

Communitarianism, ‘Social Constitution,’ and Autonomyⁱ

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Abstract

Communitarians defend what we may call the ‘social constitution thesis,’ that participation in society makes us what we are. This claim, however, is ambiguous. In an attempt to shed some light on it and to better understand the impact its truth would have on our beliefs regarding autonomy, I offer four possible ways it could be understood and four corresponding senses of individual independence and autonomy. I also indicate what senses liberals can accept that we are socially constituted and in what sense I take communitarians to argue we are socially constituted.

Introduction

Central to much contemporary political philosophy is the concept of autonomy. Political structures, it is often thought, must be set up so as to foster and respect the autonomy of citizens. Yet one recent strand of political philosophy centers around a thesis that seems to deny that autonomy can be anything like what it is often taken to be. In this paper, I discuss that thesis at length and attempt to determine its implications for autonomy.

Though there are differences in the communitarian theories of Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, and Michael Sandel, they each adhere to one central tenet. They can each be seen as defending the view that participation in society makes us what we are, that “*We are what we are in virtue of participating in the larger life of our society*” (Taylor 1984, 183, emphasis added). This is what I call the ‘social constitution thesis.’ Although one might take it as nothing more than a platitude, to do so would be both to do a disservice to the communitarian—to indicate that he has done nothing

substantive—and to underestimate the critique these authors make against liberalism, for each of these authors asserts that liberalism either ignores or cannot accept the truth of this thesis. Throughout what follows, we will discuss this assertion, but the social constitution thesis is itself ambiguous and needs analysis.ⁱⁱ After providing that analysis, I will examine the implications social constitution has for individual independence and autonomy and say something about what sort of social constitution communitarians are likely to endorse.

I. A Preliminary Understanding of the Social Constitution Thesis

To begin, I offer one short quotation each from Sandel, MacIntyre, and Taylor:

[C]ommunity describes not just what they *have* as fellow citizens but also what they *are*, not a relationship they choose ... but an attachment they discover, not merely an attribute but a constituent of their identity (Sandel 1982, 150).

Separated from the *polis*, what could have been a human being becomes instead a wild animal (MacIntyre 1988, 98).

One is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it (Taylor 1989, 35).

The idea common to these three quotations and the three thinkers more broadly is the proposition that an individual being on her own cannot be a person, a *human* being, a self. To be such, requires being "made" by others, in a *polis*, among others. A being without others can be nothing more than a "wild animal."ⁱⁱⁱ This is much more than a political thesis that communities should be emphasized over individuals or a criticism (although it is that as well) of another positive theory. This is a positive metaphysical claim about the nature and possibility of personhood. "[L]iving within ... strongly qualified horizons [provided by communities] is *constitutive of human agency*" (Taylor

1989, 27; emphasis added). It is, however, unclear, what it means for community to be "constitutive" of agency or personhood, that one "can be a self only among other selves," that separated from others one loses personhood and becomes a "wild animal."

Following Sandel, a preliminary understanding of "social constitution" might be that because we are born into and develop within community with others, our community provides us with "constitutive ties," where these are understood as ties we have to others that make us who we are. If this is the case, constitutive ties should *matter* to us—they are, after all, meant to be "deep" facts about us. As one liberal says of such ends,^{iv} "[t]hat persons usually and regularly orient themselves by reference to a set of commitments that evolve over time but do not suddenly appear and disappear is a *deep* fact—whether or not it is ultimately contingent" (Lomasky 1987, 47). Such ties might matter in the following way: if you truly have such ties to another, when that other is harmed (happy), you feel harmed (happy) as well—though perhaps with less force. As your tie to them is an essential part of *you*, and as that tie is what *it* is in virtue of to whom it binds you, it changes as they are changed and this in turn changes you.^v For example, if one feels no sense of harm after a fatal bombing in Oklahoma City, one's 'tie' to those in Oklahoma City is not constitutive.^{vi}

Although the preceding paragraph offers a phenomenological explanation as to how we might *recognize* our own constitutive ties, it does not explain what social constitution *is*. It tells us, perhaps, that in a "constitutive" community, we would feel as if we were somehow connected to our fellow citizens.^{vii} It does not, though, explain what that connection is. In the next section, I offer *possible* meanings of social constitution. I do not try to determine which, if any, is a proper meaning of a valid thesis. I do indicate what liberals and communitarians might accept as such.

II. Possible Interpretations of the Social Constitution Thesis

We begin by noticing that when we say a person is socially constituted we imply that her society (or community) contributes to her constitution. There are two questions that affect the implications social constitution has for autonomy. First, if an entity is socially constituted, does this mean that it is forever sustained by its community or is it only that the community is necessary for the entity's original genesis? In short, is the social constitution thesis a simple genetic claim or a claim about how an entity is sustained? Second, does the social constitution thesis explain something about the entity *qua* person or about the entity *qua* the *particular* person it is? If the former, it explains either how a being becomes a person (*qua* person) or how it continues to be a person (*qua* person); if the latter, it explains either how a person becomes the particular person she is or how she continues to be the particular person she is. Given the two questions, we have four candidate interpretations of the social constitution thesis.^{viii}

The first interpretation of the social constitution thesis is that it purports to explain the historic development of persons *qua* particulars; in other words, it is a genetic claim about how an individual becomes the person she is. This "genetic particular" interpretation takes the social constitution thesis to explain how the person comes to be the particular person she is (and says nothing about how she is sustained).^{ix} This plausible view, that we become the particular persons (moral agents or even "liberal individuals") we are because of the way we are "brought up," can readily be assimilated into liberal theory. We are, according to this thesis, moral agents for other reasons (perhaps due to our language abilities or intelligence), but we are the *specific* agents we are because of our socialization.

The genetic particular thesis does not involve any essentialist claim about personhood. It does not even hold that socialization is necessary; it holds only that if we are in community, the community particularizes us through socialization. As a contingent matter of fact, since we *are* all in community, the truth of the thesis would imply that we are all so particularized (made the persons we are). It remains the case,

though, that we are persons for other reasons—our personhood as such is not dependent upon our place in the world.

It is worth noting here that the idea that we have a "moral upbringing" is not foreign to liberals. Indeed, it is not even foreign to Locke (whom communitarians most often attack in this regard). His idea that we come into the world a *tabula rasa* seems to necessitate something like this. If we are *tabula rasa* upon entrance into the world, it is likely that our personalities are formed through socialization. The influence of others will obviously play a part in such an upbringing. One commentator thus tells us that Locke "assumed that an individual's beliefs ordinarily arose from social communication ... The blank-slate theory, in other words, is anything but an asocial approach to how human beings learn" (Holmes 1994, 191).^x

The second social constitution thesis, like the first, is a thesis about particular persons rather than about personhood itself. This "sustaining particular" thesis is the claim that we not only become the particular persons we do in community, but that communities sustain us as the particular persons we are. This, however, remains ambiguous. On the one hand, it seems to be a mild thesis that we need community to remain the particular persons we are. This "mild sustaining particular" thesis is simply a claim that community is somehow necessary for our retaining our particularities. But this seems to demand an explanation as to precisely *how* the community is necessary for our retaining our particularities. The lack of any such explanation suggests that we need the community to remain the particular persons we are because the community, in sustaining the person as the person she is, causally *determines* who she is (the way she is) at all times. The community, according to this "determinist sustaining particular" thesis, is (causally) responsible for any particular characteristics of the person at any point in time and, as such, individuals are unable to opt out of their particular social roles.^{xi} Because the community determines who a person is, she is incapable of choosing who she shall be. The community, then, stands in much the same relation to individuals as

metaphysical determinism claims the universe does. According to this "role determinism," it is our social roles which determine all of our actions.

Though there are times when communitarians seem to argue for the determinist sustaining particular thesis—one commentator tells us that MacIntyre "presents human life as a narrative, in which each character's role is largely predetermined" (Okin 1989, 45)—there are also times when they indicate that they would reject such a thesis. MacIntyre claims that we are "co-authors of our own narratives," that the "difference between imaginary characters and real ones is ... the degree of their authorship ... of their own deeds," and, moreover, that we "exhibit a freedom to violate the present established maxims" (MacIntyre 1984, 213 and 215 and 1988, 31). Sandel admits that "a subject [can] play a role in shaping the contours of its identity" (Sandel 1982, 152). Taylor claims that a "human being can always be original, can step beyond the limits of thought and vision of contemporaries" (Taylor 1989, 37). All three authors recognize—at times—that the community does not completely determine what we do and become. Indeed, the determinist sustaining particular thesis, I think we would all agree, is opposed to how we view ourselves, viz. as beings at least sometimes capable of choosing our own roles. In the final analysis, it simply explains too much: it entails not only the complete absence of human freedom and autonomy, but also a direct explanation for all human behavior, an explanation, moreover, such that biological (and other physical) constraints have no role in determining what we do and become. Given that and the above quotations, I will charitably assume that communitarians do not intend to support it.^{xii}

What of the mild sustaining particular thesis? If a plausible explanation can be offered as to how the community sustains particulars without causing them, the communitarian can plausibly hold this thesis, but it is, then, equally plausible that liberals can hold it; it thereby does not provide a substantive difference between communitarians and the liberals they attack. However, until such an explanation is offered, I would suggest that the "mild" thesis is too vague to accept as a legitimate thesis at all.^{xiii}

Accordingly, when I discuss the "sustaining particular" thesis below it is the determinist thesis I refer to.

Thus far we have looked at the two interpretations of the social constitution thesis according to which it is a thesis about particulars. We turn now to the two interpretations according to which it concerns personhood itself.

According to the third interpretation of the social constitution thesis, it is an essential factor of persons that they are created in community; our origination as persons is derivative upon the existence of our community. This is a genetic claim—it explains how something originates—and it is a claim about personhood rather than about particular characteristics of persons. This "genetic general" thesis indicates that personhood as such has community as its source, though not its sustenance. According to this thesis, while one must be in community to *become* a person, one does not need to remain in community to *maintain* personhood. This differs from the genetic particular thesis in that it purports to explain how a being becomes *a person* rather than how a being becomes the *specific person* he or she is.

The final interpretation of the social constitution thesis is the "sustaining general" thesis. Unlike the genetic general thesis, this requires not only that a being emerges into personhood in community, but that it must be in community to *remain* a person. While the genetic general thesis allows that a person can leave community and retain personhood—even if she never reenters community—the sustaining general does not. This thesis insists that it is an essential factor of persons that they are in community and thus that we could not exist as persons without others. On this view, our *continued* being as persons is derivative upon the existence of our community.^{xiv}

To summarize this section, we have four possible social constitution theses: genetic particular, sustaining particular, genetic general, and sustaining general. We have already said that the genetic particular thesis is amenable to liberalism and that the sustaining particular thesis is likely rejected by all parties. If then, there is to be a

significant difference between liberals and communitarians on this score, communitarians must be committed to either the genetic general or the sustaining general thesis and liberals must reject it. If liberals and communitarians disagree about how best to interpret social constitution, it will be because of what the thesis says about individual independence and autonomy.

III. The Theses, Independence, and Autonomy

We can understand "autonomy" to combine "voluntarism," or the ability to choose one's ends,^{xv} with independence, such that the autonomous agent chooses for one's self, without dependence on others. Now, MacIntyre states that "we are never more (and sometimes less) than the co-authors of our own narratives"—that we "enter upon a stage which we did not design and we find ourselves part of an action that was not of our making" (MacIntyre 1984, 213; see also Walzer 1984, 324). The drama that is the historical narrative of the community thus constrains each individual (and her drama). Individual autonomy—individual self-rule—is curtailed. The way in which that autonomy is curtailed, however, depends on the sense in which the community narrative "designs" each individual's narrative. It depends, that is, on how social constitution is interpreted.^{xvi}

Prima facie, the social constitution theses most likely compatible with individual autonomy are the genetic particular and the genetic general theses. These allow us a degree of independence from the community such that we can transcend the community's limits in our own way—in a way not authored by the narrative. Indeed, transcending the community's limits implies realizing one's independence (even if only for a moment) and that is all a liberal needs to argue against a communitarian; it allows that some of us are independent despite communitarian claims to the contrary. If a communitarian accepts one of these two theses, then, there may be no substantive disagreement between he and liberals. Both may accept the social constitution thesis as a genetic claim. The sustaining

general thesis also seems to allow a degree of autonomy, although it does limit the individual's autonomy to acts done wholly within her community—the individual cannot author her way out of community as exiting the community on that interpretation of the social constitution thesis amounts to sacrificing one's humanity or personhood. But this is all too quick; the issue is more complicated, involving a better understanding of "independence."

We can begin to flesh out what is meant by "independence" by recognizing that "independence" is shorthand for "independence from community or social influences." To be independent in any sense discussed here does not imply that one is not dependent on, say, food or water. To further flesh it out, we can recognize that as independence and social constitution are (*prima facie*) at odds with one another, there are four sorts of independence corresponding to (and each opposing) each of the four social constitution theses.^{xvii}

The first form of independence—call it "ontological independence"—is independence such that none of the social constitution theses is true. If we are independent in this sense, we are not sustained by nor created by community—either as persons or as the persons we are. This independence is *atomistic* in that it requires that the individual be seen as an atom, capable of coming into existence, continuing to exist, and acting, without any social support or input. This is the form of independence feminists and communitarians most often denounce and attribute—wrongly—to liberalism. As one of the foremost contemporary liberals tells us:

Communitarianism ... is not infrequently presented as the alternative to an 'individualism' that is defined in terms of utterly absurd doctrines, such as that each person is an atom, or an island, whose essential character is formed

independently of the influences of social groups and who is in principle entirely self-sufficient (Feinberg 1990, 82).

This (ontological) form of independence is not what is sought by liberals.

The second form of independence—call it “natural independence”—is that wherein the person qua moral being is not dependent upon anything for her creation nor for her sustenance, but qua *particular* moral being is dependent upon her place in the social world for her creation, though not her sustenance (allowing for initial, childhood, socialization). If we are independent in this way, the genetic particular social constitution thesis is true. If this is an accurate description of how we are socially constituted and independent, (and this is from whence the name derives) what makes a being a *moral* being (a person) is something it has naturally (without others)—perhaps its intelligence or its biological humanity. A claim such that all humans are persons for some (natural) reason independent of community but all persons become the persons they are due to socialization would be a claim that persons are naturally independent.

The third form of independence relevant for our discussion is one wherein both genetic theses are true, but neither of the sustaining theses are. Given this combination, the person’s creation qua moral being and her creation qua *particular* moral being are dependent upon her place in the social world and its ordering. However, her continued existence qua moral being and her continued existence qua *particular* moral being are independent of the social world. This form of independence—call it “social independence”—is a conception whereby the agent’s being—both as an agent and as the particular agent she is—is formed dependent on the social order even though she is then (after creation qua particular and qua moral being) independent. This form of independence, I suggest, is now the most commonly accepted form of independence amongst political philosophers.

The fourth and final form of independence—call it “truncated social independence”—requires that all social constitution theses excepting the sustaining particular are true. This means that the person is dependent on society for the genesis of her particularity and for the genesis and sustaining of her personhood. This, in turn, means she cannot exit community and retain personhood. For this reason, this is barely a form of “independence.” Certainly, it is not independence in any sense acceptable to liberals, who would see it as a form of *dependence*, wherein the individual is nonetheless equipped with some autonomy (once formed, she can choose to do as she wishes, excepting exit community). The communitarian can call this independence as it does allow that the agent can act on her own—without any dependence on others—so long as she is within the community (the community sustains her personhood, not her ability to act). As we will see, this might be the best sort of independence a communitarian can defend.

To quickly map out the forms of independence, we have:

- ontological: all of the social constitution theses are false
- natural: only the genetic particular social constitution thesis is true
- social: both genetic theses are true; both sustaining theses are false
- truncated social: all social constitution theses except the sustaining particular are true

With the first three sorts of independence, a being can continue to exist on its own once it exists. With ontological independence, the being comes into existence on its own both qua moral being and qua *particular* moral being. With natural independence, the being comes into existence as a moral being independently of the social world but qua *particular* moral being is developed in community. Social independence recognizes that the being is dependent upon community for its initial creation both qua moral being and qua the particular moral being it is, but includes independence from these for continued existence. The fourth form of independence—truncated social independence—requires

that the person cannot continue to exist as a person on her own. If she exits community, she loses personhood.

It is important that for all forms of independence, the individual becomes capable of contributing to her own make-up and behavior and thus capable of being held responsible for her life and actions. With both natural and ontological independence, this is immediate, the individual has these abilities seemingly upon birth—she has them on her own with no help from others. This is what it means for the being to be created *qua* moral being with no assistance from others. With social and truncated social independence, these abilities come only with the assistance of others, only when the individual is finally formed—by its association with others—into a moral being.

I have talked above about being held responsible and contributing to one's make-up. We must, naturally, ask about the ability of individuals to act voluntarily—especially if we are to define autonomy with reference to both independence and voluntarism. We do so now.

Individuals would fail to be able to voluntarily control their actions only under the sustaining particular thesis (and then only if its determinism is seen to be incompatibilist). If the "designing" (or "constituting") by the community is that attributed to it by either genetic thesis, there is no cause for concern regarding voluntarism. In both cases, once formed, individuals can choose their actions. Although the individual would face one constraint on her voluntary abilities under the sustaining general thesis (her ability to opt out of community), she may be able to voluntarily control her actions in all other cases— inability to exist without community does not necessitate inability to act on one's will while *in* community.

Communitarians may insist that it is only in a community that a person can have any autonomy; that the community allows the person to develop as a 'morally deep character.' I suggest that this is an odd view of autonomy. In the barest sense (and *pace* my own definition), "autonomy" is "self-rule." To the extent, though, that others are

needed by the self in order that it rule at all (because they are needed to maintain the person), autonomy is something other than "self-rule." Indeed, some would suggest that it is the ability to lead one's life as one wishes. This fuller sort of autonomy may, obviously, require assistance from others—without them, one may not be able to do as one desires.

What sort of autonomy is to be encouraged by society is inexorably woven through the liberalism-communitarianism debate. Indeed, in fleshing out exactly how a person is socially constituted, we are to some degree fleshing out to what extent such a being can rule itself. As should now be clear, how a community is responsible for a person's constitution is related to how she is independent and has the ability to choose her own roles in life (the degree to which she is autonomous).

We should now briefly note that as liberalism—in different forms—can accept either the genetic particular or the genetic general theses, it can allow for either natural or social autonomy. Natural law and natural rights theorists would likely accept the genetic particular thesis as it provides for natural independence and autonomy—thus allowing that persons enter society naturally as persons—without sticking them with the unlikely view that socialization plays no role. A determinate characteristic of natural law and natural rights theories is just that, that there is some natural fact about (most) human beings that makes them moral beings (and thus subject to natural law or endowed with natural rights). Other liberals—including Rawls—would endorse the genetic general thesis, capitulating to the communitarian and feminist idea that one could not become a person without first being with others. Such theorists would claim that individuals are socially independent and autonomous.

IV. The Communitarian Position

Having explained the relationship between social constitution and autonomy, we would do well to see what communitarians would favor. In many ways, the sustaining

general thesis seems to be the claim communitarians most frequently articulate. It is clearly indicated in MacIntyre's endorsing explanation of Aristotle:

Aristotle ... represents a tradition of thought, in which he is preceded by Homer and Sophocles, according to which the human being who is separated from his social group is also deprived of the capacity for justice. So ... Sophocles has Philoctetes declare that when deprived of friends and of a *polis*, he became 'a corpse among the living' (*Philoctêtês*, 1018). ... Thus Aristotle is articulating ... that a human being separated from the *polis* is thereby deprived of some of the essential attributes of a human being (MacIntyre 1988, 96).

This does more than insist that a being becomes a person (or the particular person it is) in society. It insists that exported from society, one loses one's personhood (or moral agency). Of course, a human being qua biological animal can leave its community, but without community, it ceases to be a *human* being, a person, a moral agent. MacIntyre comments on Sophocles: "In the *Philoctêtês* it is essential to the action that Philoctetes by being left on a desert island for ten years has not been merely exiled from the company of mankind, but also from the status of a human being" (MacIntyre 1984, 135).^{xviii}

Certainly, MacIntyre finds something right about the sustaining general thesis; for him (usually) a being cannot be a person if it is not part of a community. The same holds for Taylor, who tells us:

The general feature of human life that I want to evoke is its fundamentally *dialogical* character. We become fully human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining an identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression. ... But we are inducted

into these in exchange with others. ... Moreover, this is not just a fact about *genesis*, which can be ignored later on (Taylor 1991, 32-3).

The questions arise, though, of what counts as being without community and how long a being must be without a community before she ceases to be a person. Despite my earlier characterization of the sustaining general thesis, it may be that one can characterize it such that upon exit from community, one *gradually* loses personhood. This would do away with the objection one might have raised earlier, that this thesis unreasonably requires personhood to dissipate immediately upon exit from community. There remains a problem, however.

Sleeping alone at night—separate from all others—does not remove personhood. Presumably, the distance from others and the time spent isolated in this way are too minimal to effect personhood. What distance or time away from others would affect personhood—making us a “living corpse” or “wild animal”? Camping for a month alone in the mountains, miles from any other person, seems to leave personhood intact. Where is the limit? Without an answer to that question, the sustaining general thesis is not improved by conceiving of the loss of personhood as a gradual process. Indeed, we might think this line of inquiry unnecessary as in *After Virtue*, MacIntyre does say that the “individual carries his communal roles [and hence his identity] with him as part of the definition of his self, *even into his isolation*” and when Taylor continues the passage quoted in the last paragraph, he says “It’s not just that we learn the languages in dialogue ... the conversation with them [significant others] *continues within* us as long as we live” (MacIntyre 1984, 173 and Taylor 1991, 33; emphasis added). Now, if the dialogue or communal role is maintained without others, one would not need to remain in community to be a person, one would only need the community to become a person.

Given what has just been said, it might seem that communitarians would best be seen as rejecting the sustaining general thesis, as not claiming that persons are

dependent upon community for their continued existence as persons. If this is right, though, much of the communitarian rhetoric seems little more than misleading hyperbole. The essential need to be in community to remain a person is sacrificed as is the idea that we lose our personhood outside the *polis* to become "wild animals" or "living corpses." For this reason, it seems that communitarians are best seen as committed to the sustaining general social constitution thesis and the ideas quoted in the last paragraph are best seen as more aberrations than fully developed components of communitarian theory.

We should recognize, though, that the sustaining general thesis is counter-intuitive. Certainly, we can imagine a person leaving all community and experiencing no notable change—even given time. Yet her essence, according to this thesis, would be fundamentally altered—she would no longer be a person.^{xix} Even this is not the strongest sort of counter-example we can imagine. We can also imagine, and indeed popular fiction offers examples of, a person leaving her society specifically to retain or augment her personhood (or "humanity"). Such a person may, like Sandel, MacIntyre and Taylor, find the state of the world lamentable and even in opposition to her ability to live "humanly." She may fear that her continued presence in our morally impoverished society would lead her to a life of a Frankfurter wanton, a Taylorian simple-weighter or even a mere automaton, only responding to stimuli without any original thoughts. She may, that is, think her life would be one where she merely "went through the motions" of living without ever considering her actions. Would we say of such a person that she (eventually) loses her personhood upon her egress from community? I'd suggest that only dogmatic adherence to the sustaining general thesis would result in an affirmative response. But though we might think that no one could seriously maintain the thesis, much in the communitarian literature does seem to indicate that it *is* accepted.

Given that the genetic particular thesis is too weak to maintain any distinction between liberals and communitarians, that the determinist sustaining particular thesis

would be rejected by all involved in the debate, and that the sustaining general thesis should be rejected for the reasons just presented, perhaps communitarians *could* simply accept the genetic general and genetic particular theses, so that individuals could be socially independent—and maintain a plausible theory that would allow a distinction and thus debate between liberals and communitarians. The problem with that conclusion—other than its lack of fit with communitarian rhetoric—is that even in *A Theory of Justice*—to which communitarians were responding—Rawls tells us that a social order “shapes the wants and aspirations that its citizens come to have. It determines in part the sort of persons they want to be as well as the sort of persons they are” (Rawls 1971, 259, see also 1993, 41). Put simply, “Rawls is committed [in 1971] on theoretical grounds to rejecting the notion of a self unencumbered by communal commitments” (Caney 1991a, 166).^{xx} More generally, “liberals did not ... conclude that the human self was factually ‘disencumbered’ of ascriptive particularities” (Holmes 1994, 196). Thus, there are many liberals who readily accept that individuals can only be independent in the sense of social independence. (Others, particularly, natural rights and natural law theorists, are likely committed to natural independence.) Thus, with those liberals—who I take it are currently in the majority of all liberals—communitarians have no substantive difference regarding the independence and autonomy of individuals.

Conclusion

We’ve seen above that there are four ways to understand the communitarian-endorsed social constitution thesis. Communitarians have failed to differentiate between these understandings and thus have not given us a full picture of the relation they believe the individual has with her community. They have failed to explain what sort of independence or autonomy a communitarian agent could possess. Liberals may have been in a similar situation, failing to explicitly detail the same facts, but we have seen above that they could accept the truth of one or both of the genetic theses, but would

reject both of the sustaining theses (so that individuals must be either naturally or socially independent and autonomous).

Where the difference is between communitarians and liberals I can not answer. Communitarian texts largely waver between accepting only the two genetic thesis (so that individuals are socially independent and autonomous) and accepting them and the sustaining general thesis (so that individuals are independent and autonomous only in a truncated social manner). If they accept the latter option, they have a substantive quarrel with liberals. If they limit their acceptance to the former option, their quarrel is limited to one with natural law or natural rights theorists.

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ⁱⁱ My understanding of the social constitution thesis is indebted to that presented in Carse 1994.

ⁱⁱⁱ As if “wild animals” were necessarily solitary animals?

^{iv} Following a customary device, I use “ends” as a place holder for such commitments as relationships, loyalties, projects, etc.

^v If instead of a direct tie to another, you have a *doctrinal* tie to another, the constitutive tie is to the doctrine rather than to the other. If the other (who shares the doctrine) changes, there need be no change to you unless their change changes the doctrine. In short, if you have a constitutive tie to X and X changes, you should expect to change. That some other has a constitutive tie to X may be quite irrelevant to you. This is especially clear in the case of doctrinal ties as these may be constitutive of many although those many may have no part in the constitution of the doctrine.

^{vi} This cannot serve as a final test of constitutiveness. Though not having a sense of harm from that bombing means you are not constitutively tied to those victims, having such a sense of harm does not necessarily mean you are (you may suffer false-consciousness). The having of such feelings is a necessary but not a sufficient indicator of constitutive-ness, thus understood. (In the language I develop below this would be an example of sustaining general social constitution.)

^{vii} This emotional sense of social constitution compares to what Kymlicka and Norman call “an emotional-affective sense of identity” (Kymlicka and Norman, 377 n. 33).

^{viii} (a) I shall alternate between talking of these as interpretations of the social constitution thesis and as four theses. This should make no difference for my argument. My presentation of the four theses is very much improved due to a suggestion from Henry Richardson. (b) If the social constitution thesis is only a normative claim—rather than a descriptive claim as I discuss it here—it would be a claim about the normative priority of communities to individuals. I discuss that claim elsewhere.

^{ix} Communitarians often neglect biological influences, but I shall assume that this version of the social constitution thesis does not exclude them. The strongest version does.

^x As Holmes notes, Locke is "Taylor's premier example of an atomistic liberal." Holmes rightly points out that this neglects many indications that Locke "was not unmindful of social life." For example, Locke "wrote that God made man 'such a Creature, that in his own Judgement, it was not good for him to be alone.'" Moreover, Locke's "treatise on education is impossible to square with charges of liberal ignorance about the processes of primary socialization" (Holmes 1994, 191).

^{xi} This is actually too quick. The individual can, according to this thesis, opt out of any particular social role she occupies, but only if the community determines her to do so—perhaps through other social roles she occupies.

^{xii} Although there may be nothing in a more consistent communitarian theory that contradicts the determinist sustaining particular thesis, there is more in the works of Sandel, Taylor, and MacIntyre that indicates *they* believe we have some independent means of contributing to our actions and characters (I develop this line of argument further in "Communitarianism Requires Individual Independence?" (ms)). I should note, though, that the intuitions that run counter to the sustaining general thesis (see the penultimate paragraph of section IV below) also serve as intuitions against the determinist sustaining particular thesis, for if it is possible to exit community and retain personhood, it can't be that the community determines all that we do and become (as we then wouldn't be able to do or become anything outside of community).

^{xiii} The mild sustaining particular thesis seems caught between what I below call the "sustaining general" thesis and the determinist sustaining particular thesis. The former says that the community is necessary for me to retain personhood, the latter says the community sustains—by causing—my particularities. The mild sustaining particular thesis seems to be neither, but one rightfully wants to know how it sustains particulars but is neither cause of those particulars nor necessary for retaining personhood. (Note that we can imagine a story about how communities sustain personhood—perhaps a Wittgensteinian story about the nature of language, wherein without community, the ability to use language and the ability to use thought break down.)

^{xiv} This is what Carse (1994) calls the strong social constitution thesis. Caney (1991a) also discusses the social constitution thesis—calling it the social *embeddedness thesis* (see 164). He indicates that Sandel has two different opinions about it. He indicates 1982, 143 as a place Sandel treats it as a sociological point (like the genetic particular

thesis) and 11-13 as a spot where he treats it as something more—as something perhaps like the sustaining general thesis, but also similar to the sustaining particular thesis.

^{xv} See Cohen 1998.

^{xvi} I am not discussing the related issue of what options a society provides for an individual. On my account, a person can be autonomous even if there is only one real option as what matters is that the person chooses independently, not that the person have alternatives to choose from. One can independently and freely choose X even if one would not be free not to choose X.

^{xvii} In many ways this (over-)simplifies matters. In fact, independence needs to be defined by making reference to *all* four of the social constitution theses. Although this leads to *sixteen* permutations, I do not believe the other twelve permutations are useful.

^{xviii} MacIntyre clearly does not want to say that we cease to be tokens of the biological species "human being." He is concerned with human beings that are persons (see, for e.g., 1984, 161).

^{xix} This requires that she leave *all* community; if she simply leaves one community for another, she can have her personhood retained. It is not the case that her personhood would necessarily be fundamentally altered by changing communities—it may be that both communities sustain personhood in the same way.

^{xx} In this essay, Caney shows that Rawls has always rejected the disembodied (or disembedded) self—even before *Theory of Justice*. This supports Rawls's claims that he hasn't altered his theory in answer to communitarians.