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Abstract. This article examines the debate between liberalism and communitarianism in contemporary political philosophy and considers its significance for international relations. The debate tends to pose a false dichotomy between liberalism and communitarianism, and neither position alone can provide an adequate basis for international relations theory. It is necessary to go beyond the liberal-communitarian divide in order to reconcile the valuable insights that may be rescued from both positions. There is a community which is a moral reality, which includes all individuals and maintains their moral integrity, and which can accommodate all legitimate, smaller communities. This is the community of humanity, which is recognized in traditional theories of natural law and the law of nations. The article concludes by considering whether the universal community of humanity requires and justifies world government.

Introduction

In this article I outline and comment on one of the major debates in contemporary political philosophy, and consider its significance for international relations. The debate between liberalism and communitarianism has a particular significance for international relations, which is concerned with the relationships between various communities in the world, and particularly those modern political communities called nation states. I believe, though, that most debates in political philosophy have some relevance for international relations. I believe that international relations is an aspect of, or not significantly different from, politics, and that international theory is an aspect of, or not significantly different from, political theory. As Chris Brown puts it, 'international relations theory is not something separate from, running in tandem with, political theory: it *is* political theory, seen from a particular angle or through a particular filter'.[1]

Contemporary liberal political thought emerges as the mainstream in the revival of normative political philosophy after the dark ages of positivism and behaviouralism, when it was generally held that normative analysis was intellectually

[1] Chris Brown, *International Relations Theory: New Normative Approaches* (Hemel Hempstead, 1992), p. 8. For further consideration of the links between political theory and international relations theory see E. B. F. Midgley, *The Natural Law Tradition and the Theory of International Relations* (London, 1975); Michael Donelan, 'The Political Theorists and International Theory', in M. Donelan (ed.), *The Reason of States* (London, 1978), pp. 75–91; Charles Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations* (Princeton, 1979); Andrew Linklater, *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations* (London, 1982); and Mervyn Frost, *Towards a Normative Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge, 1986).

impossible and politically redundant. The liberal text which is generally recognised as marking the revival of political philosophy, and which is the starting point and focus for much contemporary communitarian criticism, is John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*.[2] Other important statements of contemporary liberalism include Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, and Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously*.[3] The main challenge to liberalism comes from communitarianism, and the debate between these two schools of thought has dominated contemporary political philosophy for the past two decades. The leading communitarians include Michael Sandel, Michael Walzer, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Charles Taylor.[4]

Although the debate in question continues in lively fashion in contemporary political philosophy, there are good reasons to doubt its novelty, and question its terms. In the history of modern political thought a number of communitarian critiques of liberalism are evident. These include Hegel's critique of liberal individualism, especially the social contract theory; Marx's critique of liberalism, especially the theory of human rights; and the New Liberalism of theorists such as T. H. Green and Leonard Hobhouse, which is a critique of earlier liberal doctrines of utilitarianism and laissez-faire individualism. Thus the contemporary debate between liberalism and communitarianism is not entirely new and without precedent.[5]

The terms of the contemporary debate need to be handled with caution. The adversaries are usually identified as liberals and communitarians. However, it is not necessarily all liberals, but more precisely deontological liberals, and atomistic or individualist liberals, who are the main target of communitarian criticism. Some of the so-called communitarians, such as Michael Walzer, would pass as liberals of some sort, and not all of them would accept the anti-liberal position attributed to them. Moreover, not all contemporary liberal political philosophers are opposed to communitarianism. In particular, and importantly, John Rawls has, in the two decades since the publication of *A Theory of Justice*, clarified and amended his views so as to show that he never was vulnerable to all the criticisms offered by communitarians, and that he now has come to concede part of the communitarian case.[6]

[2] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford, 1972).

[3] Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Oxford, 1974); Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously* (London, 1977).

[4] See Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge, 1982); Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (Oxford, 1983); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London, 1981); Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge, 1979); Taylor, 'Atomism', in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences, Philosophical Papers, vol. 2* (Cambridge, 1985).

[5] Contemporary communitarians recognise this point, of course. Michael Walzer acknowledges that the 'writings of the young Marx represent one of the early appearances of communitarian criticism', and argues that the communitarian critique of liberalism is like a fashion: 'transient but certain to return'. Walzer, 'The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism', *Political Theory*, 18 (1990), pp. 6–23, at p. 8 and p. 6.

[6] See John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York, 1993). Amongst other things, Rawls now argues that his theory of justice is political and not metaphysical. That is, the theory of justice cannot depend on a comprehensive religious, philosophical or moral doctrine accepted by all citizens, but on an overlapping consensus of competing doctrines in the political domain of society. The theory of justice is applicable not universally but only in regimes with a certain sort of political culture, that is, constitutional democracies.

The contemporary debate tends to pose a false dichotomy between liberalism and communitarianism.[7] I propose to show the significance of this false dichotomy for international relations. I will argue that neither liberalism nor communitarianism alone provide an adequate basis for international political theory, and that it is possible to reconcile the valuable insights that may be rescued from both positions.

Issues of the liberal–communitarian debate

A number of recent contributors to the literature argue that the debate between liberalism and communitarianism can be understood in terms of three sorts of claims advanced by the latter camp against the former.[8] These three claims are: first, descriptive claims about the nature of individuals as social beings; second, normative claims about the value of community; and third, meta-ethical claims about the status and justification of political principles as shared values of the community.

(a) Individual

Liberals tend to assume or argue that the individual has an identity and value prior to, and independent of, society. For example, Rawls argues that the validity and acceptability of principles of justice are established only if the principles are seen as the objective choices of abstract, rational individuals deliberating in an original position, behind a veil of ignorance which renders them unaware of their natural and social identities. Nozick argues that individuals are possessed of rights prior to political society, which can emerge legitimately only if it does not violate these natural rights.

Against such liberal assumptions and arguments communitarians argue that individuals are constituted by the communities in which they live, and that the values which influence individuals' behaviour, together with the meanings by which they make sense of their lives, derive from their community. Communitarians argue that individuals are embedded in their communities, and are encumbered by community ties. Alasdair MacIntyre offers such an argument.

> ... we all approach our own circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity. I am someone's son or daughter, someone else's cousin or uncle; I am a citizen of this or that city, a member of this or that guild or profession; I belong to this clan, that tribe, this nation. Hence what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles. As such, I

[7] This point is well made by Simon Caney, 'Liberalism and Communitarianism: a Misconceived Debate', *Political Studies*, 40 (1992), pp. 273–89. However, see the rejoinder by Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, 'Liberalisms and Communitarianisms: whose Misconception?', *Political Studies*, 41 (1993), pp. 650–56. Charles Taylor identifies 'a lot of cross-purposes, and just plain confusion' in the liberal–communitarian debate. Charles Taylor, 'Cross-Purposes: The Liberal–Communitarian Debate', in Nancy Rosenblum (ed.), *Liberalism and the Moral Life* (Cambridge, MA., 1989), p.159.

[8] See Caney, 'Liberalism and Communitarianism', whose formulation I follow here; Daniel Bell, *Communitarianism and its Critics* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 4–8; and Patrick Neal and David Paris, 'Liberalism and the Communitarian Critique: A Guide for the Perplexed', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, XXIII (1990), pp. 418–19.

inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. These constitute the given way of my life, my moral starting point.[9]

Michael Sandel emphasizes that the individual can have no identity and value prior to, and independent of, his or her community. He claims the 'community 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'.[10] Against Rawls's account of the objective choice of the principles of justice behind a veil of ignorance, Sandel argues: 'To imagine a person incapable of constitutive attachments ... is not to conceive an ideally free and rational agent, but to imagine a person wholly without character, without moral depth'.[11] Such an abstract person could not, Sandel believes, make any significant moral choices.

Charles Taylor identifies atomism as the doctrine which gives primacy to the rights of individuals and holds that society and the state are constituted by individuals for the fulfilment of their rights. Against atomism Taylor advances a communitarian argument that humans are social beings and that individuals can develop their rational and moral capacities only in the context of society.

> What has been argued in the different theories of the social nature of man is not just that man cannot physically survive alone, but much more that they only develop their characteristically human capacities in society. The claim is that living in society is a necessary condition of the development of rationality, in some sense of this property, or of becoming a moral agent in the full sense of the term, or of becoming a fully responsible autonomous being.[12]

Rawls's rather unrealistic account of how abstract individuals make the important choice of principles of justice, and Nozick's reluctance to offer any philosophical justification of his claim that human beings are possessed of natural rights, perhaps present communitarians with easy targets. Liberals might take more care in their presentation of accounts of the self and of human nature.

(b) Community

Liberals tend to stress individualism as against collectivism; self-interest as against the common good; government limited to protecting individual rights and liberties as against a strong state; and the role of the market and consumer choice rather than state regulation in the distribution of goods. Liberals tend also to advocate a state which is neutral between competing individual conceptions of the good life. For example, Rawls insists on the priority of right (that is, the common principles of justice) over the good (that is, individual conceptions of the good life). The neutral liberal state provides a framework within which individuals are free to determine their own life plans and able to interact to their mutual benefit.

[9] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 204–5.
[10] Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, p. 150.
[11] Ibid., p.179.
[12] Taylor, 'Atomism', pp. 190–1.

Communitarians argue that individualism and self-interest are destructive of social life, the community, social cohesion, and solidarity. There is a now familiar criticism of the New Right which follows these lines.[13] Communitarians maintain that there is a common good or community interest which is greater than individual goods or interests, and that the state should uphold this common good rather than remain neutral. Charles Taylor argues that a good society can exist only on the basis of a common good. He says: 'there are ... significant differences between ... liberals ... who believe that the state should be neutral between the different conceptions of the good life espoused by individuals, on the one hand, and those who believe that a democratic society needs some commonly recognised definition of the good life, on the other—a view which ... I ... defend'.[14] Michael Sandel sums up the communitarian attitude when he says: 'when politics goes well, we can know a good in common that we cannot know alone'.[15]

(c) Justification of political principles

Certain sorts of contemporary liberals seek an objective or neutral foundation for political principles so as to ensure their universal applicability. As already noted, Rawls, in *A Theory of Justice*, identifies the abstract individuals in the original position as the rational choosers of neutral principles of justice which will be acceptable to all rational individuals. Also, he emphasizes the priority of right over the good. In *Political Liberalism*, where his concessions to communitarianism are apparent, and where he confirms that the theory of justice is to be seen as a limited political and not objective metaphysical conception, Rawls still maintains that justice remains neutral between competing comprehensive moral and religious doctrines. Nozick identifies the individual as the possessor of objective natural rights and traces the emergence of the state in terms of the free, uncoerced choices of individuals.

For communitarians the task of political philosophy is not to establish the validity of non-existent objective or neutral universal principles, but to make explicit the shared values and meanings of the community. Thus, political philosophy is concerned with interpretation rather than proof. Michael Walzer makes very clear this communitarian notion of political philosophy as interpretation.

> One way to begin the philosophical enterprise—perhaps the original way—is to walk out of the cave, leave the city, climb the mountain, fashion for oneself (what can never be fashioned for ordinary men and women) an objective and universal standpoint. Then one describes the terrain of everyday life from far away, so that it loses its particular contours and takes on a different shape. But I mean to stand in the cave, in the city, on the ground. Another way of doing philosophy is to interpret to one's fellow citizens the world of meanings that we share.

[13] Sean Sayers says: 'Whether the policies of the Thatcher and Reagan years brought any overall economic benefits is doubtful: that they have had high social costs is now quite evident. The unfettered pursuit of self-interest has weakened social bonds and led to social decay and disintegration on a scale which is causing alarm right across the political spectrum'. Sean Sayers, 'Commentary: The Value of Community', *Radical Philosophy*, 69 (1995), p. 2.

[14] Taylor, 'Cross-Purposes: The Liberal–Communitarian Debate', p. 160.

[15] Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, p. 183.

Justice and equality can conceivably be worked out as philosophical artefacts, but a just or an equalitarian society cannot be.[16]

Another advocate of the communitarian meta-ethical denial of universal morality is Richard Rorty. He writes: 'no description of how things are from a God's-eye point of view, no skyhook provided by some contemporary or yet-to-be-developed science, is going to free us from the contingency of having been acculturated as we were. Our acculturation is what makes certain options live, or momentous, or forced, while leaving others dead, or trivial, or optional'. Rorty confirms that 'we think of our sense of community as having no foundation except shared hope and the trust created by such sharing'.[17] Rorty is a distinctive sort of communitarian. Like some other so-called communitarians he is happy to describe himself as a liberal. Like other communitarians he stresses the moral significance of the solidarity of distinct communities. But unlike other communitarians he is an anti-foundationalist, who denies both that political principles require any philosophical foundation, and that any fixed foundation can be supplied by any community.

The liberal–communitarian debate in political philosophy and the cosmopolitan–communitarian debate in international relations theory

Having outlined the three main issues of the liberal–communitarian debate in contemporary political philosophy, it is now possible to see how this debate relates to that in international relations theory between cosmopolitanism and communitarianism. Chris Brown argues that, for the modern age at least, the 'cosmopolitan/communitarian classification is more or less inclusive' and that the 'cosmopolitan/communitarian divide relates directly to the most central question of any normative international relations theory, namely the moral value to be credited to particularistic political collectivities as against humanity as a whole or the claims of individual human beings'.[18] Brown clarifies the positions on each side of the divide. 'Cosmopolitan thought rejects the idea that states have a right to autonomy when this autonomy could involve the violation of universally applicable standards of behaviour, while communitarian thought is unwilling to accept constraints on state behaviour which do not grow out of the community itself.'[19]

Liberal political philosophy starts from the value and interests of the individual, and is concerned with the political community as a neutral means of permitting the interaction of individuals as they each pursue their chosen goals. Cosmopolitan international theory is concerned with the individual as 'human' and not just 'citizen', and with the global community of all humans and not just the many and various particular political communities. Both liberal political philosophy and cosmopolitan international theory share a concern for the objective justification of

[16] Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, p. xiv.
[17] Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth, Philosophical Papers, vol. 1* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 13 and 33.
[18] Brown, *International Relations Theory*, pp. 27 and 12.
[19] Ibid., p. 110. Onora O'Neill also notes the similarities between liberalism and cosmopolitanism and the opposition of both to communitarianism. Onora O'Neill, 'Transnational Justice', in David Held (ed.), *Political Theory Today* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 279–82.

universally applicable political principles. Communitarian political philosophy stresses the value of the community as that which constitutes individuals and permits them to develop. Communitarian international theory recognises the political community, and importantly the state, as that which provides citizens with essential protection and the means of organizing the various other requirements of a full life. The communitarian strands of both political philosophy and international relations theory hold that the justification of political principles remains confined to particular communities and whatever agreements they are able to make amongst themselves. Both strands of thought doubt that the justification of political principles can transcend particular communities.

There are clear parallels between the liberal–communitarian debate in contemporary political philosophy and the cosmopolitan–communitarian debate in international relations theory. I have noted that there is need for caution in handling the terms of the liberal–communitarian debate, and reason to doubt the dichotomy it establishes. This is true also of the cosmopolitan–communitarian debate. Just as not all liberals are anti-communitarians and not all communitarians are non-liberals, so not all cosmopolitan thought denies the authority of states in the name of global government, and not all communitarian thought denies the possibility of widespread cooperation between states and the maintenance of world peace. The difficulty of establishing clear and fast distinctions between liberalism and communitarianism, and between cosmopolitanism and communitarianism, suggests the inadequacy of the distinctions and the need to go beyond them. However, it is possible to identify representatives of the cosmopolitan and communitarian traditions of international thought. The cosmopolitan notion of a universal community of all humans is maintained by the early modern Spanish theorist Francisco de Vitoria and, to a lesser extent, by his later compatriot Francisco Suarez.[20] Contemporary cosmopolitan international theorists, who believe that standards of justice and morality transcend national and state boundaries include Charles Beitz, who develops the work of John Rawls for a theory of international distributive justice; Andrew Linklater, who argues for a historically conceived ethical universalism; and Onora O'Neill, who develops the work of Immanuel Kant for an account of international duties.[21]

Contemporary communitarian international theorists stress the moral significance, integrity and independence of the nation and/or the state. They include Mervyn Frost, who argues that the state, amongst other communities, constitutes the individual; David Miller, who maintains the moral significance of nationalism; and Michael Walzer, who justifies the principles of non-intervention and self-defence in the relations of states or political communities.[22] Also classifiable as communitarian international theorists are all those so-called realists who maintain a state-centric view of the international environment, in which the state is a more or less self-

[20] See Francisco de Vitoria, *De Potestate Civili*, in A. Pagden and J. Lawrence (eds.), *Francisco de Vitoria: Political Writings* (Cambridge, 1991); and Francisco Suarez, *Tractatus de Legibus ac Deo Legislatore*, in J. B. Scott (ed.), *Selections from Three Works* (Oxford, 1944).

[21] See Charles Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations*; Andrew Linklater, *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations*; and Onora O'Neill, *Faces of Hunger* (London, 1986), *Constructions of Reason* (Cambridge, 1989), and 'Transnational Justice'.

[22] Frost, *Towards a Normative Theory of International Relations*; David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford, 1995); and Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (especially ch. 2), and *Just and Unjust Wars* (Harmondsworth, 1980).

contained entity, subject only to the values of national self-interest.[23] More controversially, one can identify as communitarians those theorists who recognise the existence of an international society of states, and who see the states as being the source of the shared values of the wider society. N. J. Rengger argues that the concept of 'international society' of the so-called English school of international relations, including Hedley Bull, Martin Wight and Adam Watson, 'is a form of communitarianism' and 'depends on assumptions that are familiar to some communitarian theory'.[24] The classical foundations of the 'international society' approach are to be found in the works of Hugo Grotius and Samuel Pufendorf, amongst others.[25] The problem of locating such an approach within the cosmopolitan–communitarian divide is discussed below in terms of the morality of states approach.

Evaluation of liberalism and communitarianism

In order to demonstrate that the liberal–communitarian debate sets up a false dichotomy for politics, and also for international relations through its influence on the cosmopolitan–communitarian debate, it is necessary to evaluate the opposing positions. As communitarianism presents itself as the challenger to liberalism, I propose first to outline the strengths of this challenge and the weaknesses of the liberal position, and then secondly to outline the serious flaws of the communitarian position.

(a) Evaluation of liberalism

Four valuable aspects of the communitarian critique of liberalism may be noted. First, communitarianism stresses the significance of the fact that humans live in communities. Liberals do not, of course, deny this fact, but they may not always acknowledge the significance of it. That individuals live in communities is not merely an empirical generalization, but a normative proposition. When Aristotle claims that 'man is by nature a political animal', he means not only that humans do habitually live together, but that it is good for them to do so, in that they achieve fulfilment of their nature only in the context of social and political life. Aristotle offers his claim about human nature immediately after the claim that 'the state is a creation of nature', by which he means that a certain form of political organization is a fitting and good thing.[26]

[23] Important texts of modern realism include E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, 2nd edn. (London, 1946); and Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 2nd edn. (New York, 1954). The classic texts of realism are usually said to include Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Q. Skinner (ed.) (Cambridge, 1988) , and Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, R. Tuck (ed.) (Cambridge, 1991).

[24] N. J. Rengger, 'A City Which Sustains All Things? Communitarianism and International Society', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 21 (1992), pp. 362 and 353.

[25] See Hugo Grotius, *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* (Oxford, 1925); and Samuel Pufendorf, *On the Duty of Man and Citizen According to Natural Law* (Cambridge, 1991).

[26] Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 1, ch. 2, in R. McKeon (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York, 1941), p. 1129.

The significance of human communities is especially important for international relations, which is, of course, concerned with the relations of various communities, including states and other international actors. The communitarian argument about the moral constitution of individuals by their communities, and the subsequent allegiance of individuals to their communities, including their willingness to fight for them, is significant for international relations. Political leaders may attempt to manipulate community identity, and allegiance to community, to suit their particular political purposes, but such action is possible only because of the underlying, natural inclination of humans to live and thrive in communities.

Second, communitarianism highlights the unfortunate anti-social consequences of a certain sort of atomistic individualism. These consequences are bad enough within domestic politics, when individuals and governments follow the maxim of Jeremy Bentham, echoed two centuries later by Margaret Thatcher, that the 'community is a fictitious body' and that the 'interest of the community is ... the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it'.[27] Community values and structures are neglected in the name of individual interest. The consequences are even worse in the international environment when states and other actors adopt the moral perspective of selfish individuals and neglect the notion of international community with its web of moral obligations. Not only are international values and structures neglected, but war is loosed upon the world.

Third, communitarianism may also be of value in alerting one to the possible mistake of assuming that the values of one community are necessarily those of the whole of humanity. Communitarianism, with its stress on the moral integrity of communities, guards against the imperialism of one particular culture over others. The search for a universal set of values, applicable to all individuals, is a laudable aim, but it is vitiated if the limited moral outlook of one particular culture is imposed on others. Of course, the universal community of humanity may provide the desired common perspective which maintains the moral dignity of all individuals and all lesser communities. This proposition is explored below when I consider the possibility of moving beyond the liberal–communitarian debate.

Fourth, communitarianism correctly questions the liberal notion of the neutral state. It is surely the case that no state can operate effectively without committing itself and its citizens to some substantive good. Rawls acknowledges that his principle of the priority of right over good is dependent on what he refers to as a thin theory of the good. Even if the liberal state claims to provide only a minimal framework within which its citizens are free to make their own choices of life plan, the state can be seen to be committed to particular conceptions of the individual and of the good life. Ronald Beiner argues that even if the liberal state 'does not discriminate between substantive consumer choices, it does privilege the consumer model itself, and this is a particular conception of human life and society that is deeply partisan and has been intensely contested'.[28]

[27] Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart (eds.) (London, 1982), p. 12.

[28] Ronald Beiner, *What's Wrong With Liberalism?* (Berkeley, CA, 1992), p. 7.

(b) Evaluation of communitarianism

Communitarianism succeeds in highlighting some of the weaknesses in liberalism. However, communitarianism is itself a seriously flawed political theory, the dangers of which are very apparent when it is applied to international relations. I offer five specific criticisms of communitarianism.

First, communitarianism tends to be vague about the nature, shape and extent of the community. The community could be, amongst other things, the family, the workplace, the neighbourhood, the tribe, the city, the race, the class, the nation, the state, humanity, or all of creation. Individuals are members of many, sometimes complementary, sometimes competing, communities. It is not clear how communitarians can hope to offer a coherent account of the socially constituted and encumbered individual given the complexity of community membership. However, by stressing the value of communities, which, as noted, are many and various and command diverse allegiances, communitarianism does offer a critical perspective on the political community which dominates the contemporary world: the nation state.

It is worth recalling the obvious truth that the nation state has not always existed, and it is worth considering that it may not continue to exist. There are contemporary problems, for example ecological and medical ones, which do not recognise national boundaries, and which require the global cooperation of scientists and politicians to deal with them. There are communities, for example religious and commercial communities, which would seem to transcend national boundaries and render these largely irrelevant. Within most nation states there are various communities which dispute with others and challenge the authority and boundaries of the state. The modern nation state is not self-sufficient and cannot be considered to be, by nature, the highest political community. There is already some, and there may yet be further, political organization beyond the nation state. Moreover, the nation state may not be the most important factor in building more extensive political organization. Anthony Black says: 'The lesson of communitarianism for international order is ... that groups other than nations (cities, firms, churches, pressure groups, etc.) have no less strong a claim, in principle, to stand as the building blocks of confederation and international law'.[29]

Second, communitarianism holds that individuals are in some way constituted by the communities in which they exist. It is not clear, though, what exactly this claim entails? Are individuals said to be wholly constituted, or only partially shaped by their respective communities? Does not an individual have to exist before he or she can be shaped? If so, this pre-existing individual may be possessed of natural rights or human needs which transcend all political boundaries, and which should be recognised, protected and fulfilled by all political communities.

For international relations the communitarian position holds that the political community, importantly the state, shapes the individual as citizen. Communitarianism neglects the obvious fact that before they can be shaped as citizens, individuals are first human beings, with important similarities to all other human beings, and are members of the whole human race. Their identity as human beings

[29] Anthony Black, 'Nation and Community in the International Order', *Review of International Studies*, 19 (1993), p. 88.

may be more significant than their later constitution as citizens of particular political communities.

It is not the case that liberals fail to recognize the significance of communities for individuals. As Simon Caney points out, it is precisely because Rawls is aware of the significance of social attachments for individuals that he seeks to place them behind a veil of ignorance of their social identity when they choose the principles of justice.[30]

Third, in human life community is important, but the communitarian approach, which emphasizes the supreme value of community, crucially divides humanity into those who are members of a particular community and those who are excluded from it. Communitarianism tends to stress differences rather than similarities, and tends to sanction privilege for those who are included in any community and disadvantage for those who are excluded. Michael Walzer, a communitarian who favours the community of the modern nation state, makes explicit the policy implications of his position.

> The distinctiveness of cultures and groups depends upon closure and, without it, cannot be conceived as a stable feature of human life. If this distinctiveness is a value, as most people ... seem to believe, then closure must be permitted somewhere. At some level of political organization, something like the sovereign state must take shape and claim the authority to make its own admissions policy, to control and sometimes restrain the flow of immigrants.[31]

The control of immigration would seem to be premised on the assumption that if individuals have rights these must be civil and not natural, and are enjoyed only by those who are included in the membership of the society which grants them. The control of immigration certainly denies the human right of free passage.

Some communitarians argue that one should give priority to the values of one's own community over all others, on the grounds that one's moral judgments are constituted by one's own community. David Miller, in offering a communitarian justification of the ethical significance of nationality says: 'The duties we owe to our compatriots may be more extensive than the duties we owe to strangers, simply because they are our compatriots'.[32] This response is, ultimately, arbitrary and inconsistent, for given the communitarian denial of universal morality there is no good reason, as distinct from parochial prejudice, to judge in favour of one's own community over others. This seems to be acknowledged by Richard Rorty, who advocates both solidarity, that is support for one's own culture, and ethnocentricity, that is judgement of other cultures from the point of view of one's own. He says 'we

[30] Caney, 'Liberalism and Communitarianism', p. 278.

[31] Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, p. 39.

[32] David Miller, 'The Ethical Significance of Nationality', *Ethics*, 98 (1988), p. 647. John O'Neill challenges the commonly accepted association of communitarianism and nationalism. He argues: 'Ties to nation do not represent the continuation of ties to community in a society in which such ties are being otherwise undermined—they rather signify the absence of such ties. The nation is one of the main vehicles for the construction of the unencumbered self and the disappearance of ties of community'. John O'Neill, 'Should Communitarians be Nationalists?', *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 11 (1994), p. 136.

must, in practice, privilege our own group, even though there be no non-circular justification for doing so.'[33]

Communitarianism involves not only the division of the world into us and them, and the parochial favouring of us over them, but also the neglect or denial of international distributive justice. This implication of communitarianism for international relations is noted and criticized by Onora O'Neill.

> If communitarians are correct, international distributive justice is not an issue: compatriots have legitimate priority. International distributive justice would indeed be unthinkable if the boundaries between states, and between modes of discourse and ideologies, were total and impervious. This however is the very respect in which the modern world is different from its predecessors. It is not a world of closed communities with mutually impenetrable ways of thought, self-sufficient economies and ideally sovereign states. What is more, communitarians acknowledge this in practice as much as anyone else. Like the rest of us they expect to interact with foreigners, and rely on practices of translation, negotiation and trade that cross boundaries. If complex, reasoned communication and association breach boundaries, why should not principles of justice do so too?[34]

Fourth, some liberals believe that the very notion of community threatens individual rights and liberties. John Rawls, for example, 'rejects political society as a community because, among other things, it leads to the systematic denial of basic liberties and may allow the oppressive use of the government's monopoly of (legal) force'.[35] He also argues: 'If we think of political society as a community united in affirming one and the same comprehensive doctrine, then the oppressive use of state power is necessary for political community'.[36] I do not accept such arguments because I believe that community is important in human life and that community is compatible with individual rights and liberties. However, I do believe that the communitarian notion of the socially embedded or encumbered self threatens the notion of individual rights and liberties. Communitarianism denies all natural rights and argues that individuals enjoy only those civil rights granted to them by their respective communities. Not every political community recognizes all rights and liberties, and some communities offer their citizens few if any rights. Communitarian theory leaves members of such communities vulnerable and helpless. Anthony Black argues that 'national groups, just like other "communities", only acquire moral legitimacy insofar as they bow their heads under the yoke of civil rights. This poses a special problem in cultures in which such rights are not established'.[37]

Fifth, and finally, the communitarian meta-ethical claim, that morality is relative to community and that there can be no universal morality which transcends particular communities, is the most significant for both political philosophy and

[33] Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth,* p. 29. Rorty does seek to offer some support for his privileging of liberalism. Although all human communities remain ethnocentric and limited by the bounds of their culture, it is the merit of 'the liberal culture of recent times' that it 'has found a strategy for avoiding the disadvantage of ethnocentrism'. It is in the nature of liberal culture 'to be open to encounters with other actual and possible cultures'. The liberal culture makes 'openness central to its self-image' and 'prides itself on its suspicion of ethnocentrism' (p. 2). One problem with this argument is that the openness which is the supposed merit of the liberal culture is a value embedded in, and peculiar to, this culture.

[34] O'Neill, 'Transnational Justice', p. 282.

[35] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 146, note 13.

[36] Ibid., p. 37.

[37] Black, 'Nation and Community in the International Order', p. 8.

international relations theory. The claim raises the problem of relativism, which haunts all political thought, but particularly international thought. By locating the justification of political principles within one of a plurality of communities, communitarianism renders all political values relative to their respective communities and denies them universal and objective status. The liberal Ronald Dworkin notes that relativism is inherent in Michael Walzer's communitarianism and criticizes it for disabling proper moral comparison and judgment.

> Walzer has not thought through the consequences of his relativism for a society like ours, in which questions of justice are endlessly contested and debated ... For it is part of our common political life, if anything is, that justice is our critic and not our mirror ... In the end ... political theory can make no contribution to how we govern ourselves except by struggling, against all the impulses that drag us back into our own culture, toward generality and some reflective basis for deciding which of our traditional distinctions and discriminations are genuine and which spurious ... We cannot leave justice to convention and anecdote.[38]

If all values are relative to communities, and if in international relations the significant communities are states, then there can be no moral principles which transcend state boundaries and so no objective justification for, or evaluation of, foreign policy. If communitarianism is correct, all states are caught in the dilemma of relativism. If any state, by means of its foreign policy, imposes its own values on other states it does so with no objective justification and betrays parochial self-interest, or moral imperialism. On the other hand, if states recognize their moral diversity and seek to protect this by means of principles of self-determination and non-intervention, they elevate such principles to universal status and thus implicitly deny relativism. Thus is it shown that relativism is incoherent.

Relativism may be thought by some to offer proper respect for the diversity of cultures and values, and to safeguard against cultural imperialism, supposedly founded on supposedly false absolutism. For example, Walzer sees great political danger in political thought which seeks to be detached, objective and constructive, rather than merely interpretive of the values of particular communities. He writes: 'The problem with disconnected criticism, and thus with criticism that derives from newly discovered or invented moral standards, is that it presses its practitioners towards manipulation and compulsion'.[39] The relativism of those who celebrate differences of cultures and communities leads them, however, to adopt incoherent positions on important issues of international relations. Consider the reactions of an imaginary relativist, of generally tolerant and anti-authoritarian persuasion, to the Salman Rushdie affair. She feels uncomfortable about a writer being condemned to death for having written something, but feels unable to support any absolute right to freedom of speech. She feels uncomfortable about the leaders of one state issuing

[38] Ronald Dworkin, *A Matter of Principle* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 217, 219–20. Walzer, in common with most relativists, seeks to deny his relativism. In a number of publications following *Spheres of Justice*, including *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), *The Company of Critics* (London, 1989), and *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame, IN, 1994), Walzer has attempted to argue that social criticism is possible in the absence of universal, objective principles. Walzer's attempt is bound to fail because his communitarianism cannot allow any critic an objective position outside of any community, or sufficient critical distance from any community, from which to formulate any objective evaluation.

[39] Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, p. 64.

death threats against the citizen of another state, but feels unable to support any absolute principle of sovereignty. She suggests that the writer should have taken care not to offend the values of another community, but feels uncomfortable about this community's claim to fundamental truth. She calls for a general tolerance, but feels uncomfortable about having to tolerate the intolerant. Relativists who celebrate moral differences in the world, and call for a general tolerance of diversity, seem not to appreciate the inconsistency and arbitrariness of their position. If all morality is relative to community, and there can be no universal principles of morality which transcend communities, then there is no good reason, as distinct from arbitrary prejudice, to elevate the principle of tolerance to universal status.

To render morality relative to particular communities, and to leave justice to convention is to run the risk of falling into uncritical, conservative attitudes. Amy Gutmann notes that, for example, Michael Sandel values the patriarchal family, and Alasdair MacIntyre values patriotism.[40] As noted above, Michael Walzer values the nation state. Attachment to a particular community suggests reluctance to move beyond it when morally necessary.

In summary, liberalism seeks to defend the dignity and integrity of the individual. It seeks also to promote the impartial or objective foundation, and so universal applicability, of its principles. Communitarianism reminds us that individuals do not and cannot live full lives outside communities, and points to the antisocial consequences of atomistic individualism. Communitarianism also correctly questions the liberal notion of the neutral state. However, communitarianism threatens, or does not guarantee, individual rights and liberties, and poses the problem of moral relativism.

The inadequacy of the liberal–communitarian debate

The inadequacy of the liberal–communitarian debate, and particularly the false dichotomy which it establishes, may be illustrated by its failure to encompass an important, although flawed, position in international relations theory. The morality of states position, which is the normative aspect of the international society approach noted above, seems to be neither wholly liberal nor wholly communitarian. Charles Beitz identifies the morality of states position as part of the modernized natural law tradition and traces its origins to Samuel Pufendorf, who treated states, and not individuals, as the subject of international morality.[41] Chris Brown offers a contemporary account of the morality of states position: 'Whatever the cultural differences that undoubtedly exist in the modern world, the very fact of the ubiquity of the state form tends to create a common framework of rights and duties, and thus the basis for normative theory'. He continues: 'The existence of a plurality of cultures does not undermine the possibility of moral discourse but it does ensure that the ethical foundations of the world order can only be based on the needs of coexistence and not on any shared commitment to a common conception of the

[40] Amy Gutmann, 'Communitarian Critics of Liberalism', *Philosophy And Public Affairs*, 14 (1985), pp. 308–22.
[41] Charles Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations*, pp. 8 and 65.

good life'. This ethic of coexistence permits no effective evaluation of the domestic policies of one state by another because 'for the most part the rule of non-interference ... must have priority'.[42]

Brown clearly believes that the morality of states position is communitarian. States are distinct communities subject only to their own moral principles and such international principles as may be reached by mutual agreement with other states.[43] There are no objective, universal moral principles which transcend states. Beitz, on the other hand, argues that the 'morality of states might be understood as the international analogue of nineteenth-century liberalism. It joins a belief in the liberty of individual agents with an indifference to the distributive outcomes of their economic interaction'.[44] According to the morality of states position, states, like liberal individuals, are free to pursue their own conceptions of the good life, but only within a neutral framework of universally applicable principles which permit their interaction.

The morality of states position is vulnerable to a number of criticisms, insofar as it is logically incoherent and morally inadequate. The position offers a minimal response to relativism, by showing how states with different moral outlooks, and so no common moral purpose, can reach agreement on certain common, neutral principles of interaction. However, the morality of states position also exemplifies the incoherence of relativism. If the principles of interaction, or norms of coexistence, such as non-interference, self-determination and sovereignty, are to be effective in international relations, they need to be virtually universally accepted and applicable. But for all states to grant primacy to these principles, over and above their particular moral outlooks, is to elevate them to non-relative, absolute, universal status. The morality of states position assumes, incoherently, both that states have nothing but their own distinct, relative moral outlooks, and that states will recognize universal, non-relative principles of behaviour. If there may be some absolute, universal political principles, there may be others, in which case the relativist denial of common moral purpose which underpins the morality of states position may itself be denied.

The morality of states position recognises the integrity of individual states, and perhaps even their individual leaders, in the making and adjudication of mutual agreements governing their interactions. But the position remains state-centric and fails to recognise the integrity of human beings, whose moral worth is not exhausted by their membership of a particular state. That which unites individuals as human beings may be morally more significant than that which divides them as citizens of particular, transitory states. Also, as noted above in the previous quote from Beitz, the morality of states position, by giving moral autonomy to states, fails entirely to be concerned with issues of global distributive justice. Beitz points out that 'because global distributive principles apply ultimately to persons rather than states, they may

[42] Chris Brown, 'Not My Department? Normative Theory and International Relations', *Paradigms*, 2 (1987), pp. 107, 109 and 110. Another modern account of the morality of states position is set out in R.J. Vincent, *Nonintervention and International Order* (Princeton, 1974), ch. 9.

[43] Chris Brown assumes that the 'morality of states' is the normative aspect of the idea of 'international society': Brown, *International Relations Theory,* p. 123.

[44] Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations*, p. 66.

require that interstate transfers and international institutional reforms be designed to achieve specific domestic distributional results'.[45]

Charles Beitz identifies the root error of the morality of states position as the mistaken assumption that states are moral persons, and offers a more adequate conception of the state. He says:

> the idea that all states have a right of autonomy is incorrect because the analogy of states and persons is imperfect. States are not sources of ends in the same sense as are persons. Instead, states are systems of shared practices and institutions within which communities of persons establish and advance their ends. The appropriate analogy of individual autonomy in the international realm is not national autonomy but conformity of a society's basic institutions with appropriate principles of justice.[46]

States exist as means of organizing certain human activities. They are not ends in themselves but means to human ends. They have not always existed and they may not continue to exist. They may now frustrate rather facilitate the satisfaction of human ends. Alternative ways of organizing human affairs across the globe may now be preferable. Thus, the morality of states position may be morally impoverished.

The morality of states position shows how the liberal–communitarian divide does not exhaust the possibilities of international relations theory. The liberal–communitarian divide is less clear cut than may be suggested by participants in the debate. The liberal emphasis on a neutral framework for interaction between individuals is not wholly different from communitarianism, for both positions assume the existence of different and competing traditions of morality.

Beyond the liberal–communitarian divide

I have argued that the liberal–communitarian debate sets up a false dichotomy, and that there are both strengths and weaknesses on both sides. In order to rescue the valuable aspects of the two adversarial positions it is necessary to go beyond the liberal–communitarian divide.

Can there be a reconciliation of the valuable aspects of liberalism and communitarianism? In other words, is there a community which is a moral reality; which includes all individuals and maintains their moral integrity; which can accommodate all other legitimate, smaller communities; and which can be the fount of universal values? There is but one: the human community. The human community alone can satisfy both the cosmopolitan aspiration of human unity and the communitarian ideal of group membership and solidarity.

In political philosophy the notion of the community of all humanity is articulated and supported most ably by the tradition of natural law theory. Francisco de Vitoria

[45] Ibid., p. 181. In his construction of a theory of international distributive justice, Beitz makes much use of the work of John Rawls. Given that Rawls has revised his original theory of justice in the light of communitarian criticism, it would be interesting to know how, if at all, Beitz might wish to revise his work. (This article was completed before the publication of the revised edition of Beitz's Political Theory and International Relations (Princeton, 1999), which contains a new afterword.)

[46] Ibid., p. 180.

believes that there is a natural law that applies to all humans everywhere. He recognizes that humans are gathered in particular political communities or commonwealths and are subject to the positive laws enacted by their legitimate leaders. But all political communities are subject to the *ius gentium*, or law of nations, precisely because the whole world is, as it were, a commonwealth which can sanction law. Vitoria says:

> the law of nations (*ius gentium*) does not have the force merely of pacts or agreements between men, but has the validity of a positive enactment (*lex*). The whole world, which is in a sense a commonwealth, has the power to enact laws which are just and convenient to all men; and these make up the law of nations. From this it follows that those who break the law of nations, whether in peace or in war, are committing mortal crimes ... No kingdom may choose to ignore this law of nations, because it has the sanction of the whole world.[47]

The moral strength of the *ius gentium* appears various in origin. The *ius gentium* 'either is or derives from natural law' and its 'derivation from natural law is manifestly sufficient to enable it to enforce binding rights'. Vitoria goes on to say: 'But even on the occasions when it is not derived from the natural law, the consent of the greater part of the world is enough to make it binding, especially when it is for the common good of all men'.[48] The *ius gentium* occupies a somewhat ambiguous space between natural law and positive law. The *ius gentium* is not identical to natural law, although it may derive from it, but neither is it merely the product of a pact or agreement between political communities, although it may derive moral force from the consent of the world. What is clear is that the *ius gentium* is concerned not with the interests or convenience of any particular state considered to be sovereign, but with the common good of humanity.

A proper understanding of the common good offers an understanding of the proper relationship of the individual and the political community, which in turn offers a perspective beyond the liberal–communitarian divide. Jacques Maritain argues that 'the relation of the individual to society must not be conceived after the atomistic and mechanistic pattern of bourgeois individualism which destroys the organic social totality, or after the biological ... pattern of the statist ... totalitarian conception which swallows up the person'. Human beings are by their nature social beings and so must live in society. According to Maritain: 'The end of society is the good of the community, of the social body'. But this good of the social body must be 'understood to be a common good of *human persons*'. Thus, the common good 'is therefore common to both *the whole and the parts* into which it flows back and which, in turn must benefit from it'.[49]

Do the notions of world community, the *ius gentium*, and the common good of all humanity entail world government? I doubt that they do, if by world government is meant a unitary, global, political authority with jurisdiction over all human

[47] Francisco de Vitoria, *De Potestate Civili*, question 3, article 4, in A. Pagden and J. Lawrence (eds.), *Francisco de Vitoria: Political Writings* , p. 40.

[48] Francisco de Vitoria, *De Indis*, question 3, article 1, in A. Pagden and J. Lawrence (eds.), *Francisco de Vitoria: Political Writings*, p. 281.

[49] Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, translated by John Fitzgerald (Notre Dame, IN, 1966), pp. 101, 50 and 51 (Maritain's emphasis). For a relevant discussion of Maritain see Michelle Watkins and Ralph McInerny, 'Jacques Maritain and the Rapprochment of Liberalism and Communitarianism', in K. Grasso, G. Bradley and R. Hunt (eds.), *Catholicism, Liberalism and Communitarianism* (Lanham, MD, 1995), pp. 151–72.

affairs. Such an arrangement might well have the consequence that, as one critic puts it, 'all individuality and cultural integrity would be lost'.[50] What is entailed, I believe, is a system of government for the world ordered according to the principle of subsidiarity. This now much questioned principle, which is often ridiculed by those who fail to comprehend it, can establish both the necessity and the limits of a global political authority. Pope John XXIII outlines this clearly in his encyclical letter of 1963, *Pacem in Terris*.

> The special function of this universal authority must be to evaluate and find a solution to economic, social, political and cultural problems which affect the universal common good. These are problems which, because of their extreme gravity, vastness and urgency, must be considered too difficult for the rulers of individual States to solve with any degree of success. But it is no part of the duty of this universal authority to limit the sphere of action of the public authority of other States, or to arrogate any of its functions to itself. On the contrary, its essential purpose is to create world conditions in which not only the public authorities of every nation, but also its citizens and intermediate groups, can carry out their tasks, fulfil their duties and claim their rights with greater security.[51]

The principle of subsidiarity might sanction a range of public authorities: a supreme global authority, concerned with global issues; various functionally defined suprastate organizations; states themselves; and various regional and local substate organizations.

The common good of humanity protects the dignity and integrity of all individuals whilst maintaining the good of all legitimate human communities, which are necessary for the human being as a social and political animal. This common good must be conceived dynamically. That is, the development of the world community and its political institutions must be accommodated by a concept of the common good as a developing moral reality. As Maritain says: 'The common good in our day is certainly not just the common good of the nation and has not yet succeeded in becoming the common good of the civilized world community. It tends, however, unmistakably towards the latter'.[52] The development of the world community is clearly dependent on earlier developments in human transport and exploration which opened up the whole world, and developments in trade and other human interaction which linked the parts of the world. Such developments present not only opportunities but also, in the form of global problems demanding global solutions, requirements for greater global cooperation. The further development of the world community is likely to be dependent on further developments in technology which

[50] Chris Brown, 'Cosmopolitan Confusions: A Reply to Hoffman', *Paradigms*, 2 (1988), p. 107.

[51] Pope John XXIII, Encyclical Letter, *Pacem in Terris* (London, 1965), paras. 140 and 141. The 'principle of subsidiary function' is outlined by Pope Pius XI in his 1931 Encyclical Letter, *Quadragesimo Anno* (London, 1960), in which he comments on the 1891 Encyclical Letter of Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, and seeks to establish the correct role of government in social and economic affairs. Pius XI says: 'just as it is wrong to withdraw from the individual and commit to a group what private enterprise and industry can accomplish, so too it is an injustice, a grave evil and a disturbance of right order, for a larger and higher association to arrogate to itself functions which can be performed efficiently by smaller and lower societies'. He continues: 'Let those in power, therefore, be convinced that the more faithfully this principle of subsidiary function be followed, and a graded hierarchical order exist between various associations, the greater will be both social authority and social efficiency, and the happier and more prosperous the condition of the commonwealth' (paragraphs 79 and 80).

[52] Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, p. 55.

facilitate global communication and interaction. This dynamic conception of the common good is not relativistic. Any development of the common good does not contradict, but rather fulfils, earlier realizations of it.

Exactly how the world community, with its range of public authorities, might develop is beyond the scope of this article, and perhaps beyond our ken. Such development is perhaps not guaranteed.