The first reason is that it is independent of religion and reason. Although it still imposes a condition on diversity, it is much less restrictive. The second reason this requirement is promising is because I think it still appeals to autonomy. Despite being "irrational," there is inherent rationality behind a belief system that stands the test of time.

In this essay I explored the conflict between autonomy and diversity through the Enlightenment and Reformation Projects. I then examined their conflict in *Wisconsin v. Yoder* to extrapolate a general theory for how to reconcile them. Finally, I reflected on The Supreme Court's theory to propose promising directions for improving our liberal society.