

## Liberalism and Communitarianism

### 1 Sanjay Seth's arbitrary delineation of structures

- diffuse school of ideas
  - Charles Taylor
  - Alasdair MacIntyre
  - Michael Walzner
  - various solutions/alternatives to the different problems identified in liberalism
  - accounts often negatively linked
- liberal theory accurately describes modern society, yet modern life is rubbish
  - atomised society
- liberalism is dominate theory: liberal theory misrepresents the liberal life
  - we are not unencumbered from social ties
  - choices are formed and shaped by context
  - effect of this misdescription: by impoverished vocabulary we can not examine our lives
- MacIntyre
  - similarity of post-enlightenment political cultures (radical, conservative and liberal)
  - lack common and meaningful moral vocabulary
  - can not distinguish between conceptions of good life
  - ill-equipped to resolve conflict
- Michael Sandal and others
  - liberal non-situated, unencumbered self is wrong
    - fetishisation of choice requires an unsustainable vision of the self
  - in truth, we find as well as make our identity
  - insistence of autonomy is counter-factual
  - written against the theories of John Rawls
- in fact...
  - all liberal societies evoke commonalities

### 2 A triumphant failure of society

- individualistic, rejection of tradition, social bonds are restrictive on freedom
- society of atomised selves who are unconstrained; arbitrary egoistic beings for whom autonomy is loneliness
- freedom meaning being left alone by others
  - finding neither pleasure nor happiness in their absolute freedom
- community is not ascriptive; recognise and choose membership
  - Do one's duty; Kantian liberalism

### 3 liberalism threatens actual social order by its categories

- poverty of concepts and language, failure to describe actual society
  - precarious existence because we can not make sense of our lives
- liberal theory falsified in relation to actual social existence
- living a life fully means to be able to understand and articulate the life led
- 'Habits Of The Heart' published in the 1980s, Princeton University
  - 'what are the moral and ethical values of american society'?
  - 
  - difficult in describing the riches of their lives due to the prevailing public discourse of liberalism
- valorisation of freedom and autonomy is empty, negative &tc
  - freedom: a rejection of external influence
  - liberalism can not describe what freedom is for
    - what is the purpose of our most desirable quality?
    - what do we want to determine from ourselves?
    - my opinions and values are beyond rational defense; they just are.
  -
- the continued existence of plurality of ethical and political traditions in society
  - biblical traditions continue into contemporary america
    - progressive communitarianism
    - liberal tradition of separation of church (any church) and state
  - civic republicanism continue into contemporary america
    - freedom needs nourishment, feed by civic political activity
    - rejects the value of autonomy in its self; requires contextualisation
  - liberty and autonomy is primary (first order) language

#### 4 MacIntyre

- Liberal west lacks a shared moral and ethical vocabulary
  - prime cause is the period of the Enlightenment
  - we can go back to the past after our wrong turn many moons ago...
- After Virtue
  - St. Augustine
  - Aristotle
- Whos Justice, Which Rationality?
  - there is no rational way of securing moral agreement
    - we can secure the terms of the debate but we can never secure a settlement
    - abortion, just war, &c
- rational ethical language
  - problems of philosophical argument we lost our common rational language in the Enlightenment
  - it is possible to get past rival premises
  - without a shared language choice becomes meaningless
  - we possess and use different moral and ethical fragments, these fragments leave us without the possibility for resolution
- critique of the Enlightenment
  - Resurrection of Aristotelian thought and synthesis with christianity by St Thomas Aquinas
  - enlightenment criticised historical and inherited moral language and shared intuitions.
- Project of E tried to ground independently morality with rationality. Project of E accepted cultural specificity or morality and science, but sought proof of universality. Grounding common moral and ethical language that was proved rationally, irrespective of birth &c
- MacIntyre demonstrates that it is not possible to prove a rational basis without context & circumstance. There is no presuppositionless rationality.
- Failure of E project leaves us: with a sense of shared morality. yet our shared languages are fragmented
  - pre-enlightenment community traditions held a shared moral/ethical language and recognise a specific community of understanding
  - reason and understanding was universal, therefore morality and ethicality must also be universal, this destroyed the shared moral order
  - the Enlightenment rejected various different teleology
    - i.e. values can not be deduced from traditions and communities
  - Enlightenment sought to found a rational and universal schema
    - this project did not and could not ever succeed
    - there is no vantage point outside history and tradition

- contemporary culture characterise by irresolvable moral arguments
  - colonisation of social world by different fragments of faded moral language
    - cultivate and nurture the fragments of moral languages to that we can retrieve the morality of that past.
    - utilitarian languages for public policy
    - language of human rights
  - dominant features of our age: righteous indignation and protest
    - we engage in mock rational debates
    - no equation, no weighting
    - can never win, can never loose
  - competing political languages that occupy the same space
    - not talking to each other, but talking past each other
- relationship to Neitzche
  - devastating criticism of Enlightenment, morality, christianity
    - Neitzche - will to power (moral debates). enlightenment represents a will to have power over others through moral language. There are, however, moral languages that will withstand Neitzche criticism Moral languages that are rationally defensible are ROOTED IN SHARED WAYS OF LIFE
  - rationally defensible moral languages, by enlightenment models, must be outside history, culture &c
  - MacIntyre - we can find a rationally defensible moral language, that is not Will To Power That are rooted in context, shared histories, culture &c With shared language we can articulate and defend morality in shared moral languages
  - aristotelean morality - not arbitrary or contingent
- Aristotle - acceptance of teleology in morality
  - MacIntyre - support "what is the good life for man"
  - enlightenment rejected teleology - dangerous question!
  - The Virtues - qualities, dispositions, practices that are towards a good life
  - retrieve Ancient Greek models, a return is a way out of the Enlightenment
    - accept the shared, cultural heritage politics has some sort of shared ends ontology of humans; what sort of life qua humans should be live
- local forms of community and civility to sustain us through the new dark ages, we are already governed by the barbarians

## 5 Sandel and others

- ideas of liberalism
  - the right is prior to the good  
the right to choose is defended before the choices themselves. indeed, the liberal society is not concerned with the choices that people make, just that people should be able to choose. rights are the ends here, not the means. defending the right of free speech as an end in its self.
    - rights are our collective concern
    - what is the unencumbered self?
      - the self must, therefore, be prior to the choices
    - a society of this vein is not to hold and value values in common, this would prejudice the choices of others
    - american political institutions uphold neutrality, i.e. rights prior to the good
  - Rawls 'veil of ignorance'
    - how would we choose and order laws and structure of society if we didn't know our position in that society  
theory of justice built on this philosophical experiment
    - liberals would choose theories of justice
- liberalism is too abstract
  - liberal disposes individuals of their unique attributes  
abstractions: abstract self, abstract community
  - this sort of liberalism (rights before good), and perhaps modernity in general, requires us to unencumber ourselves
  - rights rely on a notion of the self that is abstract and unencumbered outside of nature, society - outside of the web of relationships of our lives
  - rights based liberalism is not philosophically sustainable
    - we do share values - although are we equipped to talk about them?
  - deleterious consequences!
    - disables us from recognising the encumbered and specific self
    - dislocates us from our choices too!
  - we ( as a collectivity ) should support and value certain ends  
in reality there are liberal societies and that DO value ends (e.g. citizenship - although it tends towards the banal platitudes, meaningless generalities
    - conservative problems here: publically profaning choices
- political development of this criticism
  - democracies discontent - M. Sandel
  - communitarian society  
a liberal society that has values and pursues and protects these ends as a political community
  - civic republicanism
    - when citizens embrace shared ends
    - self-governing community
      - Simpsons Jeffersonian democracy is Springfield Townhall
    - cultivate sense of shared ends
  - problem of shared values....
    - community values can sometimes be conservative, homophobic, &tc
    - liberals are trying to get away from this repressive tendency in supporting rights before the good
    - liberals need to learn how to talk about morality
      - where the liberal will not go the fundamentalist will rush in...
      - in reality it is the conservatives that win when liberals defend the individuals rights
  - promote shared values, and promote debate about them