COMMUNITY, DIVERSITY, AND CIVIC EDUCATION: TOWARD A LIBERAL POLITICAL SCIENCE OF GROUP LIFE*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Although liberals too often forget it, the health of the liberal public order depends on our ability to constitute not only political institutions and limits on power, but appropriate patterns of social life and citizen character. Liberal character traits and political virtues do not, after all, come about “naturally” or by the deliverance of an “invisible hand.” Even Adam Smith did not think that, as we will see below. Harry Eckstein gets closer to the mark by suggesting that “stable governments . . . are the product of ‘accidental’ (extremely improbable) conjunctions of conditions which do sometimes, but rarely, occur in actual societies.”

Liberalism makes the protection of individual freedom its central aim, and it is not as demanding with respect to civic virtue as some other forms of government, such as the republican ideals described by Plato and Rousseau. Nevertheless, sensible liberals will allow that freedom may be constrained in various ways to help promote a stable system of decent and orderly freedom. Among the reasonable constraints are measures that help insure that citizens are educated toward liberal values and virtues. Liberals need to think about political education in order to plan for their own survival.

The liberal need to plan for civic education may be in some tension with certain freedoms—such as the free exercise of religion, as some people understand it—but that tension can be allayed somewhat if we think creatively about the indirect as well as the direct means of political education. Civic education is not undertaken only in the most direct and obvious ways: through schools, civics curricula, and direct political ped-

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agogy. People are educated indirectly in a host of ways: our social and political lives are themselves educative, not only for children but for adults as well. Indeed, liberal citizens can be encouraged to use their freedom—including their freedom to associate and cooperate—to contribute indirectly to the task of liberal civic education.

This essay will urge that a liberal political science of group life should be investigated as a tool of indirect civic education. It will address the question of how group life can be constituted and shaped so as to be of service to our liberal political order. I will largely bypass Alexis de Tocqueville’s well-known argument about the importance of participation in local communities, and instead focus on Adam Smith’s interesting and little-discussed account of the crucial role of religious communities in the Great Society.³

By drawing on Smith and the work of some subsequent social and political theorists, I also hope that this essay helps us move beyond the increasingly stale debate about whether liberalism is compatible with attractive forms of community life. Perceptive liberals have long recognized that liberalism and community are not only compatible, but that a particular pattern of community life is essential to sustaining free self-government in modern mass societies.

Exploring the educative side-effects of citizen participation in local communities, groups, and associations, will also help allay the worry that liberal conceptions of political virtue operate at too high a level of abstraction from the “self and parochial interests that conventionally draw citizens into politics,” as Shelley Burtt puts it.⁴ The practical realization of a liberal theory of justice (such as that of John Rawls) might appear to depend on unrealistic expectations about citizen virtue. The possibility of approximating liberal citizen virtue in practice will appear far more “realistic,” I shall try to show, when we flesh out the ways such virtues might be generated by the right patterns of community life.

The picture of liberal community life to be sketched here should have another kind of purchase on contemporary political argument. There is a tendency nowadays to uncritically celebrate diversity and the “politics of difference.” The argument advanced below strongly suggests that particularistic communities—including those oriented around religious, ethnic, and other forms of deep diversity—need to be constituted and shaped to be of use in a liberal regime.⁵ While heavy-handed interventions in religious life or other “private” matters may be neither necessary

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nor permissible, liberals should not shy away from the important work of shaping community life for civic ends.

II. EDUCATIONAL STATECRAFT IN THE GREAT SOCIETY: ADAM SMITH AND THE USES OF SECTARIANISM

A. Smith on civic education

Let us begin with a theorist whose impeccable liberal credentials did not stop him from worrying about the moral and civic consequences of life under capitalism. Adam Smith did more, indeed, than simply worry about what might be thought of as the civic deficit of commercial societies, he also offered a subtle and suggestive plan of public response. My aim here is to suggest that while we should not mimic this plan, we can take from it some important lessons about the indirect means of liberal civic education.

Smith regarded the new commercial order as a monumental advance over previous social forms, but it was a flawed advance: economic development could, as we shall see, undermine many forms of civic competence and personal well-being. Smith’s problem was not unlike our problem: how do we plan for a citizenry with civic competence while respecting individual freedom? Smith’s answer was that through canny statecraft we can respect associative freedom while gently shaping particular communities to draw out the resources they provide for civic education.

Smith aptly depicted mass capitalistic markets as vast networks of people whose relations are fragmentary, indirect, and often quite distant. The progressive advance of capitalism depends on an ever more developed division of labor, which in turn depends on ever more extensive markets. Since mass production requires concentrations of labor, commercial society will also tend to be urban and cosmopolitan. Modern commercial society, for Smith, is a society of strangers: a dangerously anonymous society of people with distant and fragmentary relations, a society that poses a real danger of such severe demoralization and civic decline that free self-government could be rendered impossible.

Mass commercial societies stand in stark contrast with the village and small-town life which they increasingly supplant. The Great Society is anonymous and liberating, in part because people’s conduct simply becomes so much harder to monitor as people uproot themselves and settle in expanding urban centers. While important forms of freedom become possible only in the Great Society, this new freedom is also dangerous: liberation from the thick texture of small-scale communities and

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6 This section is greatly indebted to Samuel Fleischacker’s searching criticisms of two earlier drafts, for which I am extremely grateful.
social networks of traditional village life could lead to a dangerous slackening of interpersonal relationships. While the division of labor was a critical engine of increasing productivity, Smith believed that it also threatened to transform the work of the laboring poor—"the great body of the people"—into an increasingly repetitive and narrow routine that would be as intellectually deadening as it was physically debilitating. Confined "to a few very simple operations," the worker would become "as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to" become: incapable of "rational conversation," incapable of "forming any just judgment" concerning ordinary life, still less the "great and extensive interests of his country." How could a free society survive, Smith worried, with a large segment of the populace benumbed by "gross ignorance and stupidity," prone to the "delusions of enthusiasm and superstition," and incapable of seeing through "the interested complaints of faction and sedition?"

Far from taking a laissez-faire attitude toward the deleterious consequences of the commercial order for citizen character and competence, Smith advanced a subtle scheme for civic education. He argued, first of all, that public policy "can facilitate, can encourage, and can even impose upon almost the whole body of the people, the necessity of acquiring those most essential parts of education." To facilitate the education of the common people, the state should partly fund schools so that every child could be provided with a basic minimum level of education in practical subjects: the capacity to "read, write, and account," and the rudiments of "geometry and mechanicks." Smith would have had the public further encourage basic education by giving "small premiums and little badges of distinction, to the children of the common people who excel" in their studies. And he would have imposed the requirement that people should pass a public examination before being allowed to practice a trade in a town, or enjoy the privileges associated with membership in many forms of corporate life.

For Smith, civic and moral education was not limited to the acquisition of basic intellectual tools. He also urged public attention to physical training, not simply for its own sake but as an important aspect of moral and civic education. While Smith regarded citizen militias as no longer crucial to national security (here as elsewhere, the division of labor would promote specialization), he nevertheless held cowardice to be a grave character flaw and a form of "mental mutilation" which deserves "the most

8 Ibid., p. 788.
9 Ibid., p. 785.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., p. 786; ibid., vol. 2, V.i.g, p. 796.
serious attention of government.” In order to combat this “loathsome and offensive disease” and instill a healthy measure of “martial spirit” and self-respect in the citizenry, Smith recommended public encouragement for widespread gymnastic and militia training.12

Smith advocated direct public support for a variety of educative measures, therefore, and hoped that in this way the vast bulk of the populace would acquire at least some basic intellectual tools, a degree of martial spirit, and a merited respectability. By combating both cowardice and “gross ignorance and stupidity” among the common people, Smith believed that public agencies could promote people’s private well-being, as well as the free society’s need for a “decent and orderly” populace: a citizenry able to resist “enthusiasm and superstition,” and to judge public affairs with some degree of discernment.13

The more or less directly educative measures discussed so far did not exhaust Smith’s educational plan. He also worried that the social structure of an increasingly urban, mass society would undermine moral character. The burgeoning commercial order would, Smith warned, pay a heavy price for the atrophy of the smaller social settings of towns and villages, for these social settings were, as we shall see, crucial features of the moral infrastructure of a healthy mass society.

A crucial part of Smith’s educative plan, then, was his attempt to promote substitutes for the small-scale communities of the old regime. It was for this reason that Smith arresting described religious “sects” or churches as “Institutions for the Instruction of People of all Ages.”14 Smith’s concerns were with the civic side-effects of religious communities: the social, political, and moral benefits they could provide quite apart from their religious missions.

The religions of Smith’s day could, for one thing, be counted on to help combat the “vices of levity” and the “liberal or loose” moral system, which is marked by “luxury, wanton and even disorderly mirth” and the intemperate pursuit of pleasure.15 In place of the morality of self-indulgence, religion would promote an “austere” morality, one that promotes self-control, frugality, and prudent regard for the future. These character traits would be altogether essential to the “poor workman” and the “common people,” whom “a single week’s thoughtlessness and dissipation is often sufficient to undo” forever.16

Religious communities were effective moral educators because they did more than preach morality: the very nature of the small, face-to-face community was itself a crucial means for actually securing responsible con-

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13 Ibid., p. 788.
14 Ibid. Smith uses the term “sect” broadly to include “antient and established systems” (p. 789), as well as Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism.
15 Ibid., vol. 2, V.i.g, p. 794.
16 Ibid., pp. 794–95.
duct. The moral capital provided by these small communities was especially needed by those poorer people who lacked other social supports for good conduct.

The wealthy, Smith argued, do not have the same need as the rest of us to act responsibly: their wealth provides a cushion for irresponsible behavior. Even so, the social status and visibility of persons of wealth and distinction supply them with crucial incentives for responsible conduct. Wealth and social standing make people visible to others: the wealthy are "distinguished members of a great society." Observed "by all the world," the wealthy attend to every part of their own conduct.17 This consciousness of being watched, of being visible to others, was for Smith a crucial bulwark of self-control: a crucial motive for caring about and looking after one's conduct. So while the wealthy did not need supports for responsible behavior to the same degree as the poor, they nevertheless had the motives for self-control provided by social visibility.

The poor, on the other hand, lack not only wealth but social status, and thus tend to be socially invisible. This invisibility breeds demoralization and irresponsible behavior: "Why should the man, whom nobody thinks it worth while to look at, be very anxious about the manner in which he holds up his head, or disposes of his arms while he walks through a room?"18 Indeed, for Smith, the worst part of poverty appears not to be the material deprivation—bad as that may be—but rather the demoralization bred by social invisibility. "The poor man goes out and comes in unheeded," Smith poignantly remarks, "and when in the midst of a crowd is in the same obscurity as if shut up in his own hovel."19

The basic problem for the poor is not poverty per se, but the social invisibility, isolation, and consequent demoralization which are caused by poverty and which must make it hard or impossible to rise out of poverty. Without social supports for personal responsibility, self-control, initiative, and prudent regard for the future, invisible men will not only become slovenly and unkempt in their personal habits, but will also sink into broader forms of "slothful and sottish indifference."20 "[A]s obscurity covers us from the daylight of honor and approbation, to feel that we are taken no notice of," Smith sadly observes, "necessarily damps the most agreeable hope, and disappoints the most ardent desire, of human nature."21

Luckily for most of us, great wealth and status are not the only sources of social visibility: these can also be provided by a peer group, by membership in a face-to-face community. The plight of the poor, as we have

18 Ibid., p. 55.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., I.iii.2.7, p. 57.
21 Ibid., I.iii.2.2, p. 51.
seen, is grounded less in material deprivation than in the decline of smaller social settings. The problem is that the

man of low condition . . . is far from being a distinguished member of any great society. While he remains in a country village his conduct may be attended to, and he may be obliged to attend to it himself. In this situation . . . he may have what is called a character to lose. But as soon as he comes into a great city, he is sunk in obscurity and darkness. His conduct is observed and attended to by nobody, and he is therefore very likely to neglect it himself, and to abandon himself to every sort of low profligacy and vice.

Here, then, is where the benefits of religious communities really show themselves. Nothing can combat the invisibility, anonymity, and consequent hopelessness and irresponsibility of the commercial order, Smith argues, like face-to-face religious communities. The poor man "never emerges so effectually from this obscurity, his conduct never excites so much the attention of any respectable society, as by his becoming the member of a small religious sect." 22

Popular religious communities provide moral resources greatly needed in the Great Society: not simply demanding codes of conduct, but peer groups that notice and care about the conduct of ordinary people, thereby giving them an incentive to attend to their own conduct, think about and plan for the future, and behave responsibly. Religious communities were a crucial part of the moral infrastructure of Smith's Great Society precisely because they helped provide substitutes for the social supports for responsible conduct once provided by small towns and villages. Membership in these face-to-face communities gave ordinary people a public character or reputation to lose—a social incentive to display prudent, responsible conduct.

It should be emphasized that Smith's plan for moral and civic education was not intended simply to produce a disciplined working class. He regarded self-control, personal responsibility, and a prudent regard for the future as important but fragile achievements for all. He opposed, for example, the practice of sending young gentlemen abroad for several years, because he believed that by placing young people "at a distance from the inspection and control" of "parents and relations," wealthy families encouraged "frivolous dissipation" and weakened the good effects of early education undertaken (as he thought it should be) in the home and in schools near the home (rather than in boarding schools). Indeed, he felt that the proximity of children and parents would help to restrain the conduct of both. 23

23 Ibid., pp. 773–74; Smith, Theory of Moral Sentiments, VI.ii.1.10, p. 222.
Likewise, the economic benefits of personal responsibility were important but not all-important to Smith. The economic importance of self-control and prudent regard for the future is obvious: the great mass of poor people were doomed to horrible poverty in the absence of economic growth. Not only frugality and economic growth, however, but all of the higher and nobler pursuits of human beings depend on the possession of the basic capacity for self-command. Smith did not rely on any narrow preoccupation with economic development, therefore, but instead stressed the intrinsic importance of intellectual and moral development. Communal memberships would, along with the other elements of Smith's civic education, help make people not simply more frugal, but more self-respecting and confident, more open to fellow-feeling and sympathy.

B. Smith on religious morality and its limits

Smith spoke very warmly of the habits of sober and tranquil prudence, and he regarded religious communities as crucial parts of the moral infrastructure of the Great Society. He also recognized that "austere" morals had the great advantage of being profoundly useful, even necessary, for the great bulk of common people: the working poor. Yet Smith neither opposed the virtue of liberality in the abstract, nor regarded the austere morality as altogether lovely. (Indeed, at one point he contrasts the "austerities and abasement of a monk" with the "liberal, generous, and spirited conduct of a man." )^24 Taken to extremes, austere self-command could lead to "disagreeably rigorous and unsocial" behavior. ^25 A way was needed to temper the excessive rigor of religious communities.

Smith offered a political plan to blunt the potentially sharp edges of the austere moral system, and indirectly to shape these communities toward civic aims. He argued, first of all, that it is generally best to allow religious bodies to rely on private support. Here as elsewhere, competition will promote enterprise, and encourage the clergy to maintain "the fervour of the faith" by practicing all "the arts of popularity." ^26 It should be for the clergy as for the hussars, he said: "no plunder, no pay." ^27

In this, Smith took direct exception to the view of his friend David Hume, who argued that

this interested diligence of the clergy is what every wise legislator will study to prevent. . . . Each ghostly practitioner, in order to render himself more precious and sacred in the eyes of his retainers, will inspire them with the most violent abhorrence of all other sects, and

^25 Ibid., vol. 2, V.i.g., p. 796; see also Smith, Theory of Moral Sentiments, VI.i.4, pp. 212-17.
^26 Smith, Wealth of Nations, vol. 2, V.i.g, p. 789.
^27 Ibid., p. 790. The term "hussars" refers to members of European light cavalry units.
continually endeavor, by some novelty, to excite the languid devotion of his audience. . . . Every tenet will be adopted that best suits the disorderly affections of the human frame.28

Far better, Hume said, to provide a "fixed establishment [i.e., salary] for priests," and thereby to "bribe their indolence."29

Smith certainly shared some of Hume's uneasiness about religious zeal, passion, and fanaticism, and, as we shall see, he sought ways to temper these unfortunate extremes.30 He argued that it was, however, far-fetched to think that salaries would be provided to clergy in anything like an evenhanded manner. Subsidies would be guided by religious favoritism and party spirit, and that would inflame resentment. Far better, Smith argued, for politics to resist relying on "the aid of religion," instead dealing "equally and impartially with all the different sects," and allowing every individual to freely choose his own priest. Smith hoped that, in this way, the state would not only respect religious freedom but also promote civil peace: with free competition, the number of sects would multiply, and the power of any one religious leader or community would not be very great. The fragmentation and consequent weakness of sects would encourage all to practice moderation and mutual respect. The law's impartiality among contending religions would promote "philosophical good temper and moderation," perhaps even mutual respect.31 In these ways, Smith both promoted religious freedom and channeled religious communities toward public purposes, not by force—which he thought would be not only illiberal but ineffective—but through "gentle usage."32

It is worth noting that Smith's argument that freedom for religious groups in the Great Society will lead them to multiply, fragment, and thence to moderate their opposition to one another, is an obvious precursor to James Madison's argument, in "Federalist No. 10," that the embrace of an "extended republic" would help "break and control the violence of faction."33 If a polity embraces many factions in a large territory, Madison argued, no one faction will be able consistently to dominate the others, and this "renders factious combinations less to be dreaded." Embracing a "greater variety of parties" places a "greater variety of obstacles" before "the secret wishes of an unjust and interested majority."34 In a large pol-

28 David Hume, History of England (1778), iii.30-31, quoted in ibid., p. 791.
29 Ibid.
30 Smith, Wealth of Nations, vol. 2, V.i.g., p. 806.
31 Ibid., pp. 792-93.
32 Ibid., pp. 798-99.
34 Ibid., p. 84. Later in "Federalist No. 10," Madison hearkens back to Smith even more closely (though I cannot say consciously) when he says that "a religious sect may degenerate into a political faction" in a small political unit, but a "variety of sects" dispersed across a large nation are less to be feared (ibid.).
ity with many different interests—many minority factions—governing coalitions will have to be built, and the fact that people engage in fluid, open, and shifting political coalitions should also help to moderate their partisanship.

Interestingly, Smith avoids one shortcoming of The Federalist Papers, for while that insightful analysis of America’s constitutional institutions counts on citizen virtue, it says little about where those virtues will come from. The embrace of many groups in a large political sphere remains, in Madison’s hands, largely a negative strategy for warding off unjust political combinations. The Federalist Papers do display a concern with local communities—namely, the states—but the main thrust here is to argue for the subordination of the states to the national government. Very little is said of the dependence of the national government and national citizenship on the moral resources furnished by local communities. In Smith’s writings, on the other hand, we find a fuller account of the importance of preserving vibrant small communities as means for promoting moral and civic virtues that might otherwise be in short supply in mass, commercial societies or “extended republics.”

Smith’s plan for moderating religious zeal and shaping religious communities toward civic ends does not end with his advocacy of religious freedom and nonestablishment. He also worries, as we have seen, about the excesses of religious enthusiasm, of superstitions that flourish as a consequence of ignorance and credulity, and of the tendency of the austerer system left to its own to become “disagreeably rigorous and unsocial.” Smith hoped that people would, over time, tend toward what he called “that pure and rational religion, free from every mixture of absurdity, imposture, or fanaticism, such as wise men have in all ages of the world wished to see established.” He grants, therefore, that sectarian moral education may stand in some tension with both the private good of individuals and the ethos of liberal democracy.

Smith suggests two remedies for sectarian excess. First, he recommends that free rein be given to all who would undertake gay “publick diversions”: painting, poetry, music, dance, drama, and so on. All of these will help “dissipate the melancholy and gloom” of those who might otherwise sink too deep in fire, brimstone, and religious asceticism.

In addition, and perhaps more importantly, Smith sought to promote the social influence of science and philosophy by making the study of these subjects a precondition for admittance to prestigious professions. “Science,” says Smith, “is the great antidote to the poison of enthusiasm and superstition; and where all the superior ranks of people were secured from it, the inferior ranks could not be much exposed to it.”

35 Smith, Wealth of Nations, vol. 2, V.i.f, p. 767; ibid., vol. 2, II.V.i.g, p. 796.
36 Ibid., II.V.i.g, p. 793.
37 Ibid., p. 795.
38 Ibid., p. 796.
tional requirements for the better-off members of society would thus have cultural "trickle-down" effects for society as a whole, effects which might be augmented once public subsidies for the salaries of clergymen were eliminated. The attraction of a career in the church for the ablest and best-educated people would then decline, and the most eminent men of learning would migrate from the clergy to the universities, helping (Smith might well have expected) to increase the social prestige and influence of universities at the expense of the clergy. And of course, as we have seen, Smith favored public measures to encourage the education of all; for education, he thought, would make everyone less apt to be deluded by superstition, political manipulation, and religious zeal.

Smith saw education—especially science and critical thinking—as a means of elevating and tempering the enthusiastic spirit of popular religion. Education would help defend the Great Society against the sorts of gross delusions and superstitions of religion at its worst, which were epitomized for Smith by the Roman Catholic Church: "the most formidable combination that ever was formed... against the liberty, reason, and happiness of mankind." 

C. Smith on religious freedom

Smith's is a liberal political science of group life in that he respects the freedom of people to form, join, and leave religious communities without political hindrance. He respects religious freedom without embracing government "neutrality" or laissez faire toward religion, thus avoiding the narrowness of those liberal moral theories that nowadays provide such easy fodder for liberalism's critics. Smith shows that respect for freedom of religious association can be combined with gentle and unobtrusive public policies that shape these associations toward public ends by moderating their potentially illiberal extremes and making them agents of civic education. The lesson for liberals here is that we can respect freedom without leaving the private realm altogether un governed: gentle interventions can help insure that private freedom is used in a way that promotes civic education and the public good.

A nervous liberal might still wonder whether Smith's statecraft altogether observes the limits of liberal public authority with respect to religion. After all, while Smith insists that "articles of faith are not within the proper department of a temporal authority," he also says that "public tranquility" and the security of public authority "may frequently depend

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39 Ibid., pp. 810-12. I owe this observation to Samuel Fleischacker. One might also worry, of course, that Smith here points (albeit unwittingly) toward today's rather sharp divide (sometimes called a culture war) between university professors and other intellectuals on the one hand, and common people more closely aligned with a popular clergy not associated with elite educational institutions.

40 Smith, Wealth of Nations, vol. 2, V.i.g, pp. 802-3.
upon the doctrines” propagated by the clergy. Is not the latter observation an invitation to dangerous public meddling in the private sphere?

It seems hard to deny, however, that the security of liberal values in a democratic polity depends on the religious and other extra-political convictions of citizens. Liberal citizens must, after all, find space for their political convictions in the context of their moral and philosophical values as a whole. Smith recognizes what some liberals forget: that respect for private freedom does not require that the private realm be sealed off against the deliberate influence of public policies aimed at securing legitimate civic aims.

Smith seems to me absolutely right to recognize that liberalism is about more than merely limiting public authority in the name of freedom. More fundamentally, liberalism must be about constituting a social and political order that is—in both its public and private spheres—capable of sustaining a decent and orderly freedom. This requires going beyond merely observing the bounds of public authority to insure that public values gain the support that they require in all spheres of life.

There will, of course, be limits on what a liberal state can do to bring religious communities into alignment with political imperatives, but it is hard to see how Smith runs afoul of them. He argues for religious non-establishment and an evenhanded policy of public nonsupport for religion. The freedom to form churches and define dogma is respected. It turns out that these liberal policies will also, Smith believes, generate beneficial changes in the attitudes of religious communities (making them less zealous and more mutually respectful). There is nothing to apologize for if, as a happy side-effect of freedom-respecting policies, private groups become more supportive of liberal virtues.

If Smith supported education in science simply as a way of promoting a particular conception of religious truth, this would be a problem. The public reason for promoting science, philosophy, and education more broadly is, however, to insure a basic level of citizen competence, and to dampen the threats to civil peace posed by enthusiasm, zealotry, and superstition in any and every form. Of course, enthusiastic zeal for superstition is some people’s idea of religious truth, but then liberalism is no more compatible with everyone’s view of religious truth than is any other political theory. Smith’s educational policy will not make everyone happy, but it does not depend for its justifiability upon a particular conception of religious truth. His interventions in the religious realm are

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41 Ibid., p. 798.
42 Ibid.
43 This policy is not, of course, neutral with respect to religious beliefs; but then I do not believe that the liberal state should be committed to neutrality, and I argue for this in Liberal Virtues: Citizenship, Virtue, and Community in Liberal Constitutionalism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 260-63. I discuss these conflicts at greater length in “Liberal Civic Education and Religious Fundamentalism” (supra note 5).
indirect, gentle, and guided by public aims and reasons, and thus are entirely legitimate from a liberal point of view.

D. Summary

Commercialism and the modern liberties that it fosters help emancipate people from the restraints of inherited sources of authority, and the relatively fixed expectations of inherited classes and roles. But on Smith’s account liberal republics also need to beware the anonymity and extravagance of unbounded individualism. Individual liberation can go too far: the vastness, anonymity, and fluidity of the Great Society makes it a potentially inhospitable environment for the small-scale interactions that remain a crucial component of the moral life. Liberal republics need to temper the internal dynamics of mass commercialism, and furnish partial substitutes for the communal bonds of premodern societies. The Great Society depends upon moral resources which cannot be furnished by institutions fully reflecting the cosmopolitan openness and freedom of that society.

Smith’s plan for civic education provides lessons for liberalism today. We can, with Smith, defend the free society without embracing a policy of laissez faire with respect to the civic and moral culture. We should, with Smith, recognize that local communities and other intermediate associations are important indirect instruments of civic education which may, nevertheless, need to be shaped and managed to some degree by public policies designed to encourage them to take forms that are supportive of liberal democracy.

Smith’s account is not only vindicated, but also deepened and extended, by more recent social theory and political science. Smith seems to have been right, as we shall see in what follows, to have worried about the slackening of communal bonds, and to have regarded the project of accommodating and shaping new forms of community as a crucial part of a liberal strategy for civic education.

III. Constituting Communities for Liberal Education

When does community life promote liberal democracy? Smith suggests one way of answering this question by arguing that public policy should counteract zeal and superstition as attitudes at odds with moderation in the face of diversity. Smith also emphasizes, as we have seen, the moderating effects of the fragmentation and proliferation of religious communities. This latter approach emphasizes the need to influence not the substantive convictions of communities so much as the structure of community life. It is this latter approach that I want to pursue here, for much social science after Smith reaffirms the importance of fostering an over-
lapping, pluralistic pattern of group memberships and communal allegiances.

Emile Durkheim argued that groups that totally absorb the allegiances of their members destroy the possibility of individual liberty. We should not, therefore, uncritically espouse group-based allegiances or interests, but rather welcome the clash among competing group-based allegiances, and among these allegiances and more-inclusive moral ideals. It is the state, says Durkheim, that protects individual rights, and by so doing safeguards the possibility of defection from groups. The state must permeate all those secondary groups of family, trade and professional association, Church, regional areas and so on . . . which tend . . . to absorb the personality of their members. It must do this in order to prevent this absorption and free these individuals, and so to remind these partial societies that they are not alone and that there is a right that stands above their own rights.  

On Durkheim’s account, the state safeguards individuals against the domination of particular groups, thereby nurturing their freedom. Groups, in turn, prevent social atomization and individual demoralization, thereby warding off state domination of isolated and weak individuals. Individual liberty thrives in the tension between the state and “secondary groups,” therefore; and only by preserving this tension does a social order combat both state and group oppression:

[If that collective force, the State, is to be the liberator of the individual, it has itself need of some counterbalance; it must be restrained by other collective forces, that is, by . . . secondary groups. . . . [I]t is out of this conflict that individual liberties are born.  

Durkheim’s endorsement of a complex pattern of partial allegiances gains support from the work of post-World War II “mass society” theorists, such as William Kornhauser, who warned that the atrophy of intermediate associations leads to social “atomization” and provides fertile ground for totalitarian political movements. Kornhauser argued that in “mass societies”—societies without layers of crosscutting intermediate groups and associations—both the elites and the masses are “available” for extreme forms of mutual manipulation. Isolated individuals are easily manipulated by opportunistic elites and, because they lack moderat-

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ing partial ties to others, they are disposed to form "hyper-attachments" to symbols and leaders.\textsuperscript{46} On the other hand, when popular demands can be transmitted very directly to the political center, elites will have little room for maneuvering and will often be forced to respond. In a mass society both the elites and the masses lack the moderating insulation provided by intermediate associations. Such a society is fertile ground for totalitarian political movements. Totalitarian states strive, unsurprisingly, to maintain mass-society conditions: to keep individuals isolated and to prevent the emergence of rival sources of loyalty and power.\textsuperscript{47}

A society, on the other hand, with strong layers of associations between the state and individuals is one in which the elites and the masses are insulated from mutual manipulation, and shielded from direct and extreme political demands. Citizens in a pluralistic society will, moreover, tend to form allegiances and attachments to a variety of particular parties, groups, and movements, none of which wholly consumes their loyalties.\textsuperscript{48} Political appeals flow toward the center indirectly, fragmented and moderated by associations. Shielded from direct, mass appeals, and the pressures of an unorganized but homogeneous and volatile mass of opinion, political authorities may negotiate with a variety of groups and pressures: \textsuperscript{49}

A plurality of groups that are both independent and non-inclusive not only protects elites and non-elites from one another but does so in a manner that permits liberal democratic control. Liberal democratic control requires that people have access to elites, and that they exercise restraint in their participation.\textsuperscript{50}

A network of multiple, overlapping memberships—the "cross-cutting solidarities" of a healthy pluralistic society—produces a pattern of complexly divided and partial loyalties, which promotes not only political moderation and stability, but individual liberty as well:

\textsuperscript{46} Kornhauser, The Politics of Mass Society, p. 32, and see, more generally, pp. 30–62.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., p. 62.

\textsuperscript{48} Kornhauser here builds on Durkheim:

\textquote{O}ur political malaise is due to the same cause as our social malaise: that is, to the lack of secondary cadres to interpose between the individual and the State. We have seen that these secondary groups are essential if the State is not to oppress the individual: they are also necessary if the State is to be sufficiently free of the individual. And indeed we can imagine this as suiting both sides; for both have an interest in the two forces not being in immediate contact although they must be linked one with the other. (Durkheim, Professional Ethics and Civic Morals, p. 96)

\textsuperscript{49} Kornhauser, The Politics of Mass Society, pp. 43–49.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., p. 81. Kornhauser also emphasizes (ibid., pp. 65–66) that citizens actively involved in local group life are less apathetic and more self-confident, as Tocqueville claimed (see Democracy in America, passim).
So long as no association claims or receives hegemony over many aspects of its members’ lives, its power over the individual will be limited. . . . [T]he authority of a private group can be as oppressive as that of the state.\footnote{Kornhauser, The Politics of Mass Society, pp. 80–81.}

Freedom-promoting social orders are, it appears, pluralistic: societies of partial allegiances in which groups endlessly compete with each other and with the state for the allegiances of individuals, and in which individuals’ loyalties are divided among a variety of crosscutting (or only partially overlapping) memberships and affiliations.

Liberalism needs community life, therefore, and it needs community life to be constituted in a certain way. Pluralism is the key. Liberal statecraft should aim for a complex, crosscutting structure of community life in which particular group-based allegiances are tempered by other, competing group allegiances and by a state representing a common, overarching, but partial, point of view that gives everyone something in common. The importance of a pluralistic structure of group life is reaffirmed by Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, who argue that “pluralism, even if not explicitly political pluralism, may indeed be one of the most important foundations of political democracy.”\footnote{Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 319–20.}

Partial, overlapping, crosscutting commitments educate toward political moderation in a variety of ways: partly by fostering shifting political coalitions, and with them the habit of flexible cooperation with members of other groups and communities. The fact that allegiances and memberships are partial should also help individuals maintain a critical distance on the demands of any particular group, and, indeed, pluralism should help individuals defect from oppressive group-imposed constraints: defection from a group must be easier when that group represents only a portion of one’s allegiances.

Some forms of group life are bound to be pathological from a liberal point of view. These will include “tribalistic” forms of community that entail deep suspicion of outsiders, and totalistic communities that wholly capture the identities of their members, making individual freedom, and cooperation with outsiders, difficult or impossible.

Important contributions to liberal-democratic civic education are made, therefore, not so much by the vigor of associational life per se, but by associational life properly constituted. Groups educate toward moderation, freedom, and political stability when they form complex, pluralistic, crosscutting patterns of overlapping memberships—patterns in which the state overarches all and represents certain common interests. Under
these conditions, local community and group life can be said to foster the liberal-democratic benefits of community without incurring the dangers of group-based oppression, or tribalistic exclusion of outsiders.

IV. LIBERAL CITIZEN VIRTUE AS SOCIAL CAPITAL

I have, so far, focused on arguments for the importance of intermediate associations less well-known than Tocqueville’s. Tocqueville adds, however, a dimension to the picture I have sketched that now needs to be recognized. He argued that there is a generalized readiness to associate with others that is augmented through use. “Knowledge of how to combine,” says Tocqueville, “is the mother of all other forms of knowledge.”53 and activity in political associations feeds on and helps encourage activity in civil or extra-political associations, and vice versa:

Men chance to have a common interest in a certain matter. It may be a trading enterprise to direct or an industrial undertaking to bring to fruition; those concerned meet and combine; little by little in this way they get used to the idea of association.54

The experience of cooperation with others breeds familiarity with networks of cooperative people, increases mutual trust, and therefore augments the resources available for further cooperation as new problems arise. James S. Coleman, Robert D. Putnam, and others describe this willingness to cooperate as a vital form of “social capital”: a great social resource for handling collective problems, there to be drawn on and indeed augmented as new problems are confronted and new forms of cooperation are needed.55

As Smith claimed, great societies need small communities to monitor behavior, enforce social norms, and foster cooperation. Networks of such cooperative communities help generate the resources for new forms of cooperation. In the language of game theory, people constantly confront situations in which everyone would gain by cooperating. In such situations, however, the worst outcome for any individual is to be the one who acts on the expectation that others will cooperate, only to find that they have exploited the situation for their own short-term good. Societies will be better off if people cooperate to solve collective problems, but in the absence of means for enforcing sanctions against defectors, rational self-interest will often counsel noncooperation. Where people lack mutual trust in one another’s commitments, cooperation may be impossible.

53 Tocqueville, Democracy in America, p. 517.
54 Ibid., p. 520.
Behavior can be monitored, norms enforced, and cooperation encouraged more effectively in small groups than in large ones. Consider the "rotating credit associations" which, as Putnam observes, are found on every continent, each consisting of a group of individuals who make regular contributions to a fund which is lent, in whole or in part, to each contributor in turn. The trick, obviously, is to ensure that people keep contributing even after having received a share, so that everyone has a turn to benefit.56

As with Smith's sects, the small size of credit associations and their members' frequent interactions make norm enforcement possible. Since there is an obvious short-term payoff to those who would renege after having had their turn, the members of a rotating credit association must be selected with care. A reputation for honesty and reliability is an important qualification, of course, and that reputation may be vouchsafed by previous membership in other such associations. Among the incentives to cooperation, therefore, are the benefits that accrue from a reputation for trustworthiness.

As Smith predicted, membership in associations provides lowly individuals with a public character: a substitute for the more personalized reputations possessed by great individuals. And in societies with dense, overlapping networks of associations, trust can be lent: as Putnam observes, "[s]ocial networks allow trust to become transitive and spread: I trust you, because I trust her and she assures me that she trusts you."57

Individuals in cooperative schemes witness the gains of cooperation, and acquire the reputations which make them likely future candidates for more such endeavors. The experience of successful cooperation provides both incentives to, and collective resources for, further cooperation. Credit associations are often found in conjunction with other forms of cooperation such as mutual aid societies. The reason seems to be that "all of these forms of voluntary cooperation seem to be fed by the same underlying stock of social capital," which, at its most fungible, is the generalized readiness to coalesce to form associations prepared to trust, cooperate, and monitor cooperation.58 The crucial character trait required by cooperative associations, and in turn fostered by them, is not altruism but reciprocity: a willingness to make short-term sacrifices for longer-term payoffs garnered by cooperation.59

Groups foster cooperation among members; but maximizing group-specific cooperation should not be our aim, for that could undermine the willingness to cooperate with outsiders. There are trade-offs here. Intra-

57 Ibid., p. 169.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid., pp. 171–72.
group allegiances nurture the close interaction and individualized monitoring needed to enforce group norms, punish defectors, promote cooperation, and assess the reliability of our peers. Leaving people entirely in thrall to group allegiances could, however, undermine new and wider forms of cooperation. So particular group-based allegiances promote the cooperative virtues needed by the larger social order, but they may also stand in some tension with society-wide cooperation.

Here again we can see the advantages of overlapping networks of groups: particular groups will foster cooperativeness among members; but when individuals belong to networks of partially overlapping groups, this should help foster a more generalized attitude of cooperativeness and reciprocity. Putnam's study reaffirms what Durkheim and Kornhauser suggested: healthy structures of group life are ones characterized by rich networks of broad and relatively weak group ties. Under these conditions, particular groups achieve the benefits of cooperation among members, without foreclosing the possibility of new and wider forms of cooperation across group lines. In such a social setting, government rests lightly on citizens because networks of cooperating individuals support collective endeavors and foster mutual trust.

The healthy structure of group life described above implies a corresponding ideal of civic character: one of active participation in a number of overlapping groups, combined with an openness to new groups and wider forms of cooperation. Multiple memberships and an open attitude toward new forms of cooperation would help individuals maintain a critical distance on any particular commitment. The complex structure and open quality of group life should foster personal freedom and toleration for others. Participation in cooperative schemes for mutual advantage should also teach the virtues of self-control and foresight. Where such associations are democratically self-governing, we can expect them to teach other political virtues as well. Eric M. Uslaner suggests that the good citizen can be thought of as the trusting individual, who treats adversaries with civility and respect in order to keep open the possibility of reciprocity and cooperation.60

V. Small-Group Cooperation as an Education for Liberal Justice?

One of the most difficult tasks of statecraft is to bridge the gap between the more or less self-interested conduct that individuals seem ready enough to exhibit in market settings, and the more principled and other-regarding behavior that even liberal political theories hope that citizens will at least sometimes exhibit in politics and in other social settings.61

60 Eric M. Uslaner, "Trends in Comity over Time" (unpublished manuscript).
61 I discuss this problem in Liberal Virtues, pp. 133-42.
The problem is liable to seem insurmountable if we depict human motivations as divided between narrow self-interest on the one hand, and, on the other hand, pure forms of moral conduct such as altruism or a commitment to doing the right thing for its own sake without regard to consequences. But just as the division of our social lives into individuals and the state leaves out those layers of groups and associations that, as we have seen, are so crucial to moral and political education, so too the stark bifurcation of human motivations into self-interest and other-regardingness or public spirit leaves out a category of motives and interests that we have good reason to regard as crucial to the moral economy of a modern mass society.

There are, we can now see, a whole set of "cooperative virtues" that occupy a crucial position intermediate between the noblest forms of self-sacrifice and the narrowest forms of self-servingness. The "cooperative virtues" fostered by group life are not simply all-purpose social resources, but can be important supports for a specifically liberal social order. Approximating liberal justice in practice may depend not so much on getting individuals to adopt the moral point of view in all its austere demandingness, but rather on building upon the cooperativeness and reciprocity exhibited in group life.

Among the citizen virtues on which liberal self-government depends, according to John Rawls's recent account, are what he describes as the "cooperative virtues": "the virtue of reasonableness and a sense of fairness, a spirit of compromise and a readiness to meet others halfway, all of which are connected with the willingness to cooperate with others on political terms that everyone can publicly accept." The core citizen virtue in Rawls's scheme is reasonableness. Reasonable people are not altruists (or, from a different viewpoint, "suckers") moved by impartially defined principles irrespective of how others behave, and they are not, at the other extreme, mere pursuers of rational self-interest. Reasonable people are willing to "propose principles and standards as fair terms of cooperation and to abide by them willingly, given the assurance that others will likewise do so." They seek "a social world in which they can cooperate with others on terms all can accept as free and equal. They insist that reciprocity should hold within that world so that each benefits along with the others."

Rawls does not, as one might have supposed, expect people to be educated toward just conduct by philosophical argument or moral suasion

63 *Ibid.*, p. 49. There are other aspects of reasonableness for Rawls (see *ibid.*, pp. 81–82), but they are not germane to my argument.
64 *Ibid.*, pp. 49–50; see also pp. 16–17; and in Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), "the basic idea [of reasonableness] is one of reciprocity, a tendency to answer in kind. . . . [T]his tendency is a deep psychological fact" (p. 494). Reasonable people are what Margaret Levy describes as "contingent consenters," in her important work-in-progress about the nature of social cooperation, *Contingencies of Consent*. 
alone—or even primarily—rather, the experience of cooperation in face-to-face associations plays a crucial role. Good liberal citizens are “ready and willing to do their part” in collective endeavors “provided they have the assurance that others will also do their part.”

Trust and confidence in our fellow citizens strengthens and grows more complete over the course of time as we observe “other persons with evident intention” striving “to do their part in just or fair arrangements.”

Successful cooperation breeds, therefore, greater trust and cooperation, and “trust also increases as the basic [political] institutions framed to secure our fundamental interests are more firmly and willingly recognized.”

The virtues that foster social cooperation are in turn augmented by social cooperation; like Coleman’s social capital, these virtues increase with use; as Rawls says, they are part of society’s “political capital.”

But what sorts of institutions, besides the political process itself, promote the all-important cooperative virtues? In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls described the “morality of association” as an important preparation for the highest stage of moral development, the “morality of principle.” Associations are systems of cooperation organized around shared ideals. Members are taught to take seriously the perspectives of their fellow associates; successful association promotes mutual trust, reliance, and friendship. Associations are especially important educators for social cooperation, because here the ties of friendship and mutual trust are especially intense, Rawls observes, and here too feelings of anger, resentment, and guilt are most likely to be visited upon, or felt by, those who shirk their duties.

Strikingly, the logic of Rawls’s account of how the just society might actually be realized is quite similar to accounts emphasizing the “rationality” of cooperation on self-interested grounds. From the perspective of rational self-interest, as we saw above, the reputation for cooperativeness has definite tangible benefits: by cultivating such a reputation, one becomes eligible for participation in other cooperative schemes. But reputation plays a role in Rawls’s account as well: virtuous liberal citizens want to be “fully cooperating members of society,” and they want to be recognized as such by their fellows; they want, in other words, to realize a certain ideal of citizenship in their conduct and “have it recognized that they realize” this ideal.

The convergence here is striking. “Moralists” such as Rawls hope that citizens come to prize a certain ideal of social life for its own sake: a com-

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66 Ibid.
67 Ibid., p. 163. Experiencing the benefits of cooperation on fair terms aids the transition from a “modus vivendi” to a principled political settlement.
68 Ibid., p. 157.
70 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 84.
munity of principle in which citizens act, and are known to act, on fair principles of cooperation. Those who analyze social relations in terms of self-interest and "instrumental" rationality nevertheless converge on a strikingly similar picture of the good society: the very same reputation for fair cooperativeness turns out to be the key to what Tocqueville called "self-interest properly understood." 71

This convergence is not, in the end, surprising, since in both cases the key set of institutions for socializing individual behavior is the network of associations and groups intermediate between individuals and their narrow interests, on the one hand, and the polity as a whole and its very general interests, on the other. Whether one is operating on moralistic or self-interested assumptions, fostering the spirit of cooperation, and the "in-between" virtues of reciprocity, reasonableness, and fairness, turns out to be a crucial element of moral and political education.

VI. CONCLUSION: GROUP DIVERSITY AND LIBERAL STATECRAFT

Liberals often simply ignore the project of political and moral education, perhaps fearing that the very subject brings with it the threat of heavy-handed government interventions. And yet, if Adam Smith did not adopt a "laissez-faire" attitude toward political and moral education, why should we? The health of liberal-democratic political regimes depends upon certain popular virtues and character traits which need to be planned for. Liberalism counsels not the avoidance of civic education, but gentle and (where possible) indirect educative interventions. The arguments surveyed above suggest that liberals should plan for citizen virtue by accommodating and (where possible and necessary) promoting an active and pluralistic pattern of group life.

But why, some will ask, should political observers in America worry about these matters, for surely America remains what Tocqueville observed 150 years ago: a society of "joiners" and active participators, with a vibrant civil society. Unfortunately, this complacency may be misplaced, for America's stock of social capital may be in serious decline. Putnam has recently provided a welter of evidence suggesting that communal activity in America has declined precipitously over the last twenty-five years. 72 Uslaner likewise argues that interpersonal trust was high in the 1960s, but dropped quickly in the mid-1970s, and has since hovered at a level below what is necessary to sustain collective action. 73 Americans may indeed do well, therefore, to think about ways to bolster cooperativeness and community life.

73 Uslaner, "Trends in Comity over Time."
Beyond specifying the healthy structure of group life, as we have done, we should study the ways that different types of groups foster different sorts of virtues. A fully worked out political science of group life (which I cannot provide here) would provide a taxonomy of groups and the virtues they promote and would say something about the optimal mix. In order to inform statecraft or even substantial policy reform, all of this would need to be supplemented by a critical assessment of present conditions and the social pathologies that most need addressing. It is unlikely that a single society-wide approach would be adequate: what is needed in the great American cities will not likely be altogether appropriate for small towns and rural areas.

Different groups and associations are liable to foster different virtues and values. Public institutions and associations are often expected to be politically accountable, open, and nondiscriminatory, making them capable of promoting some virtues (inclusion, mixing across particularistic group lines, perhaps tolerance) but not others. Fully public institutions must often comply with norms of inclusion. Even where they can exclude those who violate norms, they may have to abide by elaborate requirements of due process, making exclusion and norm-enforcement costly. If individuals cannot be excluded, then it may be hard to enforce demanding forms of self-control and responsibility.

Private institutions may have some great advantages when it comes to promoting certain virtues. Consider the example provided by Mitchell Duneier’s *Slim’s Table*, which is based on interviews conducted in the Valois Cafe, a haven of order and respectability on the fringe of Chicago ghetto life. The orderly atmosphere of that cafe depends on the readiness of its tough Greek owners to peremptorily evict anyone who violates the expectations of the establishment. The very fact that private communities may expel people (without elaborate due process) makes them capable of enforcing behavioral norms that are not (or no longer) enforced in much of the public realm: in city parks, on the streets, and elsewhere.

Consider another striking example of the moral resources furnished by cooperative private groups. Historian David Beito has recently described the extensive network of mutual aid societies that existed in the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century. Participation in such societies was widespread: in 1920, eighteen million Americans—or 30 percent of all adults over the age of twenty—belonged to fraternal societies. Secret societies like the Masons, Elks, and Odd Fellows could be counted on to provide aid to members in good standing who were in distress, and they built orphanages and homes for elderly members and

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74 Mitchell Duneier, *Slim’s Table: Race, Respectability, and Masculinity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 96-100 and passim.

their spouses. Fraternal insurance societies played a large social welfare role by offering their members formal insurance policies.

Membership in the aid societies was highest among the lowest tiers of wage earners. These societies played a crucial role in resettling the vast wave of immigrants that entered the country around the turn of the century. A 1919 survey of Chicago wage-earning families found that 74.8 percent of the husbands carried life insurance, along with 58.8 percent of the wives and 48.8 percent of the children under age fourteen. Over half the policies carried by husbands were acquired through fraternal orders. Perhaps most startling, the participation rate of black Americans in mutual aid societies was extremely high, rivaling membership in black churches. Black Americans had the highest rates of insurance coverage of any ethnic group in Chicago in 1919, apparently approaching 95 percent (the widely reported rate of Americans now covered by Social Security).

These fraternal societies practiced exactly the sort of reciprocity that Putnam describes. Consider the remarks of a spokesman for the Modern Woodmen of America (which called its members "Neighbors" and its lodges "camps"):

[A] few dollars given here, a small sum there to help a stricken member back on his feet or keep his protection in force during a crisis in his financial affairs; a sick Neighbor’s wheat harvested, his grain hauled to market, his winter’s fuel cut or a home built to replace one destroyed by a midnight fire—thus has fraternity been at work among a million members in 14,000 camps.

The mutual aid societies were largely self-managed, and thus they were important political educators, especially among immigrants and the working classes.

The mutual aid societies can be sharply distinguished from later government-sponsored welfare provision by the fact that the aid societies made demands on their members as a condition of participation. Membership was premised on adherence to certain moral standards, and thus, as Beito observes, “[o]ne would be hard pressed to find a fraternal society of any economic class or ethnic group that distributed aid as an unconditional entitlement.” Moreover, spokesmen for the fraternal move-

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76 Ibid., pp. 712–13.
77 Before the Depression, fraternal societies dominated the health-insurance market (at least among the working classes). Lodge doctors were hired to care for members for a set fee (ibid., pp. 716–17).
78 The Illinois Health Insurance Commission estimated in 1919 that 93.5 percent of black families in Chicago had at least one member with life insurance—followed by Bohemians (88.9 percent), Poles (88.4 percent), Irish (88.5 percent), and native whites (85.2 percent). Rates of insurance coverage for blacks were even higher in Philadelphia (ibid., pp. 718–19).
79 Ibid., p. 713.
80 Ibid., p. 722.
ment worried precisely that an expanded government role in social welfare would undermine the moral reciprocity on which mutual aid was premised: "The problem of State pensions," they declared, "strikes at the root of national life and character. It destroys the thought of individual responsibility." 81

Recent social historians have criticized the mutual aid societies for distinguishing between deserving and undeserving poor, and stigmatizing those deemed undeserving. Beito points out that all mutual aid societies of every political stripe imposed morally based restrictions on access to benefits. The socialist Western Miners' Federation, for example, denied benefits to members where "the sickness or accident was caused by intemperance, imprudence or immoral conduct." 82

Finally, Beito suggests that even where charity organizations and welfare agencies impose behavioral requirements on aid recipients, these will be perceived as less legitimate and credible than norms that emerge from within mutual aid societies. Charity-society admonitions struck a false note, Beito writes,

not so much in the specific content of the requirements themselves, but because they came from outsiders, most of whom had never been poor. Much like modern welfare-state bureaucrats, early twentieth century charity workers could never truly understand the conditions of the poor nor entirely win their respect.... [T]he poor resented and distrusted the impersonal and bureaucratic system that handed them alms. 83

The rules enforced by mutual aid societies gained their credibility and strength from their nature as horizontally generated and enforced norms. Rules imposed vertically from either charities or state bureaucratic organizations lacked credibility and effectiveness: such rules were not the product of reciprocal mutual commitment, and they were not backed up by the social monitoring of peer groups. Thus, the moral resources and moral education furnished by mutual aid societies stand in sharp contrast with those provided by the welfare state, in which benefits are provided without any behavioral demands (or in which, if behavioral demands are made, they will be ineffective because imposed from the outside). It is crucial, on Beito's account, for aid to spring up from within a moral community, which also generates norms of responsible conduct and means of enforcing these norms.

A crucial task of educational statecraft is to foster a healthy structure and mix of group life. We should, as Tocqueville warned, avoid preempt-

ing associative life by extending centralized political power too far, but that does not mean that we should embrace laissez faire, or that curtailing government is a panacea. Tocqueville himself argued that active citizen participation in political associations complements and encourages active participation in extra-political institutions.84

Relatively inclusive political associations can, moreover, help temper the particularism of our narrower and more local affiliations. The two-party system as it has traditionally existed in America, for example, encourages cooperation among disparate interests in broad-based political coalitions. Parties give these coalitions a shared political identity and program that evolves over time, and parties build bridges between local, state, and national institutions and interests.85 Political parties and other relatively open, inclusive public institutions will play a crucial role, therefore, in fostering broad forms of contact and cooperation across narrower group lines. So public and private groups and associations may have different aptitudes, and neither public nor private associations are panaceas for all that ails us.

Among the tools of community-building and community-shaping that are not much discussed by political scientists are architectural design and urban planning. Christopher Alexander and his associates have argued that today's metropolitan life arrests the development of significantly distinctive subcultures by mixing individuals "irrespective of their life style or culture." Mass societies without opportunities for the development of distinctive subcultures reduce "all life styles to a common denominator" and "[dampen] all significant variety." The appropriate solution is not the creation of insulated ghettos, but rather a "mosaic of subcultures" supported by some genuine boundedness but not hermetic closure or isolation from outsiders. Alexander and his associates describe ways of "breaking the city" into a "vast mosaic of small and different subcultures," while also encouraging an adequate measure of interaction with outsiders.86

Certain virtues are promoted by communities with a geographical, or at least genuinely interactive, basis, and these are not necessarily private. Consider the question of school reform. Many religious schools seem to have an educational advantage because they tap into the right kinds of moral communities—communities of families who genuinely interact with each other. But schools based on choice do not necessarily constitute communities in the relevant sense. While independent private schools may embody certain shared values, they are highly individualis-

84 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 520-22.
tic in that the parents who send their children to these schools have no interaction with each other. In fact, Coleman finds that nonreligious private schools have dropout rates that are even higher than those in the public system. Independent private schools seem to lack even the thin forms of community available to public schools, which at least contain students from the same (albeit extensive) geographical area.  

Public schools, on the other hand, need not take their bearings solely from the openness and diversity of the Great Society; they need not be "shopping malls." Reformed public schools might develop a focused sense of mission; they might tap into the social capital provided by some neighborhoods or interactive communities of like-minded families; they might even acquire the authority to expel students who do not conform to a school's standards. Paul Hill, Gail Foster, and Tamar Gendler argue that when public schools are not required to serve all the disparate interests of a large school zone, but are allowed to develop a particular educational "focus," they can generate many of the advantages of Catholic schools: a sense of shared purpose, a strong sense of authority within the school, better discipline, and improved academic achievement. The problems of public schooling would seem to have less to do with, as John Chubb and Terry Moe argue, democratic control per se, than with excessive centralization and distance from local interactive communities. Individual choice and market competition are not in themselves educational cure-alls.  

It is, likewise, far from obvious that a truly admirable panoply of citizen virtues can be generated solely on the basis of enlightened self-interest, important as this may be. Rotating credit associations and mutual aid groups teach broader and longer-term forms of self-interest along with a number of other important political virtues, but they do not teach all political or moral virtues. They do not, for example, foster beneficence. Beneficence involves, after all, not a series of exchanges for mutual

88 See Paul T. Hill, Gail E. Foster, and Tamar Gendler, High Schools with Character (Santa Monica: Rand, 1990), pp. 15-20, 54-56, and passim. Reform could allow public schools to develop the norms of small societies and the kinds of mechanisms we associate with Catholic schools: uniforms, strict rules about lateness and attendance, and a distinctive sense of mission that is shared by administration, teachers, and students. Of course, the power of teachers' unions is one major obstacle to reform: principals must be freer to select and dismiss staff. Hill et al. suggest that low teacher pay is also a feature of schools with a focused, rather than generalized, sense of mission: it helps insure that teachers share the mission of the school and are not doing the job simply for the money (p. 20). All of this parallels the findings of some important studies of bureaucratic effectiveness; see James Q. Wilson, Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It (New York: Basic Books, 1989), esp. pp. 109-10, 366-68.
advantage over time (as modeled by the rotating credit association) but a transfer of resources without the expectation of a return. Acts of beneficence require far-more-substantial moral backup than compliance with schemes of mutual cooperation, in which self-interest may still furnish the basic motive. Beneficence might seem a purely personal virtue, but, as Russell Hardin argues, distributive justice would appear to be a form of beneficence writ large: both involve unreciprocated transfers from the well-off to the less well-off. Both are more difficult to generate than cooperation for mutual advantage.\textsuperscript{90}

But how do we foster virtues that go beyond enlightened self-interest, such as beneficence? Religious communities may be especially helpful here. Smith’s religious sects may have happy economic and political side-effects, but they are not cooperative schemes for mutual advantage. Religious sects, as Smith described them, promote forms of self-control and discipline more demanding than those promoted by rotating credit associations, and perhaps these are necessary (or at least useful) supports for beneficence and other moral acts which (likewise) must rest on more than considerations of mutual advantage.\textsuperscript{91} Tocqueville argued, similarly, that “religious peoples are naturally strong just at the point where democratic peoples are weak,” which is to say that religion combats the “inordinate love of material pleasure” that characterizes democratic commercial people.\textsuperscript{92}

A political science of group life will acknowledge all of the virtues on which a healthy liberal democracy depends, and attempt to provide for every one. It will not be an exact science or one that permits us to avoid hard moral trade-offs. Local groups may provide moral resources on which liberal democracy depends, but decentralizing authority toward localities, neighborhoods, and particular groups also has its costs. The centralized organizational structures of urban school districts may cause educational pathologies, but these structures also make it possible for public schools to be instruments of integration and inclusion. Localism and particularism have their uses, but they must not be allowed to swallow up an individual’s sense of her rights and of the equal political standing of others. In some places, especially rural areas, the educational imperative may still be to encourage the virtues of critical distance on inherited identities. The state plays a legitimate role, as Durkheim argued, in reminding local communities and particular groups that theirs is not the only moral agenda.

\textsuperscript{90} See the helpful discussion in Russell Hardin, Morality within the Limits of Reason (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), esp. ch. 2.

\textsuperscript{91} Of course, one could say that the gains from cooperation are expected to come in the afterlife, and that the cooperative scheme is between sectarians and God.

\textsuperscript{92} Tocqueville, Democracy in America, pp. 444-45; see also vol. II, Part II, ch. 14.
The liberal political science of group life suggests that we can think more constructively about moral and political education if we think less about the simple and direct means of pedagogy, such as the school curriculum. The very structure of our social lives educates us indirectly, and exerts pervasive influences over our lives. The heavy hand of direct public control may be far from the best way of promoting the character traits and virtues on which our polity depends.

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