

Defending Liberalism Against the Anomie Challenge

Though their views are not identical, theorists like Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, and Michael Sandel claim that liberalism is detrimental to individuals. They claim that it encourages *anomie* (rootlessness or context-lessness: literally, “lack of rule” or “lack of law”), that anomie disallows the social confirmation of beliefs, and that without such confirmation, the individual is left with an uncertainty about her judgments that is opposed to firm conviction, and thus, confidence and self-respect. Liberalism, that is, “undermine[s] that sense of our status within the larger society which is supportive of our identity.”¹ Of course, liberals do not deny that self-respect is important; Rawls, as is well known, makes the social basis for self-respect a primary good.² The disagreement is about how self-respect is best supported. This paper is meant to address that question as well as the conceptually prior question of anomie. Both anomie and loss of self-respect are meant to follow from liberalism’s unwillingness to endorse a particular conception of the good. It is this I refer to as the “anomie challenge.” Though it may seem that this challenge has been well addressed, the relevance of the social confirmation of beliefs is, I believe, thus far under-appreciated. A full appreciation of this element allows for a clearer, more substantial, and more solid response.

I will discuss two plausible answers to the anomie challenge. One answer is that although liberalism refuses to insist on a single good, it can advocate a plurality of goods. Though I will not

¹Charles Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 285. One author carries this a step further and claims that the “all humans [need to experience] ... their life as bound up with the good of the particular communities which constitute their identity, and when they turn their backs on this need, their ‘personhood’ is damaged in some deep way” (Daniel Bell, *Communitarianism and Its Critics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 101; this is Bell’s antagonist, “Philip” parroting Bell’s hero, “Anne”). I will ignore this claim for two reasons: (1) it is not explicitly made by MacIntyre, Taylor, or Sandel, who I take to be the primary protagonists of the view I discuss (see n. 3), and (2) its reasoning is immune to comment—not because it is valid, but because it is closed; if a liberal agent claims not to have such a need, Bell/“Anne” can (and likely would) simply insist that the agent is damaged (has a “damaged human personhood” (p. 100)).

²See John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 106, 139, 318-19; and *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 178-83, 234, 544-46.

endorse it, pluralism has been advocated by a variety of authors and is deserving of attention. The second, more successful, answer is that the *right to choose* is the good to be advocated and that this allows for supportive, but voluntary, social structures. As this may be thought of as a liberal endorsement of toleration as a “meta-good,” I begin by discussing toleration and state neutrality in section 1. (The view I offer of liberal neutrality is derivative of my view of toleration.) I continue by motivating the problem of self-respect in section 2, looking at pluralism in section 3, and pausing to consider a possible remedy that the critics might offer for anomie in section 4.³ Then, in sections 5 and 6, I turn to a discussion of choice. There, I conclude that liberalism better supports self-respect than the opposing view and, in section 7, I deal with a rejoinder.

Before going further, though, we should get clearer about the critics’ view. Especially important is seeing that they do, in fact, take social confirmation of beliefs to be necessary. Perhaps this can best be seen by considering MacIntyre’s Aristotelean-Thomistic account.⁴

MacIntyre tells us that “from an Aristotelian point of view a modern liberal political society can appear only as a collection of citizens of nowhere who have banded together for their common protection ... They have abandoned the moral unity of Aristotelianism.”⁵ For MacIntyre, there is something deficient about these “citizens of nowhere”—they are lacking “an expression

³The critics I am discussing throughout are primarily MacIntyre and Taylor, but also Sandel. I think we can call such thinkers “communitarian,” where that means that the author is committed to the “social constitution” thesis in the sense I label “sustaining general” (see my “Communitarianism, ‘Social Constitution’, and Autonomy,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 80 (1999): 121-35) and weak voluntarism (see my “A Defense of Strong Voluntarism,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 35 (1998): 251-65). The view is, in short, a metaphysical view of the self, not a merely political thesis that communities ought to be fostered. The latter, political, thesis is found in the works of Amitai Etzioni and others of his Communitarian Network, who we might call “Low Communitarians.” Those that subscribe to the metaphysical thesis might be called “High Communitarians” (this distinction was originally made in “Freedom and Community” (*The Economist*, Jan. 1995)).

⁴For a clear statement that MacIntyre endorses Aquinas’s view—or his interpretation thereof—see his *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), p. 146.

⁵Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 156.

of some unitary order informing and structuring human life."⁶ Without this structure, they are less than they could be. They have no "orientation" and find themselves acting as if in a void.

On MacIntyre's Thomistic view, an individual's intelligence "bids him or her to ask the question 'What is my good?' and 'What precepts must I follow in order to learn what it is?'" He adds that "[t]he attempt to answer these questions will at the very least make it clear to such persons that they cannot pursue their good ... in isolation and that the relationships into which they enter in order to secure their most obvious goods *need to be such as will enable them to improve their knowledge of what their good is.*" He concludes that "the person ... has to discover ... that what he or she needs is a friend who will also be a teacher in the approach to the virtues."⁷ Apparently, we cannot approach the virtues on our own. More important at this juncture, though, is why: not merely to improve our ability to attain our goods but to improve our *knowledge* of our goods. Without others, one's beliefs about one's good is somehow insufficient.

MacIntyre continues with this line of argument in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, where he is concerned with "shared beliefs" and "a society [like ours] in which the background beliefs which made it possible to identify and understand that whole [of a person's life] are no longer shared."⁸ There he tells us that "[i]t is only by belonging to a community systematically engaged in a dialectical enterprise in which the standards are sovereign over the contending parties that one can begin to learn the truth." Of particular concern, of course, is truth about the virtues. He continues: "It is only within a community in which to some large degree shared beliefs ... are presupposed in everyday practice ... that the concept of systematic accountability for one's utterances and one's actions can also inform the shared life of a community." Indeed, he

⁶Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 33.

⁷Ibid., pp. 179-80, emphasis added.

⁸MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, p. 199.

claims that "[w]e flourish, live or die, as our theses, arguments, and doctrines live or die." Education must take place, then, to guarantee the perpetuation of the standards; this requires that the student learns "not only what the best theses, arguments, and doctrines to emerge so far have been, but also how to rescrutinize them so that they become genuinely his or hers."⁹ While I think it is true that "[k]nowledge is possessed only in and through participation in a history of dialectical encounters,"¹⁰ I do worry about any view that requires that the existing belief system be accepted by all—whether through "rescrutiny" or otherwise. That, though, is MacIntyre's point: we should accept beliefs from our communities. If we do not, we can have no certainty.

This line of argument is also in Taylor's work. He seems to think of the moral orientation or framework as a necessary condition of personhood. He says that he thinks strong evaluation "is something like a human universal" and so wants a community in which it is supported.¹¹ This is implicit throughout his discussions of strong evaluation and personhood¹² and though it may seem to be a different claim—about strong evaluation rather than belief confirmation—it is not. Strong evaluation is an ability to evaluate our lower order desires—we might say *an ability to form normative beliefs* about our more immediate wants—and Taylor thinks it is made possible by a moral orientation that requires community. Even those of us in liberal societies find that "doing without frameworks is utterly impossible for us ... this is not meant just as a contingently true psychological fact about human beings ... Rather the claim is that living within such strongly qualified horizons is *constitutive of human agency*." According to Taylor, "[m]y identity is

⁹Ibid., pp. 200-201.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 202.

¹¹Charles Taylor, "Replies," in James Tully (ed.), *Philosophy in the Age of Pluralism: The Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 213-57, at p. 249.

¹²For an interesting statement on these matters, see Taylor, "Replies," pp. 249-53. Both Kymlicka and Weinstock (to whom these pages reply) argue that liberalism provides better for self-respect and strong-evaluation than Taylor's opposing view does. See also Owen Flanagan, "Identity and Strong and Weak Evaluation," in Owen Flanagan and Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (eds.), *Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 37-65.

defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose."¹³ He says that "the fact is that our experience is what it is, is shaped in part, by the way we interpret it; and this has a lot to do with the terms which are available to us in our culture."¹⁴

Taylor, too, points out that in liberal society things are amiss: "we have [in exchange for other advantages] paid a price in the increased fragility of some human bonds."¹⁵ But most important for our purposes here is that he agrees with MacIntyre that we need the "moral unity of Aristotelianism"¹⁶ that might be found in a "true community of common deliberation."¹⁷ We need, he thinks, to be with others to deliberate well about our beliefs.

One final indication of Taylor's agreement with MacIntyre (there are many more) might be warranted to deflect any skepticism.¹⁸ In his *Sources of the Self*, Taylor explains and clearly endorses a line of criticism used by Schiller against the disengaged, instrumental reason that is supposed to be part of liberal individualism: "Atomism—that is, a condition in which everyone *defines his or her purposes* in individual terms and only cleaves to society on instrumental grounds—undermines the very basis of cohesion which a free, participatory society needs to maintain itself."¹⁹ Again, our point here is that belief formation in the liberal world is deficient: defining our purposes without others is, on Taylor's view, insufficient.

To see that community-aided belief is thought to be needed for self-respect, let's look further

¹³Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 27; emphasis added.

¹⁴Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 87.

¹⁵Taylor, "Replies," p. 214.

¹⁶MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 156.

¹⁷Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, p. 299.

¹⁸Taylor has explicitly stated that on at least one count, "the contemporary philosopher from whom" he has "learned most ... is none other than Alasdair MacIntyre" ("Reply to Commentators," *Philosophy & Phenomenological Research* 54 (1994): 203-13, p. 205).

at the idea that we need a “framework” (MacIntyre and Taylor), a “true community” (Taylor), a “moral unity” (MacIntyre), or a “moral orientation” (Taylor). On the critic’s view, this is, as I’ve mentioned, something like a necessary condition for personhood. According to Taylor,

to be able to answer for oneself is to know where one stands, what one wants to answer. And this is why we naturally tend to talk of our fundamental orientation in terms of who we are. To lose this orientation, or not to have found it, is not to know who one is. And this orientation, once attained, defines where you answer from, hence your identity.²⁰

The community, by providing this orientation, is not only what allows us to be persons, but also provides us with an identity. Frameworks, claims Taylor, provide “a kind of orientation essential to our identity.”²¹ Without this framework or orientation,²² we would be left with uncertainty about ourselves and our relations with the world and others. We would have no way to understand our own lives and how they relate to that which surrounds us. This is anomie. The disorientation faced when one is in anomie leaves us unable to confidently form judgments—including judgments of our own self-worth.

According to MacIntyre,

Anomie, as Durkheim characterized it, was a form of deprivation, of a loss of membership in those social institutions and modes in which norms, including the norms of tradition-constituted

¹⁹Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 414; emphasis added.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 29.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 78.

²²At times Taylor talks of frameworks providing orientations; at other times he seems to give primacy to orientations. I am not clear whether these are, in the end, equivalent or whether one is a metaphysical (or quasi-metaphysical) notion that is exemplified by the other. For my purposes, this will not matter and I will remain agnos-

rationality, are embodied. What Durkheim did not foresee was a time when the same condition of *anomie* would be assigned the status of an achievement by and a reward for a self, which had, by separating itself from the social relationships of traditions, succeeded, so it believed, in emancipating itself.²³

Anomie is a distressing situation for any entity to be in, but MacIntyre claims that it is considered an achievement in liberalism, where it is by (morally) disconnecting from others that we are thought to be free, so that a completely asocial "society" (using that word loosely) is seen as the ideal liberal society. Unfortunately for MacIntyre, this is not a necessary part of the liberal ideal, as we will see.²⁴ It may be a symptom present in contemporary society, but if so, it is not due to liberalism (though it may be due to some perverse understanding or mis-instantiation of liberalism). In any case, what is important for our purposes here is less the critics' view of liberalism and more their own positive doctrine, according to which to be without community is to be lost in anomie, unable to know oneself and how one relates to the world.

There is much more textual evidence that could be called upon in support of the characterization I am here presenting of MacIntyre and Taylor.²⁵ As I have presented it, that view is characterized by a belief that community is necessary for proper belief formation without which we are left in anomie. Life in liberal society is deficient because without a strong—"constitutive"—community one cannot have a *proper* orientation with which to identify and guide oneself.

tic on the matter. The arguments should go through regardless.

²³MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?* p. 368.

²⁴It may be a part of some liberal pictures. Consider, for example, Rousseau's vision of the noble savage in his *Discourse on Inequality*.

²⁵Sandel too claims that something is amiss in contemporary society; he claims that the modern liberal state does not allow us to "cultivate the shared self-understandings necessary to community in the formative, or constitutive sense" so that we are left feeling "disempowered" and "entangled" in "merely cooperative" communities that are contrasted to constitutive communities (Michael J. Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self," *Political Theory* 12 (1984): 81-96, pp. 93, 94, 87).

1. Toleration, Neutrality, and Anomie

The idea that liberalism evokes anomie emerges quite naturally from the fact that liberals often explicitly refuse to support the existence of “a good”—that is, refuse to endorse some ways of life as better than others.²⁶ In insisting that right is prior to good, liberals explicitly advocate a neutrality that allows individuals to choose their own conception of the good. For Michael Sandel, “the ideal of neutrality often reflects a voluntarist conception of human agency. Government must be neutral among conceptions of the good life in order to respect the capacity of persons to choose their values and relationships for themselves.”²⁷ If liberalism insists on this sort of neutrality of the state with regard to questions of the good (whereby the state is forbidden to promote one good over another), the critic charges, individuals will be left “to fend for themselves” in determining what they take to be good. They will be alone in determining what is of value, without aid from any authority. They will be in a state of anomie—having no context provided them.

Critics often argue that it is a mistake to give the right priority over the good. They take this to be a mistake, however, because they take it to be tantamount to a failure to recognize the moral import of the good. Hence, MacIntyre tells us that “the liberal is committed to there being no one overriding good.”²⁸ The liberal, though, can insist that *the priority of the right is itself the good*—and cannot conceptually be secondary to the right. We can call it a “meta-good,” recognizing that

²⁶I will use these—“good” and “best way of life”—interchangeably, as the best way to live one’s life is in accord with the good.

²⁷Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy’s Discontent: America in Search of a Political Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 92. See also his *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

²⁸MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?* p. 337.

it requires the priority of the right of all to their own conceptions of "the good." This is why Shklar says "Liberalism has only one overriding aim: to secure the political conditions that are necessary for the exercise of personal freedom."²⁹ As a "meta-good," the right permits various conceptions of the good (so long as they do not violate others' rights to the same) and even allows that individuals may deny its status as a good. Stated as such, it should be clear that the meta-good is toleration. Toleration requires that individuals be allowed to choose their own conception of the good.³⁰

Elsewhere, I define toleration as *an agent's intentional and principled refraining from interfering with an opposed other (or their behavior, etc.) in situations of diversity, where the agent believes she has the power to interfere.*³¹ Working with this definition, we can say that a state tolerates when it intentionally and on principle refrains from interfering with an opposed group (or its members, or its or their behavior) in situations of diversity, even though it believes it has the power to interfere. We can then say that for a liberal state to be appropriately neutral, it must intentionally and on principle refrain from interfering with any group (or its members, or its or their behavior) even though it (or its agents) believes it has the power to interfere. I shall call this

²⁹Judith N. Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear," in Nancy L. Rosenblum (ed.), *Liberalism and the Moral Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 21-38, at p. 21.

³⁰Many theorists take autonomy to be the central value of liberalism. Others take toleration to hold that place. On my view, the two are equi-primary and mutually supporting in a proper comprehensive liberalism wherein they serve different purposes. It is not that they are derived from one another in some vicious circle. Rather, they can be independently defended and once defended, the presence of each in a liberal theory gives additional support to the other in that theory, and the presence of each in a society helps to bolster the presence of the other in that society. Toleration is a behavior that one may only engage in when in society with others: see Andrew J. Cohen, "What Toleration Is," *Ethics* (2004), forthcoming. By contrast, however autonomy is understood, it is a trait of persons—regardless of whether in society with others or not. Given just this difference, it is clear that while the former is primarily political, the latter is primarily moral. My suggestion, then, is that autonomy is the root value of liberal moral theory while toleration is the root value of liberal political theory. We may need to have autonomy in order to have morality and anything to tolerate, but given societies of diverse individuals, we need toleration, not autonomy, to have a polity. Toleration might also be recognized as the more appropriate (meta-)good for liberal political theory by recognizing that some people might want to forfeit autonomy but if autonomy is taken as the good, would not be allowed to. If toleration is taken as the good, liberalism can respect such decisions. In short, toleration respects autonomy as well as the forfeiture of autonomy, but autonomy respects only toleration of autonomy and may prohibit (i.e., not tolerate) forfeiture of autonomy. Whereas many of us will not mind that, others will. Put another way,

"liberal neutrality." When neutral in this way, a state does not hinder conceptions of the good even when they oppose the majority conception or that shared by the state's leaders; it permits individuals to choose their own conception of the good (so long as they do not violate others' rights to the same).³²

If the state were to reject liberal neutrality, it could affirm a single conception of the good at the cost of other conceptions. This is why Rawls claims that if "we think of a political society as a community united in affirming one and the same comprehensive doctrine, then the oppressive use of state power is necessary for political community."³³ Refusing to tolerate different conceptions of the good requires force to suppress any rival conceptions. In contrast, liberalism requires "that government not actively promote any one culture, but rather that it provide its citizens with the means with which to pursue their lives as communal beings, whatever the culture their community embodies happens to be."³⁴ A liberal government has as its primary goal the maintenance of a social environment within which individuals can pursue their own conceptions of the good. Toleration is thereby seen as an instrumentally valuable good—meta-good—that *is* the priority of right over good and which is manifested in liberal neutrality.³⁵ "Although the liberal state does

while promoting autonomy may require impositions, toleration requires that one *not* impose oneself on another.

³¹Cohen, "What Toleration Is."

³²This understanding of *liberal neutrality* eliminates the possibility of being neutral by erecting equal barriers. As toleration permits no barriers (interference) to a conception of the good, for the state to tolerate a conception of the good, it must not try to hinder it; the liberal neutral state, then, constructs no barriers. Liberal neutrality is neutral not because it constructs the *same* barriers to all conceptions of the good, but because it constructs *no* barriers to any conception of the good (though its very instantiation, as we will see, can be a barrier to communal conceptions of the good). Of course, there are limits as to what and when we should tolerate and as to what liberal neutrality must allow (see my "What Toleration Does and Does Not Require From Liberalism" (unpubl. ms.)).

³³Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 37.

³⁴Daniel M. Weinstock, "The Political Theory of Strong Evaluation," in Tully (ed.), *Philosophy in the Age of Pluralism*, pp. 171-93, at p. 182.

³⁵It might be suggested that toleration is not necessarily due universal assent, that some may reasonably reject it. I have not, in fact, tried here to defend toleration directly as a value—though I think it is. I shall not here offer a full positive argument for toleration, but consider: if Jim claims we should not value toleration, it is likely that *he* wants not to tolerate others and wants *us* to aid him in the process. If he wants actively not to tolerate others, he wants to suppress or change them and likely wants our help in doing so. Of course, he will surely want *his* way of life tolerated. That is, he values toleration *of him*. We all want our own ways to be tolerated. Neither Jim nor anyone else

not provide an orthodox definition of 'the good life' as opposed to 'the bad life', it does administer an obligatory distinction between 'right action' and 'wrong action'. Rightness ... defines the liberal conception of the common [meta-]Good."³⁶

It has been argued, perhaps most notably by Thomas Nagel, that state neutrality is an impossible ideal, a chimera sought after by misguided liberals. Nagel argues that Rawlsian liberalism—at least as presented in *A Theory of Justice*—is itself biased toward individualist conceptions of the good and hinders conceptions of the good based on communal involvements and "well-defined types of social structure."³⁷ Joseph Raz explains it this way:

[T]he very restrictions imposed on societies by the Rawlsian principles of justice make the implementation of some conceptions of the good more difficult and their pursuit by individuals less attractive than that of others. Furthermore, the implementation of some conceptions of the good is incompatible with the principles of justice and is ruled out altogether.³⁸

According to this familiar charge, liberalism is not neutral between individualist and communal conceptions of the good, but rather favors individualist conceptions at the expense of communal conceptions.

Liberalism's lack of neutrality is made vivid when one considers the relationship that is meant

would claim otherwise (see my "The Value of Toleration" (unpubl. ms.)).

³⁶Stephen Holmes, *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 200. The critics, perhaps surprisingly, sometimes recognize that liberalism's priority of the right over the good is itself a good. Sandel tells us that "the commitment to a framework of rights can be seen as a kind of value ... its value consists precisely in its refusal to affirm a preferred way of life or conception of the good" ("The Political Theory of the Procedural Republic," in Robert B. Reich (ed.), *The Power of Public Ideas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 109-21, at p. 113). MacIntyre notes that the "overriding good of liberalism is no more and no less than the continued sustenance of the liberal social and political order" (*Whose Justice?* p. 345). One wonders, then, why eight pages earlier (337)—as quoted above—he claims there is no such good.

³⁷Thomas Nagel, "Rawls on Justice," in Normal Daniels (ed.), *Reading Rawls* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), pp. 1-16, at p. 9; see pp. 8-10. I suggest, but cannot argue here, that the same holds for all of the Rawlsian corpus—including, importantly, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

³⁸Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 120.

to inhere between the liberal state and any religious group. Though the liberal state is meant to remain neutral between all available religions, there are times when protecting individual rights may mean trampling on a religious or communal conception of the good. For example, requiring an education (or, put another way, "protecting the rights of all children to an education") that includes learning about evolution may hinder the realization of the good of a religion that preaches creationism. So too, a religion that teaches its adherents to forgo physical pleasures and material desires will likely lose adherents when its young are exposed to modern luxuries in school. That loss of adherents depletes the religious community of its members and thus hinders the realization of any communal conception of the good that the religion or its (remaining) practitioners may harbor.³⁹ What begins as an attempted neutrality, then, is not neutral; it hinders certain conceptions of the good based on "well-defined types of social structure." Even without coerced education, a state that remains liberally neutral will contain a variety of competing desiderata, and exposure to that variety can cause individuals to choose to leave the traditional group.

There is, so far as I know, no good argument against this criticism from a Rawlsian perspective. It is simply true that there may be conflicts between some communal practices and such forms of liberalism. Of course, this does not mean Rawlsian liberalism is not amenable to many forms of community—it is. Moreover, it is important to note that although Rawlsian liberalism cannot be neutral in the way Nagel, Raz, and others indicate, it is neutral in ways that are of more normative concern. It is also important that libertarian versions of liberalism that reject a state mandate for education can avoid much of this problem. They do so, of course, at great cost; members of religious groups receive less protection against their own groups (though even on

³⁹For a discussion of this problem, see Stephen Macedo, "Liberal Civic Education and Religious Fundamentalism: The Case of God v. John Rawls?" *Ethics* 105 (1995): 468-96. For one alternative liberal solution, see Chandran Kukathas, "Cultural Toleration," in Ian Shapiro and Will Kymlicka (eds.), *Ethnicity and Group Rights, NOMOS* 39 (New York: New York University Press, 1997), pp. 69-104. For another, see John Tomasi, *Liberalism Beyond Jus-*

those views, individuals have a state-protected right to exit their religious groups).⁴⁰

All forms of liberalism are neutral between individuals, if not between conceptions of the good. That is, given any two individuals, liberalism does not allow the state to engage in any activity designed to promote one over the other. This neutrality holds regardless of the conceptions of the good that the two individuals hold so long as adherence to those conceptions does not cause one individual to harm another.⁴¹ As Larmore argues, liberalism requires a neutrality of *procedure* and not a neutrality of outcome—liberalism cannot insist that any particular state of affairs be actualized, but it can and does insist that the politico-legal social processes remain neutral. The state must follow procedures that are neutral between individuals regardless of their conceptions of the good.⁴² This may have the result that certain conceptions of the good lose out. The loss of such conceptions of the good may be an unfortunate (even morally regrettable) outcome, but this does not necessitate state action to maintain those conceptions. A neutral outcome is not guaranteed and in this, liberalism privileges individualist over traditional conceptions of

tice: Citizens, Society, and the Boundaries of Political Theory (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁴⁰See my "What Toleration Does and Does Not Require From Liberalism," and Chandran Kukathas, *The Liberal Archipelago: A Theory of Diversity and Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁴¹I have been insisting that liberalism is not required to remain neutral when an individual seeks to harm another. Liberalism is a political theory (or family of theories) and thus a theory about how a state should allow interaction. That liberalism does not allow individuals to pursue conceptions of the good that are harmful to others is an instantiation of Mill's harm principle ("the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number is self-protection ... the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others" (John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1978), p. 19). It is a morally required limit to the state's neutrality by liberalism's own standards. See Philip Selznick, "Personhood and Moral Obligation," in Amitai Etzioni (ed.), *New Communitarian Thinking: Persons, Virtues, Institutions, and Communities* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), pp. 110-26, at p. 125, for a statement that "projects" must "meet a threshold standard of moral justification" such that, for example, they do not require the agent to harm others. "It is tacitly assumed that liberal neutrality ends where violation of rights begins, and that a hands-off policy is appropriate only toward rightful actions" (Loren Lomasky, *Persons, Rights, and the Moral Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 250).

⁴²Charles Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 44. John Tomasi argues for a form of liberalism that may be characterized as advocating a neutrality between conceptions of the good. He considers his view political but substantive and argues that the state must seek to limit "spillover effects" that erode community-centered ways of life (see his *Liberalism Beyond Justice*).

the good.⁴³ Though this may seem unfair to those committed to a traditional view (for example, a religious view that requires adherence by its members to strict laws of obedience to the community), it will seem eminently fair to those who would have been otherwise limited by a particular tradition they could not opt out of for non-liberal legal reasons. In any case, I am not concerned with what "seems fair," but what *is* just.

In order to understand the importance of the neutrality of procedure, we should note that liberalism is opposed to "[g]overnments that set out to privilege a particular culture, or religion, or ensemble of career paths through the workings of their institutions." Such governments generally manage such privileging "by attaching psychic or material costs, or by imposing legal obstacles, upon those whose deliberations have led them away from the particular common good in question, when they do not simply make use of their monopoly of force."⁴⁴ Such governments affirm a particular conception of the good and design procedures to attain that good. Individuals who find themselves opposed to that conception are simply out of luck. This is what liberal neutrality is meant to oppose—and to that extent also, it does disfavor traditional and community oriented conceptions of the good.⁴⁵

It is worth emphasizing that I have no intention of arguing that an authoritarian community would be impermissible in a properly liberal regime.⁴⁶ What I've said above indicates only that some such communities are *unlikely* to survive in a liberal regime—not that they are there im-

⁴³To state this point paradoxically: since the state is neutral and indifferent as to what outcome results, the outcome may not be neutral. Stated yet another way, liberalism demands that the state respect individuals (as equal citizens), but not their conceptions of the good (but see two previous footnotes).

⁴⁴Weinstock, "The Political Theory of Strong Evaluation," p. 189.

⁴⁵(a) Moreover, even the endorsement of a neutrality of outcome would not justify biasing procedures. A neutral (or even "liberal") outcome may be one desideratum, but it is not enough to abandon liberal procedural principles. This should be expected though, as some individuals will find themselves opposed to this neutral conception of the good, and liberalism respects even them (though it may disagree with their views). (b) Throughout this discussion I am relying on it being a coherent possibility that individuals are separable from their conceptions of the good. My arguments for the coherence of that possibility are presented in my "A Defense of Strong Voluntarism."

⁴⁶See Kukathas, *The Liberal Archipelago*.

permissible. There are numerous examples of religious communities that have grown smaller within a liberal state (consider the Shakers), but there are also examples of such communities that survive and even thrive (consider the Amish). Of course, no community would be allowed to expand within a liberal state if its expansion required the overt suppression of rival conceptions of the good outside that particular community's bounds.⁴⁷

Liberal neutrality is a species of neutrality of procedure. It is this insistence on a neutrality of procedure that fails to enable some communal conceptions of the good and that is thus thought to lead to anomie—for without some authoritative endorsement of a good (whether by the state or an authoritative cultural community) people are, so the claim goes, left at sea.

2. Anomie and the Grounds for Self-Respect

The critics I am discussing believe that social confirmation of beliefs is necessary for self-respect. They believe, that is, that individuals need to have their beliefs (at least beliefs regarding their core values) confirmed by others if they are to respect themselves. Given that they think liberalism fails to provide this social confirmation—that they think it leaves people at sea with regard to values—they believe that liberalism fails to support self-respect.⁴⁸

When a liberal insists that the government not endorse any one good (or plurality of goods), she is not insisting that no individual or association of individuals can endorse a good. There is no reason to think, for example, that an ideally liberal society would have no religious associations (i.e., churches). While a liberal government cannot *promote* them (to do so would be to de-

⁴⁷As per my "What Toleration Does and Does Not Require From Liberalism," within its bounds, a homogenous community need not consider any rival conceptions.

⁴⁸What is required for self-respect is, of course, largely an empirical question for psychologists. There appears to be ample empirical evidence for both sides in the debate. Liberals can indicate individuals who thrive on making their own choices and their critics can cite the pervasive feelings of "aimlessness" and "worthlessness" in our society (perhaps looking at depression studies). There is, however, an important theoretical component to this question.

viate from liberal neutrality), it also cannot forbid them or promote their dissolution (to do so, again, would be to deviate from liberal neutrality). It must tolerate (or refrain from interfering with) them. Given the history of liberalism, it is hard to understand why anyone would claim otherwise. Although many liberals were not committed to any particular religion (e.g., Hume, Mill, Rawls), many others were (e.g., Acton, Locke, Finnis). Such thinkers would not rule out the permissibility of religious organizations. They would simply maintain that these exist separate from the state and should not be privileged by the state. Given the existence of religious organizations—and such seem perennially present in human civilization—there would exist non-governmental organizations that would endorse particular conceptions of the good.⁴⁹ Indeed, there are a great many non-governmental means of support. Many voluntary associations—churches, scouting groups, singles clubs, professional associations, and so on—serve the purpose.

It may, however, be insisted that although religious (and other) organizations can help alleviate anomie and thus allow for some self-respect—by offering non-political social confirmation of beliefs—their presence is not enough. If individuals can opt out of (or into) any particular association, the mere presence of religious organizations cannot fully alleviate the problem, for individuals will not receive confirmation of their beliefs if they are outside all religious associations. This may seem a minor point as those individuals outside a religious association likely choose to be outside, but this misses the force of the objection.

At the least, fleshing out the theoretical and normative implications of our desire to support self-respect may inform the sort of work that is needed from empirical psychology.

⁴⁹I take it for granted that part of any religion is endorsement of some particular good or way of life. In the remainder, I use "religious organization" as a place holder for any non-governmental association that has, as part of its mission, the promotion of some particular good or way of life. In Rawls's terms, this would be any organization that promotes a comprehensive view. The argumentation in this paragraph is similar to Rawls's own—not only in *Political Liberalism*, but already in *A Theory of Justice*. There Rawls says: "It normally suffices that for each person there is some association (one or more) to which he belongs and within which the activities that are rational for him are publicly affirmed by others" (p. 441). In this way, each citizen "finds his endeavors confirmed by his associates" (p.

Should an individual born into and raised within a particular religious community face the option of leaving her community, her decision cannot be properly made from a perspective internal to the association.⁵⁰ She has to make the decision from a detached or "distanced" perspective, for otherwise, she would naturally be led to staying. Her religious community, interested in its own continuity, would not encourage her to exit its confines (ignoring cases of excommunication, wherein a person is forced to exit in order that the association ensures its own survival). Because it would not plausibly endorse her decision to exit, she cannot rationally take its endorsement of her staying as anything like an impartial judgment. She knows she will receive confirmation if she stays and that if she chooses exit, she will not receive confirmation, but disappointment. It would not even matter if an association *could* endorse a particular member's decision to exit (again, not considering cases of excommunication), since all members will have good reason to doubt the sincerity of the association if it fails to endorse (or if it condemns) *any* member's decision to exit. Any attempt by the community to endorse the decision should, then, "fall on deaf ears." The criticism that there is no adequate mechanism for social confirmation in a liberal society, where individuals may have to choose whether or not to remain in their communities, thus seems to stand.

The response I develop here argues that the challenge rests on a false presupposition that self-respect is derived primarily from confidence in one's beliefs. Although such confidence is beneficial to one's self-respect, it is only part of the picture. Moreover, an element necessary to self-

442). Rawls, too, then has concerns with social confirmation.

⁵⁰This is a corollary to MacIntyre's own insistence that one cannot properly evaluate a tradition from the outside (for a criticism of this MacIntyrean view, see Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), esp. pp. 47-49). To see this, recognize that what is outside a particular tradition can also not be evaluated from outside of *it*, where "it" is "outside of tradition." Being outside of "outside of tradition" can only be *within* some particular tradition. Thus, the agent cannot evaluate "outside the tradition" from inside the tradition she is considering opting out of. She cannot evaluate her tradition from outside or the outside from her tradition—an interesting paradox: "genuinely to adopt the standpoint of a tradition thereby commits one to its view of what is true and false and, in so committing one, prohibits one from adopting any rival standpoint" (MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?* p.

respect—confidence in one's abilities—is not only absent from but is hindered by the critics' method of providing social confirmation for beliefs.⁵¹

To properly develop this argument, we must recognize a distinction, often overlooked in developments of both the criticism and the response, between the confidence one might have in a particular belief or set of beliefs and the confidence one has in oneself. These may be related, but they are not the same. The challenge relies on obfuscating this distinction. It requires an assumption that lack of confidence in one's beliefs necessarily leads to (or simply *is*) a lack of confidence in oneself. If that were true, though, we could not possibly question our beliefs while retaining confidence in our ability to question them. For the liberal, that idea and the assumption that leads to it is to be rejected; it is possible to remain confident in one's abilities and yet doubt one's beliefs. Hence, Humboldt, for example, tells us that "there is more self-reliance and firmness in the inquiring thinker, more weakness and indolence in the trusting believer."⁵²

Critics claim that liberalism fails to recognize the need individuals have for social confirmation of their judgments and insist that without such confirmation, the individual is left with uncertainty about her judgments and, finally, that such uncertainty is opposed to firm conviction, and thus, confidence and self-respect. The distinction just made is already of use. Without the social confirmation that might be provided for by a more authoritative regime, the liberal individual may, in fact, be left with uncertainty about her judgments. This uncertainty is opposed to firm conviction *in those beliefs*, and thus, to confidence *in those beliefs*. This, does not, though, necessitate a lack of confidence in oneself or the self-respect that is implicit in such confidence.

367).

⁵¹In constructing the following argumentation, I rely and build upon similar arguments by Rawls (*A Theory of Justice and Political Liberalism*), Weinstock ("The Political Theory of Strong Evaluation"), and Will Kymlicka (*Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989)). All three rely on the value of choice as instrumental to rationality.

⁵²Wilhelm von Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action*. ed. and trans. J.W. Burrow (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund,

An individual can doubt her convictions and remain fully confident in her self (and her rational faculties).

If it is correct that an individual can lack confidence in her beliefs and yet remain confident in herself, the argument that liberalism cannot support self-respect because it does not support confidence in beliefs fails. In maintaining confidence in herself as a rational person, the individual in a liberal society can retain her self-respect even when she does not have social confirmation for her beliefs. Indeed, in what follows it will become clear that liberalism better allows for self-respect on these grounds than does any political theory that endorses a more authoritarian community. First, though, I turn to the liberal pluralist.

3. Pluralism

Liberal pluralists—of one stripe—have argued for a form of liberalism that provides some authority regarding the good or goods; some may think this makes it such that people are not left to themselves to determine value. Pluralism, in the simplest philosophical sense, is the view that there are irreducibly plural moral values. "Moral pluralism asserts the existence of a multitude of incompatible but morally valuable forms of life."⁵³ This is the sort of pluralism endorsed by Isaiah Berlin, for whom "objective value is ultimately not of a single kind but of many kinds."⁵⁴ This sort of pluralism does not offer any answer to the anomie challenge. It is the lack of a value endorsed by the liberal state that is seen as the problem; insisting that the state can't endorse one

Inc., 1993), p. 66.

⁵³Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, p. 133.

⁵⁴Charles Larmore, "Pluralism and Reasonable Disagreement," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 11 (1994): 61-79, pp. 62-63. See also James Griffin, *Well-Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 89-92.

because there are many (or several) does nothing to alleviate that problem—it simply explains why the state does not endorse one.

An alleviation of the problem of anomie can only come from the pluralist if he is willing to go further than the Berlin-style pluralist to offer and defend a specific list of irreducible goods. I'll call pluralists who make this move "objective list theorists."⁵⁵ As I am using the term, objective list theories reject the existence of a monistic conception of the good to which all (other) goods can be reduced, but defend a specific plurality of irreducible goods. This, it might be thought, would help alleviate anomie by providing individuals a "starting place." They are no longer "left at sea" to seek what conceptions of the good they might find in order to decide which to endorse, but have their options readily available and substantially narrowed. A narrow range of goods or endorse-able ways of life would allow for the communal sentiments desired by MacIntyre, Taylor, and Sandel by providing a list of goods around which individuals in a given community can collectively focus their lives. Even if there develop various factions within a society—one for each conception of the good allowed for by the objective list—there would be groups of people focused on particular goods or groups of goods. As such, individuals could gain confirmation for their beliefs from within a group of people accepting the same objectively valuable good or combination of goods.

Objective list pluralism as so far formulated, though, cannot adequately answer the anomie challenge. Given the sort of society just described, individuals would still have to make the initial choice of *which* objective conception of the good they should pursue and the problem discussed in the previous section regarding non-governmental organizations aiding belief confirmation again rears its ugly head. An individual might be faced with a choice of objective goods and

⁵⁵This is taken from Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), appendix I, pp. 493-502, esp. pp. 499-501.

if she is, her decision cannot properly be made from a perspective internal to any association endorsing one of the goods. Once she makes that choice, she can enter a community of fellow believers who can impart a belief system to her, but regarding that choice, she is alone. She will always have reason to doubt any community's endorsement. Authoritatively limiting the possible goods is not enough to banish anomie and even given communities that endorse specific goods, what good to endorse remains a question for individuals conceptually prior to their entering a community (i.e., prior to their acceptance of the community authority).

There is a further concern about pluralism as so far discussed. MacIntyre rightly recognizes that "the conditions of contemporary public debate are such that when the representative voices of ... subcultures try to participate in it, they are all too easily interpreted and misinterpreted in terms of the pluralism which threatens to submerge us all."⁵⁶ With an objective list of goods, it becomes all too easy for the dominant culture and its representatives to assume that all individuals actually seek one of the endorsed goods. Indeed, it may insist that only goods on the objective list can permissibly be pursued, resulting in disrespect, devaluation, and intolerance of those who (mistakenly, we assume) take something else as the good. If a minority group or subculture has its own scheme of valuation that differs from the dominant culture, that scheme and the values it embodies may go unrecognized or even suppressed. This pluralism thus threatens to discriminate adversely against those who reject its values even though they do no harm to the state or other citizens.⁵⁷

⁵⁶MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 226. That MacIntyre starts this section talking of "virtue concepts" rather than "virtues" might be taken to imply that he is using "pluralism" to denote a doctrine about conceptions of value, rather than about values. Just before the quoted material, however, he switches to discussion of "the catalogue of virtues" and the survival of the "traditional scheme of virtues." For this reason, I take him to be discussing a pluralism of values—as I am.

⁵⁷I take this argument to be reasonable, but odd coming from a thinker like MacIntyre, as it could easily be argued that the conditions of a society he would favor would be "such that when the representative voices of ... subcultures try to participate in it, they are all too easily interpreted and misinterpreted in terms of" the (possibly monistic) value endorsed by the community. Subcultures not advocating the good of the broader culture would be neces-

To reiterate: the critic would not be satisfied with either simple pluralism (like that of Isaiah Berlin) or the objective list pluralism just discussed, as neither provides full confirmation of beliefs. The latter provides some aid in this direction by providing a list of goods, but does not do enough, as individuals must still choose from that list without authoritative aid.⁵⁸ I look at a second liberal response to the subjectivism charge below, but first I turn to the critics' likely suggestion for a means to support belief confirmation and indicate why it fails as a solution to the anomie challenge.⁵⁹

4. The Alternative

Critics of liberalism might want the initial choice of which good to endorse to be a matter answered authoritatively by tradition. MacIntyre, for example, defends (and encourages) participa-

sarily at odds with the dominant culture. This is why MacIntyre and his like do not advocate maintenance of the federal nation-state in its present condition; what they need is for states to be of small enough scale such that the dominant culture is the *only* culture (hence, they often look to the Greek *polis*, or city-state, for inspiration). They need full agreement within a community as to what the correct conception of the good is and an authoritative statement about that conception. As it is unlikely that a federal nation-state could embody a single culture with a single shared conception of the good, these thinkers favor devolving political power to smaller groups that would be able to maintain such homogeneity (see, for example, Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 112-18; and Sandel, "The Procedural Republic"). On this point, they may end up in agreement with some libertarians (see, e.g., Kukathas, *The Liberal Archipelago*).

⁵⁸There are two more moves a "pluralist" (note the scare quotes) could make to satisfy the critic. First, he may endorse lexically prioritizing the objective list so that some of the goods on the list are seen as of more value than others. Once this move is made, individuals are not left to decide for themselves at all what is best for them. In this way, anomie is banished. This provision, I would suggest, is less an emendation of liberalism and more a capitulation to authoritarian impulses. Moreover, there are convincing arguments against the possibility of fully ranking objective lists (see Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 106-7; John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 92 and 118-25; and Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, pp. 395-99). The second possible move is to insist that all values on the objective list are worthy of pursuit and that as such, all individuals should pursue all of them. This admits of two sub-possibilities: in one, there are priority rules relating the different values and on the other, there are not. If there are, we seem to have much the same situation as the first possibility above: a capitulation to monism and authoritarianism. If there are not (for this suggestion, see W.D. Ross, *The Right and The Good* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), pp. 27 ff.), we seem to be left where we were in the text: how much of each good to pursue would be up to individuals who, though not "at sea," can receive no help in making the assessment.

⁵⁹I should briefly note that it has been argued that rather than supporting liberalism, pluralism "positively undermines the liberal case" (George Crowder, "Pluralism and Liberalism," *Political Studies* 42 (1994): 293-305, p. 304; see also John Kekes, *The Morality of Pluralism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 207). I am not persuaded of this, but it has no bearing on my view as I am *not* endorsing pluralism. My arguments are meant, partly, to show that there *is* a supreme liberal value.

tion in traditions that provide authoritative understandings of the world.⁶⁰ Such intervention to eliminate anomie might, then, have the government endorsing, for each group, the present way of life manifested in that group. This will be viewed with trepidation by anti-perfectionist liberals. Politicians will have their own interests (and those of special interest groups) at stake and in mind any time a question arises regarding which ways of life to be endorsed. Liberals will not want decisions regarding their ways of life made or limited by others—partly because they will see value in making the decisions themselves and partly because of a distrust of political machinery.

Part of the fear expressed in the previous paragraph may be alleviated when we recall that the critics we are discussing do not generally favor a centralized federal government (see footnote 57), but this is not completely satisfactory for the opponent of intervention, who will remind us that even less centralized and less concentrated power can be abused. Indeed, local governments have proven themselves adept at outlawing life choices unwanted by their (vocal) majorities. For example, the Supreme Court has found it necessary to strike down local ordinances regarding distribution of pornography as attempts by local governments to legislate morality.⁶¹ Similarly, *Roe v. Wade* was designed to prevent states from making abortion illegal *because* some states did so. Most recently, of course, the Court struck down state sodomy laws⁶² In all three cases, less centralized governments (municipalities and states) took it upon themselves to legislate morality and life choices for their citizens. To legislate, that is, ways of life.

It might be suggested that the critics have not indicated that *any* government should be responsible (at least directly) for the framework that provides individuals with non-subjective values. It might be suggested that that framework can and should be provided by non-governmental

⁶⁰See, for example, MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 193.

⁶¹For a discussion, see Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent*, pp. 86-90.

organizations. There is no doubt that much of what we accept as valuable is valuable *to us* because of what we have been taught by such organizations, including families, workplaces, and children's organizations (scouts, little league, churches, and so on). Of course, these sorts of organizations are *voluntary* and, thus, not opposed by liberals.⁶³ Moreover, the critics seem to reject any reliance on voluntary, non-governmental, organizations to support belief confirmation as unacceptable (see section 2 above), and if that is right, they cannot simultaneously rely on such organizations.

Recall that the critic charges that liberalism and its insistence on state neutrality leaves people to choose for themselves—to determine value on their own—without any socially endorsed grounds for their decisions. The sorts of organizations that can alleviate anomie are not, we must thus assume, meant to be voluntary. If they were, the critic would have no disagreement with the liberal.⁶⁴ They must, then, be authoritative traditions that individuals cannot opt out of. I would argue, however, that there are no such traditions—that in principle, we can opt out of any such

⁶²*Lawrence and Garner v. Texas*, case no. 02-0102 (6/26/2003).

⁶³Similarly, Anna Elisabetta Galeotti claims that "the political covers only a limited area of the total life of society. In the wider sphere of society as a whole groups and associations can freely pursue their communal goals and aims, reinforcing bonds of solidarity and loyalty among members" (*Toleration as Recognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 56). Will Kymlicka makes a similar point when he claims that we have "a choice, not between [state-endorsed] perfectionism and neutrality, but between social perfectionism and state perfectionism—for the flip side of state neutrality is support for the role of perfectionist ideals and arguments in civil society" ("Liberal Individualism and Liberal Neutrality," *Ethics* 99 (1989): 883-905, p. 895) and that the "best reason for state neutrality is precisely that social life is nonneutral" (p. 895 n. 29). The argument is that the government should not intervene in order to provide options in the "cultural marketplace" because society naturally provides those options and does so better than a government could, while a government could weaken the options: "state perfectionism would in fact serve to distort the free evaluation of ways of life, to rigidify the dominant ways of life, whatever their intrinsic merits, and to unfairly exclude the values and aspirations of marginalized and disadvantaged groups within the community" (*ibid.*, p. 900).

⁶⁴Except if he claims the liberal is wrong that the associations mentioned above are voluntary. Concerning workplaces, children's organizations, and other such mechanisms, such a claim would be far-fetched. With regard to families, such a claim is plausible. It is true that values are imparted to children in families and it would be implausible to think children *voluntarily* accept these values. This, though, is not problematic for liberals. We cannot say that imparting values to children amounts to interference with the life of an autonomous agent, for young children are not likely to be autonomous and when they do become autonomous, they can choose not to accept those values (see n. 45(b) above).

association.⁶⁵

Here's the dilemma for the critic: either I am correct and there are no traditions able to do the job he needs done, as they will do no more than the voluntary associations liberals endorse, or I am wrong and individuals cannot opt out of those traditions, in which case, we are left questioning the morality of such authoritarian practices.⁶⁶ Either the critic doesn't get what he wants or he does so by sacrificing freedom. Indeed, the liberal would question any authoritarianism because of the value she places on freedom—including the freedom to choose one's conception of the good. I will return to authoritarianism later (in section 7), but now turn to my defense of choice.

5. Choice: Its Costs and Its Value

Although the argument that liberalism causes anomie is theoretical, evidence in its favor is often adopted from social criticism masked as (armchair) sociology. Taylor tells us that the "the modern subject demands autonomy. He is not part of a larger order, but must discern his own purposes."⁶⁷ While Taylor may bemoan this, liberals do not:

Every adult should be able to make as many effective decisions without fear or favor about as

⁶⁵See my "A Defense of Strong Voluntarism." My point here is that we can choose to opt out of them; I would not deny that an association could prevent an individual from acting on that choice. The liberal state, however, must not allow such preventions, which are violations of the harm principle—the liberal state must protect the individual's right to exit.

⁶⁶For a detailed feminist critique of this reliance on tradition or "shared understandings," see Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, pp. 41-73. Okin's position is in many ways similar to that presented here. On the confusion of "shared understandings" (in the work of Michael Walzer), see also Will Kymlicka "Appendix 1: Some Questions about Justice and Community," in Bell, *Communitarianism and Its Critics*, pp. 208-21.

⁶⁷Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

many aspects of her or his life as is compatible with the like freedom of every other adult ... Apart from prohibiting interference with the freedom of others, liberalism does not have any particular positive doctrines about how people are to conduct their lives or what personal choices they are to make.⁶⁸

The critics' charge, again, is that this leads to anomie and so should be rejected. That, though, is what this paper calls into question. How then might one argue that community or government should interfere in order to authoritatively support particular values so that individuals will not have to choose them on their own?

Gerald Dworkin provides a well-known and persuasive argument that more choice can be worse than less and recent evidence from psychology supports that argument.⁶⁹ Although Dworkin does not put his argument forward as support for government interference, it can be used as part of such an argument. If more choice is not better than less, limiting choice by interference may seem more justifiable. I thus turn to Dworkin's argument.

Dworkin indicates several costs of increased options: the cost of "acquiring information required to make reasonable choices," the time and effort involved in making the choice, psychic costs (worries), added responsibility, and societal (peer) pressure to choose a particular (possibly harmful) option that would have been otherwise unavailable.⁷⁰ Dworkin also claims that "by in-

Press, 1985), p. 264.

⁶⁸Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear," p. 21.

⁶⁹Gerald Dworkin, "Is More Choice Better Than Less?" in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy VII 1982: Social and Political Philosophy*, ed. Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., and Howard K. Wettstein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), pp. 47-61. For the psychological case, see Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).

⁷⁰Dworkin, "Is More Choice Better Than Less?" pp. 50-51. Barry Schwartz indicates several worries the chooser might have: the burden of information-seeking, the regret people may feel when they choose, the sense of missed opportunities they may feel, the over-expectation of the results to be attained from one's choice, and the sense of responsibility for choosing less than perfectly. I doubt this list is exhaustive; I derive it from his "Freedom, Choice, Wealth, and Welfare" (unpubl. ms.; discussed at the University of North Carolina, April 10, 2004). A friend's story

creasing the options available, one changes the nature of the old options and may, therefore, affect the likelihood of individuals exercising such options."⁷¹

Dworkin's purpose in itemizing the costs of choice and giving examples where the increased options affect old options is to show that increased options may lead to a decline in individual welfare.⁷² I do not challenge this claim or the claim that government is meant to protect the welfare of citizens. However, given those two claims, one might conclude that government should intervene to limit benign options—those options that cause no harm other than sometimes preventing the choice of a different beneficial option. It is this further claim I challenge.

The presence of benign options can at least sometimes increase individual welfare. If an option is chosen, we have *prima facie* reason to think the chooser thinks it will improve her welfare; many times, she will be correct. Moreover, whatever costs emerge from the existence of benign options are limited. One can spend as much or as little time, effort, or money as one desires in order to obtain information that would assist in making a better decision and in actually making a decision. One can, to put the point differently, decide to be a satisficer rather than a maximizer.⁷³ One can choose—or so I would argue⁷⁴—to accept or reject much of the societal pressure placed on oneself to make a particular decision. Finally, to some degree, one can suffer emotionally as little or as much about one's decisions as one wishes; to the extent that this suf-

helps to illustrate the mistake here. Dave needed rather dangerous brain surgery and planned to have the operation performed in his home town by a local surgeon. Before the date of the surgery, he was provided a second option: a well-known and more experienced surgeon in a nearby city. He did, in fact, agonize over the decision, probably worrying about all of the things Schwartz considers. Obviously, the second option made his *decision* more difficult, but just as obviously, that is not the point. The option—which he took—made his *life* better, and that is the point. He chose to go with the more experienced doctor and had a completely successful operation. Surely his welfare might be better than if he didn't have the second option and went with the less experienced surgeon. The surgery, after all, was not routine. (Thanks to Dave Schmitz for the example and for help formulating its presentation.)

⁷¹Dworkin, "Is More Choice Better Than Less?" p. 54.

⁷²*Ibid.*, pp. 55-56. Dworkin offers three mundane examples: the effect of the introduction of cars on the use of public transportation systems, the effect of the increased acceptability of divorce on the rate of divorce (as opposed to "sticking it out"), and the effect of introducing various shirts to a man who previously had only one choice.

⁷³See David Schmitz, *Rational Choice and Moral Agency* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 28 ff.; and Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice*.

fering cannot be self-controlled, it is part of taking responsibility for one's actions. There is no denying that one must accept responsibilities when one makes decisions, but even there, the cost is controlled by the agent, for it is the agent who makes the decision. Again, none of this serves as a rebuttal to Dworkin. It simply calls into question any conclusion that his argument supports government interference aimed at increasing individual welfare by limiting benign options. Sometimes those options increase welfare and even where they do not, the cost to individual welfare is controlled by the agent.

Dworkin's second attempt to show how a larger number of options might not be better than a smaller number fails no better for the advocate of interference. The liberal can agree that "by increasing the options available, one changes the nature of the old options" and she need not deny that such changes will "affect the likelihood of individuals exercising such options." This, though, means only that with additional options, an agent will get what she chooses given the available options. Of course, the choice she makes given the added options may be different from the choice she would make without them and the increase in options may make the decision harder. That is far from conclusive reason to want options limited. It is simply the nature of options and decisions. With the ability to conceptualize options, moreover, decisions must be made—simply because more options are faced. This, though, is what it is to be an intelligent being! An intelligent being is, minimally, one that is able to understand her options and make decisions (choices) regarding those options when a situation requires it. A desire not to have options, then, amounts to a repudiation of the chance to exercise one's intellect. If one wants never to choose, one has no call for intelligence.

This line of argument is not new. It is present in Mill's *On Liberty* (chapter 3). For Mill, free-

⁷⁴See my "A Defense of Strong Voluntarism."

dom to choose how one behaves is necessary in order for individuals to exercise, and thus maintain or expand, their rational faculties. Freedom of choice is instrumentally valuable in order to promote reasoning abilities. As rationality is often seen (certainly it is seen this way by Mill) as a defining characteristic of personhood or humanity, choice is instrumentally valuable for maintaining (and increasing) one's humanity. This is the first reason that choice is valuable.

It will be objected that even if choice is necessary for an individual to become rational, more occasions of choice may not lead to greater rationality. There are four broad possibilities: (1) there is no relationship between choice and rationality; (2) although choice is necessary for the genesis of rationality, once any rationality is present, choice is no longer necessary; (3) although some minimal amount of choice is always necessary for rationality, more occasion for choice does not lead to more rationality; and (4) choice is necessary for rationality and more occasion for choice allows for more rationality. The objection assumes that I require the fourth possibility. In fact, only the first possibility hinders my argument and even there, only minimally: its truth would eliminate *this* reason to value choice.⁷⁵ I will provide three *other* Millian reasons to instrumentally value choice and, moreover, an argument that it is intrinsically valuable. Together, these make a weighty case.

A second familiar reason to think that choice is instrumentally valuable concerns "project pursuit."⁷⁶ Persons generally have projects they wish to pursue—projects that are likely to improve their lives. These can be short-term, but it may be that we need long-term projects to have a truly

⁷⁵Determining which of the four possibilities is accurate requires empirical evidence from psychology (which I would welcome). If the result of that research was that possibility (1) was found to be accurate, then as admitted, we would not have this reason to value choice; if (2) was found to be accurate, it would provide us a reason only to endorse (presumably, limited) choice for those not yet rational (a decidedly odd outcome); if (3) were accurate, it would provide us reason only to endorse some limited amounts of choice (i.e., enough to maintain rationality); if (4) were accurate, it would offer substantial support for my case—and I do find it intuitively plausible.

⁷⁶“Speaking generally, there is no one so fit to conduct any business, or to determine how or by whom it shall be conducted, as those who are personally interested in it” (Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 107). For more on this, see Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, § 78, and Lomasky, *Persons, Rights, and the Moral Community*, chap. 3. See also Schmidtz, *Ra-*

worthwhile life. Without something that we are trying to accomplish—perhaps successfully defending liberalism, writing the Great American Novel, raising good children, or building a successful business—there seems little “point” in living. Moreover, we may find ourselves doubting the “point” of life if we are continually and systematically frustrated in our attempts to pursue our projects to the extent that we come to believe the task is impossible. Now, as a matter of fact, it may be that having decisions made for us by others enables us to achieve our projects. However, as we have more intimate knowledge, generally speaking, of our projects than others,⁷⁷ we are more likely to achieve our projects when we are free to choose what we do. We are more likely to make choices that aid our project pursuit than others are—even well-meaning others. Choice, then, is instrumentally valuable to the satisfaction of projects.

Mill claims that “if all mankind minus one were of one opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.”⁷⁸ He argues that prohibiting dissent (or eccentricity) robs humanity—either of the truth, or of the chance to clarify the truth. He claims that one is only justified in maintaining a belief if one subjects that belief to scrutiny—for holding to a belief without subjecting it to scrutiny allows too easily for dogmatically holding beliefs that should be rejected. Dissent and differing ways of life, he then argues, must be permitted so that all face opposing views, which will, in turn, encourage the scrutiny of beliefs. This is the third reason choice is instrumentally valuable: as a means to justification.

tional Choice and Moral Agency, on “mauetic” ends.

⁷⁷This, is not, of course, always the case. There are times when a third party may be better able to tell us what our projects are. Indeed, there may be times when a third party confronts us with beliefs on these matters and we realize they are right. If, however, a third party insists that our project is X and we are convinced it is not, we have prima facie reason to disavow the third party’s claim.

⁷⁸Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 16.

There is one final reason that we should consider choice instrumentally valuable.⁷⁹ According to Mill, freedom to choose how one leads one's life is necessary in order to allow for the existence of genius and societal progress.⁸⁰ Geniuses are unique, having unusual talents. If they are forced to do as others insist, their creativity would likely be stifled and this would lessen the innovation and progress available in society. Put more simply, if no one is permitted to choose against societal norms, no one would come up with new—and possibly better—ways of doing things. Choice, then, is instrumentally valuable as a means to innovation and progress. By allowing individuals to choose on their own, we allow them the opportunity to develop new and better ways of performing daily tasks and to develop new and better ways of life.⁸¹

Choice, I think, is not only instrumentally valuable; it is also intrinsically valuable. The argument for this claim is premised on a recognition that a life led "from the inside," as it were, has value that a life led "from the outside" does not. Consider an imaginary case whereby Dagny acts according to "her own lights." She does what she wants, considering various options and choosing which to follow. Take a simple case wherein she is driving a car and passes several forks and intersections. She makes several turns and selects which tines of the forks to take and arrives at some location. (She may or may not have *planned* the location or route; what is important here is that she *chose* it.) Dagny is doing as she wills and this allows her life to have value *for her*. Moreover, it makes her a moral agent, and hence a being with moral value.

Now consider an opposing case. In contrast to Dagny as specified above, one who never considers her options but "just goes" because told to, because she lets the world or the community

⁷⁹Mill mentions another instrumental reason to favor choice, which I mention here only for the sake of completeness. He tells us that allowing a government the power to limit choice adds unnecessarily to the government's power and that this is to be avoided—presumably because a government strong enough to prevent us from making bad choices is strong enough to prevent us from making good choices (*On Liberty*, p. 108).

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 61-67.

⁸¹Strictly speaking, this is an instrumental reason to value freedom of choice rather than choice itself. Of course,

(or what have you) determine her actions, cannot be said to lead a life valuable in the same way (it may have value, but will be disvalued to the degree to which she doesn't choose). If Dagny^O was put in the car by others and the driver, under their orders, took her somewhere, she would not have made any choices (and would not, on this score, be autonomous), and her life would be to that degree less valuable. A life not "led from the inside" may have value, but if it does, it is for other reasons. All other things equal, a life wherein the individual chooses her path is more valuable than one in which she does not. We agree that Dagny has—so far as the details of the example go—led a better life than Dagny^O. This is so even if Dagny^O is brought to the place she (or Dagny proper) would have chosen. This is why I differentiate between the intrinsic value of choice as part of a good life and the instrumental value of choice for project pursuit. The intrinsic value is the "value we place on authenticity as one of life's fundamental goods. We want a sense that we are the authors of our own lives, that our lives, if you will, are stories that we write rather than just read."⁸² This is so whether or not we succeed in our project pursuit.

Choice, then, is not only instrumentally valuable but is also—to use Raz's terminology—a "constituent" intrinsically valuable good.⁸³ It "is intrinsically valuable because it is an essential ingredient and a necessary condition of the autonomous life. It is a capacity whose value derives from its exercise."⁸⁴ It is part of what makes a life worth living.⁸⁵ In Raz's own view, though, autonomy is valuable "only if exercised in pursuit of the good."⁸⁶ He is led to this conclusion be-

it requires that we recognize choice as valuable for those who would be geniuses (if they didn't choose in ways differing from the norm, they would not be geniuses).

⁸²Claudia Mills, "Choice and Circumstance," *Ethics* 109 (1998): 154-65, p. 163.

⁸³Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, p. 200.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, p. 409.

⁸⁵This may seem to suggest that life itself is intrinsically valuable. I do not wish to defend such a view and do not believe it is necessary for my purposes. What is necessary is that an *autonomous* life is intrinsically valuable—and, given the present argument, I take this to be true. As choice is necessary for an autonomous life, it is then a constituent intrinsic good. It is an element "but for which a situation [an autonomous life] which is good in itself would be less valuable" (*ibid.*, p. 200).

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, p. 381.

cause of a particular intuition regarding how we would answer a question about autonomy. "The question is, has autonomy any value *qua* autonomy when it is abused? Is the autonomous wrongdoer a morally better person than the non-autonomous wrongdoer? Our intuitions rebel against such a view. It is surely the other way around."⁸⁷ In contrast, I claim that choice—and autonomy—is intrinsically valuable regardless of its relation to the good. Although our intuitions may well rebel when we are faced with Raz's question, I suggest that this is because of an ambiguity in the question.

The autonomous wrongdoer is morally blameworthy where the non-autonomous wrongdoer is not. In that sense, the autonomous wrongdoer is obviously not "morally better." The autonomous wrongdoer, though, comes closer to our ideal of the person than the non-autonomous wrongdoer (or even the non-autonomous good-deed-doer). That we blame the autonomous wrongdoer indicates our disappointment with that person, who is capable of more. That we *don't* blame the non-autonomous wrongdoer is not indicative of any value we place on him; it is rather indicative of the fact that we do not consider him to be on par with us. To the degree that he is not autonomous, he may be deserving of our pity and/or our assistance, but he is a lesser being. Hence, Raz's question conflates "morally better" with "morally more valuable." "Better" may sometimes mean "more valuable," but it may also mean "worthy of more praise or less blame." The autonomous wrongdoer is morally more valuable; she is not worthy of more praise.

That the autonomous wrongdoer is more valuable than the non-autonomous wrongdoer (all other things equal) indicates that autonomy is not "valuable only if exercised in pursuit of the [independently identified] good." All other things equal, given two individuals, one autonomous and capable of making choices and one not, the first is more valuable. That we may prefer to

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 380.

save the non-autonomous good-deed-doer rather than the autonomous wrongdoer (if he does wrong enough) is beside the point. I might prefer to save my pet tarantula rather than my autonomous annoying neighbor, but it would be wrong nonetheless.

It might be suggested that valuing choice as extensively as I have argued for requires accepting that an individual making choices leads a good life simply because he makes choices—even if his choices have the effect of countering each other (e.g., in the span of a single day Joe chooses to become a doctor, then a lawyer, then a vagabond). However, as I indicated, choice is a constituent intrinsic good *because part of an autonomous life*. A life spent choosing for the sake of choosing, even though one's choices have the effect of canceling each other out, on the other hand, is not an autonomous life and so the choices that compose it are not intrinsically valuable. Perhaps this is not immediately clear. Consider the parenthetical example. Joe chooses to become a doctor and enrolls in Medical School (assume he was already accepted). An hour later he chooses not to become a doctor, but to become a lawyer and enrolls in Law School (again, assume he was already accepted). An hour later he chooses to become a vagabond, and not a doctor or a lawyer. Joe may now be characterized as autonomous but confused. If we push this to the extreme, though, Joe makes choices but is never able to carry through with any of them because as soon as he makes one choice, he makes another that counters the prior one, ad infinitum. Joe never *does* anything and cannot be characterized as leading an autonomous life—or any sort of life. His choices are thus not constituents of anything intrinsically valuable.

In endorsing choice as instrumentally and intrinsically valuable, the liberal is not committed to endorsing multitudinous and frivolous choices, but to choices that are part of an autonomous life. Choice is only a constituent intrinsically valuable good when a constituent of something intrinsically valuable. The liberal endorses freedom of choice so that agents may choose when they

so desire because *that* is part of an intrinsic good (an autonomous life) and because it contributes to the development of one's rational faculties, to project satisfaction, to justification, and to societal progress. This is why the opposing desire to have an authoritative tradition within which choice is limited is to be rejected. We are choosing beings and should not seek to have others make our choices for us.

Admittedly, nothing I have said indicates that choice can never be limited. I have argued only for the more moderate thesis that choice is valuable and that given its value, it is to be protected. This requires that government not eliminate benign options; the critic of liberalism would argue otherwise.

6. Liberal Grounds of Self-Respect

In section 2, we saw that liberalism's allowing for extensive freedom to choose does not necessarily lead to loss of self-respect as critics would have us believe. Given the last section, we can now see that liberalism actually provides a strong basis for self-respect. Again, the central theme is Millian. According to Mill, freedom to choose what one does and believes contributes to the exercise of one's rational abilities. If one does not have an answer to a question, one must think through the possible options (and their consequences) before acting or believing. This, I would suggest, is the driving force behind what I take to be a central pedagogical belief that our Introduction to Philosophy students will expand their horizons and learn to use their minds in new and more analytic ways when we expose them to problems they may not have yet considered. That exposure, it is hoped, will force them to exercise (and thus improve) their rational faculties—and

we further encourage this by opening available solutions to scrutiny.

If one improves one's rational abilities by thinking through problems on one's own—rather than simply accepting an answer from an authority—then it is likely that one gains confidence in one's abilities to think through problems the more one does so. Liberal society, with its insistence on state neutrality and the corresponding freedom of individuals to choose their own conceptions of the good, provides substantial opportunity for individuals to do so. In this way, liberalism promotes confidence in one's rational abilities. It thus promotes self-respect.

Some liberals deny that in a liberal society individuals will be faced with challenges to their core beliefs. These liberals claim that when the state refrains from endorsing a particular comprehensive view, citizens are safely left with their own.⁸⁸ This fails to recognize that with no one comprehensive view endorsed, there is likely to be a variety of comprehensive views and that people would then be exposed—sometimes disruptively—to views opposed to their own. On my view, though, this is not to be regretted. In facing such challenges, individuals are encouraged (perhaps even forced) to think through their beliefs, thus exercising their rational faculties and gaining confidence in their possession. In a liberal state, they also know that despite the challenge they are free to maintain their own view, even if it becomes a matter of faith to do so.

In contrast both to critics of liberalism and the sort of liberals just mentioned, I believe we should embrace a social system that affords challenges to fundamental beliefs. Without them, we may complacently accept the beliefs handed down to us. "It is when we are confronted with quite radically different forms of life that we are moved to reflect upon the underlying sets of concerns

⁸⁸Following Rawls, Macedo offers such a view: "[B]y avoiding comprehensive claims to truth, political liberalism does not provoke the kinds of comprehensive reflection about the coherence and compatibility of one's values as a whole—one's religious and political values, for example—that make it harder for some people to live with the political order" ("Liberal Civic Education and Religious Fundamentalism," p. 494). Macedo accepts the belief, argued against here, that self-respect requires confidence in one's beliefs and, again in opposition to my argument here, claims liberalism does not force individuals to think through their beliefs, that it need not encourage "compre-

which account for our judgments, actions and beliefs."⁸⁹ With such confrontations, one more likely uses one's rational faculties to decide for oneself if she is leading a proper life, thereby exercising those faculties, gaining confidence in them and, thus, self-respect.

The critic might seek a society that provides confirmation to its citizens' of their beliefs. Such confirmation, however, would provide citizens with less incentive to rationally evaluate their options. When individuals are faced with multiple options with none authoritatively endorsed, they have incentive to evaluate their beliefs about the options. A "society which does not through its institutions of government privilege a particular form of life, but rather recognizes the equal importance of all permissible 'conceptions of the good' and promotes its citizens' capacity to pursue them, is most likely to ... secure for its citizenry the social bases of full moral self-consciousness."⁹⁰ Thus, the "liberal polity would be *better* suited to providing the social conditions required for the fostering of" deliberative capacities "than would a communitarian polity organized around the pursuit of a more particularistic good" advocated by some of liberalism's critics.⁹¹ Confident use of those deliberative capacities contributes to self-respect. Liberalism thus better supports self-respect than the program advocated by those critics.

These Millian arguments accord well with Rawls's idea that "within a framework of equal liberty, persons express their respect for one another in the very constitution of their society."⁹² In a liberal society, individuals are treated with respect because they are seen as rational agents deserving of respect owing to their rational agency, not because of the particular conception of

hensive reflection." In this way, people are thought to be able to remain confident in their beliefs and thus, to have self-respect. See also Tomasi, *Liberalism Beyond Justice*.

⁸⁹Weinstock, "The Political Theory of Strong Evaluation," p. 186.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 187.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 186.

⁹²Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 179.

the good that they happen to have.⁹³

It is important that the ideal liberal society is characterized by a high degree of transparency. That is, the state allows a wide range of its activities to be publicly known. "When a political conception of justice satisfies this [full publicity] condition, and basic social arrangements and individual actions are fully justifiable, citizens can give reasons for their beliefs and conduct before one another confident that this avowed reckoning itself will strengthen and not weaken public understanding."⁹⁴ In according equal liberties to all citizens, the ideal liberal state also allows individuals to disagree with the state and majority opinion and to make that disagreement public.⁹⁵ Far from contributing to anomie, this openness to disagreement can contribute to confidence in self and state.

The imaginative suggestion that liberalism somehow heightened personal anxiety ... is also dubious ... Actually, tolerance for public disagreement and political contestation, typical in liberal societies, suggests a relative freedom from primal anxiety. Compared to traditional autocrats, liberal leaders are remarkably unrattled by dissent. Public willingness to censure and criticize government, moreover, depends on the underlying confidence that such attacks will not cause the indispensable law-enforcing powers of society utterly to collapse.⁹⁶

Without leading to anarchic chaos or totalitarian suppression of undefended views, liberalism

⁹³On this point, see Jean Hampton, "Should Political Philosophy be done without Metaphysics?" *Ethics* 99 (1989): 791-814, p. 811. Hampton rightly notes that what is called for is respect for others, not their views: "implicit in genuine philosophical argumentation is respect for one's opponent. One might not respect his ideas." If this weren't the case, we would not seek to convince those we respect of their errors.

⁹⁴Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 68.

⁹⁵On the necessity of dissent, see Mill's *On Liberty*, chap. 2. On transparency in liberal society, see Jeremy Waldron, "Theoretical Foundations of Liberalism," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 37 (1987): 127-50, esp. pp. 134-35 and 146-50. See also John Gray, *Liberalism*, 2nd ed. (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995), esp. chap. 9.

⁹⁶Holmes, *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, p. 270 n. 30.

encourages the development of self-respect in liberal citizens by making it such that they gain confidence in their rational abilities by scrutinizing their beliefs.

By allowing full publicity of its activity and unpunishable public disagreement regarding that activity, the liberal state can actually promote social trust. It also encourages self-respect by allowing that individuals will not see their opinions as necessarily pernicious, unjustifiable, or incorrect. They are respected as individual rational citizens whose views deserve a public hearing. The state or the majority (or other individuals) may disagree—may not even respect the individual's opinions—but because they respect the individuals, their opinions are heard rather than stifled. Further, the promotion of self-respect in individuals is likely to be self-sustaining. "[T]hose who respect themselves are more likely to respect each other and conversely. Self-contempt leads to contempt of others and threatens their good as much as envy does. Self-respect is reciprocally self-supporting."⁹⁷ Our "sense of our own value, as well as our self-confidence, depends on the respect and mutuality shown us by others. By publicly affirming the basic liberties citizens in a well-ordered society express their mutual respect for one another as reasonable and trustworthy, as well as their recognition of the worth all citizens attach to their way of life."⁹⁸ The individual is thus given indication or social confirmation of her worth in virtue of being a rational individual in her society, and this fosters self-respect. She does not necessarily receive (from the state or society as a whole) indication that her *views* are deserving of respect. Nor should she: she might be wrong. Any indication given to her that she is right should come from—and, if she is right, is likely to come from—other individuals.

⁹⁷Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 179.

⁹⁸Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 319.

7. A Rejoinder and Its Failure

The critics I've discussed may object that I have merely presupposed that fostering the exercise of citizens' rational abilities will foster their self-respect⁹⁹ and that it says nothing directly against their claim that we need social confirmation of beliefs for self-respect. Such an objection would no longer deny that liberalism can provide for self-respect, but would argue that their view also provides for self-respect and perhaps does so better. This is mistaken; we can see why by briefly following and augmenting an argument provided by Will Kymlicka.

As already discussed, the critics believe that liberal neutrality leaves individuals in doubt about their way of life and its purposes. They argue that "we need considerable social confirmation of [any] judgment in order to have any confidence in it," that our confidence in our beliefs comes from social confirmation of those beliefs.¹⁰⁰ This reliance on the authority of others does not involve the individual or her rational abilities, but the presence of others who can agree with her beliefs. While the liberal view "generates confidence in the value of one's projects by removing any impediments or distortions in the reasoning process involved in making judgments of value," the opposing view "operates behind the backs of the individuals involved—that is, it generates confidence via a process that people can't acknowledge as the grounds of their confi-

⁹⁹It might be further objected that the liberal stance endangers those who are unable to be rational. Indicating that individuals are worthy of respect because they are rational, it might be thought, leaves those who are unable to be rational no basis for respect. This is essentially correct, but I would think that there would be few such individuals at any time and that such individuals would not be concerned with self-respect. While I am not prepared to defend any particular view of rationality, it seems *prima facie* unlikely that a non-rational being would be capable of thought regarding his plight. Such thought, I would think, would require rationality, however minimally. As such, I doubt that the question of self-respect arises for a non-rational being, who is thus no worse off for his (supposed) lack of self-respect. It may be that there are some minimally rational agents and more maximally rational agents. If that is the case, on my view it may well be that there is a range of due (appraisal) respect. Importantly, though, I would argue that once an agent is above some minimal threshold, he is to be treated as a citizen with the full (and equal) legal recognition and (recognition) respect that entails. This, I think, would be enough to ensure that the minimally rational could self-respect. For the two types of respect just gestured at (appraisal and recognition), see Stephen Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect," *Ethics* 88 (1977): 36-49.

¹⁰⁰Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*, p. 61. See also Ronald Dworkin, "What is Equality? Part III:

dence." Endorsing that view requires denying that "[w]e have to think we have good *reasons* for our confidence. We'd lose that confidence if we thought our beliefs weren't rationally grounded, but rather merely caused."¹⁰¹ The polity ostensibly favored by MacIntyre, Taylor, and Sandel has its citizens raised and nurtured in a supportive but authoritative community that gives them their beliefs and confirmation of those beliefs. They do not gain confidence in their beliefs because they considered them to the best of their ability, but because they were confirmed by others. While I would not argue that such people could not be self-confident or self-respecting, I would argue that if they are, it may be for the wrong sort of reason.

Confidence in one's beliefs does not justify a claim that one is worthy of respect. Consider that individuals living under a dictator may all have the same false basic beliefs about the world (say that the world is flat, that God sits on clouds above us, and that the world is made up of four elements). These individuals might all confirm each others' beliefs and thus come to be confident in those beliefs. None of this says anything at all about the self-respect these individuals either have or do not have. If it happens that they have self-respect and this owes purely to their confidence in their beliefs, would we say that they were right to respect themselves? Would we say that a group of them who had done nothing of value in their life, squandered their family's riches, lazed about, abused others, never worked, never read, never seriously thought about life, should respect themselves simply because they confidently share the same core beliefs? Presumably not.

Self-respect is not properly derived from mere confidence in one's beliefs. It derives from the indication that an individual has that she is a valuable being in her own right. Liberalism provides this by insisting that all have equal liberty and are capable of rational evaluation of their

The Place of Liberty," *Iowa Law Review* 73 (1988): 1-54, pp. 16-17.

¹⁰¹Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*, p. 62.

beliefs. Insisting on equal liberty allows all to see that they are as valuable as anyone else and are able to exercise their rational abilities, sometimes challenging authority and received opinion. In the authoritarian polity, on the other hand, some could have considerably more liberty than others and none is encouraged to develop dissenting views.

The problem for the critic is worse than I've so far indicated, for it "can only be endorsed from the third-person perspective ... from the inside, from the first-person perspective, I can't endorse the aim that my own life be made to go better in that way."¹⁰² A rational agent cannot endorse that goal specifically because being a rational agent means being able to work through one's beliefs for oneself. To maintain those beliefs, one must see them as independently and rationally valid. Social confirmation may provide us with beliefs and endorsement of those beliefs, but these merely causal processes are not enough for the rational agent.¹⁰³ She needs to be able to confirm her beliefs rationally. While she may endorse the social confirmation process for others (if she is unconcerned with their rationality), she cannot endorse it for herself; the rational agent preserves her own rationality. "The morally autonomous person, provided she is free of coercion, will change her convictions only in response to argument."¹⁰⁴ If convictions were enforced "from up high," citizens would lose confidence in their beliefs and the self-respect it is thought to provide.

It might be objected that I have failed to appreciate how radical the criticism really is, that it provides an alternative account of rationality. This may be, but to be successful, the alternative would have to be universally entrenched within the polity. Of course, individuals would not have to understand what rationality was (on any account), but they would all have to be working with

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁰³This should not be read as a stand on the question of whether epistemology can be "naturalized."

¹⁰⁴Joel Feinberg, *Harm to Self: The Moral Limits of the Criminal Law, Volume III* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 37.

the same form of rationality (though they need not recognize this). If any individual did not, she might question her supposedly rational beliefs even though they were socially confirmed. For her, social confirmation would not promote confidence in beliefs or self-respect. If she were not stifled, she might encourage others to question what is supposedly rational, in much the same way as that great gadfly, Socrates, encouraged others to question prevailing wisdom. If she were successful, the social confirmation method would be exposed and individuals would seek their own rational confirmation of beliefs. Now, it might be possible to stifle this individual. Such maneuvers would be necessary to prevent the desire for free rationality (i.e., non-causally induced belief formation) from spreading. Authoritarianism would, then, be required (at least to a substantial degree).¹⁰⁵

Might that authoritarianism be acceptable? George Sher has persuasively argued that a government can engage in activity to "nonrationally cause its citizens to prefer to live as it thinks good, ... offer them incentives to live that way, ... create institutions or social forms that make the favored way of life possible or enable it to flourish, ... [and] threaten to punish anyone who rejects it."¹⁰⁶ Government might usefully engage in activity designed to limit benign options and to promote others—perhaps even promoting a particular conception of the good. Indeed, it is possible that much of this activity can be accomplished while promoting autonomy and that the resulting individual behavior can then be from autonomous choice based on the newly formed preferences. This, though, is nothing to treat lightly. It is, essentially, a defense of the use of government power to provide and confirm beliefs and values. If the arguments above against the social confirmation view are not enough, there is a simple political argument to consider.

¹⁰⁵For a brief and interesting, if polemical, attack on MacIntyre on these grounds (that MacIntyre endorses authority in order to dispel doubt), see Holmes, *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, pp. 94-95.

¹⁰⁶George Sher, "Liberal Neutrality and the Value of Autonomy," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 12 (1995): 136-59, p. 150. Augustine apparently had a similar view when he recanted his prior endorsement of religious toleration

The government of the United States has used the sorts of powers Sher discusses to promote admirable goals, including the equal treatment of members of both sexes and people of all races and religions, for example. But if Sher is correct—and I think he is—the same activity used to change people’s preferences for the better can be used to change those preferences for the worse. This is why liberals typically fear adding unnecessarily to the power of government (see footnote 79). If this doesn’t seem troublesome, there is one further factor to note.

Elsewhere, I defend a view of toleration and its role in liberalism that requires that individuals can autonomously sacrifice their autonomy— even voluntarily selling themselves into slavery.¹⁰⁷ Arguments against that view are generally consequentialist or eudaimonistic. Even claims of maximizing autonomy are consequentialist in nature—they sacrifice some current instance of autonomous choice for greater autonomy later. But, as Feinberg says, “whether an autonomous person’s life is interfered with in the name of his own good or welfare, his health, his wealth, or even his future options ... it is still a violation of his personal sovereignty.”¹⁰⁸ If an agent autonomously chooses to enter into enslavement,

[i]t would be misleading to describe the career consequent upon that choice as one of ‘living autonomously’, but it would be an autonomously chosen life in any case and to interfere with its choice would be to infringe the chooser’s autonomy at the time he makes the choice, that is to treat him in a manner precluded by respect for him as an autonomous agent.¹⁰⁹

after witnessing members of a troublesome sect (Donatists) brought back into the Church’s fold by force.

¹⁰⁷Perhaps they enter into a consensual enslavement contract that has the to-be-owner paying their loved ones or favorite charity ten million dollars. See my “What Toleration Does and Does Not Require From Liberalism.” This paragraph is adapted from that ms.

¹⁰⁸Feinberg, *Harm to Self*, p. 68.

¹⁰⁹Feinberg, *Harm to Self*, p. 78; see also his *Harm to Others: The Moral Limits of the Criminal Law, Volume I*

We can add that it is a manner that fails to tolerate activity not harmful to any non-consenting other.¹¹⁰

While I concede that government action can cause preference changes so that individuals act autonomously from newly caused preferences, I simply insist that though such individuals may then lead lives accurately described as autonomous, they would not be leading lives that were chosen autonomously.¹¹¹ The governmental action would have precluded that by interfering to causally change the individual's preferences. Just as hypnosis could (let us assume) change a person's preferences, so could seemingly less invidious activity. When non-voluntary, use of these methods treats individuals "in a manner precluded by respect for [them] as ... autonomous agent[s]." No rational agent would endorse another's use of such methods on herself in any but the most extreme cases. It is one thing to causally interfere with a drug addict to restore his autonomy and quite another to interfere with members of religious sects (or cults) who have autonomously chosen that membership. There is value in having autonomously chosen one's path (even when that path includes less autonomy) and that value is not always outweighed by an otherwise improved life.

8. Conclusion

Toleration and liberal state neutrality allow for individual choice, which, in turn, is to be fostered

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 116-17.

¹¹⁰Admittedly, the longer the duration of the voluntary enslavement, the stricter the needed test of competence (to consent) we are likely to think required. Indeed, if such a test is completely unworkable—something I doubt—that would be reason to exclude legal consensual slavery.

¹¹¹We might say that we violate her autonomy, globally determined, while promoting it aggregatively determined (Richard Arneson, "Autonomy and Preference Formation," in Jules Coleman and Allen Buchanan (eds.), *In Harm's*

in order to promote rationality, justification of beliefs, project pursuit, and societal progress, and which is a constituent of a good life. They also allow for self-respect based upon one's status as a fully rational citizen protected and bolstered by the state to the same extent as any other citizen.¹¹² Liberalism recognizes that "self-respect is yet another good that, though of inordinate value, cannot be conferred on one by some other person or by some set of institutions" and that "if there is a right to self-respect, it can only be a right to certain necessary conditions and not to sufficient conditions."¹¹³ Liberalism supplies those necessary conditions better than any opposing view.¹¹⁴ For this reason, choice is of value and toleration and liberal neutrality are to be normatively favored. Moreover, we have seen that the critic does not offer a satisfactory method for preventing anomie. Liberal toleration and liberal neutrality, on the other hand, allow for civil, but non-governmental (voluntary), social structures to aid belief formation and, hence, need not cause anomie.¹¹⁵

Way: Essays in Honor of Joel Feinberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 42-75, at p. 50).

¹¹²There may be cases in the real world where exposure to others (and other groups) may diminish one's self-esteem (for an interesting discussion, see Rogers M. Smith, *Liberalism and American Constitutional Law* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 194). While the liberal need not deny the importance of this issue for contemporary politics, it does not speak against liberal theory. The ideal liberal state demonstrates equal respect for *all* its citizens (there would be no institutional prejudices against any single class of individuals), and this will make unlikely, if not impossible, situations where some specific class of individuals suffers from a lack of self-respect or self-esteem. Even in the ideal liberal state, of course, particular individuals may suffer such deficiencies.

¹¹³Lomasky, *Persons, Rights, and the Moral Community*, pp. 86, 91.

¹¹⁴Perhaps freedom of choice is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for self-esteem, where that (and not self-respect) is a comparative term (like appraisal respect, as discussed in n. 99 above). While social confirmation is neither necessary nor sufficient, the liberal need not deny its usefulness for self-esteem. Psychologists will be needed if we are to determine other possible candidates to be conjoined with choice to create self-esteem and to determine ways of providing these without undo government intervention in individuals' lives. That is beyond the current project's purview.

¹¹⁵I am grateful to Madison Powers, Henry Richardson, Tom Beauchamp, Chandran Kukathas, David Schmidtz, and David Braybrooke for very helpful comments on earlier versions of the material in this paper, and to two anonymous reviewers of this journal for many helpful suggestions. I am also grateful to the Institute for Humane Studies at George Mason University for support on the early stages of this (and related) work and to the Liberty Fund for its support as I finished the paper.