A Defense of 'Strong Voluntarism'[i]

Communitarians often argue that liberals construe the self as radically isolated from experience. Sandel, for example, tells us that the liberal self is "an antecedently individuated subject, standing always at a certain distance from the interests it has. One consequence of this is to put the self beyond the reach of experience, to make it invulnerable, to fix its identity once and for all" (1982, 62).[ii] In contrast, Rawls insists that he does not need an invulnerable self; he has claimed that his theory, although Kantian, "satisfies the canons of reasonable empiricism" and avoids Kant's reliance on a noumenal realm (Rawls 1977, 165). Rawls's communitarian critics argue that he fails in this task and attack him for relying on an unviable conception of the self as independent, isolated, and invulnerable.

In this paper I do not defend Rawls against this criticism. Instead, I defend the voluntarist picture of the self with which his critics saddle him. Sandel's talk of the "unencumbered self" may be cumbersome and vague, but it contains a kernel of truth. I argue that Sandel rightly characterizes liberalism as requiring what I call "strong voluntarism" and I defend that voluntarism as part and parcel of an accurate portrayal of human agents. In so doing, I am opposing the Rawlsian response to the communitarian critics and, along with it, the dominant recent trend in liberal thought, wherein theorists have sacrificed much of voluntarism, which I take to be an ability of the individual to choose what ends will be hers (which generally takes the form of deciding what ends to retain).[iii] That this move has been accepted by many contemporary liberals (in modified forms) makes my own argument controversial.

This paper has several sections. In the first, I explain Sandel's criticism of Rawls and introduce "strong voluntarism." In section II, I examine Kymlicka's response to Sandel, argue that it is incomplete, and begin to flesh out the conception of the self which is conducive to strong voluntarism. This last task is continued in section III. In section

IV, I show that strong voluntarism and the concomitant view of the self as "unencumbered" fare better than the alternatives as explications of how we attribute moral value to our ends. Finally, in section V, I support the account of the previous sections by showing that it matches our experience of "the real world" and in section VI, I attempt to dispel the fear that it leads to social decay. We begin by briefly looking at Sandel's criticism.

<div style="text-align:center">I</div>

Sandel's criticism of Rawls serves in this section primarily as an entrance into a discussion of the liberal self and its ability to choose. Sandel's criticism, in short, is that Rawls relies on a conception of the self that has it "distanced" from its ends, "invulnerable" to experience, not socially constituted in any way. It is "antecedently individuated"—antecedently, that is, to experience—and as "antecedently individuated," the Rawlsian self is meant to be isolated from experience, remaining what it is despite any social influences. Given that the self is isolated from experience, the claim continues, experience has no effect on how the self chooses so that there are no (none self-imposed) limits on its choice. Our choosing (between, admittedly, world-given options) is not affected by the world around us.[iv] The world may provide the options, but it has no effect on *us* or how we choose. This, many claim, is not a viable picture of volition. *Of course*, they insist, the world effects *us* as much as our options.

In their rush to counter the communitarian charge, liberals have agreed with anti-liberals that although we can sometimes choose our paths, there are essential limits (i.e., limits in principle) to voluntarist abilities. They defend what we might call a "weak voluntarism," wherein our choices are influenced, and oftentimes even determined by, our social context.[v] Such a view, which we need not flesh out here, has ostensible advantages over the view of voluntarism just described. It may seem, for example, to better accord with our dependence on the social world while still allowing us some

degree of control over our lives. But accepting weak voluntarism concedes too much. I argue below that the view of voluntarism I discussed in the previous paragraph, and which I call "strong voluntarism," better accords with our intuitions about our autonomy. Strong voluntarism holds that although the world limits our options, we are always able to choose which of those options to accept—without our choosing itself being affected by the world.[vi] In contrast, weak voluntarism allows that in addition to limiting options, the world sometimes determines our choice between otherwise ostensible options—and does so in principle, and not merely *de facto*.[vii]

II

In his later work, Rawls claims that his view has been misunderstood. In particular, he claims that some mistakenly take him to rely on a view of persons such that "the essential natures of persons is [sic] independent of and prior to their contingent attributes" (1993, 27). In response, Rawls says he "believe[s] the reply found in … Kymlicka's *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* … [is] satisfactory" (1993, 27 note 29). In this section, I look more closely at Kymlicka's reply.

Kymlicka claims that Sandel's view misunderstands liberalism, that liberalism does not require that "we can perceive a self prior to its ends, but that we understand ourselves to be prior to our ends, *in the sense that no end or goal is exempt from possible re-examination*" (1988, 190 and 1989, 52). What is necessary is only that "we can always envisage our self without its *present* ends. But this doesn't require that we can ever perceive a self totally unencumbered by any ends—the process of ethical reasoning is always one of comparing one 'encumbered' potential self with another" (1988, 190 and 1989, 52-3; in the latter Kymlicka switches from plural first person to singular). The liberal can agree, Kymlicka argues, that there "must always be some ends given with the self" and insist that "it doesn't follow that any *particular* ends must always be taken as given with the self" (1988, 190 and 1989, 53). It would be incumbent upon the

communitarian to demonstrate that "we can't perceive our self without some *specific* end or motivation" (1988, 191 and 1989, 53; in all cases in this paragraph, italics in originals).[viii]

The gist of Kymlicka's argument is familiar. It parallels, I suggest, Quinean and Sellarsian epistemology, in which it is argued that there are no truths immune to revision. Those theories do not claim that we can never take anything as *provisionally* given.[ix] They claim that although all beliefs are subject to revision, we can build upon a bracketed set of beliefs that we *temporarily* refuse to revise. In the same way, Kymlicka suggests that although for the Rawlsian self all ends are subject to revision, it must always provisionally accept some ends as non-revisable. This means only that we cannot re-examine or revise all of our ends at once. It does not mean that any are immune to revision. "*[N]o end or goal is exempt from possible re-examination*."

Kymlicka's argument is powerful. It is not, however, the end of the dispute. A Sandelian may reply that implicit in the ability to revise our ends is a view of the self as devoid of all "encumbrances"—even *all at once*. Why is this? The liberal conception of the self requires that the agent can always choose between its ends. According to Kymlicka's conception of the self, the agent can choose between *any* of its ends, but can do this only because she always provisionally retains some ends that ground her rationality—she is never devoid of all ends at one and the same time. But this, I suggest, is quite beside the point.

If Kymlicka's defense of Rawls is sound, the agent can look at all of her relevant ends and desires as separate from her self (i.e., "with some distance") so that she does not have to accept any as "constitutive" of her being. For example, if I am choosing which car to buy, I thereby choose and accept one end as more "constitutive" of my being than other ends where this means that I accept it as more important to me. In this way, my choice partially defines my personality. I buy the family car, say, because I accept (choose) family stability as more defining of my character than "speed." My desire for

stability thus becomes defining of my character. By choosing the Volvo over the Porsche, I make known what I value—what I take as important, as definitive of *me*. Further, in making that choice, I distance myself from all of my *relevant* ends so that I choose which shall be defining of me. Moreover, when making the choice, I do not recognize my *non-relevant* ends as part of me. I seem to myself entirely unencumbered. Neither the relevant ends (perhaps the desire for family stability or my opposing desire for speed and "fast times") nor any non-relevant ends (perhaps my love of music) encumbers me in any sense I can appreciate while making the decision. By my choice, I accept and make "constitutive" of who I am one of the relevant ends. Prior to the decision, it is an open question who I am—am I a member of the so-called "fast-track" or a family man? Although we generally have ideas about these questions before making such decisions, the decision itself settles the issue. More to the point, any time it is a *real* question—any time I genuinely have a quandary or dilemma about what to do—*only* a decision can settle the matter.[x] This is why the "role of our decisions and choices, of having come to care about one thing rather than another, is to settle what was, prior to our commitment, unsettled" (Raz, 389).

It will be immediately suggested that although I am right to say that I was, in my example, distanced from the ends relevant to that choice, I was not distanced from *all* of my ends—even if I "feel" unencumbered, my other ends do influence me. This may be correct, although how my non-relevant ends (such as my love of music) can influence me one way or another with regard to *this* decision, I do not know. It may also be correct that without maintaining some of those ends I cannot be rational—cannot "engage in such reasoning" (Kymlicka 1988, 190; 1989, 53). This I do not dispute. What I wish to point out here is that if I can distance myself from all of my ends in this way—if in principle none is immune to revision—then *I* am something devoid of all of them.[xi] None is essentially what I am. This means not only that no *one* end is what I am, but also that even *all* of my ends put together is not what I am. *What* I am is a being which chooses its

ends; my ends are *how* I am in the world (and it is the latter we generally question when asking "who are you?").

The point here is that a person's ends may explain the way she is (and why she makes the choices she does), but they are not *her*. *What* she is, is essentially an 'I,' a thing that can, in principle, choose to accept or reject any end it has. That the agent can only choose because she has some ends that she accepts as hers for the sake of making a decision regarding other ends, is quite beside the point. She would not have those ends at all had she not chosen them; they are only hers because she chooses them.[xii] What the agent is, we might say, is an ego. Of course, the ego does not exist alone.[xiii] It will always have, this argument accepts, ends that attach to it (by its choice). Given the attachment of chosen ends, we might say that although *what* the agent is, is an ego, *how* the agent is—*the way it is*—is with all the ends it has. What I am as a self is different from the particular way I manifest myself. We can say, then, that communitarians mistake *how* I am for *what* I am.

The communitarian confusion between "how we are" (or "the way we are") and "what we are" is especially clear in MacIntyre's discussion of the unity of life as a narrative (1984, 204-226). A narrative explains the way we are (and perhaps why we are that way), but despite MacIntyre's claim, it does not answer the question "what is the self?" The statements "the roles that it occupies" or "its narrative" answer, instead, the question "how is the self?" and, perhaps, "*why is* the self the way it is?" The roles we occupy help us both to understand who we are (in the sense of "how am I now manifested in the world?") and to become who we become, but they are *not what we are*. When asked "what is a self?," the proper response is not "the roles that it occupies," for there are other factors involved in an accurate definition of the self and—importantly—the self *chooses* its roles and thus cannot be those roles. Nor can the proper answer be "the narrative." Though this may be an identifying feature, it can not be the self; to say that it is, is to confuse the self with a description thereof, for it is always proper to ask "what is

the narrative of?," and if it *is* the self, it cannot be *of* the self (the story cannot *be* what it is describing).

<div align="center">III</div>

Simon Caney gives us another way to understand the distinction I have just argued for between *what* a person is and *how* that person is (that is, how she manifests herself in the world). He reminds us that, although communitarian theories may not recognize this, there are two senses of personal identity. In the first, a narrow metaphysical sense, "the term 'personal identity' concerns the conditions under which a person may be said to exist over time" and remain the same person. In the second, psychological, sense, it "denotes one's character and self-understanding. It refers to what one holds dear and regards as essential to oneself." As Caney points out, in the psychological sense what I am may change over time even if what I am in the narrow metaphysical sense does not (1991, 162; see also 1992, 274-5 and Flanagan 1991, 134).

If my argument is correct, what I am in the narrow metaphysical sense is a choosing being, and what I am in the psychological sense (my "character") is the person with the ends I contingently have. The narrow metaphysical sense of personal identity seeks an answer to *what* a person is. The psychological sense seeks an answer to *how* the person is (that is, "how she manifests herself in the world"). It is because Sandel confuses the metaphysical and psychological, and because Kymlicka accepts this confusion, that his solution is incomplete.

The stance I am defending is also similar to one discussed by Alisa Carse. As she points out, the "liberal rejects radical choice, but ... also insists on *impartial* choice—choice that does not privilege from the outset the chooser's particular conception of the good." What is at stake is not radical choice, but impartiality and the "characterization of [the individual's] independence" (Carse, 196; italics in original). The liberal self does not radically choose—does not, that is, choose from

the standpoint of one with no ends—but chooses from the standpoint of one that always has ends that are contingently possessed.

The communitarian may object that there are some ends from which I *can't* stand back (that without these there is no *me*), but, Carse points out, the liberal can counter that those things that the communitarian insists I can't stand back from (loyalties to family, for example) are not relevant when building a moral or political theory as Rawls does (Carse, 196).[xiv] Thus, even if a liberal were to grant—as I think she should not—that the communitarian were right that one could not stand back from one's attachments to one's siblings, parents, or neighbors, she need not accept any further conclusion. *Those* attachments—as any partialities—are simply irrelevant when making moral judgments. That is, although they may be factors the moral adjudicator should know, they should not be allowed to detract from the impartiality of the adjudication process. (I take it that when a judge tells a jury to disregard a piece of information, he intends to disallow that information having an impact on their adjudication.) The very motivation behind Rawls's veil of ignorance is just this, that it would be improper to let such factors influence the devising of moral principles. This move is substantial in its own right, but I suggest that the liberal can go a step further.

<center>IV</center>

In the picture I've painted, the liberal claims that the agent *can* stand back from those things the communitarian insists she can't.[xv] In fact, *that* the liberal agent can stand back from her relations with family and friends to choose whether to accept or reject them, can make her ties to them of special moral significance in a way the communitarian cannot recognize. The liberal agent *can* stand back and choose. When she does so and decides to maintain a relationship, it says something

important about that relationship. It says that she values the relationship as something not to be given up. This is an option closed to the communitarian.

If the communitarian is right, the agent cannot stand back, evaluate, and possibly reject his "constitutive" relationships with family and close friends. He cannot, for example, decide to devalue and discount his relationship with a controlling mother or abusive father. The communitarian agent just finds himself with these attachments. In this light, that the communitarian takes these constitutive attachments to be of special moral significance seems misguided.[xvi] They cannot be rejected; the agent must maintain them *whether he wants them or not*. My claim is that liberal individualism allows for a morally richer understanding of emotional ties and that such ties can be seen as having more personal "depth" on such a picture due to its reliance on strong voluntarism. *Because* we choose to keep them, connections to others that can be opted out of (but are not) may be more genuine than comparable ties we simply "find ourselves with." Consider, for example, a married couple that never consider divorce. It may be that they never consider it because they are completely infatuated with one another or, alternatively, because although they are unhappy, they have been taught that this is how they should live. In either case (but especially the latter) actively considering their options may be a positive event; in the first case, they would reaffirm their love, in the second case, they would, perhaps, separate to lead better lives.

That our ties are sometimes valuable because we choose them does not, of course, require that choice is solely and entirely valuable for its own sake. As Kymlicka points out, for choosing to be fully valued, we must endorse some good that we choose.[xvii] This does not, however, alter the fact that what I am is a choosing being. As a choosing being, there is also a very real sense in which who (or how) I am is who (or how) *I choose* to be, just as MacIntyre claims the individualist insists (1984, 220). What the exchange between Rawls, communitarians, and Kymlicka brings out is that because we are subject

to causal influences, our choices are constrained. I cannot choose to be just anything. The choices I am faced with are choices that come to me because of my place in society. Even more, some of those possibilities "force" themselves on me in a way that makes it difficult not to choose them—difficult even to recognize that I *could* choose to reject them. Nonetheless, I could. My failure to address particular ends manifests itself as a *de facto* choice to maintain them. The more I do this, the less I live up to the liberal ideal. The ideal liberal person is one who (a) addresses—at some point in her life—all of her ends and (b) consciously and rationally decides whether to accept or reject them. She need not, of course, do this all at once.[xviii]

The picture I paint of the ideal liberal self is one wherein the self is a choosing being that, although necessarily encumbered, is not necessarily encumbered with any particular ends and is necessarily other than all her ends.[xix] Any ends she happens to have, she has contingent upon her choosing them. She can maintain rationality, as Kymlicka points out, because she does not put all of her ends up for grabs at the same time. But, I am arguing, *not* putting all of one's ends up for revision does not indicate metaphysical identification or equivalence with those ends.

It remains true that the liberal chooser rationally evaluates as an encumbered being (or, better, "with previously chosen encumbrances"). The encumbrance, however, is always contingent and never essential, as communitarians wish. It is not the case that we must accept any particular ends, but nor is it the case that the liberal self is incapable of rationality because of this independence from her ends. For the liberal, we must only be able to see ourselves "as the sorts of beings who can, in principle, stand back from our particular aims and ideals and deliberate impartially" (Carse, 197). It is not, though, just that some of our ends are chosen and some unchosen. This may well be the case in fact, but the liberal remains committed to the claim that *all* ends are *in principle* subject to the agent's choice; the liberal self is *able* to endorse or reject even the ends she has but

has not chosen. As Rawls tells us, "free persons … regard themselves as *always* capable of appraising and revising their aims in the light of reasonable considerations … they are able to control and revise their wants and desires, and as circumstance requires, they accept responsibility for doing so" (Rawls 1993, 280, emphasis added).

What is at stake in this part of the debate between liberals and communitarians is not whether liberalism fails to consider our ends, but whether, as a theory of political morality, it *should* consider them and, if so, what weight they should be accorded. Though communitarians may be right that we sometimes discover ourselves with particular ends we have not chosen, all of our ends can be rejected on reflection and *that* is morally relevant. Political theory must take account of this pervasive feature of human agency; unlike communitarianism, liberalism does so. Political theory may need to show concern with ends individuals have through no choice of their own, but this concern is rightly subordinated to the respect shown to the ability to choose one's ends.[xx] The communitarians' failure to recognize this causes them to misdescribe the self as necessarily encumbered with particular ends.

Despite communitarian objections, we can make sense of ourselves as essentially agents of choice. Communitarians also believe, however, that this is an *undesirable* view of the self that, if accepted, would "deprive us of those qualities of character, reflectiveness, and friendship that depend on the possibility of constitutive projects and attachments" (Sandel 1982, 181). Communitarians are concerned that strong voluntarism leads to weaker social relationships and social decay. If I defend strong voluntarism, then, I must also try to allay this fear. I do so below (§ VI), but first I briefly give further reason to believe that real persons are accurately described as strongly voluntaristic.

V

Despite their insistence that we are socially constituted—MacIntyre's claim that social ties "constitute the given of my life" (1984, 220), Sandel's insistence that such ties are constitutive "attachments" that we do not "voluntarily incur" (1982, 179), and Taylor's claim that the individual possesses her identity by participation in community (see, for example, 1984, 182 and 1989a, 25-52)—communitarians sometimes recognize that we can and do distance ourselves from (any of) our ends. Sandel admits that we can "distance" ourselves from our histories (1982, 179), MacIntyre insists that the self does not have "to accept the moral *limitations*" of its community (1984, 221), and Taylor claims that we can "radically re-evaluate" our own "most basic terms," "in the sense that our looking again can be so undertaken that in principle no formulations are considered unrevisable" (1985a, 40). They recognize that the agent is able to choose which ends to maintain and which to reject. As some of these ends will be relationships to others, communitarians recognize that the agent will be able to opt out of any relationship she has. This, in fact, is a central motivating fear for communitarians.

> [I]f the business of life is finding my authentic fulfilment as an individual, and my associations should be relativized to this end, there seems no reason why this relativization should in principle stop at the boundary of the family. If my development, or even my discovery of myself, should be incompatible with a long-standing association, then this will come to be felt as a prison, rather than a locus of identity (Taylor 1985b, 283).

The motivating fear described here is that individuals will be able to opt out of any relationship they happen to find themselves in—including relationships with spouses, siblings, and children.[xxi] The liberal individual, it is feared, may find these relationships to be "a prison," will thus want out of the relation, and will be able to opt out.

There can be no doubt that individuals *can* opt out of any sort of relationship—which is to say that there can be no doubt that individuals do seem to be strongly voluntaristic. One need only flip through afternoon talk shows on television to hear stories of parents leaving (or killing) their children, children leaving (or killing) their parents, siblings leaving (or killing) each other, and of course, spouses separating (or

killing one another). It is only too apparent that the ability to opt out of the closest relationship is a reality in contemporary society. It is, I would suggest, the reality of this situation that drives critics of liberalism so forcefully. They realize we *can* opt out and see people doing so in what seem to be perverse ways. The ability to opt out, the critic claims, is pathological.[xxii] If society were healthy, we would not see so many cases of people opting out of relationships that should remain "loci of identity." According to communitarians, this is the fault of liberalism.

To blame societies' ills on liberalism is, however, to conflate existing liberal society with the society of liberal theory, as if the former were an adequate realization of the latter. Of course, some do claim that liberal theory itself encourages individuals to opt out of any relationship the moment that relationship seems to be more of a burden than a benefit, but this is simply an unfair characterization. Liberal theory encourages individuals to see themselves as *capable* of opting out of any relationship, but this does not mean that we should not try to maintain relationships with those whom we are currently involved. Seeing ourselves as capable of opting out, on the contrary, should give some indication of the high esteem and value we have for those with whom we remain in relationships. We *can* opt out, but *choose not to* and this may be because of the high value we place on the relationship.

We must recognize that if people were not strongly voluntaristic, they might not be able to opt out of relationships pathologically. This gives some credence to the communitarian fear. We must also recognize, however, that it is not this alone which results in pathological "opting out"—it does not cause the pathology. Indeed, the ideal liberal individual (who is strongly voluntaristic) recognizes her need for others and seeks to maintain those relationships she has which are beneficial (not only economically, but also emotionally). Whereas a communitarian individual would not believe he could opt out of a relationship and thus would not see himself as responsible for its continuation,

the liberal choosing agent takes responsibility for the relationships she is in and seeks to further those that are positive.

I should note here that the "opting out" of relationships—of which we have ample empirical data—is not, strictly speaking, evidence that we can fully distance ourselves from our ends (as strong voluntarism requires). Many people opt out of relationships (disallowing contact with others) without it being the case that they have rationally distanced themselves from the relationship in question. Empirical evidence that this latter occurs may only be anecdotal. Some of us, at least, phenomenologically interpret ourselves as rationally distancing ourselves from so-called "constitutive relationships" so that we do not allow these to influence our behavior or who we are.

VI

As already admitted, it is a troubling fact of our times that people seem to opt out of relationships too readily. There may be something in contemporary society that encourages this activity, but to assume without argument that it is liberalism is to fall prey to a genetic fallacy. It is not enough that a society is committed (in some form) to liberalism before the onset of a problem to blame it on liberalism. Indeed, it is far from clear that there is evidence even for such a faulty argument. In fact, a strong case can be made that relationships have been made *stronger* under liberalism. Recognizing this should help to dispel communitarian fears.[xxiii]

De Toqueville found early America lacking in many respects, but not in respect of the strength of its citizens' relationships. He claimed, for example, that "of all countries in the world America is the one in which the marriage tie is most respected and where the highest and truest conception of conjugal happiness has been conceived" (de Toqueville, 291). According to this outsider's perspective, liberalism (Toqueville, of course, actually spoke of democracy) "loosens social ties, but it tightens natural ones. At the same time as it separates citizens, it brings kindred closer together." "[F]eelings natural to man [e.g. parental feelings] … are always stronger if left to themselves" (see de Toqueville, 589). Freedom to opt out of relationships does not, according to de Toqueville, weaken relationships. More recently, Gertrude Himmelfarb has discussed Victorian England, describing it as an "evolving democracy" where "all individuals were assumed to be free moral agents, [and] hence their own masters," where "a premium [was put] on the self," and morality was hoped to be a "voluntary exercise … on the part of each individual" (Himmelfarb, 51). She argues (against Marx) that although responsibility came to be seen as located in each individual (Himmelfarb, 50), the family was elevated, "revered," and "sentimentalized to a degree never known before" (Himmelfarb, 53). So too, Robert Lane provides evidence that supportive relationships amongst workers are encouraged in

a market, which is meant to embody liberal principles (see Lane, 205-288, esp. 231, 235, 252, 258; but also see 555-6).[xxiv]

Though the evidence that relationships are stronger under liberalism than under non- (or anti-) liberal regimes is not definitive, it should make us take pause. Still, there is no doubt that much evidence supports the view that individuals in liberal societies find it easier to opt out of relationships than individuals in other societies. Divorce rates are a case in point. Again, though, we must note that the *ability* to opt out of any relationship (included in strong voluntarism) does not cause people to do so pathologically. The work discussed in the last paragraph, moreover, indicates an ambiguity about the "strength" of relationships. What is indicated is a distinction between the "quality" and the "durability" of a relationship. While communitarians are interested in durability, the evidence cited above concerns quality.

In their talk of "traditions" and communal authority, communitarians are necessarily conservative (in the literal sense: they seek to conserve what already is).[xxv] What they fear is a society changing too rapidly for individuals to understand their place from day to day. In the past times they romanticize, one supposedly knew who one was and what one's roles were because these did not change often. Indeed, they often did not change within a person's lifetime. Divorce rates were, of course, lower than they currently are. Children respected their parents and cared for them in their old age, often following them in their careers. Communities were more stable and accorded more authority simply because mobility was low. In today's society, on the other hand, mobility is high and people often opt out of their community—both geographically and otherwise. Relationships are, we should agree, less durable than they once were (whether or not due to liberalism). On the other hand, as the authors discussed above point out, often-times those relationships are of higher quality even if shorter-lived.

To the communitarian, then, a liberal may respond that she is unbothered by (or at least willing to accept) the lack of durability in contemporary relationships. Such

durability, after all, often led to the oppression of some individuals by others—wives by husbands, for example. In a world where relationships are not seen as having to be durable, individuals may be more able to protect themselves by opting out of self-endangering situations. Recall now what we said above (in § IV), that connections to others that can be opted out of (but are not) may be more genuine than ties we simply "find ourselves with." Endorsement of the continued relation imbues it with meaning. Combining the two claims that one's choice imbues a relationship with meaning and that durability is not necessarily something to favor, the liberal can claim that it is quality and not durability of relationships that she is interested in. If this does not provide for the long-term stability sought by the communitarian, so much the worse for the communitarian. Durability has had negative consequences for the less powerful and high-quality relationships do provide support for individuals as well as some stability.[xxvi]

In this section I have so far argued that liberalism is not at fault for the social pathology of our age—the extreme willingness of individuals to opt out of relationships. We should also note that the liberal is no worse off than the communitarian in this regard. It can be argued that it is anti-liberal communitarian policies which cause the pathology. The suggestion here is that as a society (and its government) surpasses its liberal responsibilities and operates in such a way so as to take from individuals the burden of responsibility they should properly have (according to the liberal), it becomes easier for individuals to walk away from relationships. The individual no longer feels that opting out of a relationship is a personal loss or that he is responsible for the loss. The blame for the loss is placed on the community and its traditions. The attitude promoted is one where the society or its government is seen as at fault for citizen's poor behavior and responsible for "making things right" (and capable of doing so). Under a communitarian regime, for example, a parent might feel that he can opt out of a relationship with a child because he believes the government (society, community) should (and will) take care of the child.

I do not mean to insist that solidaristic or communitarian inclinations in our society are definitively responsible for the above-described pathology.[xxvii] I can make this claim with no more certainty than communitarians can make their claim that liberalism is responsible for it. It is, though, just as plausible and indicates that communitarianism is amenable not only to relationships of lower quality than liberalism, but also less durable ones.

Conclusion

The discussion in sections I and II was meant to determine whether communitarians are right about their characterization of the liberal self and to determine precisely what sort of voluntarism an accurate portrayal of the liberal self requires (and what that says about that portrayal). If the arguments I have presented are correct, the arguments presented by Kymlicka *et al* do not succeed in arguing against the communitarian characterization. They succeed only in showing that reflective distancing does not hinder rationality and is conducive to our own self-perceptions.

In sections III and IV, I further developed and defended the conception of the self that includes strong voluntarism. The belief that individuals can *always* choose their ends requires a conception of the self whereby the ego is strongly voluntaristic. Although Rawls and Kymlicka reject this move and accept what I've called "weak voluntarism," the arguments in these sections show that strong voluntarism remains a viable option for liberals.[xxviii]

Discussing the social pathology of our age in section V allowed us to see that the portrait I paint of strong voluntarism accurately describes individuals in contemporary society. This is regretted by communitarians; but this regret is misplaced. As discussed in section VI, strong voluntarism (and the corresponding independence it implies) does not necessarily lead to social decay. I have not, of

course, offered a remedy for our social pathology. I merely recognize with communitarians that it is our social pathology. Against communitarians, I insist it is not a result of strong voluntarism.

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[ii] In his earlier work (see also 1982, 179 and 1984, 90-91), Sandel characterizes Rawls as subscribing to this view. Although he no longer characterizes Rawls this way, he continues to saddle liberalism in general with this view (see 1996, 6, 12, 262, and 291). Given this, I will continue to talk of Sandel's criticism, using Rawls only as a representative of the liberal tradition. This should not be problematic as I will largely agree with his (here hopefully more clearly explained) characterization of liberalism.

[iii] Following a customary device, I use "ends" as a place holder for such commitments as relationships, loyalties, projects, etc. "Choosing one's ends" can be as simple as choosing to exit a room or as complex as choosing a career, a spouse, or even one's religion.

[iv] As this criticism continues, we are told that liberals "would describe … values and conceptions of the good as the products of choice or decision" (Sandel 1982, 162). Liberals, the critic charges, elevate choice so that it determines value. Given this, communitarians seem to hold that the liberal should not—apparently on pain of inconsistency—be concerned with *what* one chooses so long as one chooses. Kymlicka puts this point to pasture nicely by arguing that (1) certain paradigmatic liberals did not

hold such a view and that (2) such a view is absurd, so to attribute it to anyone who doesn't explicitly state it is too uncharitable. The view is absurd as it leads to the conclusion that if I keep choosing I am made better off—even if my choices "undo" each other. See Kymlicka 1988, 182-185 or 1989, 15-19 and 47-52.

[v] This concept is necessarily difficult to flesh out. It is meant to characterize the communitarian view, which is unclear. Communitarians often insist that we cannot choose our ends (that we simply "discover" ourselves with them), but sometimes suggest that we can. See the first paragraph of § V below.

[vi] One example: strong voluntarism recognizes that if he grows up in (and is confined to) an area where being a lumberjack is impossible, an agent cannot choose to be a lumberjack; it insists, though, that the strongest familial ties to and endorsement of civil service, for example, can be rejected.

[vii] Despite the language, I am not here discussing free will. Strong voluntarism is, I think, compatible with hard or soft metaphysical determinism as well as metaphysical libertarianism. (It's compatible with hard determinism as it does not speak at all to biological determinants; when I speak of "the world affecting choosing," it is the social world to which I refer.)

[viii] Kymlicka goes on to argue that the communitarian tries, but fails, to show just that: that we must see ourselves with communal ends.

[ix] Sellars insists that "empirical knowledge, like its sophisticated extension science, is rational, not because it has a *foundation* but because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put *any* claim in jeopardy, though not *all* at once" (1963, 170). Similarly, Kymlicka insists that a self can put *any* claim in question, though not *all* at once.

[x] I do not mean to claim that we should always make choices in the way here discussed. Nor do I deny that there are persons who *never* do so. Strong voluntarism holds only that they can, not that they will. My form of liberalism holds that there are times they *should*.

[xi] This, admittedly, relies on a bit of phenomenology (as per the end of § V). My view might be indicated by analogy: if we had a glass that (*ex hypothesi*) always had some liquid in it, though that liquid changed over time, we would not say that the liquid contributed to what the thing was. The "thing" is a glass—devoid of all liquid—even though there is never a moment when it has no liquid. So too, the self is a choosing being—devoid of all ends—even though there is never a moment when it has no ends.

[xii] Being a choosing being, of course, presents problems. See, Gerald Dworkin (1982, especially pages 50-54) for an interesting and lucid discussion. See footnote 17 below.

[xiii] I do not mean to import a Freudian schema.

[xiv] Carse's view is that whether any particular ends are morally relevant is itself a moral question. The liberal insists that communitarian ends are not. See also Caney, 1992 (278) and footnote 8 above.

[xv] Although there may be times—when considering whether to save one's child or a stranger from a danger, for example—when it is not morally permissible to so distance oneself, there are other times—when considering issues of social justice, for example—when it is not only permissible, but required.

[xvi] See, for example, Sandel's claim that if it weren't constitutive, an attachment would be "*merely* an attribute" (1982, 150; italics added).

[xvii] Although I agree that a life spent choosing with no good endorsed is not a worthwhile life, I also take choosing to be intrinsically valuable. It is, I suggest, both intrinsically and instrumentally valuable.

[xviii] (a) This, I believe, goes some way in explaining why classic liberals took fully developed autonomous persons as basic theoretical building blocks. Children and others unable to choose their ways of being are not ideal liberal persons. (b) Liberalism does not need to claim that any persons actually live up to this ideal. (c) If I fail to reject an end—whether because I explicitly accept it or because I fail to question it—the end is

part of how I am. So too, if I mistakenly or self-deceptively accept an end that I can't or don't act on (although such an end would presumably be a part of how I am in a different way).

xix As per Sandel (1982, 55), this is a possessive model of the self: it possesses, and thus is not, its ends.

xx I am not, of course, saying that political theory should show no concern with the plight of individuals who lead lives impoverished in some way because of ends that have been unfortunately ingrained into them (for example, a woman who has been socialized to believe her husband's happiness is more important than her own). Respect for the ability to choose one's ends, in fact, may indicate that this ability should be fostered where lacking. Other than using education for such fostering, however, state interference may be disallowed if there is no other concern. For a sustained discussion of this problem see Meyers, 1989.

xxi What I say here about personal relationships is *a fortiori* true of less personal social ties that allow for social solidarity and fellow-feeling.

xxii Axel Honneth talks of social philosophy as providing an account of society such that it suffers from a particular social pathology. For Taylor, the pathology is the "ethical impoverishment of subjectivity." That impoverishment includes the ability to opt out of relations we *should not want* to opt out of.

xxiii The next paragraph is due largely to Ian Maitland's synopsis of the cited material in his "The Communitarian Critique of the Market," a presentation on March 22, 1996 to the Connelly Ethics Seminar at Georgetown University (draft).

xxiv For an opposing view, see Putnam, 1995. Putnam makes much of the empirical fact that although more people are bowling, fewer are doing so in leagues (this holds for other activities as well). He takes this as evidence that people are now less social. But this is suspect. Contrary to what Putnam may think, most people do not literally "bowl alone."

They bowl with friends. Hence, the drop in league bowling indicates only a shift away from *structured* socializing. People still socialize, the modes of doing so are simply less rigid.

[xxv] On this point, see Hampton 1997, 190.

[xxvi] Some have claimed that the contemporary legal structure has made it more difficult for women and children to protect themselves than in the past (see, for examples, Glendon 1981 and Sandel 1996, 91-122). I cannot fruitfully comment here on the legalities such authors discuss, but note that such claims should only negatively impact on one's views of liberalism if it is adequately shown that liberalism is the direct cause of those legalities.

[xxvii] Certainly, government (and community) services have increased in the last 30 years as social bonds have become more fragile. I am unaware of any empirical evidence relating these two, but a statistical correlation would certainly be interesting. Even given such evidence, I fear this debate would remain at a stand-off, with both sides able to invoke empirical evidence supporting their views.

[xxviii] I cannot here show that liberalism *requires* strong voluntarism rather than weak voluntarism.