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Pluralism as a Social Practice: A Pragmatist Approach to Engaging Diversity in Public Life

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PLURALISM AS A SOCIAL PRACTICE:

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PLURALISM AS A SOCIAL PRACTICE:

A PRAGMATIST APPROACH TO ENGAGING DIVERSITY IN PUBLIC LIFE

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In

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With a

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by

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Pluralism as a Social Practice:
A Pragmatist Approach to Engaging Diversity in Public Life

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My dissertation lays a theoretical framework for rethinking the ways in which political and moral philosophers conceive pluralism and diversity in public life. I argue that many philosophers who write on the topic do not have a sophisticated understanding of religion, are not sufficiently attentive to historically produced power differentials, and/or do not adequately recognize the intersectional dimensions of diversity. Building on Jeffrey Stout's notion of democracy as a social practice, and supplemented with Cornel West's understanding of democratic faith, I use my more complex account of diversity to argue that pluralism is best approached as a social practice, instead of as a challenge that must be navigated by shared traditions or structures of justification.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation in religious ethics is also a work of political philosophy that aims to contribute to the existing literature on pluralism in public life. Though the exact definition is open to debate, pluralism, in the context of a liberal democracy, can be broadly understood as a system in which people of diverse religions and belief systems can coexist peacefully with, more or less, equal opportunity to share in political power. There are two separate sets of questions that political philosophers must address when discussing pluralism. The first are questions about the laws and government structures that make up pluralism as a political institution. The second set of questions is addressed to citizens living in a pluralist democracy concerning how they ought to act in public life in relation to their government and their fellow citizens. These are questions about civic virtue. This dissertation is primarily concerned with this second set of questions.

I advocate for approaching pluralism as a social practice, and in doing so I am recommending a way for citizens to navigate life in a diverse pluralistic society. The government has a role in adopting such an approach to pluralism—citizens are socialized in public schools and government mandated curriculums, influenced by the rhetoric of public figures, and informed by the constitutional guarantees that undergird the laws of the republic. However, in advancing a notion of pluralism as a social practice, I am not recommending a framework for legislation or a test for the courts to rule on matter of religious freedom. Rather, I present a strategy for citizens to navigate the challenges of life in a diverse society, and to do so in a way

that promotes justice and equality. Thus, I also aim to make a contribution to political ethics. I do not presume that my theory of pluralism is broadly applicable to every political or cultural context. As a citizen of the United States, I take American democracy as the context for my work. Though I would like to think citizens of other countries could find some value in my thought, I cannot claim to speak for them or their particular concerns. I take a cue from Jeffrey Stout, an author from whom I will draw heavily in advancing my own theory, in understanding my work as, in part, an act of social criticism. As such, it is "necessarily a somewhat parochial affair."[1]

A large part of the conversation on pluralism and civic virtue in political philosophy has focused on what sorts of reasons people might use to defend their positions in public life. It is religious reasons that are primarily in question here. Should religious persons living in a religiously diverse society bring their religious reasons for advocating a certain policy or position into the public debate? Some worry that doing so is a threat to social order and an unfair imposition of religion on one's fellow citizens. Others would argue that excluding such reasons from public debate is an unreasonable expectation of religious citizens and an undue limit on the exercise of religious freedom. I am more sympathetic to the latter argument, but this dissertation is not largely aimed at defending that position. Though I discuss this question briefly, specifically as it relates to the work of John Rawls, I do not dwell on it at length because: a) there is not much new territory to cover in the debate. Both positions have been detailed, analyzed, and critiqued by numerous authors, and I have very little to add to those efforts. And b) I do not find it to be a terribly useful way to approach discussions of pluralism and civic virtue. As will become clear, I am more interested in the *practices* of debate and interaction that allow

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[1] Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004): 15.

productive public conversation and promote cooperation across lines of difference (religious and otherwise). These are not entirely separate questions. After all, choosing appropriate reasons to defend one's position is part of the way one practices public discussion. I simply want to shift the focus away from the content of conversation and towards the way conversation, and public interaction more broadly, is practiced. This is not to say content is altogether unimportant. Rather, it is to suggest that the way one chooses to frame questions and responses is just as important as what is contained in those questions and responses, perhaps more important. Additionally, my focus on practices aims to look beyond debate on policies and social issues as the arena for theorizing pluralism. Debate on public issues is often the focus for political philosophers thinking through the challenges of diversity. This is understandably so, but I would like to think more broadly about how to build a healthy pluralism that promotes public cooperation. I suspect such a foundation for cooperation does not begin with debate of issues, but with cultivating certain habits that seek understanding and deploying those habit in everyday life. In fact, this is one place I distinguish myself from Stout, whose practices of democracy seem to center on the practices of debate and discussion.

A second part of the conversation on pluralism concerns the extent to which people need a unified belief system, worldview, or vision of society in order for them to live together peacefully or to make meaningful progress on moral issues as a collective. Among the authors I discuss, Alasdair MacIntyre is the most obvious example of a thinker who regards a high degree of unity—in this case a unified conception of human flourishing or the common good—as a prerequisite for a well-functioning society. MacIntyre is decidedly opposed to pluralism because of this. However, even among proponents of pluralism, there is often a concern about social cohesion that leads them to deploy various strategies that seek unity amid difference. Limiting

religious reasons in public conversation is one such strategy. Other strategies include the partial or complete dismissal of identity politics (or any politics that seeks to celebrate difference), the search for a common moral or political language that bridges differences, or promotion of a secular civic faith, among others. This impulse towards unity is understandable, and though I believe many thinkers go too far in excluding religion and other matters of identity from political life, I recognize that any theory of political pluralism must address the question of social cohesion. Approaching pluralism as a social practice provides some strategies for building a common life amidst diverse worldviews, identities, and experiences. However, I do not aim to comprehensively address all possible challenges that may arise in a diverse society. For now, I seek only to lay a theoretical framework with some preliminary case studies to address practical concerns. Further research on practical application will have to be reserved for future projects.

In the course of framing pluralism as a social practice, I also argue for a more intersectional way of thinking about pluralism. Pluralism is generally associated with religious diversity, or, perhaps more broadly, a diversity of belief systems both religious and non-religious. I want to think about how religious diversity intersects with other sorts of diversity in order to better illuminate the internal diversity of religious traditions, the power differentials that exist within and between traditions, and the sources of social conflict that theories of pluralism seek to address. Most of my discussion of intersectionality is devoted to issues of race and gender. I unfortunately neglect other loci of identity (such as ability, sexuality, class, etc.) only for lack of space, and not because I find them unimportant. Race and gender provide strategic examples to illustrate the need for an intersectional pluralism. Approaching pluralism as a social practice allows for that sort of intersectionality, because it seeks strategies for understanding people as complex human beings that are not defined only by their religion, or, for that matter,

by their race or gender. As a practice, pluralism is never finished, always adapting to particular contexts, diverse actors, and changing circumstances. The social practices of pluralism will always themselves be necessarily plural.

I begin my argument by exploring the work of two philosophers, John Rawls and Alasdair MacIntyre, whose thought on liberal pluralism has been influential, albeit in very different ways. John Rawls, whose work I explore in Chapter 1, is a prominent proponent of liberal pluralism. A just democratic society, in his view, is characterized by a reasonable pluralism that can accommodate a diverse array of religious and non-religious belief systems, and he spends considerable space weighing how such a diversity of worldviews can coexist peacefully in a way that is equally fair for all citizens. Rawls provides a helpful starting point, but I find that he focuses too much on competing belief systems as a challenge to social cohesion. This leads him to impose undue restrictions on religious persons and to neglect the historical and material conditions that also pose a risk for inciting social conflict.

In Chapter 2, I examine Alasdair MacIntyre, a notable skeptic of liberal pluralism. MacIntyre finds that the sovereign individual, created in the enlightenment and idealized in liberal thought, has produced a condition in which arguments over moral issues become interminable, because everyone is speaking from different, incommensurable premises. His proposed solution is the recovery of Aristotelian notions of virtue and practices and a tradition-based understanding of rationality. Though I will draw on his retrieval of virtue ethics, his emphasis on practices, and his elaboration of a politics of local community, I am left unconvinced that the tradition-based communities he seeks really provide the resources to resolve moral disagreement and progress towards a more just society.

My third chapter transitions from an extended discussion of particular authors to an exploration of the Pragmatist school of philosophy. The insights I derive from pragmatist philosophy provide me with a sort of *via media* between Rawls and MacIntyre, allowing me to preserve what is valuable from both authors while correcting for their shortcomings. Ultimately, I draw most heavily on the pragmatist philosophers Cornel West and Jeffrey Stout as I move towards my own constructive account of pluralism. West's notion of democratic faith and Stout's notion of democracy as a social practice provide foundational concepts as I begin to elaborate my theory of pluralism as a social practice in the final chapter.

My fourth chapter attempts to move from the theoretical to the practical realm. I will describe in more detail what it means to approach pluralism as a social practice before exploring questions of application. Two brief case studies explore what it might look like to practice pluralism in different contexts and with different goals in mind. I use these case studies as a starting point for further research that will consider additional strategies and practices that citizens can learn from, as they seek to build relationships and habits of interaction that allow for a more productive pluralism to develop over time.

CHAPTER 1

RAWLS, PLURALISM, AND THE ROOTS OF SOCIAL CONFLICT

The work of political philosopher John Rawls is a helpful place to start when considering

a new approach to pluralism, because his rethinking of democracy and pluralism in the liberal

tradition has been particularly influential. Rawls writes in the social contract tradition and is

frequently credited with reviving contract theory in political philosophy. However, he does not

use the contract metaphor, as the classical theorists did, to explain the legitimacy of government.

Instead, he uses the idea of contract as tool to uncover the principles that should be used to order

a just, democratic society. It is, therefore, an exercise in moral theory as much as it is political

theory. A just, democratic society, as he sees it, is characterized by a reasonable pluralism that

can accommodate a diversity of belief systems. Rawls has often been criticized for putting too

many restrictions on religious persons in his vision of pluralism.[2] Though I am sympathetic to

this critique, I would like to modify it a bit. Rawls does go too far in excluding religion from

public life, but this is not because he is a closet secularist or lacks respect for religious people. In

fact, some of Rawls's posthumously published writings demonstrate the tremendous respect he

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[2] See for example Christopher Eberle, *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Paul Weithman, *Religion and the Obligations of Citizenship,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Nicholas Wolterstorff, "The Role of Religion in Decision and Discussion of Political Issues", in R. Audi and N. Wolterstorff, *Religion in the Public Square* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 67–120; as well as others I will discuss below.

held for religion.[3] Rather, I argue Rawls's attempt to separate religion and politics to the greatest extent possible results from an inaccurate diagnosis of the roots of conflict in society. He identifies differences of religious and philosophical beliefs as the main source of social conflict but ignores the material and historical sources of conflict that arise from inequality of wealth, status, and opportunity, as well as past injustices. Because Rawls ignores this second aspect of social conflict, his account of pluralism is insufficiently complex, historicist, or intersectional, and this limits the usefulness of his still influential theory for navigating the challenges of pluralism.

1.1 Rawls on Religion and Pluralism

Rawls's theory evolved over his lifetime as he responded to his critics and revised his thought accordingly. In *A Theory of Justice,* Rawls presented a comprehensive vision of justice that, according to his critics, left little room for a diversity of beliefs and perspectives. In the later expression of his theory, *Political Liberalism*, Rawls introduced the distinction between comprehensive and political liberalism. He characterized his theory of justice as a purely political conception that could tolerate a diversity of comprehensive worldviews (including religious worldviews). Having made this distinction, he devotes considerable energy in *Political Liberalism* to developing his conception of "reasonable pluralism." We can consider *Political Liberalism* to be the first systematic explanation of Rawls's mature theory, and his last book, *Justice as Fairness,* can be considered his final and most developed statement of it. I will

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[3] John Rawls, *A Brief Enquiry into the Meaning of Sin and Faith, with "On My Religion,"* Ed. Thomas Nagel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

concentrate my summary of Rawls' thinking about religion on this later stage of his work, focusing mainly on *Political Liberalism* and *Justice as Fairness*.

To understand what Rawls is trying to accomplish, it is important to note that his political philosophy is an exercise in ideal theory aimed at elucidating what it would look like, given realistic limits, for a democratic society like the U.S. to attain the full realization of its political values. He does not spend much time dwelling on our less than ideal reality, because he believes ideal theory is our best tool in striving towards democratic perfection. There is much debate among political philosophers about the utility of ideal theory as a normative tool, and this is partly in response to the paradigm established by Rawls.[4] My critique of Rawls is not a critique of ideal theory in general or a defense of non-ideal theory per se. Rather, my problem lies in his stated reasons for choosing ideal theory as his method. The work of ideal theory, he says, is to enable us to continue public discussion even when it seems we lack enough shared understanding to resolve the issue at hand. He writes:

> Since the conflicts in the democratic tradition about the nature of toleration and the basis of cooperation for a footing of equality have been persistent, we may suppose they are deep. Therefore, to connect these conflicts with the familiar and the basic we look to the fundamental ideas implicit in the public political culture and seek to uncover how citizens themselves might, on due reflection, want to conceive of their society as a fair system of cooperation over time[5]

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[4] For a helpful "conceptual map" of this debate, see Laura Valentini, "Ideal vs. Non-ideal Theory: A Conceptual Map," *Philosophy Compass* 7 (2012), 654–64.

[5] John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, ed. Erin Kelly, 2nd edition (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2001), 46

Political philosophy, therefore, aids us in our own self-understanding as a society. It gets us back to basic principles that help us make sense of the conflicts of values and understandings that cause social cooperation to break down.

Rawls's justification of ideal theory makes the most sense when we consider that, in his view, the roots of conflict in democratic societies are primarily ideological. He writes, "the most intractable struggles…are confessedly for the sake of the highest things: for religion, for philosophical views of the world, and for different moral conceptions of the good."[6] Thus, a fundamental challenge for the democratic society is the existence of a plurality of comprehensive doctrines, whether they be religious or philosophical with competing conceptions of morality and the good life. (Notably, Rawls does not want to confine ideological pluralism to *religious* pluralism). Rawls seeks to elaborate the mechanisms by which people with deeply held convictions can agree on common principles of social cooperation without giving up said convictions.

Rawls's theory assumes and seeks to accommodate a *reasonable* pluralism. A reasonable pluralism is, presumably, the only sort of pluralism a society can be expected to accommodate. That is, if certain persons are not reasonably willing to cooperate with others who do not share their particular beliefs, then there is little hope for achieving a stable basis of cooperation among a diverse citizenry. We should, however, interrogate what exactly Rawls means when he uses the term reasonable. He is careful to distinguish "reasonable" from "rational." A person or group may act in a way that is rational, but their actions may not be reasonable in the context of a society conceived as "a fair system of cooperation over time."[7] In a society so understood, a

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[6] Ibid., 4.

[7] Ibid., 6.

reasonable person will propose, acknowledge, and act according to principles that can be

recognized by all as fair terms of cooperation. This means the reasonable person will not act

against these principles to pursue their own advantage (though it may be *rational* for them to do

so), but will honor the principles even when it goes against their own narrow interests, and can

expect others to do likewise.[8]

In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls appears to make a distinction between reasonable

individuals and reasonable comprehensive doctrines. He first assumes that reasonable persons

will only follow reasonable comprehensive doctrines. He then characterizes reasonable

comprehensive doctrines as having three features: i) they are an exercise of theoretical reason,

meaning they express an intelligible view of the world that harmonizes the various aspects of

human life in a consistent and coherent way; ii) they are an exercise in practical reason, meaning

they provide guidance on which values to prioritize and how to balance values that conflict; and

iii) they draw upon a tradition of thought and doctrine.[9] Rawls does not explain *why* these

characteristics define the reasonableness of a doctrine. This is unfortunate, because it is not

immediately clear that such features would (a) guarantee that followers of such doctrines would

adhere to principles of fair social cooperation or (b) prevent followers from acting against

principles of fairness in favor of their own interests. To his credit Rawls does not propose that

these features should be used as criteria for the inclusion or exclusion of various comprehensive

doctrines. Instead he calls his account of reasonable comprehensive doctrines "deliberately

loose" and adds, "We avoid excluding doctrines as unreasonable without strong grounds based

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[8] Ibid., 6-7.

[9] Ibid., 59.

on clear aspects of the reasonable itself. Otherwise our account runs the risk of being arbitrary and exclusive."[10] Here, Rawls illuminates exactly why detailing the characteristics of reasonable comprehensive doctrines beyond his initial definition of reasonableness is problematic. One might then wonder why he chose to lay out these characteristics at all.

He does not include this list of characteristics in *Justice as Fairness,* perhaps having recognized the weaknesses of doing so. Instead, he defines the reasonableness of comprehensive doctrines in the same way he defines the reasonableness of individuals: according to their willingness to both propose and comply with principles that can be recognized as fair terms of social cooperation, even when such principles are against their individual interests. In this context, a reasonable comprehensive doctrine will recognize, given that democratic citizens all have equal liberty of conscience and an equal share of the corporate political power in society, that "there is no reason why any citizen, or association of citizens, should have the right to use the state's power to favor a comprehensive doctrine, or to impose its implications on the rest."[11]

With this statement, we can begin to understand what Rawls means when he says that his theory of justice as fairness both acknowledges the fact of, and seeks to accommodate, a *reasonable pluralism.* In other words, Rawls recognizes that a diversity of comprehensive doctrines is a permanent feature of democratic society, and moreover, the fact that democratic citizens are free and equal, gives each of them the right to follow any reasonable comprehensive doctrine they choose. Therefore, all citizens are entitled to their own particular worldviews, but they are necessarily limited in what they can do with those worldviews: i.e. they cannot use their

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[10] Ibid.

[11] Rawls, *Justice as Fairness,* 191.

coercive political power to impose their own religious, philosophical, or moral beliefs on others. For Rawls, all citizens hold coercive political power, regardless of whether they hold a government office, because "in a democratic regime political power is regarded as the power of free and equal citizens as a collective body."[12] This, of course, raises an essential question. (Indeed, it can be considered *the* central question that Rawls is trying to answer.) Given the fact of reasonable pluralism *and* the fact that all citizens share equally in political power, "in light of what reasons and values—what kind of conception of justice—can citizens legitimately exercise that coercive political power over one another?"[13]

The answer, according to Rawls, is that it must be a *political* rather than a comprehensive conception of justice. A political conception of justice has three characteristics: (i) it is worked out in reference to a specific subject, the basic structure of a democratic society—thus it is specific rather than comprehensive; (ii) it does not presuppose any particular comprehensive doctrine; and (iii) it "is formulated so far as possible solely in terms of fundamental ideas familiar from, or implicit in, the public political culture of a democratic society."[14] The goal, then, of a political conception of justice is to establish a basic structure for fair democratic cooperation according to principles that all citizens can endorse according to their common human reason. This provides a common basis of justification and a common set of principles from which citizens can draw when exercising their coercive political power over other citizens.

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[12] Ibid., 40.

[13] Ibid., 41.

[14] Ibid., 26-27.

The next question to ask is how it could be possible for citizens in all their diversity to affirm the same set of political principles of justice. To answer this, Rawls introduces the overlapping consensus, the idea that citizens affirm the principles of justice for different reasons based on the particular comprehensive doctrine they follow:

> The thought is that citizens in a well-ordered society affirm two distinct although closely related views. One of these is the political conception of justice they all affirm. The other is one of the opposing comprehensive (or partially comprehensive) doctrines, religious, philosophical, and moral, found in society. For those who hold well-articulated, highly systematic, comprehensive doctrines, it is from within such a doctrine (that is, starting from its basic assumptions) that these citizens affirm the political conception of justice. The fundamental concepts, principles, and virtues of the political conception are theorems, as it were, of their comprehensive views.[15]

The consensus on the principles of justice is overlapping, in the sense that citizens all affirm the principles, but do so based on a variety of worldviews and commitments. This is also what makes the principles of justice "free standing," to use Rawls's terminology, in that they are not founded on any single comprehensive doctrine, and they do not require that citizens adhere to any one comprehensive doctrine in order to affirm them.

Rawls insists that the overlapping consensus is not a mere *modus vivendi,* in which "social unity is only apparent, as its stability is contingent on circumstance remaining such as not to upset the fortunate convergence of interests."[16] In a *modus vivendi,* the principles of justice act as a sort of treaty, begrudgingly adhered to by all parties because it is not advantageous for any to violate it. But should conditions change, each party would be prepared to pursue their own

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[15] Ibid., 33.

[16] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* Expanded Edition, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005): 147.

goals at the expense of the other parties in the treaty.[17] An overlapping consensus must go much deeper than this to achieve lasting social stability; parties must genuinely affirm the principle of political justice upon which social cooperation is founded, not out of begrudging tolerance but out of sincere conviction derived from whatever beliefs and commitments each individual or group holds. Of course, it is unlikely that an overlapping consensus would emerge *sui generis* from a diverse society. Surely, it would be very difficult to achieve such a consensus on principles of justice that all can affirm for overlapping reasons, and Rawls does not assume that it would emerge easily from a society characterized by reasonable pluralism.

As he envisions it, the overlapping consensus must emerge over time. It may start out as a *modus vivendi,* but it gradually becomes something deeper. It is the ability of religious persons to adjust their own comprehensive views to accord with a public conception of justice that prevents the overlapping consensus from being a purely pragmatic arrangement. The shared political principles that the overlapping consensus reflects become socialized in each new generation so that they become a part of society's shared self-understanding.[18] As Rawls understands religious, philosophical, and moral commitments, they are not so static that they cannot adjust to new circumstances; though his use of the term "comprehensive" doctrine at times seems to imply this, he actually thinks that most people's doctrines are only *partially* comprehensive and often are not fully articulated or systematic. This leads Rawls to conjecture that citizens can, over time, come to accept a political conception of justice as fully compatible with their own religious,

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[17] Ibid., Rawls, *Justice as Fairness,* 192.

[18] Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* 164-165.

philosophical, and moral commitments, especially as they come to appreciate what such a

conception achieves:

> they acquire an allegiance to it, an allegiance that becomes stronger over time.
> They come to think it both reasonable and wise to affirm its principles of justice
> as expressing political values that, under the reasonably favorable conditions that
> make democracy possible, normally outweigh whatever values may oppose them.
> With this we have an overlapping consensus"[19]
>
> Rawls believes that a democratic society characterized by reasonable pluralism really

needs the sort of deep agreement on basic principles that an overlapping consensus represents.

This is necessary to navigate social conflict and to achieve norms of fair cooperation by which

all (or at least the vast majority) are willing to abide. This is true in part because the liberal

democratic principle of legitimacy recognizes *all citizens* as having coercive political power.

Therefore, when citizens exercise that coercive power over one another, they ought to do so from

a common basis of justification based on the operative political concept of justice rather than

their own comprehensive doctrines. This is the foundation of Rawls's idea of public reason.

Rawls describes public reason as follows:

> [because a basic feature of democracy is the fact of reasonable pluralism] Citizens
> realize that they cannot reach agreement or even approach mutual understanding
> on the basis of their irreconcilable comprehensive doctrines. In view of this, they
> need to consider what kinds of reasons they may reasonably give one another when
> fundamental political questions are at stake. I propose that in public reason
> comprehensive doctrines of truth or right be replaced by an idea of the politically
> reasonable addressed to citizens as citizens.[20]

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[19] Rawls, *Justice as Fairness,* 194.

[20] John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited" in *Political Liberalism*, Expanded edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

In other words, when citizens reason with each other about *public* questions that require *public* justification, they should use *public* reasons, that is, reasons that "fall under the political values expressed by a political conception of justice."[21] It should be noted that Rawls does not think public reasons must be given in *all* instances of public debate; it is only when fundamental political questions are at stake—such as those regarding constitutional essentials or issues of basic justice—that the use of public reason becomes necessary. Most legislative matters do not concern fundamental questions of justice in this way. Examples of matters that do concern such fundamental questions include who has the right to vote or who has right to fair equality of opportunity.[22]

Rawls's initial formulation of public reason in *Political Liberalism* received much criticism for placing too much of a burden on religious persons to translate their convictions into "public" reasons and asking them to bracket their religious convictions to an unreasonable degree. Rawls took some of these criticisms to heart and issued a revised formulation of public reason in a 1997 essay entitled, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited." While in *Political Liberalism* he had suggested that religious reasons (or reasons stemming from other, nonreligious comprehensive doctrines) should not enter the debate on these questions at any point, he now proposed that such convictions *could* come into the conversation provided that adequate public reasons were offered at some point. The need for public reasons thus remains, but Rawls admits that there is a value in allowing people to also express their reasoning based on their own comprehensive doctrines; this helps citizens to understand each other better.

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[21] Rawls, *Justice as Fairness,* 91.

[22] Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* 214.

It is important to note that Rawls's idea of public reason is not meant to serve as a restriction on free speech.[23] Citizens are always free to speak from their own worldviews and convictions[24]; they should never be legally obligated to adhere to the norms Rawls proposes. Rather, Rawls offers the idea of public reason for two purposes. First, as I have already suggested, it provides a way of assessing the legitimacy of a law or policy that addresses issues of basic justice. Laws that concern such matters should not be grounded in any comprehensive doctrine, as this would violate the liberty of conscience that a reasonable democratic pluralism requires. A law that can be justified by adequate public reasons, on the other hand, and is supported by a majority can be seen as legitimate and binding. The duty to provide public reasons for such laws then falls more heavily on those who have the power to pass and enforce the law: government officials, legislators, judges, and candidates for public office. However, the duty of public reason also falls on ordinary citizens, because, in a representative government like a democracy, citizens vote for those representatives who make and enforce the law. This is the primary way in which ordinary citizens, who do not hold public office, exercise their coercive political power over other citizens, and this comes, with certain moral (not legal) obligations. Rawls explains:

> Ideally, citizens are to think of themselves *as if they were legislators* and ask
> themselves what statutes, supported by what reasons satisfying the criterion of
> reciprocity, they would think it most reasonable to enact. When firm and
> widespread, the disposition of citizens to view themselves as ideal legislators, and
> to repudiate government officials and candidates for public office who violate
> public reason, is one of the political and social roots of democracy, and is vital to

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[23] Rawls, "Public Reason Revisited", 445.

[24] In fact, Rawls suggests that sharing our comprehensive doctrines in public life can be beneficial: "It has the advantage of citizens informing one another where they come from, so to speak, and on what basis they support the public political conception of justice. All this may have desirable consequences and may strengthen the forces working for stability." (*Justice as Fairness,* 90).

its enduring strength and vigor. Thus citizens fulfill their duty of civility and support the idea of public reason by doing what they can to hold government officials to it.[25]

This brings us to the second purpose of Rawls's idea of public reason: it offers an account of civic virtue. Rawls is not only telling us what makes a law legitimate and binding but also telling us how citizens in a democracy under conditions of reasonable pluralism ought, ideally, to act towards their fellow citizens. They should not vote solely (or even primarily) according to their own interests but should consider their duty towards their fellow citizens when electing representatives and supporting legislation.

1.2 Critiques of Rawls's Understanding of Religion and Pluralism

There are many religious thinkers who are sympathetic to Rawls's account of religion and pluralism. For example, Catholic philosopher Daniel Dombrowski wrote an entire book defending Rawls's approach to religion,[26] and Islamic political philosopher Abdullahi An-Na'im notes that his own notion of civic reason is incredibly similar to Rawls's idea of public reason.[27] Nevertheless, Rawls has his fair share of critics among theologians and philosophers of religion. Among the two facets of Rawlsian pluralism I have covered so far, the overlapping consensus is rarely a target of critique, but the idea of public reason remains a point of contention.

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[25] Rawls, "Public Reason Revisited," 444-445

[26] Daniel Dombrowski, *Rawls and Religion: The Case for Political Liberalism,* (Albany: SUNY press 2001).

[27] Abdullahi Ahm An-Naim, *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Sharia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008): 97.

Some such criticisms were raised before Rawls revised his initial formulation of public

reason, and thus do not account for the less restrictive vision that Rawls offered in "The Idea of

Public Reason Revisited" and successive works. Nevertheless, many of these criticisms can still

prove useful for reconsidering this later articulation. Philip L. Quinn provides one such

perspective in his 1995 presidential address to the American Philosophical Association. He uses

the debate around abortion to cast doubt on whether the practice of public reason provides a

sufficient basis to reach a consensus on the issue. Quinn chooses the case of abortion because

Rawls himself used it as an example of the application of public reason. Rawls contends that by

applying the values of public reason, one can conclude that a woman has "a duly qualified right

to end her pregnancy during the first trimester." He reaches this conclusion by claiming that the

value of the equality of the woman overrides the value of respect for human life, in this case

because the right to an abortion is needed to give women's equality substance and force. Quinn

points out that one could reach a very different conclusion while agreeing that these two values

are in play. One could easily argue that the value of human life must override the equality of

women, in order to give the fetal right to life substance and force. The question in play has to do

with the status of fetal life, and whether or not it counts as a full-fledged person. Public reason,

according to Quinn, cannot resolve this question, because it would require that it be resolved

through appeals to common sense and uncontroversial science, neither of which can achieve a

consensus on when life and personhood begin. Quinn concludes, "My suspicion is that public

reason will fairly often fail to determine a balance of liberal political values that can be seen to

be reasonable by all citizens of a democracy as deeply pluralistic as ours is. I have little confidence in its resolving power, its ability to provide guidance where guidance is needed.'"[28]

While Quinn casts doubt on the idea that public reason can supply the necessary resources to address the questions of justice that are debated in a pluralistic democracy, Nicholas Wolterstorff worries that the practice of public reason could actively undermine the creation and sustenance of a just democratic society. He notes that Rawlsian liberalism takes public reason to be a way of honoring the freedom and equality of both religious and non-religious members of society. However, Wolterstorff argues that it actually puts a much greater burden on religious persons, especially those who want to live an integrated life in which their religious convictions are in line with their political and moral convictions, and their actions in both public and private are consistent with their convictions. These people cannot just divide their life into a religious component and a non-religious component, because "it is a matter of *religious* conviction that they ought to strive for a religiously integrated existence."[29] Thus, the very act of asking them to divide themselves in this way is a violation of their religious freedom. The result of asking people to suppress their religious convictions in public life will not be a more civil and reasonable public conversation; the result will be outbursts of resentment from religious people who feel their voices are not being heard.

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[28] Philip L. Quinn, "Political Liberalisms and Their Exclusions of the Religious" in *Religion and Contemporary Liberalism,* Ed. Paul J. Weithman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997): 150.

[29] Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Why we should Reject what Liberalism Tells us about Speaking and Acting in Public for Religious Reasons," in *Religion and Contemporary Liberalism,* Ed. Paul J. Weithman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).

Wolterstorff provides a helpful explanation of one way in which Rawls fails to understand the nature of religious conviction. Though I am sympathetic to Wolterstorff and others who make similar points, I am ultimately interested in critiquing Rawls's pluralism from a different angle: his diagnoses of the roots of conflict in society. This also functions as a critique of the way Rawls engages religion, because he is drawing on what William Cavanaugh calls "the myth of religious violence." The idea that competing belief systems, particularly competing *religious* belief systems, are a prime cause of social conflict has deep roots in the history of modern Western political philosophy. In fact, it is a common presupposition of contemporary political philosophy that liberalism was founded in reaction to the 16th and 17th century "Wars of Religion." Cavanaugh traces this narrative from its early form in the 17th and 18th century thought of philosophers like Locke and Rosseau, to it mature form in contemporary 20th and 21st century philosophy. As the myth goes, the wars fought in Europe after the onset of the Protestant Reformation were primarily fought over irreconcilable differences of religious belief and were made possible by absolutist governments allied with religious authority. As a result, liberal notions of toleration, the privatization of religion, and the decoupling of state and religious authority rose in reaction against the violence that had engulfed the continent.[30]

Cavanaugh points out that there are numerous problems with this narrative. For one, the myth implies that wars were fought *only* between people of different religious persuasions, but he lists numerous examples of Catholics warring against Catholics, Protestant princes supporting the Catholic monarchs, Catholic and Protestants forming alliances, etc.[31] These examples, would

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[30] William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 130-36.

[31] Ibid., 141-150.

seem to suggest, that religion was not the only cause of the so-called "wars of religion." In fact, it is disputable whether religion can even be identified as the *primary* cause, rather than political, economic, or social factors. Furthermore, rather than accepting the idea of the modern secular state as the *solution* to the violence, Cavanaugh provides evidence that the consolidation of state power that would result in the creation of the liberal nation-state began before the wars of religion and was, in part, a cause of them.[32]

Cavanaugh goes further than arguing that these other factors may have been equally or more culpable than religion in inciting the wars; he argues, instead, that religious causes are not analytically separable from political, economic, and social causes. The idea that religion was the primary cause of the violence relies on a notion of religion as something that is easily recognized and isolated. However, as I will explain below, religion is not easily defined, and religious studies scholars have long recognized how the category can encompass things not traditionally considered "religion." Contemporary scholars have analyzed the religious dimensions of cultural phenomena as varied as baseball, Tupperware, Oprah, and nationalism.[33] Cavanaugh is most interested in the last item on this list: the religious dimensions of nationalism and the modern nation-state. The story of the rise of liberalism, in his eyes, is a story not of the secularization, but rather the *sacralization*, of the state. In the 16th and 17th centuries this sacralization was

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[32] Ibid., 160-167.

[33] David Chidester, *Authentic fakes: Religion and American Popular Culture,* (Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005); Kathryn Lofton, *Oprah: the Gospel of an Icon,* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011); Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96: 1 (Winter 1967): 1-21.

realized in absolutist governments, but even as western nations moved toward liberal democracy, this sacralization of the state did not disappear. As Cavanaugh explains:

> The migration of the holy is much easier for a modern person to identify in early modern Europe than in the contemporary liberal nation-state. Civil religion in the contemporary United States is in some respects similar, but in others quite dissimilar, to the worship practices of Christian Churches. When the topic is religion and violence, however, the most relevant aspect of the holy is the ability to organize lethal forces; the argument, after all, is that religion is especially prone to compel people to die and kill…Any uncomplicated tale of progress from the barbarous religious past to a peaceable secular present must reckon with the staggering amount of energy, resources, and devotion marshalled by the militaries of Western nations, especially the United States.[34]

Cavanaugh reminds us that violence is often tied to power. The powerful have the ability to impose their will through coercion and violence. The disempowered may fight back against this in a variety of ways, both violent and non-violent. (This will be relevant to my discussion of race and gender below). If we carry this insight beyond the military power exercised by modern liberal states, we can connect it back Rawls.

Rawls's diagnosis of the roots of conflict extends beyond religion to include all comprehensive doctrines, but it can still be seen as an extension of the same preoccupation with religious violence that Cavanaugh critiques. Given the prevalence of the myth of religious violence, it is certainly understandable that Rawls would reach the conclusion that he does. Furthermore, by arguing that his analysis is inaccurate, I do not mean to dismiss the role that competing belief systems can play in generating conflict; it is simply insufficient to explain the challenges of achieving a just and well-functioning pluralist democracy. Cavanaugh helps us significantly in understanding *why* it is insufficient and his insights are consistent with much other literature in the discipline of religious studies. It is widely understood by scholars in the

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[34] Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence,* 178-9.

field that reducing religions to a system of belief amounts to filtering all religions through a Protestant Christian lens.[35] There is, unfortunately, much less agreement on how exactly religion should be defined. Still, using the tools of religious studies, we are reminded to take into account the vast internal diversity of religious traditions, material manifestations of religious practice, the way religion is lived out in particular contexts, and the histories that shape religious people and groups. It is the material and historical elements of analysis that I am most interested in employing to rethink the roots of social conflict.

As I embark on this mode of analysis, I should note that some thinkers, such as Richard Rorty, who will be discussed in chapter 3, view Rawls's theory as historicist, and I do not completely disagree. It is historicist in that Rawls does not appeal to some ahistorical universalized notion of justice on which to build his theory; he looks to the shared convictions already implicit in a culture. (This is his basis for his idea of the overlapping consensus). In contrast, his notion of public reason, as Malcom Morano points out, seems to rely on some universal faculty of reason present in all citizens as its basis.[36] Thus, while Rawls adheres to historicist sensibilities in some parts of his theory, he strays from them in others. My contention, then, is that Rawls is inconsistent and insufficient in his historicism.

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[35] See, for example, Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) and "Thinking About Religion, Belief, and Politics," In *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies.* Ed. Robert Orsi, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2015); Robert Orsi, "Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live In?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42 (2003): 169–74.

[36] Malcolm Morano, "The Role of Religious Reasons in a Liberal Democracy" *Res Cogitans* 5 (2014): 114.

Jean Elshtain provides another angle on why Rawls's approach to pluralism falls short. Much like Cavanaugh, she is skeptical of the mythos that surrounds the liberal state, but in her case, she wants to reexamine the idea that liberalism provides the optimal conditions for religious believers to freely practice their faith. Her critique shifts the focus from the ways in which Rawlsian liberalism excludes religious commitments from public life to consider "those terms of *inclusion* that have the practical effect of decomposing any and all authoritative religious claims, meaning the claims of particular communities."[37] Elshtain doubts that religious communities can offer the resources to remedy the shortcomings of Rawlsian liberalism because of the damage already done to religious authority by contemporary liberal society (which is presumably informed by Rawlsian assumptions in her view). In the process, we have lost sight of the recognition that plural communities are constituted by a *variety* of norms, not a single set of political principles on which we must agree. Rawls worries about the dangers of conflict between competing perspectives, but Elshtain suggests that democratic politics is *defined* by such conflict and competition and that a democratic polity has a stake in keeping it alive:

> The upshot within [Rawls's] perspective is depoliticization in the interest of sustaining an order buttressed by a set of principles that are themselves removed from disputation. A rather ascetic rationalism supplants the strenuousness and rambunctiousness of all those past, present, and continuing arguments generated from the deep entanglements of politics and religion in American life.[38]

Part of the problem, for Elshtain, is the way in which Rawls's thought encourages citizens to think of themselves as unbound by the past. Drawing on Hannah Arendt, Elshtain argues that, historically, a legitimate authority was one which was *bound*—bound by law,

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[37] Jean Elshtain, "The Question Concerning Authority," in *Religion and Contemporary Liberalism,* Ed. Paul J. Weithman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997): 253. (Emphasis Elshtain's).

[38] Ibid., 254.

tradition, or the precedent of the past. The unbound authority was a tyrant, lawless and capricious. Such a view recognizes that freedom and boundedness are not mutually exclusive. One can offer loyalty to a shared tradition without losing the capacity for independent thought and action. In fact, "This bounded freedom is the only way to guarantee creation of a common space, to simultaneously constrain yet nurture and make possible human action."[39] For Elshtain, citizens need to see themselves and their leaders as part of a tradition that has been built up over time from the founding of the country's institutions. Yet Rawls and other contractarian liberals encourage citizens to see themselves as co-founders of these institutions, thus, unbinding citizens from the past and its tradition and creating a situation in which "nearly everything at every moment is up for grabs."[40]

In her essay, Elshtain does not spend much time engaging Rawls' theory directly; she merely uses him as a representative of the contractarian liberalism that plays the villain in her account of the erosion of legitimate authority. So, it is worth interrogating her criticisms of him further. How, in fact, does Rawls encourage citizens to see themselves as unbound from the past? Rawls's commitment to ideal theory makes his writing read like a rather abstract, ahistorical treatise on political justice, but if we return to his justification of ideal theory, we can see that it stems from an historicist impulse. Ideal theory, in his view, is meant to aid us in our self-understanding of our society by uncovering the fundamental ideas that are already implicit in the public political culture. These fundamental principles provide "a way of continuing public discussion when shared understandings of lesser generality have broken down."[41] Therefore, his

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[39] Ibid., 255.

[40] Ibid., 257.

[41] Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* 46.

theory is both descriptive, in that it claims to detail principles already implicit in our culture, and normative, in that it lays out an ideal of political justice to which we ought to aspire.

Rawls thus see himself as working within a tradition, and he also thinks it important that citizens see themselves standing within a particular tradition of political justice. This is evident in his description of the overlapping consensus as something that must develop and become stronger over time as citizens develop an allegiance to the underlying principles rather than tolerating them as a mere *modus vivendi*. Nevertheless, Rawls does, as Elshtain says, encourage citizens to think of themselves as unbound from the past in his idea of the original position and the veil of ignorance.

The original position functions as a sort of thought experiment, imagining a hypothetical and nonhistorical position in which citizens could enter into an agreement (or social contract) on principles of political justice. In the original position, Rawls imagines citizens standing behind a "veil of ignorance" in which they know nothing about their social position, the comprehensive doctrine to which they adhere, or their natural talents and abilities. Citizens in this state of ignorance are then symmetrically and equitably situated. No one person has greater bargaining power due to historical and social conditions, and no one is tempted to agree on a principle that might unfairly advantage their interests over others. Since this original position is purely hypothetical, it is to be understood as a device of self-clarification, in that it helps us to understand what we already think "on due reflection are the reasonable considerations to ground the principles of a political conception of justice."[42] It models both the fair conditions of

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[42] Rawls, *Justice as Fairness,* 18.

agreement between free and equal citizens and the acceptable restrictions on reasons that various parties may put forward to justify or reject potential principles of justice.[43]

Rawls encourages citizens to put themselves in the original position by "reasoning in accordance with the modeled constraints, citing only reasons those constraints would allow."[44] It is from here that he derives his idea of public reason. He also uses the original position to argue for his two principles of justice. These two principles are i) that each person has equal and adequate liberty and ii) that any social or economic inequalities be a result of fair, equal opportunity and be of the greatest benefit to the least advantaged.[45] Thus, in accordance with Rawls's overall aim, the original position has both a descriptive and a normative function. It asks citizens to put themselves in the original position in order both to better understand and to better practice the conditions of fair democratic cooperation. Returning to Elshtain, we might ask again why this is problematic. Elshtain would argue it is problematic because it encourages citizens to see themselves as unbound from the past and, thus, undermines the authority of a robust civic and democratic tradition. However, Rawls might easily reply that the original position helps citizens to better understand the ground of their democratic tradition and the principles it entails, and in so doing they are better able to put those principles into practice.

In order to consider in more depth the problem with asking citizens to imagine themselves as historically unbound, we turn to Sheldon Wolin's review of *Political Liberalism.* Wolin calls Rawls's idea of a "well-ordered democratic society" a "nowhere that is

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[43] Ibid., 14-18.

[44] Ibid., 86.

[45] Ibid., 42-43.

oxymoronic."[46] With this phrase, he implies that such a society has never existed and never could exist. A democratic society and a well-ordered society are oxymoronic, at least to the extent that Rawls imagines it as a society largely free from intractable conflict. For Wolin, conflict (even the intractable variety) is a crucial part of a vibrant democracy. He writes, "In the age of vast concentrations of corporate and governmental power, the desperate problem of democracy is not to develop better ways of cooperation but to develop a fairer system of contestation over time, especially hard times."[47] Here we see that Wolin does not agree with Rawls's contention that the greatest source of conflict in society is the existence of conflicting comprehensive doctrines; it is instead the severe power imbalances that develop in the non-ideal conditions of history. This difference makes clear why Wolin and Rawls differ on the value of conflict in society. If the root of conflict is purely ideological, a matter of competing beliefs, then fair cooperation between people holding competing beliefs is the necessary condition of a just society. If on the other hand, the root of conflict is the visceral material realities that have developed through a society's history, then some form of productive friction is needed to contest those conditions and create a more just social arrangement.

This difference also clarifies the reason that Wolin finds the original position to be an inadequate thought experiment for theorizing the conditions of justice. Wolin contends, "the most crucial omission from the original position is any recognition that a political society inevitably carries a historical burden as part of its identity, that it has committed past injustices

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[46] Sheldon Wolin, "The Liberal/Democratic Divide. On Rawls' Political Liberalism", *Political Theory* 24:1 (February 1996): 118.

[47] Ibid., 115.

whose reminders still define many of its members."[48] Thus, beyond the loss of the authority of history and tradition that Elshtain critiques, the original position encourages citizens to unbind themselves from the *burdens* of history. Apart from a recognition of the burden that historical injustices impose, citizens cannot determine how to move forward towards a more just state of affairs.

1.3 Race, Gender, and the Burdens of History

In order to understand why this alternative account of social conflict should lead us to think about pluralism differently, I will take a brief detour to explore the historical "burdens" of racism and sexism. Political philosophers tend to talk about race and gender much differently than they talk about religion, but they are all aspects of identity shaped by history and context. In my view, race and gender should not be considered separately from discussions of pluralism, in part because they illuminate the material and historical dimensions of social conflict that are often ignored in discussions of religious disagreement. In due course, I will also make clear why religious conflict should be contextualized in the same way.

It should be noted that Rawls does acknowledge some need to correct for certain historical and social contingencies in order to maintain a just social structure. This is why he includes "the difference principle" in his second principle of justice, namely that any social or economic inequalities be to the greatest benefit to the least advantaged members of society. With this principle, Rawls sets up the justification for some sort of social safety net that will ensure the

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[48] Ibid., 116.

continuation of equal freedom and equal opportunity for all, despite accidents of birth and misfortune. In much of Rawls's discussion of the difference principle, he seems to focus only on class inequality. This is certainly the case in *Political Liberalism,* where he discusses the difference principle only briefly.[49] In *Justice as Fairness,* where it is discussed in greater depth, he also identifies a person's native endowments and good or ill fortune as contingencies worth taking into consideration. Ultimately, however, Rawls suggests that the best way to determine who constitutes the least advantaged members of society that the difference principle is meant to protect is by assessing their share of "primary goods." The primary goods are the tool Rawls uses to further work out what equal liberty and equal opportunity look like. The primary goods are described as things citizens need to live a complete life. The types of primary goods are as follows:

i)   Basic rights and liberties, such as freedom of conscience and freedom of thought
ii)   Freedom of movement and free choice of occupation, given the background condition of an array of diverse opportunities
iii)   The powers and prerogatives of offices and positions of authority (open to the public)
iv)   Reasonable expectation of income and means to achieve a wide range of ends
v)   The social bases of self-respect (needed for citizens to have a sense of their worth and the confidence to pursue their desired ends).[50]

It strikes me that this list does have some power to uncover social inequalities that go beyond mere differences of class and income. For example, the idea that the social bases of self-respect are a primary good can account for the ways in which differences in gender, race, sexuality, and ability operate in our non-ideal social circumstance to undermine this sense of

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[49] Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* 282-285.

[50] Rawls, *Justice as Fairness,* 58-59.

self–respect and the confidence to pursue desired ends for certain groups. Notably, in *A Theory of Justice,* Rawls describes self-respect as "perhaps the most important primary good."[51] He associates self-respect with having a plan of life and believing one has the ability to carry it out, which in part requires enjoying the appreciation of others. However, subsequent critiques have noted that Rawls does not distinguish self-respect from self-esteem. The basis of self-respect described in *A Theory of Justice,* seems to more appropriately describe self-esteem. Janice Richardson, in her review of feminist contract theory, helpfully distinguishes the two:

> Our self-esteem is based upon our estimate of our abilities—taking into account feedback from others—and can vary over time. Self-respect, by contrast, is based upon the view that we have equal self-worth as persons, that is, we are not to be treated as subordinate, and is clearly of primary important to us.[52]

Tommie Shelby, who deploys a non-ideal theory of justice for anti-racist ends, makes a similar distinction:

> Self-respect can be an element of a person's sense of self-worth. But unlike self-esteem, the role it plays in constituting self-worth is not contingent on a person's particular ambitions or self-confidence. Self-respect is a matter of recognizing oneself as a rational agent and a moral equal and valuing oneself accordingly.[53]

This distinction between self-esteem and self-respect is critical for both a feminist and anti-racist understanding of justice because it focuses on the importance of marginalized people recognizing their equal worth and equal entitlement to respect from others. As Shelby points out, self-respect is embodied and acted out in one's conduct. People with self-respect are more likely

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[51] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice,* 440.

[52] Janice Richardson, "Jean Hampton's Reworking of Rawls: Is 'Feminist Contractarianism' Useful for Feminism?" in *Feminist Interpretations of John Rawls,* Ed. Ruth Abbey, (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013): 139.

[53] Tommie Shelby, *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent, and Reform,* Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016): 98.

to resist unjust treatment and demand proper respect. "When a healthy sense of self-respect is widespread in a society, this helps sustain just practices and deter injustice."[54] Furthermore, it helps to illustrate the way experiences of oppression, marginalization, and subordination can harm citizen's sense of self-worth and contribute to the continuation of injustice. Thus, Rawls's inclusion of the social bases of self-respect of a primary good shows promise for moving beyond a purely class-based notion of social disadvantage, but it's potential is not fully realized because he conflates self-respect and self-esteem.

Even after discussing his list of primary goods, Rawls continues to talk about social disadvantage as if it is mostly a matter of income inequality. He does briefly consider how it applies to race and gender in an effort to answer some of his critics, but his response leaves much to be desired. He first notes that race and gender had not previously been mentioned, because he is mainly concerned with ideal theory. Ideal theory assesses the fairness of the basic structure of society from the point of view of the representative equal citizen whose liberty and equality of opportunity are secure (given these conditions, distinctions of gender and race ought to be irrelevant) and from the point of view of representatives of various levels of wealth. Finally, Rawls acknowledges that there may be some instances in which other positions (beyond income differences) should be taken into account:

> …Suppose, for example, that certain fixed natural characteristics are used as grounds for assigning unequal basic rights, or allowing some persons only lesser opportunities; then such inequalities will single out relevant positions. These characteristics cannot be changed, and so the positions they specify are points of view from which the basic structure must be judged.
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> Distinctions based on gender and race are of this kind. Thus if men, say, have greater basic rights or greater opportunities than women, these inequalities

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[54] Ibid.

can be justified only if they are to the advantage of women and acceptable for their point of view. Similarly for unequal basic rights and opportunities founded on race. It appears that historically these inequalities have arisen from inequalities in political power and control of economic resources. They are not now, and it would seem never have been, to the advantage of women or less favored races. To be sure, so sweeping a historical judgment may occasionally be uncertain. However, in a well-ordered society in the present age no such uncertainty obtains, so justice as fairness supposes that the standard relevant positions specified by the primary goods should suffice.[55]

This quote more or less dismisses the idea that gender and race difference could have any relevance in Rawls's ideal theory. As to how the theory might serve to correct the injustices of our current non-ideal circumstances, Rawls would presumably argue that anyone who considers the underlying principles of justice would recognize that any inequality based on gender or race would be unjust. Thus, any thoughtful and reasonable citizen, upon due reflection, would reject any such distinctions. This does not, however, appear to be borne out in our current circumstances. To understand why Rawls's account is unsatisfactory, it is necessary to listen to the voices of those most affected by distinctions of race and gender, namely women and people of color.[56]

Since Rawls writes within the social contract tradition, we might begin this effort by examining the subversive contract theories of Carol Pateman and Charles Mills. Pateman wrote *The Sexual Contract* in 1988 to address the contract tradition's silence on gender inequity. Inspired by Pateman's work, Mills authored *The Racial Contract* in 1997 to make a similar critique of the contract tradition's silence on issues of race. In 2007 Pateman and Mills

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[55] Ibid., 65-66.

[56] I recognize that trans and non-binary persons would also be affected by gender distinctions in different ways. Rawls does not acknowledge their existence and so does not account for them in his theory. I do not know of any voices from non-gender conforming people that offer a critique of Rawls, but I welcome any suggestions that would help me better take these voices into account as well.

collaborated on *Contract and Domination,* in which they put their perspectives into conversation, considered what they might add to their previous work, and addressed their critics.

It is a common misreading of these subversive contract theories (or perhaps of contract theories more generally, for those unfamiliar with them) that the authors really believe such a contract happened in history; that males contracted with one another to suppress women or that white people contracted among themselves to keep people of color down. Instead, Pateman variously refers to contract theory as "conjectural history"[57] and "political fiction."[58] It is a useful story we can tell to explain the legitimacy and authority of modern government. Like Rawls, traditional contract theory usually takes the form of ideal theory. It not only helps make sense of modern governing structures, it also tells us something about how government and civil society *ought* to function under ideal conditions. The subversive contract theories of Mills and Pateman depart from this tendency in order to tell a story about the decidedly non-ideal conditions that have developed in history, specifically the oppression of women and people of color.

As Patemen tells it, the standard social contract narrative is missing half the story. It tells us about the contract that justifies the rule of government (the rule of men over other men) but tells us nothing about the contract that justifies the rule of women by men, that is, the sexual contract. The contract tradition tells a story about the freedom of humans in their natural state and the measure of that freedom they give up for order and safety, but women are not necessarily assumed to have the same natural freedom. In the state of nature, they are still subject to men. All of the classic contract theorists—Rosseau, Locke, Kant—with the exception of Hobbes posit

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[57] Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988): 1.

[58] Ibid., 7.

that women lack the capacity of "individuals" and do not have full ownership of what Locke

terms "property in their person."[59] Thus, they are not parties in the original contract and are not

considered to have an equal part in the civil society that is created by the contract, but neither are

they left behind in the state of nature. Pateman explains:

> Women are incorporated into a sphere that both is and is not in civil society. The
> private sphere is part of civil society but is separated from the 'civil' sphere. The
> antinomy private/public is another expression of natural/civil and women/men.
> The Private, womanly sphere (natural) and the public, masculine sphere (civil) are
> opposed but gain their meaning from each other, and the meaning of the civil
> freedom of public life is thrown into relief when counterposed to the natural
> subjection that characterizes the private realm.[60]

Because the "sexual contract" is relegated to the "private" sphere, it receives little attention from

political theorists, who see the public sphere as their primary domain of enquiry. However, as

Pateman points out, "sexual difference is political difference."[61] Both in Pateman's retelling of

the contract story and in the actual realities of history that the contract is meant to elucidate, to be

female is to have different rights and levels of access in political life. Women have only recently

been accorded full equality under the law in the U.S. and most feminists would agree that de

facto equality is still out of reach.

To be sure, contemporary theorists like Rawls do not make the same assumptions about

women's subordination to men that the classic theorists did. The question, then, is whether

contract theory as ideal theory can be retrieved in a way that supports the full equality of women

and men and does so in a way that helps us realize that equality in actual life. As we already

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[59] Ibid., 6.

[60] Ibid., 11.

[61] Ibid., 6.

discussed, Rawls appears to recognize the equality of men and women, but does not dwell on this issue, because he assumes that gender/sexual difference would not be a problem in the ideal society he imagines. For thinkers like Pateman, this is not helpful, because it underestimates the deep roots of the sexual contract and does not give us the tools necessary to deal with its ongoing manifestations. Pateman herself does not think contract theory can be retrieved for emancipatory purposes. Though she finds it useful for generating a critique of existing structures, this is only because she is turning an existing tradition on its head to show its deficiencies. For Pateman, the normative use of contract theory for theorizing ideal conditions should be abandoned. The metaphor of "contract" is still too laden with the baggage of its history of justifying subordination. The idea of "property in the person" on which the metaphor of contract rests is inherently problematic for Pateman. Even if women are taken to possess equal property in their person, as the classic theorists did not believe, this does not resolve the relationships of domination and subordination that the contract metaphor undergirds:

> The political fiction of property in the person is required in order to present major institutions such as traditional marriage and employment as constituted by free relations. Pieces of property in the person can be (said to be) freely contracted out without detriment to the person who owns them. Thus a worker who enters into an employment contract rents out not himself but his services or labor power, a piece of the property he owns in his person….The property is useful to the employer only if the worker acts as the employer demands and, therefore, entry into the contract means that the worker becomes a subordinate. The consequence of voluntary entry into the contract is not freedom but superiority and subordination.[62]

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[62] Carole Pateman and Charles Mills, *Contract and Domination* (Malden, MA: Polity Books, 2007): 17.

Of course, the employment contract is presumed to be free, because it is voluntary. This assumes that no one enters into a contract unless it is to their benefit, but Pateman is skeptical of this logic:

> Contractarians, or at least those who have the courage of their convictions, treat social life as nothing but contract all the way down, but contractarianism is rarely taken to its logical conclusion. The conclusion is that there are no limits on the property in person that can be contracted out (no one would do it if it were not to their advantage), so that (uncoerced) slavery and renting of votes for instance become legitimate.[63]

Certainly, few contract theorists would take the logic of contract to this conclusion, and Rawls does not explicitly assume the possession of property in the person. But Pateman finds that contemporary contract theorists have not revised the tradition in any way that is helpful for creating a freer and more democratic society. In fact, Rawls's work merely obscures the existence of unfree institutions by presenting them as free institutions justified by the agreement of individuals behind the veil of ignorance. Institutions like employment and marriage, that Pateman sees as in dire need of reform, are taken for granted by Rawls and not given any type of extensive treatment because, in his view, "our social life is a voluntary cooperative scheme."[64]

Mills, unlike Pateman, still believes contract theory can be retrieved for liberating purposes. Though he takes inspiration for his own subversive contract theory from Pateman, he is also influenced by two other feminist contract theorists, Jean Hampton and Susan Moller Okin, who are more amenable to the contractarian project. They point out several problems with

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[63] Ibid., 18.

[64] Ibid., 25-26.

Rawls's theory from a feminist perspective but do not think these issues invalidate the project as whole.

Mills follows Okin and Hampton in believing that contract theory may still be useful. For him, exploring the racial contract is a starting point to improve the story of the social contract. Though Mills does not argue that there was an actual historical moment in which white people contracted among themselves to create a global racial order in which they were at the top, he does think that the Racial Contract has a better claim than other contract theories (including the feminist ones he is inspired by) to being an actual historical fact. By this he means that the origins of the global racial order that still exists today are readily accessible. It was formed in recent history, beginning with the European voyages of discovery, and gradually consolidated through the enlightenment, European colonialism, and the aftermath of colonialism. Its origins are not lost to "the mists of history" to the extent that they can only be recovered by conjecture about some hypothetical state of nature. Even in the case of Pateman's sexual contract, clear historical origins are inaccessible since male domination of women reaches back before recorded history. Racism, by contrast, is a modern ailment, and, thus, we can actually say something about its origins.[65]

For Mills, it is no accident that the golden age of contract theory overlapped with the period of time in which global white supremacy was being consolidated. Leaving aside Hobbes, who used the contract as a defense of authoritarian government, the classic contract theorists used the contract metaphor as a justification for enlightenment liberalism and its tenets of equality and freedom for all men. It is seemingly contradictory that such ideals could be heralded

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[65] Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

at the same time as the conquest of the Americas, the massacres of Native Americans, and the transatlantic slave trade. Mills explains, "this contradiction is reconciled through the Racial Contract which essentially denies [nonwhite people's] personhood and restricts the terms of the social contract to whites."[66]

This is not merely conjecture on Mills's part; many of the contract theorists themselves provide evidence that when they say "men," they really just mean "white men." Both Hobbes and Rosseau claim their "state of nature" was purely hypothetical, or at least consigned to the distant past, but further reading reveals that this is only the case for Europeans. Both authors use (non-white) people from other parts of the world as examples of the state of nature existing both in the past and present. The state of nature conjured images of non-white savages, very much in line with European perceptions of colonized peoples. Locke had investments in the slave trade, something that would very much contradict his egalitarian ideals unless he did not view Africans as fully human. Kant provides perhaps the most explicit evidence that he did not accord non-whites full personhood. This is clear not so much in his moral theory as it is in his lectures on anthropology and geography. In his essay "The Different Races of Mankind," he theorized a "color-coded hierarchy of Europeans, Asians, African, and Native Americans, differentiated by their degree of innate talent."[67] Talent, in this case, entails the capacity for reason and moral self-education. The foundational theorists of the social contract, then, were all very much bound up in the logic of the racial order that was developing and being consolidated during their lifetime.

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[66] Ibid., 64.

[67] Ibid., 71.

The Racial Contract, therefore, underwrites the social contract in the sense that it is "a visible or hidden operator that restricts and modifies the scope of [the social contract's] prescriptions."[68] In the time of the classical theorists discussed above, the logic of racism was explicit and enshrined in law. We now live in a time in which racism is no longer officially sanctioned by law in most places around the globe, and yet Mills claims that the Racial Contract is an ongoing reality; it has simply been rewritten over time. We now live in an age of "colorblindness" in which race nevertheless continues to be a significant factor in one's access to power, resources, and general well-being. The extension of formal rights to non-white people apparently blinds white people to the ongoing operations of white supremacy. For Mills, the move in modern contract theory towards ideal theory is further evidence of this operation, as theorists like Rawls posit principles that extend to people of every color without recognizing that formal rights have, as of yet, proved insufficient to correct the enduring inequities of modern history. Modern political and moral theorists appear to treat racism as marginal or incidental to history rather than as an enduring reality very much ingrained in the modern world order. This leads Mills to uncover a peculiar irony of our time:

> Thus in effect, on matters related to race, the Racial Contract prescribes for its signatories an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world which they themselves have made.

In uncovering this epistemology of ignorance, Mills goes some way in explaining why the abstract ideals of Rawlsian contract theory cannot provide the necessary tools to correct our non-ideal reality. In order to further demonstrate this point, it is helpful to also explore the

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[68] Ibid., 72.

sociological research of race theorist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. Bonilla-Silva's understanding of the

U.S. as a "racialized social system" provides another helpful explanation as to why liberal

principles alone are not sufficient in and of themselves to create equality in a society marked by

historical inequity. In a racialized social system, the structure of a society is partially based on

race. Different races receive different social rewards and develop different interests. A racialized

social system is hierarchical—socially constructed racial categories generate new forms of

human relations with clear differences in status. Bonilla-Silva suggests that "we can speak of

racialized orders only when a racial discourse is accompanied by social relations of subordinate

and superordinate among racial groups."[69] The social structure that emerges is accompanied by a

racial ideology that helps normalize racial inequality.

Much like Mills, Bonilla-Silva argues that there has been a transformation in the U.S.

racial structure since the 1960's. We have transitioned from the overt Jim Crow form of racism

to a new "color-blind racism" that operates in more covert and subtle ways. Though it might be

said that African-Americans have achieved equality under the law, de facto inequality is still

evidenced by economic disparities, unequal access to housing and education, underrepresentation

in political offices, and overrepresentation in prisons. The new racism is largely invisible to

whites, because it is institutionally enforced. Further, the ideology of colorblind racism serves to

rationalize racial inequality. One of the frames of colorblindness that Bonilla-Silva delineates is

"abstract liberalism." This means that whites will extend classical liberal principles to racial

situations in ways that preserve racial inequality. This may entail appeals to principles of

political liberalism—such as equality of opportunity, meritocracy, or equal rights—or principles

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[69] Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 2001): 43.

of economic liberalism—such as free market competition, individual choice, or limited government intervention.[70] In other words, Bonilla-Silva helps us understand how it is possible that white people have a hard time seeing racism, despite the persistence of inequality in outcomes between whites and people of color. The very formal rights that were extended to non-white people serve as the basis for explaining away any further instances of inequality.

If abstract principles can be used to justify racial inequality, then we might have doubts about the ability of Rawl's ideal theory, based on such abstract principles, to sufficiently address the differences in the way these principles are experienced in reality. Rawls's two principles of justice attempt to account for the inevitability of social and economic inequality by articulating the conditions under which it is justified. The first principle guarantees "an equal right to a full basic scheme of liberties," and the second requires that social and economic inequalities be attached to fair equality of opportunity and "be of greatest benefit to the least advantaged members of society."[71] However, insofar as these remain abstract principles, they cannot account for the gap between formal equality and true equality that African-Americans claim to experience. Equality of opportunity is one of the principles of abstract liberalism that, according to Bonilla-Silva, white Americans often employ to make sense of racial inequalities. But although fair equality of opportunity is, in principle, a right extended to all Americans, Bonilla-Silva argues that racial minorities do not experience equality of opportunity in the United States. Rawls himself acknowledges the limits of his theory to deal with the problem of rights that are merely formal, but he maintains that "it is beyond the scope of a philosophical doctrine to

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[70] Ibid., 140.

[71] Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* 291.

consider in any detail how this problem is to be solved, such a doctrine must explain the grounds upon which the necessary institutions and rules of law can be justified."[72]

It would seem, then, that the problem elucidated by Mills and Bonilla-Silva is irrelevant to Rawls's project, but Mills insists that this is not the case. Consider that Rawls thinks he is uncovering ideals that are already present in U.S. democratic culture and born out of enlightenment humanism. Mills points out that these "noble ideals" were never separate from racialized thinking. Racism was not an unfortunate deviation from these ideals; it was bound up in their construction. To the extent that we have not overcome that history, racism is s*till* bound up in the liberal ideals implicit in our culture. This may not be immediately obvious, especially to white citizens, but Bonilla-Silva uncovers it by demonstrating the ways white people use liberal principles to explain away the persistent inequality of people of color in the United States. Rawls, then, cannot rely on these implicit ideals to explain how institutions and rules of law can be justified, because these implicit ideals were themselves racialized ideals from the beginning. Our institutions and laws are racially discriminatory not *despite* these ideals, but very much in line with them as they were understood during the enlightenment and during the founding of the United States when enlightenment humanism was built into the constitution alongside the institution of slavery. To be sure, there is no clear *logical* connection between liberalism and racism. In fact, liberal ideals such as equality and freedom would logically lead away from racism or any other form of unjust discrimination. Nevertheless, the principles in and of themselves have not proven sufficient to overcome racism, and Rawls is mistaken to think they provide adequate tools to navigate these persistent inequalities.

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[72] Ibid., 357.

1.4 Pluralism and the Roots of Social Conflict

One might at this point ask, why I would spend so much time discussing race and gender when I am supposed to be discussing pluralism, generally defined by a diversity of belief systems or worldviews. I would first respond that, in my view, discussions of race and gender are not peripheral to discussions of pluralism. Though we generally assume a pluralist democracy to be one that allows for religious freedom, we cannot then subsequently assume that we understand people's motivations based mainly on their religion. The discussion of how best to put pluralism into practice must account for the way people are influenced by other facets of their identity. One is rarely identified by one thing alone. One can be a Christian and also black and female and heterosexual and disabled. Each of these facets of one's identity will influence how one experiences the world and acts within it. I am suggesting we should approach pluralism intersectionally, not defining people by their religion alone, but also recognizing that other facets of their identity might inform their actions and opinions on public issues.

Secondly, it is worth pointing out that religions, as much as race or gender, are marked by history. They do not exist in some essential form in a timeless vacuum, though sometimes they are treated that way in the language we use. Thankfully, Rawls does not fall into this trap; he is clearly aware that religions evolve and adapt to different contexts, but he does not take the next logical step to then recognize that more than competing belief systems might be at work when conflict arises between religious groups or individuals. For Rawls, it is still competing beliefs that form the biggest obstacle to just social cooperation. This overlooks the social unrest what has occurred throughout American History when marginalized and oppressed groups have sought to claim a greater share of rights and equal participation in American democracy, unrest

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that has occurred both as a result of these groups fighting for greater inclusion and as a result of more powerful groups seeking to suppress these efforts. Though violence is present in many such cases, this unrest and its suppression does not always manifest itself as out and out violence. It might also look like civil disobedience or peaceful protest. Suppression of such efforts may occur in the way they are dismissed or denied a platform by media outlets, unable to procure funding, or framed as dangerous and radical despite largely nonviolent organizing tactics. As just a few examples, consider the 1921 massacre in Tulsa's "black wall street," the 1992 Los Angeles race riots, the 2014 protests that erupted in Ferguson, Missouri in response to the police shooting of Michael Brown, the women's suffrage movement and backlashes against it (including the much feared "hatpin peril"[73]) in the early 20th century, the women's march of 2016, and increasing movements (like #MeToo) to resist sexual assault and violence against women. None of these instances of conflict and social unrest can be identified specifically with religion, even if some people likely had religious and/or theological motivations for participating in them.

I would argue that the way Rawls thinks about religion holds a strong resemblance to the way we talk about religion in American public life. To be sure our discourse about religion is multifaceted and complex; I cannot claim to capture it completely. However, I do observe a strand of public discourse about religion that, like Rawls, takes differences of religious belief and the imposition of religious belief in public life to be a significant source of conflict in society. One place (though certainly not the only place) we can observe this is in conversations about Islam.

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[73] For more on this, see Karen Abbot, "The Hatpin Peril terrorized men who couldn't handle the 20th century woman" *Smithsonian Magazine,* April 24th 2014. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/hatpin-peril-terrorized-men-who-couldnt-handle-20th-century-woman-180951219/

In the years since September 11, 2001 and the beginnings of the war on terrorism, there

has been much conversation about whether Islam is compatible with democracy, whether it is

inherently oppressive or inherently violent, and whether or not Muslims can be trusted to

assimilate into American life (or whether instead they will try to stealthily implement sharia law

in the U.S.). Certainly, there are many people who would defend Muslims against these charges,

but it is still evident that suspicions about Islam are deeply rooted in public discourse. The

underlying suspicion is that there is something in Islam, as a belief system, that simply cannot be

reconciled with American democracy; perhaps it is thought to be essentially theocratic and

cannot tolerate religious freedom, or it demands violence against non-Muslims, or it requires that

women be relegated to a subordinate status. In any case, the claim is that it is the *beliefs* of

Muslims that will not allow them to peacefully assimilate into American life.

This ignores much of the history of relations between Muslims and other groups in the

West. In fact, much of the history that Mills draws on in *The Racial Contract* is also relevant in

this case. Islam was racialized in the course of European colonialism, and many would argue that

the War on Terror has racialized it further. It was seen as the religion of a less rational people

who were clearly inferior to European Christians and easily enticed into religious rigidity and

authoritarian tyranny. Many reformist movements in Islam were born from the imposition of

western thought and culture on Muslim countries. A very small minority of these reform

movements evolved into radical extremist groups that came to be the terrorists we know today.

To then see this extremist violence as a natural outgrowth of Muslim theology, rather than as a

re-interpretation of Muslim theology in reaction to Western imperialism, ignores the historical

realities.[74] And yet many in the U.S (not to mention Europe and Australia), continue to write pieces about how Islam itself is the problem.

It is also important to recognize that Muslims are a diverse group with many divergent histories that should prevent us from looking at them as a singular group. For example, Muslims have lived in the U.S. since it was founded, having arrived on African slave ships. African American Muslims have lived in the U.S. much longer than the Muslims that immigrated from the Middle East, India, and Southeast Asia. These groups likely have a very different experience of being Muslim in the U.S. based on their different histories. Therefore, we cannot understand Muslim-Americans based on facile appeals to their theology and ethics. They, like members of any group, are complex human beings formed by diverse experiences.

Emphasizing the ways in which history and experience inform religious identity helps us understand the challenge of pluralism in a way that looking at it as merely a problem of competing belief systems cannot. One seemingly popular way for citizens to engage different belief systems is to organize interfaith dialogues. Though there can undoubtedly be value in such efforts, they are also worth interrogating. To look at these efforts intersectionally is to ask, who is invited to participate in these dialogues? Who is understood to have the authority to speak on behalf of their religious tradition? Are faith traditions treated as a monolith or is the internal diversity of traditions acknowledged? These questions begin to underscore the places where power and authority are located within the tradition, and whose voices are not heard in such conversations. In truth, it is likely impossible to design an interfaith dialogue in which the full

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[74] Carl Ernst, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Modern World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Khaled Beydouyn, *Islamophobia in America: Understanding the Roots and Rise of Fear* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018).

spectrum of voices within each tradition is included. Imagine trying to include voices from all the hundreds of Christian denominations present in the U.S. This would be overwhelming in and of itself, and to then to attempt to represent the denominations intersectionally one would need to include people of various gender, racial, and sexual identities as well. Even still, the full spectrum of voices within Christianity would not be included. While interfaith dialogues can be a helpful tool for gaining deeper insight into other faith traditions, these insights must be understood as only partial. They cannot encompass the whole of a tradition and all of its diverse participants, and they cannot fully account for the power differentials and internal debates within the religion. Provided this is recognized at the outset of such dialogues, they remain a valuable tool for the practice of pluralism. Nevertheless, they should be seen as only one tool in a larger toolbelt for navigating the differences that create social divisions. Their focus on religious difference, usually understood as different belief systems, limits their utility and necessitates a wider range of practices to bridge such divisions.

Ultimately, there is so much more than differing belief systems underneath the deep disagreements that exist in our public life. What Wolin, Mills, and Pateman help us see, is that we are still very much marked (burdened even) by a history of inequality and injustice that persists into the present, imprinted on our institutions and the way we practice our ideals. This burden of history is just as much, or perhaps more, a catalyst for social conflict as differences of belief. The debates sparked by the Black Lives Matter movement and the #MeToo movement are only the most recent examples. Both of these movements seek to challenge the historical inequality of African Americans and women which has yet to be corrected. To be sure, these movements also seek to change our beliefs about the world, the things we believe that serve to diminish black lives or doubt women's claims of harassment and violence. However, these are

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not the sort of beliefs that Rawls imagines as the source of conflict; they are implicit in our public political culture to an extent that Rawls cannot see.

If we begin to look at the roots of social conflict as not just a matter of competing beliefs but also as result of historical and material realities, then we may have to rethink our prescriptions for navigating political and social disagreement. As Elshtain and Wolin point out, Rawls is so afraid of social conflict that he tries to depoliticize politics as much as possible. However, would he reach the same conclusion if he understood the roots of conflict as I do? Perhaps. Or alternatively, perhaps he would agree with Wolin that conflict is a crucial part of a thriving democracy. Presumably, it is not a good thing when conflict results in violence or civil war, but that does not mean people can't actively debate or contend with one another in public life, even beyond the limits that Rawls suggests for virtuous citizens. In fact, this may be the only way to draw attention to the burdened histories and persistent inequalities that characterize our non-ideal reality. How we understand the risks and challenges of pluralism, therefore, effects how we choose to navigate them. To the extent that the way Rawls talks about religion and religious diversity mirrors the way we talk about these subjects in American society as a whole, we fall prey to an inadequately complex, intersectional, or historicist understanding of American pluralism. Only by refining and revising this understanding, and the analysis of social conflict it entails, can we hope to find a way forward through the many obstacles we still face in building a just and healthy pluralist democracy.

CHAPTER 2

ALASDAIR MACINTYRE'S CRITIQUE OF LIBERAL PLURALISM

Alasdair MacIntyre is not an obvious resource to draw upon when developing a new approach to pluralism. However, his work raises some important concerns that we must keep in mind when considering what a better approach to pluralism would look like. Pluralism as a political arrangement is often associated with the development of the liberal democratic state, beginning with the enlightenment. Rawls, who we examined in the previous chapter, represents an influential reworking of enlightenment liberalism and its political theory, while MacIntyre's neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics represents an influential critique of it.

MacIntyre is much more skeptical than Rawls of the possibilities for a successful pluralistic society. To some extent, they might be said to agree on the sources of social conflict; For Rawls it is different belief systems, which include competing religions, philosophical worldviews, and moral conceptions of the good. Competing notions of the good are also at issue for MacIntyre. However, this is mainly true in a pluralistic society; in the tradition-based communities MacIntyre advocates, the sources of conflict might look different. And, as I will discuss, MacIntyre frames this challenge quite differently than Rawls—in a way that is more attentive to the history of traditions, the way these traditions shape their constituents, and the distinctive moral languages they produce (which may not be easily translated across traditions).

MacIntyre, like Rawls, assumes there must be a shared structure of justification in order for productive debate to happen. Unlike Rawls, he does not believe this can take place in a pluralistic society characterized by the coexistence of a diversity of moral traditions. For MacIntyre, moral debate, with minimal exceptions, is only coherent and productive in the context of a single shared tradition. This difference stems from a disagreement over the extent to which a person can detach themselves from whatever religious tradition or philosophical worldview they adhere to. Rawls seems to think this is possible; MacIntyre is not so sure. His position has affinities with Jean Elshtain's critique of Rawls, in that MacIntyre sees people as very much bound up in the traditions they participate in; they cannot detach themselves from their traditions, because they are formed by them in ways that they are not even fully cognizant of. MacIntyre sees Rawls as representative of the modern liberalism that he is critiquing: Rawls conceives people mainly as individuals, he give little attention to humans as members of families or communities, and though he seeks consensus he offers very little in the way of resources for resolving interminable moral arguments.[75] MacIntyre is also critical, more broadly, of those who write in the tradition of enlightenment liberalism and adopt its notions of rational enquiry. Speaking generally about philosophy that assumes people can reach an impartial stance by distancing themselves from their particular context and worldview, MacIntyre writes:

> Its requirement of disinterestedness in fact covertly presupposes one particular
> partisan account of justice, that of liberal individualism, which it is later to be
> used to justify, so that its apparent neutrality is no more than an appearance, while
> its conception of ideal rationality as consisting in the principles which a socially
> disembodied individual would arrive at illegitimately ignores the inescapably

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[75] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, 2nd Edition,* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 246-253.

historically and socially context-bound character which any substantive set of
principles of rationality, whether theoretical or practical, is bound to have.[76]

To further bolster this point, MacIntyre observes that modern academic philosophy has largely
failed to offer resources for the resolution of fundamental disagreements over questions of justice
and practical rationality. In fact, philosophy professors are just as entrenched in their own
positions—and unsuccessful at convincing those with opposite positions—as the average citizen,
even if they articulate their arguments with greater precision and clarity.

Interminable disagreement is not just a feature of the academy. In the public sphere,
disputes on these matters take the form of the assertion and counter-assertion of competing and
incompatible premises by contending social groups. The result is that we cannot resolve any
debate about important moral issues, because, for the most part, we are simply speaking past one
another. This is the fundamental problem that MacIntyre identifies in moral philosophy, and by
extension, in Western society as a whole. Having identified this problem, his work attempts two
major tasks: to understand how we got here and to propose a better approach to thinking about
morality.

2.1 MacIntyre's Sociology of Modern Moral Philosophy

In *After Virtue,* his first major work aimed at accomplishing these tasks, MacIntyre seeks
to uncover the sociology of the current moment in order to better understand our predicament.

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[76] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 3-4.

The majority of the book is not devoted to discussing how one becomes good or virtuous. [77] Rather, his main argument in *After Virtue* is that this is an important question to ask in moral enquiry; the problem is that we have stopped asking it, and our modern assumptions have diverged so radically from those of Aristotle that we can no longer arrive at a coherent answer.

An incredibly influential moral theory in our current age, which MacIntyre finds hiding in a variety of philosophical guises, is emotivism, the notion that all moral judgments are merely statements of personal preference. MacIntyre takes emotivism to be the thesis against which he must position himself. This is not merely because it is an influential philosophical proposition, but also because "to a large degree people now think, talk, and act *as if* emotivism were true, no matter what their avowed theoretical stand-point may be. Emotivism has become embodied in our culture."[78] Thus, MacIntyre treats emotivism not only as a philosophical theory but also as a sociological hypothesis that explains something about the interminable character of moral argument in contemporary culture. We find such a variety of "heterogeneous and incommensurable concepts" being espoused by participants in any debate that there is no hope of settling any issue. We are afflicted by a "pluralism that threatens to submerge us all."[79]

MacIntyre's use of the word "pluralism" here, differs from Rawls in that he is not yet considering whether it might be possible for a society to accommodate a diversity of religious or philosophical beliefs; he is simply observing our current failure to do this successfully. He speaks not so much about pluralism as a political hypothesis, but rather pluralism as a descriptor of our current state. To be sure, this less-than-ideal reality will figure into his proposals for how

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[77] Though MacIntyre does some constructive work in chapters 14 and 15.
[78] Ibid., 21, (Emphasis Macintyre's).

[79] Ibid., 210.

such a diversity of beliefs and premises should be handled, but first he must identify the roots of the problem by tracing the history that led us here.

The problem, as he sees it, begins with the enlightenment attempt to justify morality while rejecting teleology. For Aristotle, ethics is the science that aids us in making the transition between "human-nature-as-it-happens-to-be" and "human-nature-as-it-could-be-if-it-realized-its-*telos.*"[80] Enlightenment thinkers almost uniformly reject such a teleological view of human nature; beginning with Pascal, philosophers begin to argue that reason can only speak of means and not of ends.[81]

This line of thinking leads many modern philosophers to assert that no "ought" conclusion can be derived from "is" premises. In other words, one cannot determine how something *ought* to be or behave simply from knowing what or how something *is.* However, this logic only works for non-functional concepts. A watch is a functional concept, for example, because a "good" watch is a watch that functions as a watch *ought* to function: it keeps good time, fits comfortably on one's wrist or in one's pocket, does not break easily, etc. "Watch" is a concept we define in terms of the function it serves. Thus, MacIntyre points out, it is a curious consequence of the enlightenment rejection of teleology that "human" ceases to be a functional concept. In part, this is a consequence of the fact that enlightenment thinkers began to see humans as individuals first and foremost, rather than social creatures occupying various social

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[80] Macintyre, *After Virtue*, 50.

[81] Ibid., 52-53.

roles. For Aristotle, ethics was a *political science,* concerned not only with the good of the individual but also of the community, or the *polis.*[82]

The enlightenment created the autonomous individual, and in the process, according to MacIntyre, rendered moral argument incoherent and interminable:

> the price paid for liberation from what appeared to be the external authority of traditional morality was the loss of any authoritative content from the would-be moral utterances of the newly autonomous agent. Each moral agent now spoke unconstrained by the externalities of divine law, natural teleology or hierarchical authority; but why should anyone else now listen to him?[83]

The problem of understanding each individual as an autonomous moral agent is that each person becomes their own moral authority, subject to no other. To abstract the individual from a tradition, a history, a community is to disconnect that person from any common basis of agreement with other people. Although many modern moral philosophers have tried to articulate an objective, impersonal ground for morality, MacIntyre insists that all such attempts have failed. Contemporary moral argument has become interminable in the sense that there seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement. Even though moral arguments often purport to be impersonal and rational, appealing to justice, rights, or duty, they fail to convince anyone who does not share the same understanding of what justice, rights, or duty entail.[84]

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[82] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* 2nd Ed., Trans. Terrence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1999): 1-2.

[83] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981): 65-66.

[84] Ibid., 6-8.

As a corrective to this precarious condition, MacIntyre proposes the recovery of two

concepts: the understanding of human life as a narrative unity and the concept of a practice with

goods internal to itself. To understand each human life as a narrative unity is to reconnect the

individual with the tradition, the history, and the community by which she was preceded, by

which she is formed as an individual, and within which she will live out her life. Such a narrative

approach makes human actions intelligible because, MacIntyre explains, "I can only answer the

question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find

myself a part?' We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters—roles into

which we have been drafted—and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to

understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed."[85]

To understand our lives as narratives, then, is to understand ourselves as much more than

autonomous individuals. We are social animals. We are rooted in a social world with certain

expectations and certain conceptions of the good, and within which we play certain roles.

Narratives also have a teleological character. We live our lives, both individually and socially,

with certain conceptions of what is possible in the future. Furthermore, this possible future is a

shared future, lived with other people who share in the same possibilities.

The need to conceive of practices containing internal goods is a corrective to the

tendency of certain enlightenment philosophers to think of morality in terms of altruism. To

think that moral practices might contain certain internal goods is to understand that they are not

merely altruistic, containing no benefit for the actor, but rather contribute to the overall good of a

human life, the achievement of *eudaimonia.* Recalling Aristotle, MacIntyre proposes that our

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[85] Ibid., 201.

capacity to perform such practices is learned over time, and these capacities can be called virtues. In other words, "a virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods."[86] Additionally, virtues are learned through the community or society in which we are raised. Understandings of the virtues particular to that community are inculcated in us by others in the community: our parents, our teachers, our friends. In this process, one learns that virtues, the practices they enable, and the goods that they make possible are necessarily social; "my good as a man [sic] is one and the same as the good of those others with whom I am bound up in community."[87]

2.2 The Rationality of Traditions

The ultimate reason that MacIntyre wants to recover these notions is to discern a way forward for rational moral enquiry. The enlightenment has failed to deliver a universal rationality that transcends any particular tradition or social context. As MacIntyre sees it, they failed in this task because no such universal rationality exists. Rationality is context bound; it can only take place within a shared tradition of enquiry, because such a tradition has a shared language, a shared set of premises, and a shared history. Moral enquiry is most productive within a coherent tradition of this sort. The way forward, then, is to recognize this fact and give our allegiance to some tradition or another.

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[86] Ibid., 178.

[87] Ibid., 213.

MacIntyre is not a moral relativist, though he sometimes sounds like one in his suggestion that rationality is relative to the tradition within which it takes place. Still, this does not mean that no tradition is superior to any other or that no tradition has a better claim to truth than any other. Instead, it means that truth or progress is most effectively pursued within a tradition that shares a language of enquiry. MacIntyre, then, is perhaps more accurately characterized as a moral pluralist because he recognizes that there are a variety of moral languages within which moral enquiry can take place, and he doesn't think there is any single language of morality or rationality that is universal. Interestingly, it is his moral pluralism that leads him to reject pluralism as a political arrangement. A pluralist society cannot have productive moral debate, because we are all speaking different, incommensurable languages. Unlike Rawls, MacIntyre does not believe we can translate our tradition-bound reasons into some sort of "public" reason.[88] Such public, non-tradition-bound reasons do not exist, or at least not to an extent that will allow for productive debate.

2.3 Interrogating MacIntyre's Concept of a Tradition

It is MacIntyre's focus on tradition-based rationality that makes him a strange resource to draw on in a discussion of pluralism. He is, after all, arguing against the liberal pluralist tradition as a useful way of approaching social and moral life. I want to examine the parts of his thought that are not amenable to pluralism, and in the process, I will interrogate the ambiguities and deficiencies in his notion of tradition. However, we will see in the next section, that MacIntyre

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[88] Though his more recent work, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity,* does suggest we can find some agreement on common goods, as I will discuss below.

may indeed be a useful resource for a discussion of pluralism, particularly if one conceives pluralism as a social practice.

The first reason that MacIntyre's theory does not seem amenable to pluralism, is that he doubts that arguments from various traditions can be translated in a way that allows for the successful resolution of disputes with people who adhere to other traditions. However, I find that his understanding of a tradition is too vague to merit his conclusions regarding how we ought to practice moral debate.

Before proceeding further with this critique, we must be clear about how MacIntyre defines "tradition." In *After Virtue,* MacIntyre defines a "living tradition" as a "historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition."[89] A tradition, then, is itself an argument, but unlike the interminable arguments of modernity, it proceeds based on certain first principles that all agree on. If the first principles change, it is because the tradition has evolved over time. Those who take part in this extended argument must be aware, to some extent, that this argument has a particular history and is embodied in a particular social community. There is no Rawlsian attempt to distance oneself from such particularities.

It would be helpful to have a clear example of what does and does not constitute a tradition. MacIntyre is better at providing the former than the latter. From his writing we can understand that Thomism is a tradition and liberalism is a tradition in crisis. It is not clear what to make of certain movements that are explicitly aimed at challenging tradition. For example, is feminism a tradition? It might be, depending on how one interprets MacIntyre's definition.

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[89] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 222.

Feminism has not reached a clear consensus about how it is defined or what its goals are (in fact, these questions seem to be more and more disputed over time), but it can certainly be seen as an extended argument about the goods that constitute it. It is possible to trace the argument from the so-called first wave through the second, third, and fourth waves. To the extent that feminism can be identified by these historically defined waves, it is aware of its history and engaged in an ongoing argument about where we should go from here.

A question that might be raised against this conclusion (that feminism is a tradition) is whether or not feminists are in agreement on the basic premises or first principles of their tradition. This is very much an open question in my mind. I could raise as a plausible premise for feminism the idea that men and women are essentially equal, and I think most feminists would generally accept this premise. However, the premise becomes foggier when we recognize that there may be widespread disagreement on the meaning of the terms "men", "women," and "equal." Ideas of sex and gender, including the categories "man" and "woman," are being constantly deconstructed and the increasing number of people identifying as "non-binary" complicates this even more. Furthermore, there is some debate over the extent to which one can affirm men and women as equal while still affirming fundamental differences between them. Complementarian feminists, for example, affirm the equality of men and women while also arguing that they should occupy different roles—roles that can look very much like the traditional gender roles that most feminists have sought to challenge.

Additionally, it is unclear in MacIntyre whether one could be loyal to multiple traditions at once, though I read him as saying that one cannot. For example, could one be loyal to both feminism and Islam? This is an ongoing debate among Muslims. Some say Islam and feminism are incompatible while others are happy to embrace the label of "Muslim feminist." The fact that

self-identified Muslim feminists exist, demonstrates that it is theoretically possible to embrace

both traditions (if in fact feminism is a tradition). Nevertheless, MacIntyre seems to imply that

that only one tradition should be the object of one's loyalty if one is to engage in coherent moral

conversation. And this either casts doubt on the idea that feminism can be understood as a

tradition or casts doubt on MacIntyre's conclusions.

We might alternatively define feminism as not a tradition, but a mode of analysis which

one can use to argue for change within one's own tradition. This would more or less solve the

issues I identified above. However, I am not convinced that it resolves the ambiguity in

MacIntyre's understanding of tradition. After all, feminism does fit MacIntyre's criteria in quite

a few ways. It is only the dispute over definitions that makes it truly difficult to categorize. And I

expect such disagreements over premises and definitions could be found in many other

traditions. Moreover, there remains the question of the extent to which one can raise feminist

concerns about a tradition while still remaining loyal to that tradition (and, thus, able to

participate in it as an ongoing argument). Susan Moller Okin states the problem quite well:

> In spite of MacIntyre's persistent use of gender-neutral language, it is clear that
> most women, as well as men who have any kind of feminist consciousness, will
> not find in any of his traditions a rational basis for moral and political action.
> Where, then, do we stand? Are we outside all traditions and therefore "in a state
> of moral and intellectual destitution?" Can one be anything *but* an outsider to a
> tradition that excludes one, and some of the things one values most, from what it
> regards as the best human life?[90]

The ambiguous case of feminism reveals another difficulty in MacIntyre's theory:

understanding how, in tradition based rational enquiry, significant social change can happen.

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[90] Susan Moller Okin, *Gender, Justice, and the Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1989): 60-61.
(Emphasis Okin's).

How can a tradition be challenged in such a way as to be transformed into a more just system if one is bound to speak within the terms of the tradition itself? Put another way, is it not true that the very premises of the tradition itself must be undermined, in some cases, in order for it to progress? We can take as an example the work of Charles Mills and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva that I addressed in the last chapter. Mills uncovers the ways in which the principles and premises of liberal contract theory were built on the exclusion of racialized others. Bonilla-Silva demonstrates that racism has not gone away so much as it has adapted to a society in which overt racism is no longer acceptable, and liberal principles like equality of opportunity are used to justify persistent oppressive social structures. These two authors at the very least cast doubt on the extent to which liberalism can be reformed using its own terms of debate. Similar arguments could be made about the persistence of sexism despite formal equality between men and women. It would be unfair to say that MacIntyre does not address these questions—though I will argue he does not address them adequately—and, before pursuing further critique, it will be important to understand how social change looks in his tradition-based enquiry.

On the question of loyalty and dissent, MacIntyre has an intriguing sentence in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry,* which might make some critics uneasy. Here MacIntyre posits that "membership in a particular type of moral community, one from which fundamental dissent has to be excluded, is a condition for genuinely rational enquiry and more especially for moral and theological enquiry."[91] He does not explain further at this point; he is simply proposing a hypothesis that he will go on to defend in the remainder of the book, that rational enquiry should be tradition based. Still, at no point in the book does he return to address the idea of

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[91] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990): 59.

"fundamental dissent" and its necessary exclusion. Excluding dissent of any kind could be read by some as inherently oppressive. Nevertheless, if I read this sentence in the larger context of his work, I don't take him to mean disagreement or conflict cannot take place within a tradition. MacIntyre thinks traditions should be *living* traditions that change and develop over time. It is perhaps more generous to interpret him as saying that people must accept the premises or first principles upon which a tradition is founded in order to participate in it; otherwise, they are not even speaking the same language, and no progress can be made.

MacIntyre, in fact, wrestles elsewhere in his work with questions surrounding the extent to which dissent can be tolerated as well as the extent to which loyalty can be considered a virtue. In an essay entitled "Toleration and the Goods of Conflict," he begins with the question, "when ought we to be intolerant and why?"[92] We can surmise from the title of the essay that, unlike Rawls, MacIntyre is not averse to conflict in politics. Conflict can be productive and even essential to the progress and enrichment of a community.[93] Instead, MacIntyre seeks to clarify when conflict become detrimental to the life of a community. What is the line between unjustifiably suppressing dissenting viewpoints and justifiably excluding certain voices? In other words, what sorts of utterances can be viewed as intolerable within a conflict? It should be noted that he is interested in this question as it pertains to local communities and not the national state. He is quite worried about the pernicious effect of the state intervening in debates between rival conceptions of the human good. Local communities, as will be discussed further in the next section, are where MacIntyre believes debate on such questions is most productive and

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[92] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Toleration and the Goods of Conflict," in *Ethics and Politics: Selected Essays, Volume 2* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 205.

[93] Ibid., 207.

appropriate and, thus, is the proper context within which to consider questions of justified intolerance.

With this in mind, he lays out several conditions for rational dialogue on the common goods of a community. First, a community aiming for a consensus on the common good should aim to include as many voices as possible so long as they share this goal, but "it must also ensure that those with irrelevant or conflicting aims do not subvert their shared enquiry."[94] Second, rational discussion can be said to be incompatible with certain modes of expression such as threats and insults, and the employment of such tactics could justifiably result in a person being temporarily excluded from the conversation. Finally, it is reasonable for a community to consider some questions conclusively settled, and "an insistence that certain kinds of questions remain open may be a sign of the type of character that disqualifies those who possess it from further participation in discussion."[95] Macintyre offers opposition to antisemitism as an example of a point that should be reasonably regarded as conclusively settled. Thus, Holocaust deniers could justifiably be ignored and excluded from engagement in debates relevant to this question. In each of these cases, MacIntyre does not advocate government suppression of these viewpoints so much as a tacit or explicit agreement among members of a community to ignore them or exclude people who express them by choosing not to include them in decision-making conversations or positions of local authority.

MacIntyre, like Rawls, is interested in defining the qualities of civic virtue: those practices and dispositions that allow one to contribute most productively and positively to the life

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[94] Ibid., 215.

[95] Ibid., 217.

of a community. Those who severely lack such virtue, to the extent that they become a serious detriment to their community, are those who might be justifiably excluded from the conversation, but the terms of such exclusion and the means of its enforcement are ultimately to be decided by the group or community within which this issue arises.

It is helpful to further consider MacIntyre's account of civic virtue by looking at an essay he wrote entitled, "Is Patriotism a Virtue?", in which he never answers the question in his title with a definitive "yes" or "no." MacIntyre is duly skeptical of the modern nation-state and the loyalty it demands of its citizens. Still, he finds this question productive for contemplating the extent of the loyalty and consent that a community may demand of its members; the nation is after all conceived as a social community, even if MacIntyre doubts it can be a successful one. He concludes that loyalty, in this case understood as patriotism, does not exclude most forms of dissent, including criticism of the government, its structures and policies, and those who hold power. There is, however, *some* level of dissent that must be excluded if one can be said to exhibit the virtue of loyalty[96]:

> What then is exempted? The answer is this: the nation conceived *as a project*, a project somehow or other brought into birth in the past and carried on so that a morally distinctive community was brought into being which embodied a claim to political autonomy in its various organized and institutionalized expressions.[97]

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[97] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Is Patriotism a Virtue?", in *Communitarianism: A New Public Ethics,* ed. Markate Daly (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1994): 314.

This illuminates what MacIntyre means by "fundamental dissent" in *Three Rival Versions*; it is dissent that has given up on that tradition as a project worth continuing; such dissent undermines the very existence of the community or tradition one is critiquing.

Lisa Tessman helpfully extends this analysis to consider what this account of loyalty might mean for oppressed or marginalized groups. She finds MacIntyre helpful in articulating what loyalty means as a virtue and how it still allows for critique, but her main interest lies in considering the virtues of groups engaged in liberatory struggles. MacIntyre's analysis allows her to establish that one can be a member of a marginalized group or identity while still being critical of it. For example, black women can fight against anti-black racism while still calling out the sexism they experience from black men; this does not make them disloyal to their community, even if they are sometimes accused of being so. This allows her to acknowledge the complex and intersectional nature of identity and how it makes loyalty as a virtue incredibly complicated. Following MacIntyre, she proceeds with "the assumption that one cannot be loyal to a group if one questions or undermines its basis for existence."[98] This means that one cannot be loyal to women while simultaneously seeking to deconstruct the category "woman." Such attempts at deconstruction have happened and seem to be becoming more common, and far from condemning such attempts, Tessman recognizes that such "betrayals" may in some cases be entirely necessary. The challenge often lies in distinguishing whether deconstruction of a group identity is called for, or whether seeking transformation is a better course of action.

Tessman argues that loyalty in such a context is a "burdened virtue," a term she uses to describe "virtues that have the unusual feature of being regularly disjoined from their bearers

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[98] Lisa Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005): 150.

own flourishing."[99] It is burdened because the types of identities and communities that are available under conditions of oppression create moral dilemmas for political resisters in regard to loyalty:

> First, when they are loyal to a group that calls for critique but not deconstruction, they are burdened with a commitment to a community that may still do significant damage to their selves (because the community has not yet been critically transformed in ways that would reduce its internal dynamics of domination and subordination) and with the hardships of being a critic, never fully belonging as a comfortably accepted member. Second, when political resisters consider loyalty to communities that—as their own critical judgements may lead them to believe—would be better deconstructed, they find not that they are saddled with loyalty as a burdened virtue, but rather that loyalty becomes altogether unavailable as virtue. In these cases, disloyalty is morally prescribed.[100]

This assessment of the complex dynamics of loyalty and dissent goes much further than MacIntyre in describing the difficulties of life in a community for those who feel marginalized or seek social change. Tessman clearly sees her treatment of loyalty as building on MacIntyre rather than critiquing him. Nevertheless, I find that her analysis highlights an area in which MacIntyre's theory in sorely lacking: an awareness of the complex and messy dynamics of social change, particularly from the perspective of those who do not feel at home in their community or tradition.

This is not to say that MacIntyre does not address social change at all; he certainly does. His clearest treatment of social change occurs in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* with his notion of epistemological crises. An epistemological crisis occurs within a tradition when,

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[99] Ibid., 160.

[100] Ibid., 156.

By its own standards of progress, it ceases to make progress. Its…methods of enquiry have become sterile… [or] begin to have the effect of increasingly disclosing new inadequacies, hitherto unrecognized incoherencies, and new problems for the solution of which there seems to be insufficient or no resources within the established fabric of belief.[101]

Such situations require the invention or discovery of new concepts and theories that allow a community to both explain why the crisis occurred and give new coherence to the tradition going forward. To achieve this, a tradition may have to look outside itself, to other traditions, to discover new resources that will resolve the epistemological crisis. Some people within the community should commit themselves to study of another tradition to find these resources, and such an enquiry may require an admission that the alien tradition is superior in some respects. Once all questions and arguments can be adequately answered, the epistemological crisis has been resolved.

MacIntyre is known for contending that liberalism is one such tradition in crisis, and this serves as a useful starting point from which to assess his account of social change. A first question one might ask is, whether a tradition will be able recognize that it is in such a state of stagnation. MacIntyre has a ready answer to this challenge since he concedes that "an epistemological crisis may only be recognized for what it was in retrospect."[102] One need only return to the first pages of *After Virtue*, to recall that MacIntyre is under no illusion that liberalism has recognized its state of incoherence. However, nearly 40 years after the publication of *After Virtue*, as politics in the United States has grown more and more contentious, polarized, and chaotic, it is plausible to think we may be getting closer to recognizing it (insofar as we see

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[101] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?,* 361-62.

[102] Ibid., 363.

the U.S. as a manifestation of the liberal tradition). Nevertheless, those who profess their

allegiance to classical liberalism often argue that we need to get back to the tradition's best

principles (e.g. civil debate and reasoned disagreement) rather than that we ought to look outside

the tradition; one need only peruse to pages of the New York Times Op-Ed section for examples

of this tendency[103]

Since I have said that MacIntyre does not give enough consideration to marginalized

groups, we might now consider how they fit into his notion of epistemological crisis as it

pertains to American liberalism. "Marginalized groups" are, of course, diverse, both internally

and externally, so I will try to avoid painting them with too broad a brush. For now, I will stick

to my previous examples of race and gender and the social movements that surround them. If we

return to the subversive contract theorists treated in the previous chapter, we will remember that

both Patemen and Mills describe liberalism as built on the exclusion of women and people of

color. Thus, we cannot simply argue that racism or sexism are incompatible with liberal

principles or a symptom that liberalism is broken. In fact, liberalism can be said to be functioning

exactly as it was designed to function.

Now, as I wrote in the previous chapter, there is no clear logical connection between

liberalism and racism or sexism. If one takes liberal principles at face value, they would seem to

lead in the opposite direction. Therefore, it could perhaps be said that feminists and anti-racism

activists are exposing "hitherto unrecognized incoherencies," thus precipitating an

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[103] See, for example, Bret Stephens, "Free Speech and the Necessity of Discomfort" *The New York Times* (February 22, 2018) https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/22/opinion/free-speech-discomfort.html and Armando Ianucci, "Russia Banned My Movie; Hold Your Applause" *The New York Times* (March 9. 2018) https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/09/opinion/death-stalin-banned-russia.html

epistemological crisis and perhaps helping to resolve it. Still, this is not the crisis in liberalism that MacIntyre has diagnosed. As he sees it, the problem with liberalism is that it has made each person a sovereign entity, entitled to their own opinions, and this gives people no way to talk to one another. Perhaps this is part of the problem, but it is not enough to account for the sort of critiques that these activists make.

Is the person of color who challenges white supremacy merely speaking their own opinion? In part, yes, but they are speaking out of their own experience, one that the white person who disagrees with them cannot fully understand, because they have never experienced racism. And the woman who challenges sexism and misogyny is, again, speaking from an experience which men do not, for the most part, share. Once again, we are embedded in our history and experiences, but this is not precisely the same as being embedded in traditions. In fact, a tradition-based community of enquiry could be subject to the same differentials of power and social status as a pluralistic liberal democracy, and with no better resources to resolve them.

Feminist philosophers Nancy Fraser and Nicola Lacey elaborate on this problem further by arguing that, despite his emphasis on moral practices that develop and are cultivated within a tradition, MacIntyre does not sufficiently deal with "evil practices," because he does not offer enough analysis of the working of power in the conditions under which practices emerge. That is to say, he is clear that moral practices are socially established and socially sustained; they are embedded in relationships—and in the role one occupies within those relationships—and reinforced by recognized sources of authority and established social norms. However, he does not duly consider the negative side of such practices, that they can condition people to act in ways that are ultimately detrimental to themselves and others. Fraser and Lacey offer sexual harassment as an example:

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It is underpinned by social institutions of masculinity and normal sexuality—whether one is doing masculinity right is not up for one to decide; there is a public objective fact of the matter about standards. The practice itself is an item in a matrix of sexual practices that are constitutive of a particular and concrete masculine sexuality. The practice and the institutions have their counterpart in discourse: pornography, men's talk, women's talk and other discourse of gender from women's magazines and romantic fiction to psychoanalysis and sociobiology.[104]

Given this picture, what MacIntyre lacks is an account of how the excluded make their voice heard and how those who are included but dominated can critically challenge the status quo. As Fraser and Lacey point out, such an account is not difficult to come by: "fragmented experience generates contradictory experience which can, in turn, generate critical ideas when subjects try to make sense of their lives."[105] In other words, marginalized persons may be spurred by their experience of marginalization to question their tradition, and then to challenge it. There may be room for this account in MacIntyre's theory, but at present, it is altogether missing.

In a brief response to Fraser and Lacey, MacIntyre admits that he has done little to address such evil practices. However:

This dilemma does not arise if a conception of justice and other virtues which is adequate both to the relationships internal to practices and to those between participants in particular practices and wider local community, can be invoked against deformation and prejudice. The conception of justice as a virtue which is required if the goods internal to a practice are to be achieved, let alone the goods of individual lives and of communities, is itself sufficient to provide a standard for identifying and condemning the deformations and distortions to which practices may be subject.[106]

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[104] Nancy Fraser and Nicola Lacey, "MacIntyre, Feminism and the Concept of a Practice," in *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre,* Eds. John P. Horton and Susan Mendus (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 272.

[105] Ibid., 279.

[106] Alasdair MacIntyre, "A Partial Response to My Critics," in *After MacIntyre,* 290.

This response, if I understand it correctly, appears to argue that all that is needed to guard against inequality, discrimination, or oppressive structures is an adequate understanding of justice. Still, MacIntyre does not explain *how* such an adequate conception of justice as a virtue can develop in a community that is marked by inequality or oppression. Furthermore, the virtue of justice can only guard against the "deformation" and "distortions" of practices that lead to injustice for women and others, if indeed these "evil" practices can be seen as deformations and distortions. If, instead, the tradition is built upon a certain understanding of gender that reinforces the practices of proper masculinity and proper femininity, as Fraser and Lacey describe—if so called "traditional" gender roles are seen as the proper order of things—then such practices are, in fact, fully consistent with that tradition and will not necessarily expose incoherences when challenged.

The brevity of MacIntyre's response, likely due to the length constraints of the edited volume in which it is published, prevents us from better understanding his point. Nevertheless, without a more robust theory of the workings of power and the obstacles it presents for social change, MacIntyre is unlikely to satisfy his feminist critics. His argument for how we ought to engage in moral enquiry only works if tradition-based rationality is in fact more effective for making moral progress than liberalism. At present, MacIntyre leaves us with much the same problem as Rawls does: a common language of justification alone will not save us. For Rawls, shared political principles of justice translated into the language of public reason were not sufficient to challenge entrenched structures of racism and sexism. MacIntyre relies not on the common language of public reason, but the common language of a single tradition to solve such problems. However, since the language about justice, equality, difference, and social status,

among other things, will be relative to a particular tradition, and since existing norms and social structures are embedded within that moral language, it is not obvious that tradition-based enquiry contains the resources to challenge structures of injustice.

2.4 Tradition, Pluralism, and the Politics of Local Community

A second reason MacIntyre's theory does not seem amenable to pluralism lies in his critique of the liberal state as the context for a pluralist society. The liberal state is ideally neutral, not embracing any particular tradition, comprehensive doctrine, or idea of the good. Though MacIntyre is critical of this ideal of neutrality, he also does not ally himself with the communitarian critique of liberalism which posits that the nation-state should give expression to some notion of the common good. Such thinking assumes the nation-state can be the locus of community, and MacIntyre worries that such thinking contains the seeds of totalitarianism. Liberals have been right to reject such notions, but they put too much faith in the neutralist state to produce the necessary conditions for productive public deliberation. The practice-based Aristotelian forms of community that MacIntyre idealizes can only be realized in small-scale, local forms of political association.[107]

MacIntyre understands politics in the Aristotelian sense. Ethics is not separate from politics. Humans are political animals, and ethics is a political science. In our present culture, politics is seen as a choice, an optional activity available to those who have time and interest. Politics, in this way of thinking, "has as its central concern the adjustment of the relationships of

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[107] Alasdair MacIntyre, "A Partial Response to my Critics," in *After Macintyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre,* Eds. John Horton and Susan Mendus (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994): 302-303.

state and market."[108] Politics in the Aristotelian sense is an activity in which every citizen should take part because the good of each individual is bound up in the good of the community, and the aim of the political community is the common good and the flourishing of its members. A political community, then *should* have some overriding notion of the common good as the communitarians suggest, but the modern nation state cannot be the bearer of this vision because it is too large, bureaucratic, and unwieldy. A political community with a vision of the common good must be one in which everyone is able to participate. Everyone must have a voice, even the most vulnerable.

In *Dependent Rational Animals,* MacIntyre devotes significant space to considering the sorts of social and political structures that would give voice to the vulnerable, specifically, in this case, the disabled. In doing so, MacIntyre aims to highlight the fact of human dependence (practically embodied in, what he calls, "the virtues of acknowledged dependence") and its relation to the common good:

> What I am trying to envisage then is a form of political community in which it is taken for granted that disability and dependence on others are something that all of us experience at certain times in our lives and this to unpredictable degrees, and that consequently our interest in how the needs of the disabled are adequately voiced and met is not a special interest, the interest of one particular group rather than others, but rather the interest of the whole political society, an interest that is integral to their conception of the common good. What kind of society might possess the structures necessary to achieve a common good thus conceived?[109]

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[108] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: an Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 182.

[109] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1999): 130.

Most contemporary political philosophy cannot answer this question because of its failure to deal with the intermediate forms of association that occur between the nation-state, on the one hand, and the nuclear family on the other. The nation-state is too large and unwieldy to cultivate the relationships of just giving and receiving that MacIntyre seeks (though it may in some cases provide regulatory guidelines in the service of humane goals, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act[110]). The family, in contrast, is a source of such relationships, but not the only one, and the family can only flourish within a social environment that is also flourishing; it is not a self-sufficient institution.[111]

The form of association best suited to cultivating and sustaining the virtues of acknowledged dependence is that of the local community, one in which intermediary institutions such as "families, workplaces, schools, clinics, clubs dedicated to debate and clubs dedicated to games and sport, and religious congregation may all find a place."[112] Such a community is also one in which each member is regarded as someone from whom we can "learn about the common good and our own good, and who may always have lessons to teach us about those goods that we will not be able to learn elsewhere."[113] In the case of the disabled, we might learn from them how our judgement of a person, their reasoning or abilities, is erroneously influenced by their physical appearance or manner of self-presentation. Through encountering and building relationships with such persons, we are challenged to rethink the dominant norms of our social environment and to work to transform those norms. This attitude, in which it is acknowledged that we have

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[110] Ibid., 133.

[111] Ibid., 134.

[112] Ibid., 135.

[113] Ibid.

something to learn from each other member of a community, must be regarded as a "political" attitude, according to MacIntyre. To adopt this attitude towards the disabled is to accord them political recognition and to recognize that it would be wrong to exclude them from political life.[114]

Though still not particularly attentive to question of power, this account gives some voice to the fact that the way a society approaches difference (in this case, differences of ability) affects its capacity to challenge unjust social and political norms. In some ways, this vision seems a form of ideal theory, a la Rawls, in that it envisions a just political order that does not, to my knowledge, exist in reality. Yet, in keeping his vision small and localized, MacIntyre makes it easier to imagine its application. His emphasis on virtues and their constituent practices provide some concrete steps each person can take to cultivate the virtues that allow such a society to exist. In this case, in order to cultivate the virtues of acknowledged dependence, we can begin by adopting the attitude that each person is someone from whom we can learn, adapting our habits of interacting with others to reflect this attitude, and encouraging fellow community members to cultivate this attitude as well.

Dependent Rational Animals provides his most robust account of civic virtue and how the actions of citizens in relation to one another can either promote or stifle social progress. Notably, the book is not at all focused on tradition-based enquiry, like most of his later works, and perhaps this is why I find it more compelling. Macintyre does advocate a politics of local community in his more tradition focused writing as well, though not in so much detail, and his treatment of this political model in other works leaves me with a point of confusion: I do not

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[114] Ibid., 137-8.

understand the connection between MacIntyre's politics of local communities and his tradition-based enquiry. Must local communities be constituted by a single tradition in order to fulfill MacIntyre's vision? Do local communities work as an arena for politics only insofar as the members of that community identify themselves as standing within a single tradition?

This returns us to the ambiguity in MacIntyre's notion of tradition discussed above. His work on tradition-based rationality suggests that it is only within traditions, with their common moral language, that deliberation on the common good is coherent. Yet in his more extended discussions on the politics of local community in *Dependent Rational Animals* and, to a lesser extent, in *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*,[115] his defense of tradition-based enquiry does not make an appearance. Could not such a political model be practiced in a pluralistic community characterized by people from a diversity of traditions deliberating on their common good?

Mark Murphy raises a similar question focused on MacIntyre's discussion of goods internal to a practice. He points out that, in *After Virtue,* MacIntyre "takes it to be a defining feature of goods internal to a practice that one who has not been initiated into and educated within a practice is not competent as a judge of internal goods: such a person cannot appreciate them adequately, cannot understand when they have been achieved, and cannot discern greater or lesser achievement with respect to the realization of those goods."[116] Regardless, then, of whether a plurality of traditions exists in a community, it will always be the case that a plurality of practices exists, and this itself is a barrier to deliberation on the common good. By MacIntyre's account, chess players cannot understand the internal goods of football and vice

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[115] Ibid., 176-183.

[116] Mark C. Murphy, "MacIntyre's Political Philosophy," in *Alasdair MacIntyre,* Ed. Mark C. Murphy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 173.

versa. This is also an obstacle because the pursuit of the common good involves deliberating on the proper ordering of goods, and an inability to understand the goods of other practices makes such an ordering impossible to achieve. As Murphy points out, it might be argued that the deficiency in one person's knowledge can be supplemented by another person's knowledge, and, thus, there is common pool of knowledge from which a community can draw. But such deliberation requires "essentially, *comparative* knowledge—knowledge of the relative importance of different goods, of how certain goods should or should not be subordinated to others,"[117] and how is this possible when MacIntyre has already noted that outsiders to a practice cannot adequately understand internal goods. The challenges of translating moral language apply not only across different traditions, but across different practices, which may even occur within the same tradition. Such is the extent of MacIntyre's concern about the limits of language to bridge differences of history, tradition, and experience.

It may simply be the case that MacIntyre's thought has evolved over time, including his skepticism about comparative knowledge. After all, he has clearly moderated his rather dire conclusions at the end of *After Virtue.* Ultimately, the extent to which we accept that deliberation on the common good can happen within a community depends on the extent to which we believe comparative knowledge is possible, as well as the extent of the agreement on moral issues we consider possible in a diverse society.

Pragmatist philosopher Jeffrey Stout, who I will treat in more detail in the next chapter, provides a helpful critique in this regard. He argues that MacIntyre both underestimates the amount of agreement we currently have and overestimates the amount of agreement we actually

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[117] Ibid., 174. (Emphasis Murphy's).

need. MacIntyre, after all, does not provide us any way of determining how deep moral disagreement goes in a society or how much agreement we might need to get by. Stout, drawing on Donald Davidson, posits that our moral disagreement does not go "all the way down"; if it did, we would not be able to agree about the issues on which we disagree. The very fact that we understand that we are disagreeing, means that we are on some level speaking the same moral language.

Stout also asks if we need the complete consensus on the good that MacIntyre seems to demand. He posits that an overlapping consensus can serve us quite well. It is, after all, hard to imagine any society that has not had a diversity of beliefs about human ends, and we will always have to navigate such diversity. Stout proposes that in the U.S. most people at least agree on the provisional *telos* of our society. This *telos* grew from the idea that an end to wars of religion, (and attempts to impose a comprehensive vision of human good by coercion or force) is both morally good and practically desirable.[118] Most people still agree that freedom of religion and speech are good things and should be preserved by society. There is, then, some level of consensus about moral values. Furthermore, though some issues (like the morality of abortion), seem particularly difficult to reach a consensus on, there are innumerable other issues which we hardly ever have reason to debate (such as the morality of plucking out the eyeballs of innocent people). It is much easier to name the issues on which we cannot agree than to list all of the issues on which we take our agreement for granted.

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[118] Here Cavanaugh's "Myth of religious Violence" shows us up again, this time in Stout's work. It is still problematic, but I do not spend time critiquing it as I did with Rawls. This is only because I think the idea that this myth provides a provisional *telos* for American society is defensible, even if it is based on an inaccurate understanding of history.

I find Stout successful in critiquing MacIntyre's profound skepticism about the possibility for moral agreement. Stout does not wish to deny the challenges of contemporary moral discourse, he simply wants to question MacIntyre's more dire conclusions. On the other hand, it seems to me that the more MacIntyre elaborates on his politics of local community, the more he calls his own conclusions on this matter into question, and perhaps this is less a sign of inconsistency and more a sign of the way his thinking has changed over time. The difficulty in reading all of MacIntyre's major works together, is that it is not always clear what he has retained and what he has modified or left behind as we move from his earlier works on tradition-based rationality to later works that focus more on common goods and community. Stout's critique is helpful when applied to these earlier works, but MacIntyre's more recent work seems to address some of Stout's concerns.

For example, in *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity,* MacIntyre appears much less skeptical about the level of agreement possible across different communities and cultures. In critiquing Bernard William's claim that there can be no single conception of "the good life," MacIntyre proceeds to list eight goods whose contribution to the good life would be hard to deny regardless of culture or context. These are: good health, a standard of living free from destitution, good family relationships, sufficient education to develop one's powers, productive and rewarding work, good friends, leisure time outside of work, and "the ability of a rational agent to order one's life and to identify and learn from one's mistakes."[119] Whether or not one agrees with his list, it is interesting to note that MacIntyre believes these goods could be widely agreed upon, regardless of the tradition to which one is loyal. This certainly suggests that he is much

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[119] MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity,* 222.

less skeptical about the possibilities for moral agreement than either I or Stout gave him credit for based on his earlier work.

Further, I wonder if his understanding of the politics of local community can be adapted as a resource for my understanding of pluralism as a social practice. As I have already noted, *Dependent Rational Animals* moves away from discussion of tradition-based rationality and spends more time considering what virtues are necessary to healthy communal life. This requires him to elaborate ideas like the virtues of acknowledged dependence, already discussed, which should lead us to seek to learn from one another. Later in *Dependent Rational Animals,* he recommends the virtue of truthfulness, which in the context of deliberation requires us to make ourselves intelligible to others by sharing those elements of our particular history necessary to make our actions understood. Both the attitude of learning from others and the effort to make ourselves intelligible to others are central to our ability to deliberate on moral issues. This seems just as true for seeking understanding across the differences of each individual's unique history and experiences as it is for seeking understanding across traditions. Indeed, as I develop my account of pluralism as a social practice, it will become clear that these are just the sorts of virtues that must be cultivated to better navigate the challenges of life in a diverse society.

I would contend that it is not identification with a single tradition that makes local communities a good place to engage in politics. Rather, local politics is more effective because it is easier for each person to make their voice heard and to effect meaningful change. People have more opportunity to get to know each other as human beings and to seek to understand those who are different from themselves. While national politics can feel distant and impersonal, local politics is an arena in which relationships can be built, even with those who have conflicting

interests and opinions. Therefore, I do not see why the politics of local community could not be practiced in pluralistic communities characterized by many different identities and traditions.

Truthfully, I am not sure MacIntyre would disagree with this conclusion. My confusion over whether or not local communities must be tradition-based stems from both the ambiguities in MacIntyre's notion of a tradition (which I discussed earlier) and a slippage in the way I use the term pluralism versus the way MacIntyre understands it. When he uses the word pluralism, it is generally associated with liberalism. From this, I surmise that, for him, it entails incommensurable accounts of goods that make moral deliberation impossible. So long as he associates pluralism with liberalism, MacIntyre must understand it to be undergirded by emotivism in which no notion of the common good is possible because each individual speaks only for themselves. A pluralistic community, from my perspective, is simply a community characterized by the coexistence of people from a diversity of religions, cultures, and/or belief systems; it is a diverse community that also strives for cooperation across the lines of difference that divide it. I do not assume that deliberation on the common good would be impossible in diverse communities like this. I am more concerned about what sorts of social and communal practices constitute the type of community where such deliberation can happen.

This also seems to be MacIntyre's main concern in his more recent works. The key, for him, is that community or group members cultivate virtues and practical reasoning that allow them to pursue common goods. The virtues enable practical reasoning because they are "just those qualities that enable agents to identify both what goods are at stake in any particular situation and their relative importance in that situation *and* how that particular agent must act for

the sake of the good and the best."[120] Virtues, if we remember, are acquired human qualities or dispositions that enable the achievement of certain goods. Practical rationality is the sort of reasoning that allows one to act in different situations in response to different needs and the pursuit of various goods. The dispositions, or virtues one acquires over one's life, allow one to act well in different situations. The virtue of justice will enable one to act justly, the virtue of courage will enable one to act courageously, etc.

Furthermore, virtues, the practices they enable, and the goods they make possible are necessarily social. Practical rationality involves the ability to recognize one's role in community or a particular group context (such as a family or a workplace), and to evaluate how one ought to act in various situations with a consciousness of who else has a stake in the outcome and what one's relationship to them is. According to MacIntyre:

> to evaluate in this way is to presuppose a narrative understanding of both individual agents and institutions, to presuppose that it is only in the contexts supplied by background narratives that particular actions and courses of action can be adequately understood and evaluated.[121]

Here we return to the importance of understanding life as a narrative. Deliberating on moral issues requires us to understand our place in this narrative and in the narrative of our community. When a person is asked to account for or reflect on their actions, this too will necessarily be a narrative activity. We make ourselves intelligible, both to ourselves and others by telling a story.

In my last chapter, it will become clear that conceiving of pluralism as a social practice relies on many of these same insights. The need for a practical rationality that is attentive to contexts and relationships and the practice of making oneself intelligible to others through

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[120] Ibid., 190.

[121] Ibid., 218.

narrative will both be important components. Ultimately then, though I am skeptical of the way MacIntyre conceives tradition-based enquiry, I find his account of the politics of local community, and the virtues and practices such a politics requires, compelling. Conceiving pluralism as a social practice does not preclude us from thinking nationally or even globally, but it does require us to recognize that to a large extent pluralism is "practiced" in our everyday interactions and the relationships we build with those who are different from us. In this regard, the politics of local communities is integral to a productive pluralism. Macintyre's conception of virtue ethics more broadly, also provides valuable resources. When he moves away from discussion on tradition and towards examining what deliberation on the common good looks like, I find much agreement between our two theories as will become clear.

CHAPTER 3

JUSTIFICATION, MORAL AUTHORITY, AND DEMOCRACY IN PRAGMATIST
PHILOSOPHY

Though I have been critical of both Rawls and MacIntyre, I have also tried to articulate

the points on which I find their contributions valuable. My point has not been to dismiss them

completely, but to demonstrate how their ways of analyzing pluralism and its challenges fall

short. Rawls's notion of a society founded on principles that are not grounded in any particular

religious or philosophical doctrine is a helpful way of envisioning a society that can

accommodate a great diversity of worldviews. However, his diagnosis of the roots of social

conflict focuses too much on differences of belief and does not recognize how differences of

history and experience also cause social tension. MacIntyre, on the other hand, recognizes that

our worldview is shaped by embodied experience and social practice and he is attentive to the

promise of politics on a local level. However, his notion that productive moral conversation can

only take place within a shared tradition underestimates the possibility for bridging differences

of belief and practice, and as such it is not conducive to a healthy pluralism. Thus, I begin the

chapter with the question: how can we formulate an approach to pluralism that both corrects the

shortcomings of Rawls and MacIntyre and preserves what is valuable? I find part of the answer

in pragmatist philosophy, particularly as it is articulated in the work of Jeffrey Stout and Cornel

West, and I will use their thought as a starting point to develop my own approach to pluralism in public life.

3.1 Pragmatism, Truth, and Justification

Pragmatism has perhaps more often functioned as a critique of traditional philosophical reasoning, epistemology in particular, than as its own discreet type of philosophy. Pragmatist philosophers since the 19th century have been making claims about what we cannot know and have argued that we should stop trying to pretend that we can know so much. Cornel West talks about the pragmatist "evasion" of epistemology, and Richard Rorty describes William James as "debunking" epistemology. Such statements would lead one to believe that pragmatist philosophers have no epistemology of their own and do not care to develop one. Yet, to the extent that pragmatism makes claims about knowledge, truth, and our access to both of them, it most certainly does have an epistemology, even if it consists in the rejection of traditional epistemological formulations. Pragmatists tend to be skeptical of both correspondence and coherence theories of truth. In other words, they reject the search for foundations and first principles, as well as the notion that we get closer to truth by understanding the relation of sentences to one another. Instead, pragmatists tend to define the truth of a proposition by its consequences or its usefulness for solving problems. This leads many critics to charge them with moral relativism, but few pragmatists philosophers would affirm that charge. In fact, this way of thinking about truth is more accurately a way of stating what we are *justified in believing to be true.*

The key here, is to distinguish between truth and justification. Pragmatists often reject any claim that humans have access to objective reality or truth. This is because humans are agents in the world we seek to know and understand; we cannot step outside of that world and look upon it as a spectator. The fact that we are each embedded in our own reality means that we cannot become detached observers of that reality in order to discover what is really "real" or "true." Our beliefs about the world are always formed by our experience of it, and these beliefs are both formed by and acted out in social practices. Thus, rather than asking what is true, pragmatists find it more useful to ask when we are justified in believing something to be true.

I follow the lead of neo-pragmatist philosopher Jeffrey Stout in the way I understand the moral consequences of this distinction between truth and justification. Stout's pragmatism does not argue that truth is relative, but it does argue that *justification* is relative. By this he means that the justification of a proposition is relative to epistemic circumstance, meaning what facts and evidence are available. Some of the available facts may be facts about the moral agent and these are what make moral truth seem subjective. The moral propositions a person is justified in believing may depend on their particular experiences, the norms of their society, the platitudes their peers take for granted, etc. A person is justified in believing things based on such evidence, subjective though it may seem, until other evidence is made available to them that might give them reason to question these things. To say that justification is relative still allows Stout to maintain that truth is not relative. It also does not prevent us from being able to make arguments about what we ought to believe or how we ought to act. We can, and should, still debate such things in our quest to solve social ills and better our society.[122]

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[122] Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988): 25-31.

Stout, of course, calls himself a moderate pragmatist and, thus, distinguishes himself from some other pragmatists who might be more reticent to affirm the existence of moral truths. I am happy to adopt this "moderate" label for myself as well, since I, like Stout, wish to hold on to a stronger notion of truth. I share Stout's discomfort with speaking of truth in terms of usefulness or "cash value" as many pragmatists do. I take such formulations of truth, in most cases to be either a) another way of speaking about justification given our limited access to truth or b) a way of elucidating that the question of what is true matters most when it comes to solving real world problems. Still, if truth is understood simply in terms of expediency, there may be serious moral consequences, especially in our age of "alternative facts". Indeed, this way of speaking about truth might lead someone like MacIntyre to think of pragmatism as simply another form of emotivism.[123]

For my part, I do not set out to give a fully developed account of truth. By embracing Stout's distinction between justification and truth, I do not claim to likewise embrace his particular minimalist definition of truth (which can be summarized in equivalence formulas like *P* is true, if and only if *P*). I would take the minimalist account as a passable starting point for discussing truth, insofar as it helps is understand what we mean when using the word "truth" and distinguishing it from "justification." However, I am not opposed to considering accounts of truth that go farther and help us clarify further what precisely it means for something to be true. Part of my assumption is that in a pluralist context, there will be many different accounts of truth and of what is true. The question I am asking is what it looks like to navigate those competing accounts in a way that is productive and conducive to cooperation across lines of difference. I

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[123] Stout makes a similar observation in *Ethics After Babel,* 244.

don't think I need a robust account of truth in order to answer that question, and in fact, I suspect

doing so would be counterproductive[124]. Rather, I prefer to remain open to hearing diverse

formulations of truth and diverse metaphysical views of the world as part an ongoing

conversation about how viewing pluralism as a social practice can accommodate such diversity.

I find it important to view my own proposals, not as a settled answer to the challenges of

pluralism but as always part of an ongoing conversation that is itself part of the practice of

pluralism.

For now, I merely want to posit that the distinction Stout makes between truth and

justification is a helpful starting point from which to begin reworking the thought of Rawls and

MacIntyre. It is not too difficult to see some of the affinities Rawls and MacIntyre have with

pragmatist thought. As Rorty points out[125], Rawls's political liberalism takes a

nonfoundationalist approach to political and moral theory. His principles of justice are not

justifiable because they rest on metaphysical truths or a comprehensive view of the world.

Rather, they are a "free-standing" political construction, and this makes them amenable to an

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[124] It would be counterproductive in the sense that I want my pluralism to be as inclusive as possible of
people with diverse truth claims. Any account of truth I give risks excluding people, whether or not that is
my intention. Consider, for example, that Stout tries to allow for pluralism in his own account of truth,
but theologians such a D. Stephen Long raise significant questions about whether that account is truly
inclusive of Christians in *Speaking of God*: *Theology, Language and Truth,* (Grand Rapids, MI: William
B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009): 268-279.
     I maintain that it is completely possible to leave the exact definition of truth an open question in
my own theory, which people can fill in as they see fit. A bigger obstacle to convincing people to
embrace my account of pluralism would if their beliefs or worldview find no value in seeking cooperation
across lines of difference. In the next chapter, I will further clarify what specific philosophical and
theological commitments are necessary in order for people to accept my account of pluralism.

[125] Richard Rorty, "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy" in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (New
York: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 175-196.

overlapping consensus that can support reasonable pluralism in a democratic society. They are justified not because they are true, but because they are useful in the sense of being conducive to sustaining a well-ordered democratic society. This approach to justification is thoroughly pragmatic, as is the way Rawls reasons about how an overlapping consensus can form over time through socialization. Still, I find Rawls conception of pluralism lacking, in part because it is insufficiently pragmatist. He does not fully understand the knower as an agent in the world who cannot separate herself from that world. Instead, he encourages citizens to divorce themselves from history and experience, to attain a more objective view of justice. Pragmatists would argue that no such possibility of objectivity exists, and we do ourselves no favors by pretending it does. Though Rorty finds a form of pragmatist historicism in Rawls's theory, I argued in Chapter One that Rawls is, in fact, insufficiently historicist. Rorty does not see this flaw, perhaps because his understanding of religion and its role in public life is similarly flawed, as I shall discuss below.

MacIntyre is much more attentive to the ways people are embedded in a society or community. In fact, such embedded-ness is part of what makes productive moral discourse possible. Justification is relative for MacIntyre as it is for Stout, but in Macintyre's case, it is specifically relative to the tradition of thought and practice in which one is raised. As previously discussed, Stout differs from MacIntyre on the degree of consensus a society needs in order to function. I share the conviction of Stout, and many other neo-pragmatists, that it is more useful to focus on the small things that we share in common than to seek widespread agreement on social norms. I argued in the previous chapter that the level of agreement MacIntyre recommends could be potentially oppressive to those who do not easily fit with the prevailing social norms, and that his notion of an "epistemic crisis" does not provide sufficient resources for challenging

injustice. Widespread agreement on ways of thinking and acting certainly sound appealing, but, in my reckoning, pluralism is also important, perhaps even necessary, to moral progress.

Pragmatism, then, gives us new avenues for thinking about justification and moral debate. Both MacIntyre and Rawls, in their own way, assume we need some common form of justification to resolve moral issues. Pragmatism, at least as it is articulated by Stout, suggests there are a diversity of ways a proposition might be justified and a variety of reasons someone might be justified in believing it. The question then becomes, how does such a view of justification allow us to navigate competing truth claims and address pressing moral problems? Ultimately, I find pragmatism useful for resolving the tension that results from competing traditions and beliefs, because it allows for the existence of multiple and diverse ways of knowing. By simply adopting the pragmatist attitude that other people may be justified in believing what they believe, even when we fundamentally disagree with them, we are one step closer to having productive conversations across lines of difference.

This, of course, does not prevent us from feeling that the beliefs we hold are not merely justified, but are also true, nor does it prevent us from trying to convince others that our way of thinking is the correct one. I share with Stout the understanding that justification is relative, but truth is not. We all have reason, then, to seek truth and to defend our understanding of the truth. Understanding that other people may be justified in believing something we feel is patently wrong does not prevent us from trying to convince them to think differently. When I say that this understanding of justification brings us one step closer to having productive conversations across lines of difference, I mean only this: It can help us resist the temptation to dismiss people who disagree with us as merely stupid, ignorant, or incapable of rational thought. It can help us understand that people come to hold their beliefs for a variety of reasons and out of a variety of

life circumstances. This recognition provides a first step in understanding the person with whom we differ, and such understanding is the first step in productive dialogue. At least as I see it, this is the promise that a relativized understanding of justification holds for my account of pluralism, but I do not simultaneously advocate a relativized account of truth.

3.2 Pragmatism and Pluralism

The pragmatist distinction between truth and justification thus provides a useful starting point from which to further explore the resources that pragmatism offers for an account of pluralism. However, this understanding of justification can only be understood as a valuable resource insofar as it results in pluralist political commitments in practice. Another way to ask the questions would be: does their epistemology lead pragmatist philosophers to develop the sort of social and political commitments that I seek? Given the pragmatist insistence on the connection between theory and practice, this question provides a valuable test of pragmatism's pluralist potential.

It can certainly be argued that pluralism, of some sort, is a logical consequence of pragmatist thinking that is reflected in the writing of both early and contemporary pragmatists. Pluralism, of course, has a wide variety of meanings, and it shows up in many variations throughout the pragmatist canon. I am particularly interested in pluralism as a political and social arrangement and as a means of navigating the challenges of a diverse society. Still, it is worth exploring the varieties of pluralist thought pragmatists have developed and its connection to their politics. William James, one of pragmatism's earliest proponents, was a committed pluralist in the metaphysical rather than the political sense. In *A Pluralistic Universe*, he depicted the

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universe as, in reality, a multiverse (though not in the sense physicists use it today); it is home to a diversity of things strung together but never fully absorbed into a continuous whole, a work always unfinished and continually in process. Many of those who were influenced by James drew out the political implications of this way of thinking more fully. John Dewey is the most obvious case. Cornel West describes Dewey as an "epistemic pluralist," arguing that although Dewey is often accused of scientism, he did not believe scientific methods to be applicable or appropriate to all areas of life. Rather, Dewey maintained that there were various "ways of knowing," each with its own procedures and mechanisms of justification. Science would be one way of knowing, but art or religion could be another, and none of these can claim any privileged access to truth or reality.[126] This is, again, a thoroughly pragmatist approach to truth and justification, but the consequences for Dewey were not merely intellectual but rather directly connected to his social activism and commitment to democracy. Democratizing knowledge by recognizing diverse ways of knowing, is one step towards democratizing society.

Louis Menand argues that Alain Locke, Horace Kallen, and Randolph Bourne are often overlooked examples of those who developed the political implications of pragmatist thinking more fully. Though not professed pragmatists themselves, they were all students of Dewey and James, and each made important contributions to conversations on cultural pluralism in the early 20th century. Menard explains, "James drew no particular political conclusions from his pluralism (though it undoubtedly had some connection with his impassioned anti-imperialism). But Kallen, Locke, and Bourne saw that if the universe is multiple and unfinished, then a society like the United States in 1915—particularly an ethnically heterogenous society—might be

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[126] Cornel West, *American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989): 98.

understood as multiple too."[127] These thinkers go a step farther than Dewey in thinking of U.S. society in pluralistic terms, because, as West points out, Dewey was still prone to seek homogeneity as a recipe for public unity. By contrast, these thinkers recognized that pride in one's ethnic group or particular culture was not incompatible with civil cohesion.

Menand argues that concerns about cultural pluralism have also animated the contemporary resurgence of pragmatism beginning with Richard Rorty. It is contemporary pragmatist thinking on pluralism that I am most interested in, particularly as it is expressed by Stout and West. However, it is worth first spending some time on pluralism in the thought of Richard Rorty. Later neo-pragmatists owe much to his rethinking of the early pragmatist tradition. Though Stout and West each developed their own ways of pragmatist thinking, they often find themselves writing in conversation with Rorty and defining themselves in distinction from him. By first understanding Rorty's thought, we can better understand the ways in which Stout and West build on and offer needed corrections to it.

Writing nearly a century later, Rorty is heir to certain philosophical and cultural shifts that were only beginning at the time pragmatism first developed. The most significant of these is the shift from modernism to postmodernism. Rorty points out that definitions of "post-modernism" are quite varied, but the common trait of most definitions is that they "have something to do with a perceived loss of unity."[128] The philosophical shifts that precipitated this perceived loss of unity are varied, though Rorty puts particular emphasis on Darwin's theory of evolution as a key turning point. Earlier philosophy influenced by Platonic idealism assumed the

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[127] Louis Menand, *Pragmatism: a Reader* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997): xxviii.

[128] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000): 262.

necessity of a soul or some special faculty that separated humans from other creatures. Darwin's theory grounded humans back among the animals and depicted the origin of life as an almost accidental development, far from the divinely ordained created order in which many wished to believe. Rorty proposes that this animalization of man "made it possible to believe that there are many different, but equally valuable, sorts of human life. They made the idea of convergence to unity less compelling. Vertical ascent from the Many to the One entails such conversion, but horizontal progress can be thought of as ever-increasing proliferation."[129] In Rorty's view, Darwin made way for a less hierarchical and more pluralistic vision of reality.

The cultural consequences of the shift towards postmodernism is that a greater range of human identities (i.e. gender, sexuality, religious, or ethnic identifications) are viewed as acceptable and legitimate, because these categories are understood as social constructions rather than reflections of some underlying essence. For example, this means there is no essential quality of femininity or masculinity that women and men possess; these qualities are influenced by social norms that create expectations for how we should live and act. Social constructionism therefore makes way for greater pluralism by making it possible for people to define themselves in ways that were not possible before.

Situating himself within these philosophical and cultural shifts. Rorty suggests that postmodern skepticism is really just a form of pragmatism. Those who criticize postmodernism, social constructionism, and pragmatism for being too subjective and relativistic, he says, are asking the wrong questions. Rorty wishes to move away from the distinctions between subjective and objective, relative and absolute, discovery and invention, and begin asking if this

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[129] Ibid., 266.

vocabulary, based in the Platonic metaphysics that Rorty rejects, is actually useful. Pragmatism breaks down these dichotomies, which are all meant to distinguish appearances from reality. It no longer asks whether our knowledge of things corresponds to the way things actually are; instead, it asks, "are our ways of describing things, of relating them to other things so as to make them fulfill our needs more adequately, as good as possible? Or can we do better? Can our future be made better than our present?"[130]

In approaching ethics within this pluralistic and nonfoundational point of view, Rorty suggests that we think of pragmatism as "an attempt to alter our self-image so as to make it consistent with the Darwinian claim that we differ from other animals simply in the complexity of our behavior."[131] This approach does away with the old distinctions between the soul and the body, the faculty of reason and the domain of the passions, which were used to differentiate humans from animals. Knowledge in that view meant the ability to see past appearance to reality. Ethics was based on the ability of humans to *know,* to overcome their base animalistic instincts and act with obedience to immutable moral laws.

The notion of morality as rational obedience to moral law is one that Rorty cannot accept. Pragmatism doesn't recognize unconditional, categorical imperatives, because it sees everything, including ethics, as relational. The view of morality as universal law does not adequately recognize the human self as relational, incapable of existing independently without any concern for others. It sees humans as essentially self-interested, which is why we require transcendent moral laws. Rorty aligns himself with Dewey in understanding the self, not only as relational, but

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[130] Ibid., 72.

[131] Ibid.

as a work in progress: our relationships with others shape us and influence how we act. Understood in this light, "moral development in the individual, and moral progress in the human species as a whole, is a matter of re-marking human selves so as to enlarge the variety of the relationships which constitute those selves."[132] In this framework, we need not see ourselves only in relation to those people we know; we might identify with people halfway around the world. Moral development is a process of the enlargement of the self to accommodate a sense of relation with a wider and wider swath of people. The zenith of this process would be "an ideal self to whom the hunger and suffering of *any* human being (and even, perhaps, that of any other animal) is intensely painful."[133] At the societal level, then, moral progress means "getting more and more people into our community—of taking the needs and interests of more and more human being into account"[134]

To view ethics in this way, is to understand moral norms as social constructs. Rorty sees no problem with this. In fact, the *social* process of constructing such norms is exactly how moral progress is made. To say something is a social construct is simply to understand that it is expressed in a particular language, in a certain set of sentences, which may be used in some cultures but not others. There is an effort to establish certain norms, such as human rights, as universally based on some quality we all possess as human beings, but even human rights appear as a western construct influenced by Christian notions of the brotherhood of man. This is not to disparage human rights— pragmatism can affirm them if they prove to have utility for human societies—but to recognize

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[132] Ibid., 79.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Ibid., 82.

the role that language plays in human community. Our social nature means that we learn to express ideas in a common way that others in our community can understand. This means, given our condition of pluralism, that it will be difficult to establish a truly universal morality based on some common trait that we all share, but perhaps, says Rorty, this should not be our goal:

> Pragmatists suggest that we simply give up the philosophical search for commonality. They think that moral progress might be accelerated if we focus on our ability to make the particular little things that divide us seem unimportant— not by comparing them with the big thing that unites us but by comparing them with other little things. Pragmatists think of moral progress as more like sewing together a very large, elaborate, polychrome quilt, than like getting a clearer perception of something true and deep.[135]

Rorty, like the early pragmatists, expresses loyalty to the particular over the universal, if only because the particular is where we reside. Yet, our relationality means we can and must find ways to cooperate with one another.

The way Rorty speaks of morality as a process of enlarging the self and one's community sounds quite lovely at times, but even with this initial description, before we have even begun to discuss Rorty's thoughts on religion, some might suspect his vision is too secular for a truly pluralist vision. His focus on Darwinian theory as a source for ethics[136] and his rejection of any notion of absolute moral law might leave some religious persons to wonder if they have a place in his social vision. Though Rorty's work makes room for human diversity, it is rarely religious diversity that he is referring to. He himself was an avowed secularist and many have criticized

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[135] Ibid., 87.

[136] This is not to suggest that Darwinian evolutionary theory is incompatible with religion, a proposition that many religious people would flatly reject. Rather, Rorty's move to use this theory as the basis for his approach to morality might strike some as a very secular and worldly approach to ethics that leaves little room for religious ways of knowing.

him for the way he understands religion and religious people, particularly in the public sphere. His most notorious essay on this point was "Religion as Conversation Stopper," written as a reply to Stephen Carter's *The Culture of Disbelief*. In the essay, Rorty argues that religious arguments in the public sphere cause democratic deliberation to break down and that we should all strive to enforce the privatization of religion, keeping it out of discussion of public policy.[137] Rorty later modified his views on this point, admitting that religious people should be free to articulate that their reasons for supporting certain policies or legislation stem from their religious convictions.[138] Nevertheless, it remains apparent throughout Rorty's writing that he does not think highly of religion and that his ideal society would be thoroughly secular. Indeed, Jeffrey Stout points out that Rorty often falls into language of essentialism when he talks about religion (religion in *essentially* harmful to democratic dialogue, religious institutions are *essentially* breeders of ill-will), while his pragmatist commitments lead him to criticize essentialism in every other case.[139]

Like Rorty, Stout is not religious and feels discomfort with some of religion's more fundamentalist manifestations, but unlike Rorty he sees no reason to make pronouncements on religion as whole. Instead, he writes, "I…see religion, in its public as well as its private manifestations, as an ever-changing mixture of life-giving and malignant tendencies. I welcome into public conversation any fellow citizens who share the desire for justice and freedom, be they religious or not. Because my proximate goal is to befriend all such people, the only forms of

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[137] Ibid., 168-174.

[138] Richard Rorty, "Religion in the Public Square: A Reconsideration," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 31:1 (Spring 2003).

[139] Jeffrey Stout, "Rorty on Religion and Politics," In *The Philosophy of Richard Rorty*. Ed. Randall E. Auxier and Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 2010): 544.

religious ideology I am interested in denouncing are the ones that wittingly or unwittingly block the path to justice and peace."[140]

Stout and Rorty both view democracy as the type of society most conducive to addressing social ills. Indeed, most pragmatists put great faith in democracy as a form of government, perhaps because it allows for a society that is always "unfinished" in which social norms and values can be continuously reshaped as the need arises. They tend to think of a just society as always a work in progress—something we must continuously pursue—rather than something that can be realized with any finality. As noted above, Rorty views social progress in terms of "getting more and more people into our community—of taking the needs and interests of more and more human beings into account"[141] This would seem to be a recipe for a broadly inclusive pluralist vision, but this vision does not materialize when we look more closely at Rorty's ideal democratic society. A detailed examination reveals the ways in which Rorty fails to accommodate not only religious people, but other marginalized groups as well.

We get some insight into what Rorty conceives as his ideal democratic society in his 1998 book *Achieving our Country: Leftist Thought in 20th Century America.* The book has received renewed interest after the 2016 presidential election because of a passage that seemed to predict the election of someone like Donald Trump. The passage in question draws on Edward Luttwak's suggestion that fascism may be the American future. Rorty predicts that:

> Members of labor unions, and unorganized unskilled workers, will sooner
> or later realize that their government is not even trying to prevent wages
> from sinking or to prevent jobs from being exported. Around the same
> time, they will realize that suburban white-collar workers—themselves

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[140] Ibid., 526.

[141] Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 82.

desperately afraid of being downsized—are not going to let themselves be
taxed to provide social benefits for anyone else… At that point something
will crack. The nonsuburban electorate will decide that the system has
failed and start looking around for a strongman to vote for—someone
willing to assure them that, once he is elected, the smug bureaucrats, tricky
lawyers, overpaid bond salesman, and postmodernist professors will no
longer be calling the shots.[142]

This statement is nestled within a larger critique of the Left in American Politics. It is a
prediction of what could happen if the political Left fails to rethink its current trajectory, and in
the eyes of many this is exactly what happened in the 2016 election.

      The Left in America, according to Rorty, has lost its ability to engage in national politics,
because it has lost it sense of national pride and its hope for the future of the country. Rorty sees
in the Left a tendency to dismiss the nation-state as obsolete, but this is misguided because the
national government remains the most powerful agent capable of affecting the lives of American
citizens. What is needed, he argues, is a renewed civic religion, a vision of democratic faith that
describes what our country could be and motivates citizens to strive towards achieving it.
Throughout the book, Rorty implies that such a vision must be thoroughly secular. I propose a
slight modification of his argument: in our current day and age, what we need in a civic religion
is a faith that is not so much secular as it is pluralistic—a faith that our nation can sustain fruitful
democratic participation, even across the lines of deep difference that divide us.

      Rorty takes the title for his book from the last paragraph of James Baldwin's *The Fire
Next Time*:

      "If we—and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively
conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of
the others—do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to
end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country…"[143]

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[142] Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in 20th Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard
University Press, 1999): 89-90.

[143] James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (The Dial Press: New York, 1963): 119.

Baldwin's insistence that there may be a need to "create" the consciousness of others, to achieve a country that has not yet been achieved, belies a vision of what the American nation *could be.* Such a vision, not of what our nation is, but of what it could become, is what Rorty believes the American Left needs to reclaim if it is to successfully engage in national politics. Yet it is not Baldwin, but Walt Whitman and John Dewey that Rorty holds up as exemplars. Whitman and Dewey, he says, offered a new narrative about the nation in the hopes of mobilizing Americans as political agents for the achievement of their vision. Rorty emphasizes time and again the thoroughgoing secularism of their civic faith. Central to their vision is the idea that "America" and "democracy" are "shorthand for a new conception of what it is to be human—a conception which has no room for obedience to non-human authority, and in which nothing save freely achieved consensus between human beings has any authority at all."[144] They wanted "to put hope for a casteless, classless America in the place traditionally occupied by knowledge of God," in other words, to make their utopian vision of social justice the unconditional object of desire[145].

Dewey and Whitman's vision is an interpretation of what the country *could be,* not an objective assessment of what it is. Such a vision of what we ought to aspire to achieve is what Rorty finds lacking in current leftist politics. The reformist left of the early 20th century focused on translating their vision of social justice into legislation—working within the system through participatory politics, developing concrete policies for economic equality and redistribution of wealth, and building coalitions between those at the bottom and those at the top, unions and intellectuals, journalists and civil rights activists. These were the characteristics of the old, reformist left.

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[144] Rorty, *Achieving Our Country,* 18.

[145] Ibid.

This old left was gradually replaced starting in the 1960's with a new left, what Rorty calls the "cultural left." This new left has shifted its efforts away from countering the forces of selfishness through redistributionist economics and policies that temper human greed, and towards countering the forces of sadism, the term Rorty uses for things like racism, sexism, and homophobia. Rorty names it the "cultural left" because it is more focused on changing culture than changing laws. The creation of new academic departments such as Gender Studies and African American Studies, demonstrates efforts to counter sadism through teaching Americans to recognize otherness (and ultimately to preserve it). Rorty recognizes the achievements of this new left—sadism is no longer socially acceptable in the way it once was—but something has been lost as well.

Particularly among the academic left, there is a tendency to analyze into abstraction, to frame everything within Focauldian theories of power that leave little room for meaningful political action. We now have, says Rorty, "A spectatorial, disgusted, mocking left rather than a left that dreams of achieving our country." Indeed, they doubt whether it is achievable at all, and this leads them "to give cultural politics preference over real politics, and to mock the very idea that democratic institutions might be made to serve social justice. It leads them to prefer knowledge to hope."[146] In the process, the pragmatic reformist efforts of the old left have been lost to a revolutionary rhetoric that eschews participatory politics that seek to work within the system, waiting instead for the system to collapse by some other means but not specifying how we would actually get there.

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[146] Ibid., 35-36.

I find Rorty's critiques of the left today prescient and still apt in many ways. However, his proposed solutions, though thought provoking, leave me unsatisfied. I am uncomfortable with the thoroughgoing secularism of the civic faith he wants us to recover and would like to replace it with a more pluralistic brand of democratic faith, building on the thought of Stout and West. I acknowledge, in making this distinction, that secularism and pluralism are both slippery terms that can be understood in a variety of ways. Some might assert that secularism is the necessary condition for pluralism, that the government and those who participate in politics should remain religiously neutral in order that the free practice of a diversity of religions can flourish. However, when I say that Rorty's brand of civic religion is too secular, I mean that it seems to exclude religion and those who practice it.

At times, he seems to imply that religious belief is incompatible with democratic faith. He does not qualify or argue with Whitman and Dewey's desire for "utopian America to replace God as the unconditional object of desire"[147] or to "redefine God as our future selves,"[148] but surely many religious Americans would take issue with such a formulation of national pride. In fact, any formulation of civic faith that asks religious persons to make the nation-as-it-could-be their unconditional object of desire rather than God or some eternal realty, is likely to drive many of them further away from the national pride Rorty seeks to inspire. His idealization of a secular civic religion once again reveals his deep skepticism about religion in public life. And this is understandable, as many other philosophers share his concerns about the potential authoritarian impulses or otherworldly quietism that religion can inspire. Though there is validity to this

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[147] Ibid., 18.

[148] Ibid., 22.

concern, it is also the case that religious faith can inspire social and political action, as Rorty knows from the social gospel tradition of his own grandfather, Walter Rauschenbusch—and faith in democracy or a national project need not always be in conflict with religious faith.

I contend that a pluralistic rather than a secular formulation of civic faith could better reconcile religious believers and non-religious people who share common visions of social justice. It creates the possibility of building coalitions between people who wish to participate in a common project, though they may come to it for different reasons. Additionally, when I advocate a pluralist faith, I use pluralism in a broader sense than it is often used by political philosophers. They tend to confine pluralism to making room for a diversity of belief systems (religions or other philosophical systems). As I have said in previous chapters, I believe a robust definition of pluralism should consider other types of diversity that help us account for the historical production of difference, such as race and class, as they intersect with religious diversity. The question of how to create a healthy pluralism requires that we take this intersectional understanding of diversity into account. Thus, a pluralist faith must acknowledge the many intersecting lines of difference that divide us, while also maintaining hope that a democratic public can sustain and engage those differences.

The question then remains whether Rorty's secular faith can sustain democratic pluralism, and for me that question extends beyond his exhortation to return to the secular civic religion of Dewey and Whitman; it also exposes shortcomings in Rorty's critique of the cultural left. I find much to be affirmed in his critique—the image of academics so paralyzed by theory and critique of the system that they cannot find any justification to act is a familiar one, and I agree that cumulative, piecemeal reforms are more likely to bring about meaningful reform than

a revolutionary overthrow of the system. Yet, I worry that his critique of identity politics and multiculturalism goes too far.

Rorty variously criticizes multiculturalism, which "suggests a morality of live-and-let-live,"[149] and the cultural left's rejection of the melting pot metaphor (because their desire to "preserve otherness" is not conducive to creating a unified movement[150]). He is clearly skeptical of language that is too tolerant of difference, not because he is unsympathetic to what it aims for, but because it makes it much more difficult to unite people in a common vision. He writes, "If the cultural left insists on its present strategy—on asking us to respect one another in our differences rather than asking us to cease noticing those differences—it will have to find a new way of creating a sense of commonality at the level of national politics. For only a rhetoric of commonality can forge a winning majority in national elections." [151]

Rorty may be right here; it certainly *is* difficult to found a political movement on the celebration of difference. At times, his words are reminiscent of Mark Lilla's *New York Times* op-ed after the 2016 election entitled "The end of identity liberalism." Lilla posits that the idea of celebrating our differences is "a splendid principle of moral pedagogy—but disastrous as a foundation for democratic politics in our ideological age."[152] His conclusion is that the election proved the need for an end to identity liberalism. Though I, too, see the risk in trying to create

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[149] Ibid., 24.

[150] Ibid., 100.

[151] Ibid., 101.

[152] Mark Lilla, "The End of Identity Liberalism," *New York Times,* Nov. 18, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/20/opinion/sunday/the-end-of-identity-liberalism.html> Accessed February, 23, 2019.

unity while affirming diversity, I also see this as a risk we desperately need to take, in part because identity politics is not fully chosen. For those who fit within the identity categories of "queer" or "female" or "person of color," those categories have in many ways been thrust upon them by the body they were born into and the consequences it has had in their social, political, and economic lives. As Imani Perry wrote in response to Lilla:

> "Identity" is more than simply a personal possession that is only meaningful in terms of how groups are represented in politics or boardrooms. Identity is a marker of how resources and opportunities are distributed in our society. People who belong to groups that have been historically discriminated against, and that continue to face systemic inequality, know that identity determines advantages and disadvantages, with both economic and social consequences.

Leaving behind identity politics might mean too quickly leaving behind this recognition. In an effort to find a rhetoric of unity, we must be careful not to lose sight of the way the real differences between us affect our place in society.

I wish that Rorty had engaged more deeply with Baldwin's words in *The Fire Next Time.* For Baldwin tells the story of a country built on white Christian mythologies, a country that cannot see itself for what it truly is, and so cannot become something more. If we continue to think of ourselves in these terms, Baldwin writes, we condemn ourselves to sterility and decay.[153] Though we must certainly work together to overturn this mythology —Baldwin says we, white and black, desperately need one another—it will not be through any facile rhetoric of commonality. It will require us to face our deepest fears and insecurities, particularly those of us who are white. The movement in parts of the political left to recognize difference, and to preserve rather than assimilate it, seems to be an attempt to recognize this: that we are not merely

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[153] Rorty, *Achieving Our Country,* 108.

a white, Christian nation, and continuing to think of ourselves as one holds us back from becoming what we could be. When affirming difference leads to political inaction, as Rorty contends, then there is certainly a problem, but moving too quickly to a rhetoric of commonality solves nothing.

Rorty asserts that his call to collaborate in a shared national vision is not to endorse what Baldwin called "the collection of myths to which white Americans cling," and it is certainly not to participate in any call to return to a great American past that never existed. But what I don't hear from Rorty is the notion that whatever vision for the country the left presents, it must be one that overturns prevailing white Christian mythologies and seeks a society that accounts for the entrenched differences and disparities that prevent true justice from being achieved.

3.3 Towards a Pluralist Faith and Practice

When I call for pluralist democratic faith, I am calling for a vision that allows deep differences to exist in tension with the quest for unity. And this is certainly no easy task. As I see it, this is a small modification of Rorty's proposal, but an important one. If we follow Rorty in understanding that "Democracy" and "America" provide a particular vision of what it means to be human, I suggest, in the spirit of Hannah Arendt, they should reflect that to be human is to be plural. If there is anything we have in common, it is this: we are all the same in that we are all different. To seek democracy then, is to seek a society that embraces that plurality.

The question Rorty might raise here is can such a vision lead to concrete political action? After all, part of his concern is that too much emphasis on difference, and on analyzing the conditions that create it can be an obstacle to such efforts. I don't think a pluralist vision is

inherently unconducive to such action. What paralyzes political efforts rather, is the academic

tendency to theorize into abstraction the forces that produce difference and to undermine any

reform effort that does not entirely revolutionize the existing system in one fell swoop. Instead, I

envision a political program that seeks, if only by piecemeal reforms, to create a society that

makes room for a diversity of human identities and experiences and, in particular, aims to

overturn those elements of the existing system that reinforce historically produced relationships

of inequality.

      Still, I think there is a place to recognize that a political program focused mainly on

policy and legislation may not be sufficient in and of itself. Consider, for example, something

Patrisse Cullors, co-founder of Black Lives Matter, said in a 2017 interview:

> It's not just about policy. It's why, I think, some people get so confused by us.
> They're like, 'Where's the policy?' I'm like, "You can't policy your racism
> away." We no longer have Jim Crow laws, but we still have Jim Crow hate.[154]

I suspect Rorty's contention that a political program should be accompanied by a corresponding

vision of what the country should be, is meant to fill in this gap. A well-articulated vision, one

that as I said earlier presents a clear alternative to the prevailing white Christian mythologies,

may in fact help to do the work that policy cannot. It is certainly worth bearing in mind the need

for a politics that can go beyond pure policy when needed. The academic left can easily fall into

the trap of getting bogged down in recognizing the limits of policy. It is still important not to, as

Rorty puts it,

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[154] "The Spiritual Work of Black Lives Matter," Interview with Patrisse Cullors and Robert Ross, *On being with Krista Tippet,* February 18, 2016.

'prefer knowledge to hope." This does not mean we should eschew knowledge of things as they are; it simply means we cannot let that prevent us from hoping for things as they should be and acting to achieve that state of affairs.

Here Cornel West's notion of prophetic pragmatism helps us a great deal. West finds promise in pragmatism's ability to question traditional conceptions of knowledge and objectivity. However, he is concerned that the pragmatist commitment to re-examining traditional paradigms of knowledge and interrogating the ways in which knowledge is assessed, legitimated, and expressed, may not always result in the logical political commitments such an analysis must entail. These inquiries have serious power implications, because they help us assess what types of knowledge are privileged and passed on to the next generation. In West's view, pragmatists must critically scrutinize the impact of such privileged accounts of knowledge and work to promote the democratization of American intellectual life. That is, pragmatism as a system of philosophical enquiry must be accompanied by praxis.

At its best, says West, pragmatism is prophetic. As he envisions it, prophetic pragmatism "analyzes the social causes of unnecessary forms of social misery, promotes moral outrage against them, and organizes different constituencies to alleviate them, yet does so with an openness to its own blindness and shortcomings."[155] This is what West refers to as prophetic pragmatism's critical temper, which must be complemented by democratic faith defined as "a Pascalian wager (hence undermined by the evidence) on the abilities and capacities of ordinary people to participate in the decision making procedures of institutions that fundamentally regulate their lives." I always loved his parenthetical aside, "hence undermined by the evidence,"

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[155] Cornel West, "The Limits of Neopragmatism," *Southern California Law Review,* 63:6 (Sept. 1990): 1750.

because it captures how easily one can lose faith by dwelling too long on analysis of the existing state of affairs. In this formula, faith mitigates against the academic hopelessness that Rorty diagnoses. Pluralist faith, in my reckoning, is a form of democratic faith, perhaps also undermined by the evidence, that our nation can sustain fruitful democratic participation, even across the lines of deep difference that divide us.

In my mind, people can adopt a pluralist faith based on a variety of commitments, both religious and secular. Stout points out that he and West come to their democratic faith in different ways. West's faith is quite theological, drawing from Niebuhr's Augustinianism and the Christian prophetic tradition. His hope, as Stout understands it, "is the fruit of a leap of faith in the face of facts that are not hopeful. It is a hope against hope, always mindful of the tragic realities around him."[156] West's Christianity seems to make this hope possible for him. Stout as an atheist for not come to Democratic faith in the same way. He says, "My democratic wager is that the grounds for this worldly hope and the evils we need to resist are to be found among the people."[157]

I am not an atheist, like Stout, but neither do I tend to frame my pluralist faith in theological terms. And although I, in many ways, experience hope in my own, often ill-formed, religious beliefs, this is not the foundation of the pluralist faith to which I have committed myself. My faith, like Stout's, is found in people and their capacity for justice and democratic cooperation. As I said above, West's description of democratic faith as "undermined" by the evidence rings true to me, but this is not because I hold a 'hope against hope' that people can be

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[156] Stout, *Democracy and Tradition,* 57.

[157] Ibid.

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better than they are. Rather, as I see it, the "evidence" that undermines democratic is found in news coverage of tragic events, polarized politics, the seemingly unbreakable control that powerful interests have over society, etc. There is much that would lead us to cynicism. And yet, my everyday experience of people finds them to be capable of tremendous grace, kindness, open-mindedness, and good will. Anecdotical though this evidence is, I find that it is backed up my research in the social sciences around human relationality and the science of connection. This research suggests that when people are given the resources and opportunities to connect with one another, to have meaningful conversations, and overcome stereotypes, their capacity for peaceful cooperation with diverse people increases significantly.[158] My larger point is that a certain degree of pluralist faith—faith, that is, that citizens can sustain fruitful democratic participation, even across the lines of deep difference that divide us—is likely necessary to make pluralist practice seem like a worthwhile endeavor. However, I do not think this faith needs to be grounded in the same way for each person. It is simply a way to sustain hope even when cynicism becomes a temptation, a way to keep pursuing connection even when division seem insurmountable.

For the question of how pluralist democratic participation can be sustained, not just theoretically but practically, we turn to Stout's notion of democracy as a social practice. This is his response to the New Traditionalists, a label he gives to MacIntyre as well as theologians Stanley Hauerwas and John Milbank, who criticize liberal democracy for its rootless individualism and forsaking of tradition. Stout posits that democracy in the United States *is* a tradition—a pluralistic tradition.

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[158] A good introduction to this literature can be found in Niobe Way, et al., *The Crisis of Connection: Roots, Consequences, Solutions* (New York: NYU Press, 2018)

Paradoxically, Stout seeks to develop "an anti-traditionalist account of modern democracy as a tradition." It is an anti-traditionalist account in that it recognizes that modern democracy marked a radical break with the more tradition-based societies of the past and the deference to authority they demanded. And yet, democracy is a tradition in that it is "best understood as a set of social practices that inculcate characteristic habits, attitudes and dispositions in their participants" that have achieved enough stability to be transmitted from one generation to another.[159] This also serves as a counterpoint to Rawls, because the ethical content of the democratic tradition is not best characterized by agreement on a conception of justice or a set of common justificatory principles through which all can reason. It is more about ways of acting and interacting, habits of thinking and being that are conducive to the healthy civic life of a democracy. Indeed, Stout sees himself charting a middle path between the liberalism of Rawls and Rorty and the traditionalism of MacIntyre.[160]

In interpreting democracy as a tradition, Stout is responding to MacIntyre's critique of liberalism. This could lead one to think that Stout is using the terms "democracy" and "liberalism" interchangeably: if MacIntyre claims that liberalism is essentially anti-traditionalist, then Stout will counter this claim by arguing that democracy, and by extension liberalism, is a tradition (and not a tradition in crisis, as MacIntyre might claim). However, Stout's argument is a bit more complex. He does not conflate democracy with liberalism; in fact, he is skeptical that "liberalism" as a single tradition really exists as MacIntyre describes it. Liberalism, past and present, is too varied in its thought and execution to be to be painted with such a broad brush.

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[159] Ibid., 203.

[160] Ibid., 296.

Instead, Stout posits that, "we might use the phrase 'liberal society,' if at all, simply as a name for the configuration of social practices and institutions we in the United States and certain other countries happen to be living with right now."[161]

In offering an account of democracy as a tradition, Stout does not mean to conflate it with liberalism, though he acknowledges that the terms are intimately related in their historical development, from the enlightenment onward. Emphasizing "democracy" instead of "liberalism" as a tradition allows Stout to give an alternative accounting of the state of modern ethical discourse. While MacIntyre understood liberalism in terms of the sovereignty of the individual, Stout describes democracy by its social practices—that is, the relational aspect of modern moral discourse, the demands ideals and practices of deliberative democracy make on the way we relate to one another. This strategy also allows Stout to describe the practice of democracy as simultaneously traditional and anti-traditionalist.

To understand the claim that democracy is an anti-traditional tradition, we must understand that traditionalists, old and new, require some amount of deference to authority—the authority of a tradition, a practice, an institution, a text, etc. At the other end of the spectrum, some defenders of democracy have sought to eliminate *any* deference to authority from modern ethical discourse. According to Stout, foundationalism is the theoretical consequence of this quest. Foundationalism problematically assumes all claims to be guilty until proven innocent. That is, they are false unless shown to rest on a foundation of certainty. Pragmatism, on the other hand, recognizes that some claims are innocent until proven guilty and should be seen as justifiable commitments until a legitimate argument is raised against them.[162] Religious

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[161] Ibid., 130.

[162] Ibid., 212.

commitments could be said to be of this kind, because they often cannot be said to rest on a foundation of certainty, at least not one that is accepted by nonbelievers. Nevertheless, religious believers can be justified in holding their opinions and making claims based on religious commitments until a legitimate argument is raised against them. Stout calls this way of thinking about justified claims pragmatism's most important contribution to democracy.[163] It is democratic in that it takes a wide variety of claims from a diversity of people to be legitimate and justified. Yet the authority of those claims is always defeasible, open to reassessment and revision when counterarguments are mounted to challenge them.

The question, still, is to what extent one can both question authority and retain some form of moral authority on which to base one's moral reasoning. Democracy, in Stout's reckoning, does not reject deference to authority altogether. Rather, it diffuses moral authority, not limiting it to leaders or specially trained experts, but extending it to "anyone who proves his or her reliability as an observer and arguer in the eyes of the community."[164] The democratic impulse, then, lies in the power of "the people" to grant moral authority as they see fit. This is not to advocate some sort of "tyranny of the majority," which is its own form of authoritarianism and one to which democratic culture is particularly prone. Rather, Stout contends, "the only defensible form of democratic community is one in which ethical authority is treated as an entitlement (to deference) that one must earn by repeatedly demonstrating one's reliability as an ethical judge.[165]" In other words, each person is not treated as an authority in and of themselves,

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[163] Ibid., 213.

[164] Ibid., 221.

[165] Ibid., 281.

but rather the authority of the individual is socially given—something that must be continually earned in relationship to one's fellow citizens.

This way of thinking about authority resists the extreme individualism that MacIntyre criticizes, and it avoids the too hasty tendency to advocate conformity that some find in MacIntyre's thought. Nevertheless, it also has affinities with MacIntyre's examination of conflict and toleration in that it is up to a community to decide who is given moral authority. People who make certain sorts of unjustified claims or bad faith arguments might be reasonably excluded from a conversation or regarded as having no authority in such matters. The difference between Stout and MacIntyre here is that Stout envisions this process taking place within a pluralist democracy. Such ways of distributing moral authority do not require a shared tradition of moral thought; they simply require a shared tradition of practice. As Stout describes it:

> Part of the democratic project is to bring as many groups as possible into the discursive practice of holding one another responsible for commitments, deeds and institutional arrangements—without regard to social status, wealth, or power. Because the entire practice is involved, not merely the ideals abstracted from that practice, a common morality can only be achieved piecemeal, by gradually building discursive bridges and networks of trust in particular settings.[166]

This is a thoroughly pragmatic way of thinking about finding agreement on moral issues; it does not require common beliefs or principles. These things can be discovered and revised in piecemeal fashion and need never be decisively resolved. The *practice* of discussing moral questions, instead, is primary.

The social practices that Stout most often associates with the democratic tradition are those of giving and asking for reasons and keeping track of other's commitments. Each person

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[166] Ibid., 226.

reasons from her own commitments and keeps track of the commitments from which others reason. It is this "need for each participant to keep track of other participants' commitments and to assess those commitments from his or her own point of view"[167] that makes a discursive social practice *social*, not a social contract to which individuals must commit on pain of being called unreasonable or a community that shares broad agreement on moral norms. These practices provide a useful starting point for what it means to think of pluralism as a social practice. The idea of keeping track of other's commitments in democratic discourse provides a possible way to bridge deep differences. If we seek to understand the commitments of those with whom we disagree, rather than assuming our own commitments are universal, we come to understand them better. This allows us to talk with them more productively, but it also provides a way towards understanding them as complex human beings rather than straw men. This practice can then provide the conditions for a deeper more productive pluralism to emerge.

Still, Stout's description of democratic culture is only a starting point for considering the practice of pluralism. Though he assumes democracy is pluralistic, the social practice of democracy need not be seen as synonymous with the practice of pluralism. Instead, I think of pluralism as a social practice that is a subset of the practices of democracy. Furthermore, healthy pluralism requires a deeper examination of the practices that promote social cooperation across lines of difference. Stout's practices seem to draw from ideals of civil disagreement and reasoned debate, which are commonly valued in American democracy. I maintain that we need to think beyond debate towards dialogue and cooperation. Though these things are not excluded from Stout's model, they are, in my opinion, underdeveloped. In the next chapter, I will further

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[167] Ibid., 280.

develop and extend the notion of pluralism implied in Stout's idea of democracy as a social practice. Just as pluralist faith is a way of approaching democratic faith, pluralism as a social practice is one way of approaching the practice of democracy. Taken together, I argue, this combination of faith and practice provides a more fruitful way of navigating the challenges of living together in diverse society.

CHAPTER 4

APPROACHING PLURALISM AS A SOCIAL PRACTICE

Stout's notion of democracy as a tradition that entails certain social practices, serves as the starting point for my account of pluralism. As noted in the last chapter, Stout understands pluralism to be a part of the democratic tradition, at least in its American iteration. However, understanding pluralism as a social practice requires us to think beyond the practices Stout finds in the tradition of democracy—those of giving and asking for reasons and keeping track of each other's commitments. These practices provide a useful starting point for thinking about what is required to navigate the challenges of pluralism in public life, but they do not exhaust the list of social practices that would be helpful to citizens seeking to better engage the diversity in their midst. In this chapter I develop a more constructive account of pluralism as a social practice. I will approach this in three ways: first, by considering how thinking about pluralism as a social practice can build on what we have learned from the authors I have discussed so far, with particular attention to the insights it draws from virtue ethics; second, by considering a couple of preliminary case studies of organizations that can be said to be practicing pluralism; and finally, as a way of synthesizing what I have garnered from the former explorations, by considering the theological and philosophical commitments necessary for citizens to embrace the practice of pluralism.

4.1 Revising Rawls and MacIntyre

John Rawls and Alasdair MacIntyre have served as the primary foils for my account of pluralism. The places in which their analyses succeed and fail have helped me highlight the ways in which my approach can improve on existing influential understandings of pluralism and its challenges. It will now be helpful to briefly review their positions and what we have learned from them.

Part of my disagreement with both thinkers stems from their understanding of the nature of politics and the sources of social and political conflict. An underlying problem in the way each of them understands these things can be found in the level of consensus they both deem necessary for a well-functioning society. MacIntyre, who advocates tradition-based communities, predictably seeks a high level of consensus on basic premises within those communities. Given that Rawls is a liberal pluralist, one might expect him to allow for a lower level of social consensus in his ideal theory. However, his theory still demands a high level of agreement on core principles. As Elshtain and Wolin observed in Chapter 1, Rawls is afraid of political conflict and this leads him to attempt to de-politicize politics as much as possible. Of course, Elshtain and Wolin's critique assumes that conflict is an inevitable part of politics—perhaps not violent conflict, which Rawls fears the most, but certainly contentious debates and deep divisions between competing interests. Like Rawls, I am interested in the question of how to bridge these deep divisions, but I align myself more closely with thinkers like Chantal Mouffe who view politics agonistically. MacIntyre, in my understanding, is more amenable to conflict in political life. It is only interminable conflict that concerns him because it inhibits moral progress in society. Though I have reservations about his proposed solution, I can at least agree with

MacIntyre that we need better resources for approaching intractable debates in public life, and I hope to uncover some of these resource in my case studies below.

If, in the process of describing pluralism as a social practice I begin to sound like bridging divisions of religion, race, and class will be an easy process if we just identify the right practices, I want to assure the reader this is not the case. Cultivating pluralist practices of interaction may give each of us a better "toolkit" with which to seek understanding and cooperation across lines of difference. At the very least, it may help us approach this task with less trepidation and discomfort. However, I believe a vibrant pluralism is likely to be accompanied by agonistic politics in which diverse groups, in Mouffe's words, "have different interpretations of shared principles and they fight for their interpretation to become hegemonic."[168] Such agonistic struggle is not necessarily a bad thing. It is certainly not ideal (which is probably why it does not show up in Rawls' ideal theory), but it is the nature of human plurality that a permanent shared consensus on basic principles, their interpretation, and their implementation is unlikely to be achieved. A healthy pluralism does not, in my view, require that agonistic political conflict be eliminated. Rather, it requires a) that all groups[169] have a voice and an opportunity to participate in political life, and b) that citizens and governing officials have

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[168] Chantal Mouffe, "The Limits of John Rawls' Pluralism," *Theoria,* 56:118 (March 2009): 9.

[169] Within reason. Although I would advocate that as many people as possible have a voice, I also recognize that there may be certain limits. Some individual and groups, those deemed "hate groups" for example, might be reasonably excluded from participation, at least in certain instances. This is, however, a complicated issue in its own right, and it deserves a much more careful discussion than I can devote here. For now, I will point back to MacIntyre's essay "Toleration and the goods of conflict" as one possible resource for considering this question further. Some recent critiques of free speech absolutism will also be helpful. See for example: Andrew Marantz, "Free Speech is Killing Us," *New York Times,* October 4, 2019; Andrew Marantz, *Anti-Social: Online Extremists, Techno-Utopians, and the Hijacking of the American Conversation,* (Viking, 2019); P.E. Moskowitz, *The Case Against Free Speech: The First Amendment, Fascism, and the Future of Dissent*, (New York: Bold Type Books, 2019).

practices and structures that prevent political disagreement from descending into violence and allow for the pursuit of compromise and cooperation where possible.

It is his fear of conflict that informs Rawls' idea of public reason and leads him to introduce the question of what sorts of reasons virtuous citizens may use in public debate. Though I did not dwell at length on this matter, since it has been discussed in depth elsewhere, it is worth considering how that question pertains to an understanding of pluralism as a social practice. I said in my introduction that I wanted to shift the focus away from the *content* of what one says and towards how one ought best to practice conversation—the sorts of questions that will be most helpful, for example, when seeking to understand somebody with whom one disagrees. However, good conversational practices will inevitably have some relation to content. Guidelines for asking good questions or giving thoughtful responses will, to some degree, address the content of those questions and responses. What I want to move away from, rather, is the notion that citizens must limit the sorts of reasons they use, not allowing them to bring their religious belief or other aspects of their identity into public life and, thus, not allowing them to bring their whole, authentic selves into the conversation. I seek practices that allow people to be full and complex human beings while also being able to engage other full and complex human beings across lines of difference.

MacIntyre does not wade into this debate. The use of religious reasons in public debate has less to do with its interminable character than the individualist enlightenment assumptions that undergird Rawls's theory. Ultimately, I do find MacIntyre's skepticism of public conversation in a liberal pluralist society justified to some extent. He is, in my view, right to believe that asking people to bracket their religious or other tradition-based commitments holds little value for productive debate. Doing so allows us to believe we are speaking from some

faculty of universal reason that all can understand, when in fact nobody understands each other's reasons fully because the convictions that form them are hidden. (Indeed, we may not even fully understand our own reasons.) Two things are lost by disguising one's religious reasons under the guise of some form of common reason: First, we lose an element of self-reflection that is necessary for productive conversation. When we believe we are successfully translating our religious reasons into public ones, we may not recognize the ways in which these reasons do not translate. Second, we lose some insight into people on the other side of a debate. Since we are not given the opportunity to fully grasp *why* they hold their position, the possibility of understanding, much less convincing them to think differently, is significantly diminished. Thus, the debate is more likely to seem interminable.

Of course, it is not obvious that if people reveal their religious reasons for supporting a position that a debate will suddenly be easy to resolve. MacIntyre would likely be skeptical of this proposition as well. After all, he is not sure we can understand another tradition without sustained study of that tradition. And though "traditions" and "religions" are not synonymous in his thought, this might still lead us to ask whether increased religious literacy among the citizenry would make conversation more productive; perhaps we all just need to study more religion. As a religious studies scholar, I am certainly in favor of promoting religious literacy and believe it would be a net benefit to public life in a pluralistic nation. However, religion is a complex topic, and it is difficult to say what precise impact encouraging citizens to study various religious traditions would have on public conversation. There is always a risk in studying a religious tradition and then believing we can understand the beliefs and commitments of every individual within that tradition. In other words, it is easy to stereotype people or put them in a box simply because they belong to a particular tradition. Religious literacy, then, must include an

awareness of the internal diversity of religious traditions as well as an awareness that individual religious actors have complex motivations that are not always easily explained by their religious beliefs.

This dissertation has dwelt so closely on intersectionality for precisely this reason. Neither Rawls nor MacIntyre attends sufficiently to the intersectional nature of identity, and this is one reason their understandings of pluralism fall short. Ultimately, I think religious literacy is undoubtedly helpful, but it is no replacement for learning the sorts of practices that help make diverse people intelligible, in a way that simply knowing facts about their religion cannot.

Lack of attention to intersectionality also helps explain what I see as the authors' incorrect diagnosis of the roots of conflict in society. Rawls seems to think competing comprehensive doctrines are the main risk factor for inciting social conflict. For MacIntyre, modern moral conflict stems from competing traditions as well the loss of traditional authority resulting in the autonomous individual unbound from traditions. Both Rawls's idea of "comprehensive doctrines" and MacIntyre's understanding of a tradition provide a possible way to restate the old concern about competing religions inciting violence or social unrest. (Of course, this is more clearly true of Rawls than MacIntyre). However, both also attempt to broaden the category beyond religion alone. Comprehensive doctrines, by Rawls's definition, are simply competing worldviews with differing ideas of the good. For MacIntyre, a tradition is just a historically and socially embodied argument, an ongoing conversation about a way of life and the goods that constitute it. Rawls, more than MacIntyre, is concerned about potential conflict arising from competing belief systems. MacIntyre is willing to imagine traditions in a somewhat agonistic relationship. Competition between traditions is not the problem so much as our inability to acknowledge that we are formed by different traditions and narratives—in other

words to acknowledge that we are not autonomous moral agents. It is really our desire to imagine ourselves as rational individuals disconnected from any external authority that creates an interminable conflict over goods.

I have argued that neither Rawls's nor MacIntyre's approach adequately explains the roots of social conflict. An intersectional analysis is key to achieving a more adequate explanation. For Rawls, an intersectional approach could call more attention to the historical burdens of racism and other forms of inequity that cannot be resolved by simple appeal to liberal principles or limits on certain types of reasons in public conversations. For MacIntyre, an intersectional approach might help him clarify how marginalized people can be understood to fit into traditions that do not fully accept them and how social change happens in a strictly tradition-based community.

I want to call attention to this question of the roots of social conflict, because it is a question that is intimately bound up with discussions of pluralism. Pluralism, for most political philosophers, is understood to come with distinct challenges (due to the need for people with distinct worldviews to co-exist peacefully and to cooperate for the common good). An intersectional analysis adds another level of complexity because it recognizes the multiple and intersecting forces that shape people's worldview. If we understand the challenges of pluralism to be rooted not only in competing beliefs and worldviews, but also the diverse and intersecting concerns about identity, history, and social status that animate people, we might choose to navigate those challenges differently. My intersectional approach leads to me to focus on practices as the foundation of a healthy pluralism. Thinking about pluralism in terms of practices allows me to account for diverse belief systems as well as the social, material and historical sources of difference.

127

4.2 Virtue ethics and practices

As I have said before, I am interested in approaching the challenges of pluralism from the perspective of civic virtue. That is, I am asking how ordinary citizens can best navigate the diversity in their midst. What practices of conversation and interaction should they employ as virtuous citizens of a society? What such practices are conducive to a healthy and productive pluralism? I look to virtue ethics in order to answer these questions, but I also approach them through a pragmatist and pluralist lens.

Approaching pluralism through a pragmatist lens, particularly as pragmatism is articulated by Stout and West, offers a way to draw on the strengths of Rawls and MacIntyre while avoiding their shortcomings. Virtue Ethics, as I understand it, need not preclude pluralism. Admittedly, of course, I understand pluralism differently from MacIntyre, as I have already noted. For me, it is not inextricably linked to liberalism, and could very well have a place in the politics of local community as MacIntyre envisions it. Democracy characterized by a reasonable pluralism need not limit the ways in which religious people can participate in public life as Rawls suggests; it need not ask citizens to detach themselves from their history, their tradition, or their identity. Drawing from Stout and West, I contend that there is a way to seek a reasonable pluralism that also allows people to hold onto their context and commitments, the histories and traditions that formed them.

I draw more from virtue ethics than I do from social contract theory in seeking this way forward. After all, pragmatism entails an emphasis on practical knowledge and context-based justification; knowledge is acted out in everyday practices and moral habits are formed by everyday interactions. When I think about virtue ethics, I associate it with these same insights: ethics can be understood in terms of virtues, and virtues are habits cultivated over time in

relationship with others. Virtues are also a form of practical knowledge; they allow us to achieve the internal goods associated with a practice. If democracy, and pluralism by association, can be understood as a set of social practices with certain internal goods, then we must draw on virtue ethics to understand those practices.

MacIntyre defines a practice as a coherent, complex, socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that activity can be realized.[170] When I advocate thinking of pluralism as a social practice, I mean that it entails certain habits of thought and action in the way one relates to other human beings of diverse identities, beliefs, and backgrounds. It is certainly complex, in the sense that there will be no single activity or action that encompasses the practice of pluralism (more on this below); it is a social and cooperative activity as indicated by the fact that it necessarily involves interaction with other people. Still if it is to meet MacIntyre's definition, pluralism should also be both "coherent" and "established." I take these to be related components of his definition because he views practices in light of their historically development. Practices such as art, farming, or football (each of which MacIntyre uses as an example of a practice) all have histories over the course of which they have developed certain rules, sources of authority, and standards of excellence. This process of defining and refining the practice over time gives it coherence and establishes it as a recognized human activity. Does pluralism meet these criteria?

I do not think I am required to strictly adhere to MacIntyre's definition of a practice in order to defend my own position. Afterall, thinking of pluralism as a social practice is, I am arguing, a new idea. Therefore, it may follow that it is not established as a practiced nor has it been explored long enough to reach a fully coherent form. On the other hand, I also claim to

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[170] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 187.

build on Stout's understanding of democracy as a tradition, with the practice of pluralism being a subset of the practices of democracy. It would then be worth asking what it means to think of pluralism as part of the American democratic tradition. Pluralism, after all, is a part of American history: It is built into the establishment and free exercise clauses of the first amendment. It is implied in the popular understanding of the United States as a "nation of immigrants" and in national symbols such as the Statue of Liberty. It is, in this way, integral to American self-understanding. Of course, it is also a contested part of the American tradition, as is evidenced by the backlash that comes with each new immigration law or each new wave of immigrants, in the diverse supreme court cases that have ruled on disestablishment and freedom of religion, and in public conversation about how or whether certain religious groups fit into the fabric of American life. (See, for example, my discussion of Islam in Chapter 1).

Pluralism, then, is certainly a part of the American democratic tradition. It has not typically been thought of as a practice, though it could be argued that it has been socially embodied in certain times and places in the United State throughout its history. I am however arguing that, more consciously and explicitly approaching pluralism as a social practice will better enable us (us being those citizens looking to better navigate the diversity in our midst) to achieve the goods associated with it. This brings us to another aspect of MacIntyre's definition of a practice: practices contain internal goods, and participating in a practice enables people to realize those goods. What then, are the goods internal to the practice of pluralism? To some extent, I consider this an open question. Some goods can only be understood by engaging in a practice, cooperatively with others, over time. Thus, some of the goods of pluralism are probably yet to be discovered. However, there also spring to my mind several goods that *could* be internal to the practice of pluralism. These are: The building of solidarity with others in a community, the

achievement of healthy relationships and a common life, the overcoming of contentious conflicts

and polarizing divisions, and an increased capacity for self-reflection and self-knowledge.

What sorts of actions or dispositions are then necessary to achieve these goods? Again, I

consider this a partially open question. The case studies I examine below offer some preliminary

insights into the answer. However, I also view the insights they yield as only partial. They

provide two sightings of the practice of pluralism, but there are so many more efforts and

organizations out there doing important that could provide additional wisdom. It is part of my

understanding that the component actions, attitudes, and dispositions that make up a pluralist

practice will always themselves be necessarily plural. Thus, a capacity for practical reasoning

and the virtues that enable it are of critical importance. Those of us who seek to practice

pluralism will need to cultivate our practical reasoning skills such that we can make adjustments

in our practice as the context demands.

Thinking about what it means to cultivate a pluralist practical rationality helps us

overcome the limitations of the authors I have discussed so far. For most of them, questions

about the practice of pluralism have largely been explored with regard to public debate about

policy or moral issues, and this is something I want to challenge. Rawls is concerned about what

a fair system of cooperation means for debate about key political principles and the structure of

society. This leads him to feel concern about the types of reasons that can fairly be used in such

debates if the resulting policy/structural changes are to be considered just. MacIntyre worries that

moral debates in public life have become interminable and, therefore, we have little hope of

making moral and political progress if we are not speaking from a common tradition (though we

will find that his recoveries of virtue, practice, and the narrative character of human life do

ultimately prove helpful in moving outside the political realm as it is conceived in modern

times). Stout seeks to refute both of these approaches by conceiving democracy as a tradition characterized by certain social practices that seek to accommodate a diversity of voices. Nevertheless, the practices Stout identifies with the democratic traditions still seem to be practices associated with debate and political discussion. Giving and asking for reasons implies that we are seeking to convince or to be convinced. Keeping track of each other's commitments allows us to more effectively understand the person with whom we are engaged in discussion and, thus, we have a better chance of reaching some level of mutual agreement.

This is where I depart from Stout, who has been so helpful to me up until this point, and begin to think in a more Macintyrean mode. In many ways, it makes sense to focus on public conversation and debate about social and political issues when seeking a society capable of making moral progress. Doing so also alludes to certain American ideals about what public conversation ought to look like—i.e. it should be characterized by civil discourse, reasoned debate, and compromise that allows people to cooperate across political and ideological lines. However, I contend this focus on political/moral debate is limiting. It is limiting because it does not ask what comes before such debates: what has to happen to prepare people to enter into such conversations? What virtues must they cultivate and how do they acquire them?

It is also limiting because, for many people, political participation will not take the form of publicly wading into such debates. Their participation in such conversations will occur on a more interpersonal level, between friends and family members, perhaps acquaintances and co-workers as well, seeking to make sense of current events. It is possible that these interpersonal conversations are more likely to lead a person to revise their thinking about an issue, because their interlocuter is someone they trust and with whom they have an existing relationship that is not primarily defined by politics. At the same time, the fact that people

132

regularly try to avoid political topics at Thanksgiving dinner with their family suggests that, even in the context of loving relationships, there is fear around bringing up touchy issues.

Beyond extended conversations on difficult topics, it is worth observing that people's experience of politics, of social and moral debates, is framed by their daily activities and interactions. Even passing comments from strangers may at times feel loaded with political connotations. Further, the way individuals choose to interact with people who look different from themselves is partly influenced by political rhetoric and news coverage of certain groups. We might then add another set of questions focused on interactions with people with whom we have no relationship, or only a passing relationship.

This is where MacIntyre helps us a great deal by reminding us that politics and the pursuit of common good extends beyond the realm of debates about government policy or the activity of presidential elections. Human political life and the pursuit of common goods begins in our everyday associations with other people: family, friends, work colleagues, neighbors, etc. The practice of pluralism begins here as well, in our everyday encounters and relationships. Therefore, focusing on public conversation and civil debate as the arena for the practice of democracy and pluralism will only get us so far in learning to cooperate across lines of difference. What is required is the cultivation of practical rationality, as MacIntyre describes it, that allows us to assess each situation we enter into, identify what is a stake for everyone involved, and consider what common goods are best pursued in that particular place among that particular group of people. Certain virtues must also be cultivated to enable this sort of practical reasoning. The virtues of acknowledged dependence and truthfulness that MacIntyre described in *Dependent Rational Animals,* will likely be important, along with virtues like justice, courage, and prudence. However, I do not intend to lay out an exhaustive catalog of pluralist virtues; I am

more interested in asking, what sites of pluralist practice already exist to cultivate these capacities in people and what can we learn from them?

To begin to uncover these sites, I will consider case studies of two organizations that, in distinct ways, are practicing pluralism. The first, Essential Partners, is dedicated to facilitating dialogues in polarized, divided, or contentious communities. The practices of speaking, listening, and asking questions that they have developed provide some preliminary guidance on how to conduct conversations across lines of difference. The second organization, the Industrial Areas Foundation, focuses on building broad-based organizations that can act for change on the local level. Their method and philosophy of organizing offer insights into the sorts of practices that are necessary to build diverse coalitions that can act together for the common good. I have worked with both organizations in some capacity. Thus, my case studies are informed by personal experience as well as substantial research. Jeffrey Stout also wrote a book on the IAF as an example of democracy in action, which I take to be further proof of the organization's usefulness as a case study for the practices of pluralist democracy. The reader will notice that I draw in part from Stout's book but much more heavily on my own experience with the IAF. This is because I find that Stout, despite his valuable observations, misses some important aspects of IAF practice. My particular critiques, however, will become clearer as my case study proceeds.

4.3 Essential Partners and the practice of public conversation

Essential Partners (EP), formerly known as the Public Conversations Project, is a non-profit organization dedicated to facilitating and training people to facilitate dialogues. They use the term dialogue to describe "a conversation in which people who have different beliefs and

perspectives seek to develop mutual understanding."[171] Dialogue, as they see it, is different from debate in that it is not based around arguing for one side of an issue or another. Rather dialogue participants "often agree explicitly to set aside argument so that they can focus on mutual understanding."[172] EP also distinguishes dialogue from mediation, conflict resolution, and problem solving, although it may serve as an aspect of such processes.

EP's particular method is called Reflective Structured Dialogue. Though not all dialogues need to be structured in order to be productive, the planning and structure that characterizes EP's approach is designed to facilitate dialogues among people and communities that suffer from relationships of "distrust, animosity, stereotyping, and polarization."[173] In such contentious situations, a great deal more preparation, structure, and clarity of intention is needed to effectively purse the goals of mutual understanding that dialogue aims to achieve.

Through dialogue, EP seeks to disrupt habits of interaction that promote and sustain conflict. Common patterns of conversations in longstanding political conflicts are self-perpetuating; they do little to resolve the conflict or promote cooperation between contending parties. The people who speak with the most confidence and certainty tend to dominate the spotlight. Those who are less certain or clear in their views are often reticent to speak up. People tend to selectively remember facts that support their claims and to selectively listen to their opponent's perspective for evidence of lies or ignorance. Few genuine questions are asked, and little new information is brought to light.[174]

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[171] Maggie Herzig and Laura Chasin, "Fostering Dialogue Across Divides: A Nuts and Bolts Guide from Essential Partners" (Cambridge, MA: Essential Partners, 2006): 4.

[172] Ibid.

[173] Ibid., 5.

[174] Ibid., 8.

Disrupting these old patterns of communication requires extensive preparation before the dialogue begins. Facilitators talk with potential participants to get a better sense of the situation, what has and has not been helpful in the past, and what hopes and motivations they hold for moving forward with a new approach. Given that significantly divided or polarized groups and communities are marked by histories of distrust, deception, and hidden agendas, those planning the dialogue must be completely transparent about the process. Everyone involved, including conveners, facilitators, and participants must have a clear idea of what to expect and of what will be expected of them. Part of this process is collaborative planning that allows each participant to take responsibility for and ownership of the dialogue. People who have often felt disempowered, marginalized, or victimized by the "old conversation" can feel newly empowered by their involvement in this "new conversation" which seeks to be adaptable and responsive to participant needs. It is also crucial that participation be voluntary so as to ensure that every participant is committed to the goals of the dialogue.[175]

Once the dialogue convenes for the first time, it is important for the group to make a communication agreement. EP recommends against having the group create a communication agreement from scratch, because it is likely to take up a lot of time and cause frustration and annoyance, especially among those who are eager to begin the dialogue. This does not mean the facilitator should not lead some exercise that get people reflecting on what conditions allow for a healthy dialogue. Such exercises are often a component of the process. However, EP already has a well thought out, pre-prepared set of agreements that they will propose to the group. The facilitator will hand out the list of proposed guidelines and give participants a moment to look

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[175] Ibid., 10-11.

them over. Then the facilitator asks the group if they have any questions and whether they would like to adopt the guidelines as-is or with revisions. If suggestions are made and agreed to by all, they can be added to the agreement. The agreement can also be revised at a later time if certain group members raise a concern that the guidelines are not adequately serving their intended purpose.[176]

The guideline's proposed by EP consist of 9 agreements. Many of these guidelines can apply to difficult conversations more broadly, not just the structured dialogues the EP facilitate. Therefore, as I list each guideline, I will also provide some explanation as to why it illuminates helpful conversational practice:

1. "We will speak for ourselves and allow others to speak for themselves with no pressure to represent or explain a whole group"[177]

This guideline allows participants to be individuals rather than representatives of entire groups. It invites people to share the whole full range of their thoughts, hopes, and concerns, not just those they believe reflect the larger consensus of the group they represent. Allowing others to speak for themselves also guard's against stereotyping by encouraging participants to be intentional about seeing their co-participants as unique individual rather than only as members of a particular group.

2. "We will not criticize the views of others or attempt to persuade them."[178]

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[176] Ibid., 142-3.

[177] Ibid., 17.

[178] Ibid., 18.

One goal of dialogue is to temporarily set aside attempts to persuade other people in order to first work toward mutual understanding. The dialogue guidelines seek to create a safe space within which participants feel free to express their deeply held beliefs, values, and concerns without fear of being attacked. Participants are commonly encouraged to ask "questions of curiosity" when addressing others in the group, meaning questions aimed at better understanding that person and their perspective.

3. "We will listen with resilience, 'hanging in' when something is hard to hear"

This guideline encourages participants to resist hasty reactions when they hear things that make them uncomfortable. This guards against the conversation breaking down when controversial or contentious topics come up. Healthy dialogue, particularly where deep divisions exist, requires a certain level of resilience among the participants to keep it on track. This does not mean participants must simply stay silent when something is deeply hurtful or upsetting to them. It simply asks people to be thoughtful about how and when they speak up.

4. "If tempted to make attributions about the beliefs of others (e.g. You just believe that because…), we will instead consider asking a question to check out the

assumption we are making (Do you believe that because… or What leads you to that belief?)"[179]

This guideline once again encourages participants to ask questions of curiosity that allow them to interrogate their own assumptions and seek understanding.

5. "We will share airtime and participate within the suggested time frames"[180]

This guideline seeks to ensure that everyone is given the opportunity to speak and no single person dominates the conversation. It helps even out power differentials in room, by ensuring that no one is given a disproportionate voice in the conversation. This is reinforced by the structure of the dialogue, which I will discuss below, in which each participant is held to a strict time limit during which they are allowed to talk.

6. "We will not interrupt except to indicate that we cannot or did not hear a speaker"

This guideline again seeks to ensure that all voices are heard and to make sure people can express themselves fully without interruption.

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[179] Ibid., 16.

[180] Ibid.

7. "We will 'pass' or 'pass for now' if we are not ready or willing to respond to a question"[181]

Here participants can feel assured that they are not *required* to speak if they are feeling uncomfortable or simply need additional time to gather their thoughts.

8. "When we discuss our experience in the dialogue with people who are not present, we will not attach names or other identifying information to particular comments unless we have permission to do so"[182]

Since the topics around which dialogues are centered are often sensitive and contentious, people should have a reasonable expectation of confidentiality regarding the information they share. Different circumstance may require varying levels of confidentiality in their agreements. This guideline can be adapted to express a looser or a much stricter confidentiality agreement.

9. "We will not continue the discussion through email."

This guideline rests on the idea that these conversations are most likely to succeed when they occur face to face. Email does not always convey tone, and it doesn't allow for non-verbal

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[181] Ibid.

[182] Ibid., 19.

communication like body language to add context. Email messages can easily be misinterpreted, particularly in the context of a difficult dialogue. This rule may be revised as participants get to know and trust each other more.

The communication agreement helps arrange patterns of communication that promote the goals of the dialogue. However, in order to be effective, the agreement must be returned to frequently to ensure it continues to meet the needs of participants. The facilitator must also hold the group accountable to sticking to the agreement, gently reminding participants that fall into old habits of speaking to rephrase or rethink their comment.

The particular practices that EP employs once the dialogue begins also serve to reinforce the patterns of communication that the agreements seek to promote. Dialogue usually begins with highly structured conversations and then moves to less structured formats later in the process. In the structured conversation, the facilitator asks a question and then gives the group a few minutes to silently reflect on it. The participants then go around in a circle, sharing their answer to the question within a time limit set by the facilitator. Some participants may choose to pass or pass for now, and the facilitator will come back to them at the end to see if they have anything they would now like share. In the go-around, one person speaks at a time, with no interruptions, and no one speaks for a second time until everyone has had their chance to speak. This structure creates a level playing field that allows all voices to be heard and to be allotted equal time. It also encourages the rest of the group to focus on listening to each person, rather than preparing a reaction or response in their head. If questions arise while they are listening, participants are encouraged to write them down. After the go-around is complete, they will have the opportunity to ask these questions of each other, and the conversation can flow more freely. Structured go-arounds are a good place to start a dialogue process while participants are still

getting familiar with one another. Over time, the group may feel the go-arounds are too formal and opt to try a popcorn format in which anyone can respond as they feel ready. However, if it becomes apparent that certain people are dominating the conversation or certain voices are not being heard, the facilitator may find it useful to return to the go-around format at least temporarily.

I will pause here in my description to note that the highly structured nature of this dialogue may have limited applicability to the idea of pluralism as a social practice. It is useful for pre-planned conversation on difficult topics, which can certainly be considered part of the practice of pluralism. However, if we aim to also consider what habits citizens can cultivate in their everyday interactions with diverse people—where such structure is absent and the messiness of human interaction is present—the usefulness of the EP approach becomes less clear.

This is a valid concern, but before investigating what bearing the EP method can have on less structured interactions, let us first consider where such structure might have a place in the practice of pluralism. I take a cue from virtue ethics in understanding the ethics of democracy and citizenship in terms of habits that must be cultivated over time in community with others. In order for young people to cultivate these habits, it is necessary for role models and authority figures in their lives to model them and to play a role in their development. Parents, for example, can use elements of this structure to help children under their care resolve arguments—perhaps giving each child a set time to speak and offer their perspective without interruption. However, the structure is likely most easily adapted to classrooms, which are already considered to be a location in which young people learn skills for discussion and civil debate. Incorporating EP style dialogue into classrooms provides one way to accomplish this, especially when contentious

or controversial topics come up in class discussion. Essential Partners has recently begun a major effort to investigate the possibilities for dialogue in the classroom. In 2017, they received a grant from the University of Connecticut to develop dialogue based teaching methods for higher education classrooms, in collaboration with six faculty from four different institutions who will serve as co-principle investigators.[183] In March 2019, they launched a new website (highered.whatisessential.org) offering information and resources to faculty and administrators who are interested in incorporating dialogic practices into their classrooms.

In an article co-authored by Jill DeTemple (one of the faculty investigators and a professor of Religious Studies at Southern Methodist University) and John Sarouff (a facilitator and trainer for Essential partners as well as an adjunct professor at Gordon College), the authors describe situations in which difficult topics arose in their classroom where they felt that they, as the professor, failed to engage the situation in a helpful or meaningful way. For DeTemple, it was an African-American student using an image of a police car as a symbol of a border or boundary on campus. The image, presented in a predominately white classroom, sent her stumbling through an explanation of how not all communities experience policing the same way. For Sarouff, it was an incident in which a (conservative?) speaker invited to participate in a panel on homosexuality in Christianity left many students feeling upset. Especially given that he was teaching a class on mediation, Sarouff felt like he should have used this as an opportunity for a deeper conversation, but in the moment, he failed to transition into a fruitful dialogue. Both these incidents presented disruptions of normal classroom conversation that, properly handled, could have turned into valuable teaching moments. This leads the authors to frame their article with

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[183] Press Release (February 13, 2017) https://whatisessential.org/news/essential-partners-wins-major-grant-university-connecticut-develop-dialogue-based-teaching Accessed August 22, 2019.

this guiding question: "How can we best manage social, political, and/or religious disruptions in classroom spaces, and how can we employ dialogue as a structure that allows such disruptions…to become meaningful and useful?"[184]

They find the use of Reflective Structured Dialogue (RSD) in the classroom to be a valuable tool to accomplish this goal. Drawing on the RSD model, they recommend teachers think of themselves as facilitators. This is perhaps not a particularly novel idea; many teachers already understand themselves as facilitators of classroom discussion. DeTemple acknowledge that she thought of herself this way long before discovering RSD, but she observes:

> Understanding myself as a facilitator in the ways that an RSD approach suggests, however, has caused me to think of myself as facilitating student relationships as learners. This means getting out of the way more consciously during group discussions, especially early on when the tendency is to look for constant guidance from an authority figure in the room. It means asking questions to which I don't know the answer. And it means reiterating, over and over again, that the quality of the classroom experience is dependent on the relationship my students have with one another.[185]

Borrowing elements of RSD is one way to create classroom spaces where this is possible. This means making communication agreements like the one EP recommends and enforcing it throughout the semester. It may mean employing the highly structured discussion practices that EP uses in their initial dialogues when particularly contentious or difficult topics come up. Finally, it means learning to ask the sorts of questions that stimulate dialogue rather than contentious debate.

EP's model for asking questions is one that can be used in more structured environments, like classrooms, but it can also be used by individual citizens. This is the portion of EP's method

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[184] Jill DeTemple and John Sarrouff, "Disruption, Dialogue, and Swerve: Reflective Structured Dialogue in Religious Studies Classrooms", *Teaching Theology and Religion* 20:3 (2017): 284.

[185] Ibid., 289.

that I find most generally applicable to developing pluralist conversational practices. Different

circumstances may merit different sorts of questions, but at least for the beginning of a dialogue,

EP recommends that questions have certain characteristics. Good opening dialogue questions

should:

- Encourage reflection
- Give participants new information about each other
- Focus on the perspectives and experiences of the dialogue participants, rather than people outside of the dialogue
- Encourage people to share their lived experiences and the way those experiences have shaped their perspective, thus helping others perceive them as unique human beings
- Invite people to share their view in a descriptive way that does not default to pre-formed positional statements.
- Invite people to share the complexities of their views, including their doubts or uncertainties alongside their strongly held convictions
- Help participants reflect on and speak about the meaning they attach to particular events, symbols, labels, and common phrases
- Encourage participants to speak about what they want to learn, not just what they already know.[186]

All these characteristics of good questions help keep a dialogue open, reflective, and non-

adversarial. They allow people to see each other as complex human beings, not just embodiments

of a particular position or identity. An opening question in an EP dialogue will often take form of

asking participants to share an experience that shaped the way they think about an issue. This

helps other participants come to understand not just *what* a person thinks but *why* they think that

way and *how* that way of thinking developed from their life experiences. This is a good way to

start a series of go-arounds. A good follow-up question might be to ask participants what is "at

the heart of the matter" for them. Again, this encourages people to explain why their position is

so important to them and promotes reflection on what is truly at stake. Another common

technique is to ask bivalent questions. A bivalent question avoids either/or framings and

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[186] Ibid., 66.

promotes nuance and complexity in responses. For example, a facilitator might ask participants where they feel pulled in different directions on an issue, what doubts or mixed feelings they have about the topic under discussion. This allows people to show the nuances of their position without forsaking the conviction they feel; it once again helps others see them as complex human beings and invites reflection from both speaker and listeners.

When faced with a tense conversation or a potentially divisive topic of discussion, everyday citizens can also draw on these general guidelines for asking questions. They provide strategies for getting a deeper understanding of why people hold the positions they do, why they have such strong feelings about certain issues, and what commitments undergird their opinions. EP's proposed communication agreement also provides helpful suggestions on ways to continue the conversation after these initial questions have been answered: Do not immediately respond with assumptions about why they think the way they do or try to convince them to think differently. Instead, follow up with questions of curiosity that interrogate your assumptions and seek deeper understanding of the person you are in conversation with. Do not interrupt them before they are done speaking or shut down when things get hard to hear. Instead listen intentionally and with resilience.

There are exceptions to every rule, since situations and contexts vary widely, but EP offers some preliminary guidelines to engage difficult conversations when they come up. We may feel a temptation to argue and try to convince the person with whom we are in conversation to think differently, especially when we find their position to be immoral or unacceptable. However, EP suggests that when people feel listened to, when they feel they are given the opportunity to share their deepest convictions and to be heard without judgement, they become much more open to hearing and listening to people on "the other side" in the same way. When

everyone in conversation is encouraged to open up in this way, it provides an opportunity to find common ground and ways to work together.

4.4 The Industrial Areas Foundation and the practice of democracy

This second case study helps us to think more intentionally about social action, not just dialogue, by examining an organization that actively works to achieve political and social change. The Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) describes itself as "the nation's largest and longest-standing network of local faith and community-based organizations."[187] More specifically, they are dedicated to the practice of local, broad-based organizing. Local IAF organizations consist of a wide range of religious and civic institutions, and these networks provide a foundation from which to "create new capacity in a community for leadership development, citizen-led action and relationships across the lines that often divide our communities."[188]

The IAF models agonistic politics in a way that EP's more conciliatory model does not. We will quickly notice just how different these two models are, and it would be easy to judge them to be incompatible. However, I do not think this is the case. They are merely different sites of pluralistic practice that are best employed in different circumstance. We will see below that the IAF methods are primarily aimed at *public* relationships. EP's methods, alternatively, could be employed in both public and private relationship, depending on the circumstance. Their practices of conversation can be helpful in any situation in which differences of opinion or experience present a barrier to productive and meaningful dialogue. EP's method was also

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[187] "Who we are," http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org/ Accessed September 8, 2019.
[188] Ibid.

originally designed for restorative purposes—aimed towards rebuilding relationship in contexts where conflict and division has become toxic. At that point, conciliatory action is necessary for progress to be made. Though they have more recently adapted their method to other settings, like classrooms, where they are focused more on building relationships than restoring them, they are nevertheless doing so to help people navigate future instances of toxic conflict in more fruitful ways.

The IAF, on the other hand, provides a lens into the ways conflict can be healthy for a community or society. IAF leaders, however, are more likely to use the word "agitation" than "agonism." They seek to agitate people, institutions, and communities, creating productive conflict that spurs change for the better. Here conflict has become toxic, and more conciliatory dialogue practices are not so necessary; instead strategically confrontational practices are in order.

Though the IAF organizes for political and social change, no chapter is organized around a single issue. The purpose of forming a broad-based organization is to build a coalition that can work for the common good of the larger community, rather than focusing on parochial interests. To accomplish this, they need power. A popular organizing maxim is "There are two kinds of power: organized money and organized people." Having a diverse, broad based organization builds "people power".

One thing I appreciate about the IAF is that they take seriously the Aristotelian concepts of politics and practical knowledge that MacIntyre seeks to recover, but they deploy these concepts in the service of a pluralist democratic vision. I find the IAF to be evidence of my earlier claim that Neo-Aristotelianism does not necessarily entail traditionalism,. They see themselves as a school of public life, dedicated to cultivating the habits and practices of a healthy

democracy. Their iron rule of organizing is "never do for others what they can do for themselves." The idea is that an organizer's main function is to help participants develop the skills and habits of civic action that makes a robust democratic society possible.

One way in which they mirror the traditionalism of MacIntyre is in their focus on organizing institutions rather than individuals. These institutions are very often churches, synagogues, and other religious congregations. The value of working with religious congregations is twofold. On the most practical level, religious congregations are already organized. Organizing individuals requires starting from scratch to build the necessary relationships for concerted political action. Organizing institutionally allows the organizer to leverage existing relationships, expand on them, and deploy them in the service of collective action. This quality, of course, is not specific to religious institutions; it is true of the other sorts of institutions the IAF works with, such as neighborhood organizations, labor unions, nonprofits, and other civic organizations.

More specific, though not exclusive, to religious institutions is the power of religious traditions for moral formation. Adherents are often motivated by their religious beliefs to work for justice or social change, and the IAF provides them a path to do that. This is not to say that the IAF is disingenuously using religious authority to convince people to join their cause. Attend any IAF meeting and it becomes clear that the organizers, too, are formed by religious principles and stories, even when they are not religious believers themselves. (I have also met multiple organizers who became religious only after they began working for the IAF and came to understand religious belief in a new light). Stories from the Bible are often used to illustrate lessons about politics and organizing. Stories from non-Judeo-Christian texts are less common, perhaps because Christian and, to a lesser extent Jewish, congregations have formed the vast

majority of their religious membership since the IAF was founded. As the religious landscape in the U.S. becomes more diverse, IAF chapters are working to diversify their membership, and the stories they tell will likely have to become more diverse as well. Nevertheless, the use of biblical stories in IAF meetings often relies more on the power of stories to illustrate concepts and convey truth than it relies on religious beliefs. There is a sense that these stories convey truths beyond the particularities of the religions from which they come. Though IAF leaders certainly respect the particularities of individual traditions, they also operate under the belief that there are broader, perhaps more universal, truths to be garnered from those traditions. It could be argued that the IAF has its own pluralist theological vision to complement its political pluralist practice. Member institutions and individuals within those institutions don't necessarily have to accept that theological perspective to participate (the organization can function with some sort of overlapping consensus), but the theological or moral vision they embrace will likely have to find value in working with people who have very different beliefs and worldviews or who come from very different social locations.

Of course, religious institutions do not have a monopoly on moral formation. All civic institutions have formative power for those who participate in them. In fact, IAF national co-chair Ernesto Cortes argues that civic institutions are critical to the formation of democratic citizens. In "Toward a Democratic Culture," an article Cortes published in *The Kettering Review*, Cortes bemoans the decline of intermediary institutions as one cause of the increasing polarization and cynicism in American politics. By intermediary institutions he means the civic institutions that occupy a place between the private life and the sphere of government and legislation. In addition to religious congregations, these institutions might include neighborhood organizations, labor unions, and mutual aid societies, among other things.

Why are such institutions important to a healthy democracy? They are a source of human relationship and social knowledge. Participating in intermediary organizations trains people to think beyond themselves as individuals, to consider themselves part of something collective. Most importantly, these organizations can train us to have deliberative conversations with people whose perspectives and experiences are different than our own. According to Cortes "it is only through these kinds of conversations that people develop the capacity to think long term, to consider something outside their own experience, and to develop a larger vision of their neighborhood, their state, or their society"[189]

It would be fair, at this point, to wonder if Cortes paints too positive a picture of the institutions of yesteryear and their ability to foster democratic virtues. However, Cortes is not merely waxing nostalgic about the past; he has a vision of the role intermediary institutions can play for the future, and it looks very much like the IAF model of a school of civic life. Organized institutions, as Cortes sees them, can serve to combat the narcissism and alienation that have come to characterize American society (here we see the Aristotelian inspiration behind his political philosophy):

> A counterweight to these forces is for organized mediating institutions to place an emphasis on practices focused on character development, *philia* (Aristotle's notion of political friendship), *phronesis* (the practical wisdom that comes from *metis* or tacit knowledge), *praxis* (action that is aimed, calculated and develops reflective thinking), and the justice that emerges when all parties with a stake in the question are involved in the deliberation[190].

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[189] Ernesto Cortes, Jr. "Toward a Democratic Culture," *Kettering Review* (Spring 2006), 47.

[190] Ibid., 48.

These are the political practices that Cortes wants us to cultivate. Since we are unlikely to develop them as individuals, there must be some intermediary site of association where they can grow.

To some extent, Cortes sees the IAF fulfilling this role. However, since the IAF relies on existing institutions to build its broad-based organizations, a larger commitment to reviving civic institutions and building healthy forms of human association is also required. Good organizing both within and between institutions is a necessity for a healthy democracy. As Cortes explains;

> In my own experience, organizing cultivates those practices when we take time to teach people to have one on one relational meetings and reflect of them afterward. The practices are further developed when the relational meetings lead to house meetings, whether they take place in a house or a school, a recreation center or a synagogue. These small group meetings are about telling stories and developing narratives, but also about inquiring into the deep concerns affecting people's daily lives…These small group conversations, properly directed and aimed, then lead to research actions, to explore the dynamics, dimensions, and complexities of an issue, in order to prepare for public action.[191]

Here we get an idea of the practices that undergird the IAF's method of organizing. It begins with one on one meetings and builds to concerted action for change. Important to the IAF philosophy, however, is that the public action at the end of this process is not necessarily the most important goal. Rather, teaching people these practices, and developing the relationships that result from these practices, is often more important. Not all one-on-one or house meetings result in a public action, but they can at least provide a foundation for relationships that will last beyond that specific meeting.

Building relationships that will last beyond a single meeting or action is critical to sustaining the power of a broad-based organization. Cortes calls the sorts of relationships that develop from IAF organizing practice "political friendships" (drawing on Aristotle's notion of

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[191] Ibid.

philia). These are different from private friendships in that they are not built on the same foundation:

> *Philia* is not about intimacy or warmth or affection; it is about the disinterested capacity to be concerned about the Other's wellbeing: the Other who has become your comrade, with whom you are in solidarity, but not necessarily always in agreement. *Philia* requires both face-to-face engagement and the capacity to step outside of oneself and see the Other as having a claim on us. It requires recognizing the Other's dreams, aspirations, hopes and anxieties, as well as his or her depth and complexity. To put it another way, for *philia* to begin to develop, you must *know the Other's story.*[192]

When Cortes describes political friendship as disinterested, he means it is not founded on sentiment, as private friendship would be. Instead *philia* is founded on solidarity, a commitment to work together towards common goals. This is important to note, since we will see that the IAF put a lot of emphasis on the role of self-interest in public relationships. Understanding the self-interest of others is connected to this idea of "knowing the Other's story." Political friendship does not require the intimacy of private friendship, but it does require us to seek to understand the other with whom we wish to work: what are their hopes and fears? What motivates them to seek change? What experiences shaped them to become who they are today? Knowing the other person's story provides a level of understanding that allows us to bridge differences, overcome stereotypes, and understand the other person as a full and complex human being: Someone we can work with, even if we do not always agree with them.

The role of self-interest in public life becomes clearer when we look at public relationships more broadly, not only those we might consider "political friendships." Public relationships, more broadly conceived, will also include those who oppose us and actively work

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[192] Cortes, 50 (Emphasis Cortes's).

against us. These might not be friendships, but they are relationships nonetheless. Edward

Chambers, Cortes's predecessor as IAF co-chair, explains further:

> Public relationships, [in contrast to private ones], are open, formal, capable of withstanding scrutiny, above board, and accessible to all. The glue of public relationships is also different. Here the ground rule is *quid pro quo*—you help me, I help you. This is where we learn about making and keeping public promises, and about how to hold and be held accountable. Enlightened self-interest, not mutual self-sacrifice, is what makes public relationships work. Here the power mode is stronger than the love mode. This is the world of exchange, compromise, and deals—the world of contracts, transaction, and the law.[193]

Many people may find this picture of public relationships distasteful and cynical. People

who possess a strong ethic of justice, especially those who are religiously motivated, don't

always like to think of relationships in terms of *quid pro quo,* power, or self-interest. This might

be particularly true of Christians who have been taught that an ethic of self-sacrificial love ought

to guide all of their actions, public and private. Given the number of Christian congregations that

fill their ranks, it is unlikely that IAF leaders would want to dismiss these feelings completely.

Instead, they try to reframe these characteristics of public relationships in a more positive light. It

is certainly fine for Christians, and others, to find motivation in an ethic of self-sacrificial and

unconditional love, but in order to make real change, people must also recognize the realities of

public life. Politicians, legislative bodies, businesses, and other powerful people or groups are

unlikely to abide by a principle of selfless love. In order to work with them, which is necessary

for change to happen, we will have to conceive that relationship in a way that does not rely on

their willingness to set aside their self-interest.

Recognizing the role of forces like self-interest in public relationships does not mean

setting aside concern for the common good, it simply means rethinking what self-interest means.

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[193] Edward Chambers, *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice,* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2003) 70.

The IAF teaches a relational concept of self-interest, one that "enables people to understand that sustaining and developing their own concept of self-interest requires them to be concerned with the self-interest of others."[194] Common goods are not effectively achieved without taking into account the interests of all parties affected. At the same time, those who seek to put aside their self-interest in pursuit of the common good need to reflect on their self-interest as well, in order to better understand themselves and their own motivations. Furthermore, by reflecting on their own self-interest, such people will be better equipped to understand the self-interest of others.[195] These reflections on self-interest enable productive public relationships by providing starting point for negotiation and compromise. When we reflect on the self-interest of ourselves, those we are in solidarity with, and those who seem to oppose us, we are better equipped to find solutions where our interests overlap. Compromises will be necessary for all parties, but the common good can be advanced, if only incrementally.

Power is another key ingredient in efforts to work for the common good. This is the main aspect of IAF practice that I find missing in Stout's book, *Blessed are the Organized*. Though it does discuss power, briefly, in different places though out the book, he spends little time helping understand the way the IAF conceives power. Indeed, he devotes only one sentence to the fact that the IAF considers itself to be building "relational power,"[196] which is surprising given that this is a central part of the IAF's self-understanding as an organization. Notably, I have spoken to

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[194] Cortes, "Towards a Democratic Culture," 49.

[195] Notes from National Training, July 2017.

[196] Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 149.

multiple IAF leaders who also felt Stout overlooked this aspect of their work, so I am not alone in this observation.

To begin to understand the IAF's notion of power we should first observe that you cannot negotiate if you do not have a seat at the table, and getting a seat at the table requires power and influence. Like self-interest, power can have a negative connotation for those seeking to work for the common good. Power is seen as corrupting, leading people to act selfishly and without concern for the less powerful. It is also seen as something that is exercised, often unilaterally, over less powerful people. Power is adversarial and competitive, seen as a limited resource that only some people can have. The IAF, however presents an alternative, relational vision of power. Even power understood as domination entails relationships. One cannot dominate without someone to be dominated. Seeing the relational nature of even the crassest form of power is the first step to understanding another side of power, one that is obtained by strengthening, rather than exploiting, human relationships. As Chambers explains:

> People who can understand the concerns of others and mix those concerns with their own agenda have access to a power source denied to those who can push only their own interests. In this fuller understanding, "power" is a verb meaning "to give and take," "to be reciprocal," "to be influenced as well as to influence." To be affected by another in relationship is as true a sign of power as the capacity to affect others. Relational power is infinite and unifying, not limited and divisive. Its additive and multiplicative, not subtractive and divisive. As you become more powerful, so do those in relationship with you. As they become more powerful, so do you. This is power understood as relational, as power *with*, not *over*.[197]

Building power is necessary for effective social action, but in order to pursue common goods, it has to be the right sort of power—relational power. As noted earlier, organizers often say there are two types of power: organized money and organized people. By organizing people IAF organizations build relational power that can counter the forces of organized money that

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[197] Chambers, "Roots for Radicals" 28, (Emphasis Chambers).

often have outsized influence on politics and legislation. Of course, even a broad-based

organization needs money to function. Organized money is not a fully negative type of power,

but it becomes detrimental to the common good when the interests of the few dominate the

interests on the many. Thus, IAF chapters must be very intentional about organizing money in a

way that promotes relational power. For this reason, member institutions pay dues as part of their

membership in an IAF chapters. Different organizations pay different amounts in dues,

depending on what they are able to contribute, but a larger amount does not equate to a larger

influence in the organization. Dues simply give institutions a sense of ownership in the

organization, and it also prevents the organization from being beholden to outside interests.

It is also important to note that power within an organization is not limited to the

authority of the few paid organizers that work for the IAF. If the organizers unilaterally made all

the decisions about what issues and actions the organization would undertake, they would be

doing their job very poorly. One of the main jobs of the organizer is to identify and develop

leaders who can take on greater responsibility as representatives of their institution within the

IAF organization. These may not be leaders with formal authority, like pastors or rabbis. Clergy

already have full-time jobs as leaders of their institutions and are unlikely to have much time to

commit to becoming an IAF leader as well. Rather, organizers often find lay people who have

the respect of their peers. Sometimes these people need time to develop into well-regarded

leaders within their community, but the organizers see that potential in them and work to

cultivate it.

Leaders from various member institutions form an IAF chapter's decision-making and

planning team. As representatives of their institutions, these leaders should be attentive to the

needs and concerns of the people within that institutions, and they should also be capable of

mobilizing people to support and show up to IAF actions. Organizers and existing leaders are

also always looking to identify and develop new leaders as well. There is no particular limit to

the number of people who can take on a leadership role for their institutions. Since, in the IAF

philosophy, power is not a scarce resource, there is no need to limit more people from becoming

part of an organization's leadership team. Cultivating new leaders is a way of building more

power for the organization.

Cultivating leaders is also a way of building citizens who are better prepared to act

politically and make change in the places they live. One thing Stout does very well is share

stories of citizens becoming leaders, even when they occupy precarious or marginalize position

in society. For example, he observes a tendency in the IAF to define citizens in moral rather than

legal terms. He explains, "Anyone who enters so deeply into a community's life that he or she is

reasonably taken by others to be partly responsible for that community's arrangements is a

citizen in the moral sense."[198] Stout makes this observation after witnessing the moral authority

an immigrant woman commanded in the San Antonio organization. I had a similar experience

working with the IAF chapter in Dallas in their effort to revise the city housing code to provide

higher minimum living conditions for Dallas tenants. The effort began when some local Latina

women, from a neighborhood with many dilapidated apartment complexes, came to the IAF

wanting to know about their rights as tenants. The fact that most of these women were not

citizens (or even documented immigrants in some cases) and spoke little English did not prevent

them from leading the charge in an ultimately successful effort to reform the housing code. There

is perhaps no better illustration of the IAF's effectiveness in building power and cultivating

citizens (in the moral sense) than watching women from a marginalized sector of society take

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[198] Stout, *Blessed are the Organized,* 100.

calls with city councilmen, organize busloads of people to show up to meeting at city hall, and

make speeches to large crowds including, in some cases, the mayor of Dallas.

The IAF's practice of cultivating the leadership and organizing skills in ordinary people

demonstrates an extraordinary faith in people's capacity to act as democratic citizens. Saul

Alinsky, the founder of the IAF, said "belief in the capacities and wisdom of ordinary citizens is

a fundamental pre-requisite for democracy."[199] This statement has much in common with Cornel

West's definition of democratic faith[200], but I think IAF organizers would not be so quick as

West to say this faith is "undermined by the evidence." Their methods of cultivating citizens

leaders have been refined and proven themselves effective over decades of work. Their practices

of listening to people in local communities before deciding on issues and strategies demonstrates

a belief in the wisdom of such ordinary people to know what best serves their community. They

often criticize issue-based organizations for going into communities, thinking they know the

issues in advance, without really listening to the people there. The IAF places a great deal of

emphasis on listening to and learning from local knowledge before determining which issues to

engage and how to engage them.

Such faith in ordinary people, as well as a commitment to cultivating their potential is

critical to the way the IAF practices democracy. Their philosophy of organizing would be

incoherent if they did not believe that even those who lack much formal education have wisdom

and skills that are valuable to their work. Their iron rule of organizing, "never do for others what

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[199] Quoted in Cortes, "Towards a Democratic Culture," 55.

[200] I we remember, West defines democratic faith as "a Pascalian wager (hence undermined by the evidence) on the abilities and capacities of ordinary people to participate in the decision making procedures of institutions that fundamentally regulate their lives."

they can do for themselves," would be meaningless if they did not believe ordinary people could learn the practices of public life that make social change possible.

4.5 Lessons and limits of the case studies

Looking at these two case studies together, we can observe a few common threads. The first—and perhaps the most central to their work—is an emphasis on relationships. Both EP's and the IAF's methods are grounded in an awareness of human relationality. For EP's dialogues to bear fruit, participants, who may already be in very contentious or strained relationship, must learn to relate to one another in a healthier way. For the IAF's broad-based organizations to build power, they must first build relationships between diverse people and institutions. The relationships that result, in both these cases, may not be intimate friendships. Intimacy is not a precondition for people to be able to find common ground and work together, but rather a willingness to listen, to learn another person's story, to share one's own story and make oneself intelligible to others, to accept compromise when necessary, and to see even those with whom one deeply disagrees as complex human beings worthy of this effort.

This emphasis on relationship reflects a narrative understanding of human life, which MacIntyre deems critical to moral deliberation. In the IAF, organizing relationships begin with one-on-one meetings in which people share their stories. In EP dialogue, people are not asked to simply lay out their positions on certain issues; instead they are asked to share an experience that led them to feel the way they do about that issue. This emphasis on narrative is also pertinent to a second common thread in these case studies: the notion that building relationships requires self-reflection. The opening round of an EP dialogue is built on questions that require participants to reflect on their experiences, their commitments, their hopes, and their doubts. (They did after all

name their method *reflective* structured dialogue.) Moreover, their communication agreement is filled with guidelines asking people to examine their assumptions. Self-reflection is also an important component of the IAF model of action. Public relationships, as they define them, are built on enlightened self-interest, and this requires people to reflect on their own self-interest just as much as it requires them to recognize the interests of others. But beyond this, every public action an IAF organization undertakes is followed by a collective self-reflection, and the group debriefs what went well, what could have gone better, and what the next steps are moving forward.

A final common thread is the practice of accountability. Practices of holding and being held accountable are a challenging but essential component of both approaches. For EP the dialogue facilitator is mainly responsible for holding participants accountable to the communication agreement, intervening compassionately but firmly when people stray from the guidelines. However, the facilitator is also accountable to the group, because they must continuously show themselves to be fair and competent in order to maintain the group's trust in their authority over the process. The IAF holds people accountable to the commitments and promises they have made. Because they work to get commitments for change from local leaders, lawmakers, and other public figures, those figures need to know the IAF is going to hold them accountable if they don't follow through. Accountability is also important as an element of the "political friendships" that members build within the organization.

By studying these two organizations, we can begin to think about what ordinary individuals not involved in them can adopt as practices in everyday life. EP reminds us that the way we choose to frame questions and responses when conversations become contentious is incredibly crucial, as is cultivating a certain amount of resilience that allows us to "hang in

there" when things become difficult. Even those of us who do not have the benefit of a structured dialogue facilitator to oversee our conversations when they become contentious can learn to think like a facilitator, cultivating the sort of practical knowledge that facilitation requires and applying those skills to steer the conversation in a more fruitful direction. You might, for example, use some of the EP guidelines to make the conversation feel less like a debate or an argument and more like a dialogue. This could be achieved by asking questions of curiosity that make the other person feel listened to and understood. Responding with such curiosity can help deescalate the conversation, whereas immediately trying to convince the other person to think differently would not. Similarly, thinking like a facilitator can help you be reflective in the way you share your perspective with the other person, asking, what would it mean to make yourself intelligible to this person who deeply disagrees with you? Is it simply a matter of making the most cogent and logical argument? Or would sharing part of your personal narrative be more effective? Is it necessary to assert your opinions uncompromisingly? Or would describing the areas in which you have mixed feeling make the other person more sympathetic? These are the sorts of questions a pluralist practical rationality, informed by EP practices, might lead one to ask. They may be answered differently for different conversations (for instance, although the EP approach is largely conciliatory, there may indeed be times when it is important to be more uncompromising in one's convictions), but simply having this set of questions at your disposal will be a helpful tool.

The IAF reminds us that even when agitating for social change, there is still a value in taking the time to build relationships and to continue reflecting on those relationships. It is not only in the context of a conciliatory dialogue that we benefit from learning another person's story or seeking to understand another person's interests. Even when that person is on the other

162

side of the fight, there is value in trying to understand that person better. Doing so allows us to find the places where interests overlap and compromise is possible. Further, understanding that person as a complex human being with their own interests and motivations helps reinforce the maxim of "no permanent allies, no permanent enemies." People are understood, not as opponents who will always be on the wrong side, but always as people it is possible to work with, even if doing so may be challenging or even impossible at certain times.

In both cases, cultivating relationships is viewed as central to building a better society. These insights are reinforced by current research in the social sciences which suggests human relationality is a powerful force that, properly understood, can be deployed to remedy complex social problems. Psychologists Niobe Way and Joseph Nelson put it nicely when they observe, "The science of human connection consistently reveals that it is our stereotypes of one another and our lack of curiosity in each other that lead us to believe that we have nothing to learn from one another."[201] Because of this, they argue, we tend to lose sight of each other's full humanity. Way and Nelson experimented with a middle school intervention called "the Listening Project" in which they taught students an interviewing technique that helped them to both better listen to others better and share what was most meaningful to them. Through this project, they found the students were better able to overcome harmful stereotypes (both stereotypes held by them and stereotypes imposed on them) that got in the way of building the relationships that made emotional, physical, and academic success possible. Way and Nelson's research on adolescents suggests that human connection enables human flourishing from an early age. Thus, they argue,

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[201] "The Listening Project" in Way et al. *The Crisis of Connection,* 277.

163

training young people in practices that overcome stereotypes and promote relationship should be emphasized as a critical element of a good education.

As another example, a report by the Perception Institute on *The Science of Human Equality,* collates and summarizes research on implicit bias, racial anxiety, and stereotype threat. The report both describes the problems presented by these phenomena and the interventions that are shown to be most effective in mitigating them. These interventions include helping people see out-group members as individuals rather than representatives of the group, practicing perspective-taking in order to see another point of view, leading people to question their own objectivity rather than taking for granted that their understanding is correct, and cultivating intergroup relationships (in other words, relationships with people different from oneself).[202] It is easy to see how these interventions overlap with the techniques deployed by EP and the IAF.

On the other hand, the Perception Institute's report also grants us insight into the limitations of these two case studies. Both EP and the IAF illuminate techniques that help people from diverse backgrounds connect and work together across lines of difference. However, as the Perception Institute points out, there are larger structural problems at work—systems and institution that perpetuate racism and injustices. EP and IAF may not provide the best means of addressing these larger, systemic problems.

I chose two organizations that were non-issue based for my initial case studies. Their work is based primarily on crossing the lines of difference that divide us, rather than working for any specific social cause. However, some people might question whether this allows them to combat the larger structures and institutions that perpetuate injustice in society. An argument could be made that both organizations are doing necessary work that is part of this process.

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[202] Rachel Godsill, et al. *The Science of Equality, Volume 1: Addressing implicit Bias, Racial Anxiety, and Stereotype Threat in Education and Health Care.* (The Perception Institute: November 2014): 44-55

However, one might also, justly, wonder if organizations that are explicitly organized around combating such structures of injustice might ultimately be better equipped to bring the sort of change we really need.

For my part, I believe such cause-based organizations also have valuable lessons to offer, and I recognize that focusing only on EP and the IAF for my case studies has its limits. For example, the anti-racism work that the Black Lives Matter movement engages in across the country requires a different set of organizing strategies than those deployed by the IAF, since they are devoted to the particular task of demolishing structures of racial injustice. This too is a part of bridging divides and creating the conditions for cooperation between diverse racial and social groups, yet it often looks much less conciliatory and unifying than something like an EP dialogue, and it may be harder for them to build a broad-based coalition than it is for a non-issue specific group like the IAF. This type of work, which inevitably gets labeled divisive by certain commenters, is nevertheless important for creating a more just society for all citizens. The tension between the conciliatory, relationship-building work that I find so compelling and the more confrontational agonistic work of dismantling oppressive structures, which I also find crucial, is something I must continue to explore through further case studies of organizations engaged in these different types of work. Ultimately, then, my two case studies provide only a preliminary insight into the practical application of approaching pluralism as a social practice.

4.6 Pluralism as a Social Practice: Theological and Philosophical Commitments

Having explored a few potential examples of organizations practicing pluralism, let us now turn to another question related to the application of my theory: the question of audience. In my introduction I explained that my argument was addressed to citizens seeking better

approaches to engaging the difference and diversity in their midst. Yet it is worth further interrogating whether or not my argument can appeal to this audience. I have tried to articulate a vision of pluralism that is as inclusive as possible of diverse belief systems and worldviews. By focusing on practices, I have tried to avoid demanding too much in terms of the shared commitments that are required of people. Nevertheless, my approach likely does require citizens to hold other philosophical and/or theological commitments in order to embrace the practice of pluralism in their everyday lives, and it is worth exploring precisely what such commitments are necessary.

Though I was informed by pragmatist approaches to truth, justification, and moral authority when developing the idea of pluralism as a social practice, I aim to outline an approach to engaging diversity in public life that is accessible to ordinary people who have no knowledge of the pragmatist philosophical tradition. For those who do not share my philosophical leanings, the pragmatist distinction between truth and justification might be one source of concern. After all, my own pluralism partly rests on the idea that people may be justified in believing many things even if those things prove to be wrong, misinformed, or morally questionable at a later time. That is, I hold the view of many pragmatist thinkers that justification is relative to context and available knowledge. Truth, on the other hand is not relative, though I contend our access to it is often limited and, thus, a certain amount of intellectual humility may be in order when asserting truth claims. One question that might arise from is whether those who do believe humans have substantial access to truth, especially ultimate truth, through holy texts or some other form of revelation, can embrace pluralism in the same way that I do. I would respond that, although many religious traditions believe humans have access to divine revelation or some similar source of transcendent knowledge, religions also tend to emphasize the limits of

humanity and the obstacles humans face in grasping such knowledge. Even in religions like

Buddhism, where humans might be able to attain ultimate truth without divine assistance, it is

understood to be a long and difficult process, perhaps one that that lasts many lifetimes, to reach

nirvana.

Furthermore, the plurality of interpretations and practices within any religious tradition

are enough to demonstrate the limitations human's face in seeking truth. William Galston

articulates this well in his response to Wolterstorff's critique of value pluralism (which, much

like pragmatism, can be accused of denying the existence of a *summum bonum*):

> While Wolterstorff is obviously right that the Abrahamic faiths endorse the
> general *concept* of the highest good as right relation to God, they disagree, not
> only among one another, but also internally, as to the specific *conception* of right
> relation. A transcendent God is not only inexhaustibly infinite, beyond the
> capacity of finite speech to describe (let alone circumscribe), but also
> substantially hidden. Not surprisingly, as the Abrahamic faiths have developed
> over time, each has undergone a process of internal pluralization. Depending on
> how a specific religious community specifies and orders God's attributes and
> interprets God's word, there may be an endless variety of orientations—toward
> faith as opposed to works, the heart as opposed to the law, inner spirituality as
> opposed to external observance, self-improvement as opposed to social reform,
> retreat from the world as opposed to immersion in the world, contemplation as
> opposed to action, political innocence as opposed to worldliness, and so forth.[203]

Galston's point is that, in the Abrahamic religions, God's infinite being can never be fully known

by finite humans, and this restates the agnosticism about human access to truth that pragmatists

(and value pluralists like Galston) often observe in their philosophizing. Non-Abrahamic

religions have their own ways of articulating human limitations and making sense of conflicting

interpretations of religious truths. Thus, the idea that humans have limited access to truth is not a

specifically pragmatist notion.

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[203] William Galston, *The Practice of Liberal Pluralism,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 195.

Furthermore, saying that there are certain limits on human access to truth does not mean that we cannot hold certain ideas about the world with relative certainty. Many religious people, among others, hold beliefs they do not view as open to revision. For example, the majority of Muslims and Jews will insist on the idea of God's one-ness as a core tenet of their faith that is not up for debate, even if some smaller theological details that help them make sense of this one-ness may be revisable. Most of us, religious at not, likely hold at least some beliefs that we view as beyond debate. Though a certain level of intellectual humility is probably important to participating in the practice of pluralism, I would still contend that one can hold these sorts of uncompromising beliefs while seeking to understand and cooperate with others who think differently.

This relates to another concern that certain political philosophers have expressed about religious diversity: The fact that many religions claim to be the only path to salvation/truth strikes some as a significant barrier to a healthy pluralism. Rousseau famously asserted that it is impossible to live peacefully with someone we regard as damned.[204] This line of thinking suggests that in order for a religiously diverse society to function peacefully all religious people would have to be theological, as well as political, pluralists. In other words, they would have to believe that there are many paths to salvation and ultimate truth beyond the one professed by their traditions. I have never found this argument convincing. To be sure, if religious people hold onto a form of theological exclusivism that keeps them from interacting, even in passing, with those who do not share their convictions, there may be problems. However, this is not the case for the majority of religious people in the United States.

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[204] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, The *Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, Ed. Victor Gourevitch, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 144.

I would maintain that is possible to be a theological exclusivist while still embracing life in a pluralist democracy. One simply has to believe there is value in finding ways to interact and cooperate with people who come from different traditions. Religious people will likely have a diverse set of theological justifications for why this is valuable. Some may have a practical rather than theological explanation: e.g. we live in a diverse society and have no choice but to learn to navigate it. Still, as long as one's theological system leaves some room for cooperation with those outside of it, I see no *overwhelming* obstacle to a healthy pluralism. Some efforts at cooperation will be more successful than others, some conversations will be more productive than others, and some disagreements will be more difficult to navigate than others. The practice of pluralism will have to be adaptable to different contexts and shifting circumstances, and it will inevitably be challenging at times. But challenges and obstacles can only be engaged on a case by case basis as they arise. To my mind, the existence of theological exclusivism should not be seen as an insurmountable barrier to the possibility of cooperation across lines of religious difference.

I would contend that different views of human nature and varying levels of faith in the capacities of ordinary citizens can be a larger obstacle. As I noted above, both EP and the IAF display great faith in humanity, despite the challenging work that they do. However, I suspect this faith is lacking for a large number of Americans. Especially in a time of increasing polarization in American politics, it is easy for people to dismiss those who think differently than them as ignorant, backwards, or stupid. Such thinking allows us to write off a large number of our fellow citizens without really engaging them. Democracy—and the quest for a truly democratic system in which everyone has a voice and a share of power—requires us to believe people are capable of making good, well informed choices when voting, supporting certain

policies, etc. A commitment to practicing pluralism, as I have described it, similarly requires a certain level of faith in people who think differently, act differently, or come from entirely different social locations than ourselves.

It is for this reason, that I believe pluralist faith, in the same vein as Cornel West or Jeffrey Stout's democratic faith, is a necessary aspect of a healthy pluralism. We have to, on some level, believe that people are capable of working together and finding common ground. We must believe there is some value in seeking to understand even those whose beliefs or opinions we find repugnant. It may be the case that such faith must develop over time, as people become more adept at cultivating the sorts of habits that allow them to cooperate across lines of difference. Part of this faith rests on a particular view of moral formation. I am informed by virtue ethics here, but again, ordinary citizens need not have any conception of virtue ethics in order to understand pluralism as a social practice. The idea that a healthy pluralism can be built through particular practices of human association simply requires one accept that people are capable of learning how to be better citizens, better neighbors, and better friends.

What, then, do we do with people who lack this sort of pluralist faith? This would seem to be the most difficult obstacle I have to overcome if I want people to embrace my approach. My provisional answer, is that those of us seeking to cultivate a healthy pluralism in our communities should engage those people the same way we engage all people who think differently from us—with practices that help us both seek to understand their less optimistic view of humanity and that make our own faith in humanity more intelligible. One of the challenges of holding a pluralist faith is that it will necessarily require us to engage those who do not hold this faith in the same way or who choose to place their faith elsewhere.

4.7 Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have aimed to make a modest contribution to prevailing approaches to pluralism in political ethics by proposing a new framework that conceives pluralism as a social practice. Framing pluralism in this way is only a starting point; more work still needs to be done to fully understand the sorts of practices and virtues that facilitate productive conversation and cooperation across lines of difference. My preliminary case studies provide a starting point, but more case studies and research will need to be done. Further, it is important to understand that the practices of pluralism will always themselves be *plural*—varying based on context and changing as circumstances evolve. Thus, understanding these practices will be an ongoing effort, perhaps never complete. The commitment to undertaking this effort is perhaps more important than having a complete list of practices. After all, building a healthy pluralist society requires the commitment of its citizens, even if we are all imperfect in our execution of that commitment.

The audience I am writing to is those who already want to find better ways to navigate human diversity in their own context. Though perhaps I have implied my own conviction that seeking out such practices has value and importance, I have not made an explicit argument for the value of pluralism or diversity. Here, my modest aim was only to convince those who already see navigating diversity as an important and pressing task that they should approach it as a matter of pluralist faith joined with pluralist practice. Thus, when I say above that "building a healthy pluralist society requires the commitment of its citizens," I also recognize that not all citizens hold this commitment and that convincing them to adopt this commitment is a separate endeavor from what I have aimed to achieve here. My contribution to the conversation on pluralism so far is thus aimed primarily to those already interested in the conversation on either an academic or a practical level (or both).

I also contribute to this conversation specifically in my engagement with Stout. I understand myself to be building on, but also revising Stout's notion of democracy as a tradition characterized by certain practices. I consider pluralism to be one of those practices that makes up the democratic tradition. This would seem to make my argument only a minor addendum to Stout's more extensive work on the subject. However, I would assert that my analysis contributes much more than this. Pluralism is already a part of Stout's understanding of democracy, but it is underdeveloped, as are the practices he associates with it. He focuses mainly on practices of public debate, a tendency he shares with many other contemporary political philosophers. However, I have argued that a healthy democratic and pluralist society begins prior to the public debates about policy and social issues that go on in the public square. The roots of healthy pluralism can be found in the everyday activities of human association, even those that are not considered to be strictly political in nature. This is an insight I draw from MacIntyre with his much more robust account of human relationality and community.

Finally, I have devoted significant space in my analysis of various authors to considering the roots of social conflict. I have drawn on William Cavanaugh to dispute the idea that religion is a primary cause of conflict, and I have drawn from feminist and anti-racist thinker to consider how historical and material conditions as well as power differentials can themselves be significant sources of conflict. My point in doing this has been to rethink the nature of the challenges presented by life in a diverse, pluralistic society. In other words, I have hoped that in more accurately describing the challenges of pluralism I could also uncover a more helpful way to approach those challenges.

However, there is one final constructive proposal I want to make based on my reading of social conflict. It has become my understanding that if people are equipped with habits and

practices that allow them to connect, understand, and be curious about one another, then much dangerous conflict can be avoided, or at least successfully navigated in ways that avoid significant harm or violence. I don't assert this naively; there is certainly much hard work to be done and some situations will prove more challenging than others. I also do not want to overlook the significant obstacles posed by differences of power, identity and social location. Nevertheless, this is part of my pluralist faith. It is easy to be cynical in a society that often doesn't teach relational skills or facilitate the cultivation of authentic human connections. If we can't get over the idea that simply having reasoned debates over issues is enough to achieve a healthy civil society, we will remain polarized and divided. Focusing instead on how habits and practices of cooperation can be cultivated in people is a starting point for bridging differences, tearing down stereotypes, and enabling human connection.

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