

# **Liberty, Equality, Community: Morality Within Dialogue**

**Harvey B. Sarles**

**Janis H. Sarles**

IN CONSIDERING the moral sphere which a modern Humanism can inspire, it is useful to return to the joined concepts of Liberty, Equality, and Community (Fraternity) which informed the revolutions of two centuries ago. An analysis of this phrase which joins the notion of individual freedom, the relation of equality between individuals, and raises the question of how we are bound together - all taken as a piece - is a promising exercise. For in our times, we have concentrated first upon individual freedom, and only more recently upon the wishes and needs of all persons to partake in that same degree of freedom. What we find still lacking, however, is the sense of relationship, of how we are to come and be together; of community.

As we embark into an examination of these terms as a unity, we discover that the personal or individual freedom and the concept of equality

Harvey B. Sarles is Professor of American Studies, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.  
Janis H. Sarles is a Critic of the World.

which underlay the idea of Social Contract Theory of the Enlightenment, while powerful in its opposing any political monarchy or religious hegemony, leaves much to be desired in the present age. In a moral context, there remains a sense of incompleteness. Without the additional notion of community, the phrase turns out to splinter and to divide, either leaving a moral sense outside of its thinking, or presuming that the free individual will simply *be* moral.

The issue of our being moral comes to face the light of day, as it were, on its own - without having to gain strength by its power to oppose. As we attempt to be whole Human persons, being moral, ethical, having values which inform and guide our being is central to life and to living: community. And, as we may find that dialogue is central to this concept, this essay speaks as two voices.

In approaching this phrase - liberty...equality...community, which seems as true to me (to *us*: I do not live *alone!*) today as it must have to Locke and Jefferson, I (we) am confronted by all these questions. My (our) temptation is to enter the "confessional" mode by enticing the reader to identify with the writers as they explore these words and their conceptual underpinnings.

Alternatively, and more safely, it is tempting to construct a narrative which seemingly explores the concepts as if the author is removed, remote, and ultimately objective: as if attempting to maintain the cool, scientific, Enlightenment proclamation that reason and rationality will tell us what is our nature, and how we are, really. I (we) know, well by now, that the concept of the nature of the human condition is so deeply embedded in historical shrouds, that we need to unpack it *continually*. In (post-)modern parlance, we need to "deconstruct" these ideas to see what is in them, and how they have affected, even defined our thinking. Possibly, in this way, we can get beyond them, and look forward.

I (less, we) find it attractive, seductive even, to take the idea of "liberty," place it within my concept of myself, and take it to the limits of the universe. Ayn Rand and libertarianism have nothing on my desires and some old habits of wanting to proclaim my personal hegemony over...everything. (Rand 1961) Give me liberty!..and I'll take it to its utmost limits. Ambition, competition: I'm just beginning! Watch my dust! I don't want to "hurt" anyone else, just to explore the spaces which surround the possibilities of my skills as articulator and word-merchant. I want to live not just today, but to imagine that these words will stay alive...forever.

"How ungracious," says the other.

"Honest!" "Just trying to be honest to my concept of myself, and to understand its limits, its edges," I reply boldly (but feeling a little chagrined, wondering if my self-proclaimed agnosticism leaning toward atheism, hasn't been displaced to my libertarian ego).

Coming back down to the earth, that conceptually shrinking littler sphere, I wonder that the phrases equality and community seem so small from the heights of my libertarian egoisms. Not being able to return to earth without feeling somewhat deflated, I ponder those other words as questions of harmony and of balance. "One *cannot* live alone" - from this exalted position - seems to run just parallel to: "man cannot live by bread alone!"

"Does not! Not, *cannot*," I hear the otherCs) voice more as a strong feeling somewhere in my gut, more than in my ears. Another voice in me wonders too, if my ears don't seem smarter than my gut; closer to the seat of reason. My gut seems to say: "baloney!"

Am I caught in some epic battle between my encapsulated individualistic libertarian self which seems individual and rational, and my gut which tells me that I "cannot" - no, I mean "do not" live alone?

"What difference," I ask myself: "cannot/do not...live alone?"

#### Liberty and Natural Law Theory

Ah! Relief! Here, the narrative - I can draw back and tell my story...which the more actual - I, a dialogic - I, understands at some level. But the story does not always translate into behavior. The old version, the Enlightenment version, the social contract story, depended on the assumption that all humans are primarily and intrinsically *individuals*. And now we witness the rediscovery of ethnicity, its admission into the plural world of America, the notion that we live as families mostly; the reaction to pleas for liberty and the use of human reason, as many return to a literal notion of a deity who will tell us how to be and what to think. The human in Humanism is seen less as granting strength and freedom, increasingly as leading away from community, and arrogant more than enlightened. The liberal concept behind liberty is seen less as celebration, more as "gliberal" and soft-headed "communistic," trying to substitute concepts of pity and

charity for community.

Why did the concept of individual liberty and freedom seem obvious not so long ago? Where did the story come from? What is liberty, precisely, as the concept has come down to us?

Most of it, it seems, emerged in the Europe of the 16th and 17th centuries: in part as a reaction to a variety of abuses committed by those who led the Catholic-Christian Church (Montaigne 1965); in part it was the rise of scientific thought and method which moved away from scriptural accounts, to observe, describe, and test the world as it is. How we are, the human story, was going to be understood by looking to nature rather than to the kings and churches who claimed some knowledge above and beyond us ordinary folk.

This account, inspired by Aristotle (McKeon 1941) and invented more than observed by Hobbes, created a new notion of liberty based on a depiction of nature as it was "likely" to have been before "civilized societies" were formed. "...human beings are atomistic, rational agents whose existence and interests are ontologically prior to society." (Dietz 1987:2) Man/men were totally "free" to pursue their own interests. They existed totally outside of any developmental contexts: "let us...consider men as if but even now sprung out of the earth, without all kinds of engagement to each other." (Hobbes in Dietz:20) \*

This picture was linked imaginatively with another ancient story of the difference between humans and other species being due to human "reason". Especially (the story goes), we learned, we humans, to imagine the future. Society was formed because men(!) could foresee death and became afraid: joined together to form society, balancing liberty and the fear of death. (Women were, all this time, at home with the kids, never having known or experienced "true" freedom! - like animals, under the dominion of free but petulant, nomadic males. Whither dialogue?)

\* This section of the essay relies primarily on Mary Dietz' (1987) essay which attempts to lay out both an analysis of liberty qua liberalism, to elaborate the feminist critiques of liberalism, and to criticize them as falling short of a truly participatory democracy. She focuses on the term "context," as the critical missing aspect so far, suggesting that we - all of us (meaning: men and women) - need to broaden our knowledge, thinking, and behavior and engage more fully in democratic practices. Her essay pursues the concepts of all of us re-joining together, newly; similar to the joining, in this essay, of the concepts of liberty, equality, and community."

References to Dietz' essay and analysis, her references, will be placed in parentheses as follows. Thus (Berlin in Dietz: 10), refers to Berlin, quoted by Dietz, or page numbers alone.

I (we) use Dietz because the essay is well-crafted, and takes us directly to the present moment. It includes a most thoughtful and active critical-feminist critique of modern liberal thought, and enables the new possibility of a modern dialogue, which I (we) elaborate in Section IV.

While much of this story seems fanciful, and has little scientific basis, it still has much appeal today, in informing how many people (especially Bloom and other neo-conservatives) fill the concept of liberty. Within its context, any felt limitation on this (notion of) liberty seems to be against our nature. Thus, to be supportive of "others" in helping to ensure their equality is construed as a weakening of our sense and pursuit of liberty. They (these "others") ought, by this theory, to be strong enough to assert their own liberty, not to be aided by us; for then they are not acting truly human, and we are weakening our own destinies by lending a helping hand (Bloom 1987; Wilson 1975). Workfare, not welfare!?

Further, the modern neo-conservative theory goes, those who live ethnically (tribally) have not truly become human - reasoning and thoughtful, self-contained creatures - if they do not realize their own individualism. Ethnicity and cultural difference translates, in this theory of liberty, into the less-than-rational, the not-yet-quite-human (Bloom: 189). This concept of the really free, the story goes further, is limited to an "aristocracy" who, through a monarchical force, will help keep this concept of freedom and liberty alive and well, while the "others" subvert it. At least in the Hobbesian version which seems very appealing today, the only way to preserve true liberty is through the "device" of a monarch, who will move to keep down any tyranny against the "natural law" of individual freedom.

Indeed, any notion which attacks reason and liberty in this sense, is construed to be an attack upon reason. For Allen Bloom, the solution is to return to the source of philosophy, to Plato and aristocratic Athens. I.F. Stone retorts huffily, that the Platonic idealism will suppress free speech...but now, alas, in the name of liberty. (Stone 1988) This concept of liberty remains alive and well in modern libertarianism, and in the minds of many who worry when their personal visions of self-determination are thwarted or attacked by forces which seem to them irrational. In this sense, the concepts of liberty, reason, and rationality are complexly interwoven.

Hanging over this approach to the concept of liberty is, of course, a literal religious outlook which foresakes personal liberty, and interprets the nature of our being within the context of the deity telling *me* how to be. Whereas the liberal Christian and Catholic traditions distinguish between "faith and reason," leaving open the possibility of a secular state, fundamentalist religion often proclaims itself on its face to be outside of rationality. To be human is to have the liberty and freedom...to "choose" to believe. To live, to be, to be human, is to live correctly to die well; not to live morally and justly. Liberty, as a term, is obviously open to various interpretations,

and cannot "live" alone.

The "accusations" of being irrational are frequently leveled at persons or groups who disagree with one's sense of personal liberty raised, as Ayn Rand, to the level of the transcendent: e.g., against women (poor math skills equate to less rational or irrational, as do "moods"); against cultural pluralism and cultural relativism where indifferent ways of approaching the world equate to an attack on an "absolutist" notion of reason. In sum, this "natural law" version of the concept of liberty, which lays some claim to science and nature, is not very compatible with the allied concepts of equality and of community. At most, they remain largely unexplored, and afterthoughts within Natural Law Theory.

Dialogue?

Liberal Pragmatism: Liberty and Equality

Modern pragmatic notions of liberty deriving from Bentham and Mill, as well as Jefferson, concentrate on pursuing individual liberty within some limits: e.g., so as not to hurt or to impinge hurtfully on the liberty of some other. Each of us owns s/his own "space," which is fairly "large" - "the freedom of all its members to realize their capabilities" (3), but always limited by the fact of others pursuing their own lives and happiness.

In a recent critical essay, Mary Dietz outlines the salient features of the liberalism which underlies the nature of citizenship as it exists in America. She explores the liberal notion of liberty, and why this has seemed to limit its accessibility to women, in particular. But the critique seems to have wider applicability. Especially, the concept of community either remains "empty" - lacking analysis - or community is presumed to exist; perhaps magically, perhaps at a level so ordinary that it does not require analysis. Dietz, within her feminist critique, transforms or translates the issue of community into one of "context." Perhaps it is just this sense of community (= context?) which exists among ethnic and religious groups which seems particularly difficult or threatening to the (liberal) concepts of individual liberty to which we presently adhere. \*

There are in this "bare bones" analysis, three particular features of

\*"...in the American political tradition there exist two 'bodies' within the historic 'body of the people' --a collectivity informed by democratic practices on the one hand and a collectivity informed by an antidemocratic political economy on the other." (Wolin in Dietz: 16)

modern liberal political thinkers:

(1) "the notion that human beings are atomistic, rational agents whose existence and interests are ontologically prior to society...rational individuals who have intrinsic worth"; (2) The central ethical principle of the Western liberal tradition: "...society should ensure the freedom of all its members to realize their capabilities." In Mill's classic formulation: "the only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it"; (3) "...an emphasis on human equality," which is "central" but has various formulations emphasizing the commonality of human reason (Locke), "the same capacity for pleasure, hence the happiness of society is maximized when everyone has the same amount of wealth or income (Bentham), the free use and enjoyment and disposal of possessions...because such freedom contributes to that equal development of the faculties of all which is the highest good of all" (T.H. Green). That is, "liberal theories usually begin with some version of the presumption of perfect equality among individual men [thus] societal justice entails equal suffrage, in which every single person should count...as any other." (2-3)

Egalitarianism takes the form of "negative liberty...the area within which a man can act unobstructed by others." (Berlin in Dietz:3) This remains ethically neutral or empty - unaddressed: neither "the 'right' choice nor the 'good' action but simply the freedom of the individual to choose his own values or ends without interference from others and consistent with a similar liberty for others."

Each person is the "bearer of formal rights," which are "not subject to political bargaining or the calculus of social interests"(Rawls in Dietz:4). "This notion of rights sets up the distinction between 'public' and 'private' that informs so much of the liberal perspective on family and social institutions." There is a private realm for individuals which has included marriage and family, and which (in feminist perspective) has included "'woman's sphere' as 'male property'" which has served to keep women "from the life of the public."

And liberalism has tied to these, "the idea of the free individual as competitor." Born in the formation of capitalism, this mix of "natural law theory" and a Weberian-Marxist derived critique sees the individual-as-competitor as an aspect of "a new ethic of self and work...to replace privilege, prescription, and primacy of rank." In supporting the emerging notion of individual freedom and rights, from an ancient aristocratic-feudal form, this liberal notion "lent support to the active pursuit of things beneficial to an economic system based on production for the sake of profit." This pre-

sumes a notion of the individual (man!) who competitively "tend[s] naturally to pursue his own interest and maximize his own gain." (5)

Here, we have a theory of human nature in which the individual (man!) is primarily egoistic, a psychological theory of motives in which the driving force of human action is "not to be found in any noble desires to achieve 'the good life' of the 'morally virtuous society' but rather in the inclination toward individual advancement" or the maximization of profit, in the marketplace (in the Reagan era) or in the other places where society seems to grant prestige in other eras. But, asks Dietz, how do we arrange "access to the race itself, to the market society?" (5) In critical parlance, how do women and others who are left out, join the liberal "discourse?"

For the Humanist critic, one of the problematic notions of community located here, is that the concepts of liberty, freedom, and community are conflated with political economy: not just with how humans are, but with how we go about making our livings. As we shall see, there are more interweavings between concepts of liberty and individuality and economy than are obvious from within the Humanist tradition. While none of these appear to be *necessary* in theory, (there is a form of "socialist" Humanism [Fromm 1965]), it is the case that some of the current attacks on concepts dear to Humanism are less directed toward Humanism, than to the sorts of individualism which have seemed to be inherent within it.

In this context, "liberty comes to mean...a set of formal guarantees to the individual that he (and later she) may enjoy a fair start in [Adam] Smith's 'race.'" That is, "citizenship becomes less a collective, political activity than an individual, economic activity--the right to pursue one's interests, without hindrance... Likewise, democracy is tied more to representative government and the right to vote than to the idea of the collective, participatory activity of citizens in the public realm." (5)

While the current critique of liberalism is tied to the market in a variety of ways, this may be a mark particular to the 1980's, and more generalizable to attaining of prestige (with or without money and its accoutrements); that is, of a variety of measures of "importance." What is left out from the 18th century French collection of the terms: liberty, equality - and fraternity which Dietz calls "context" and I (we) have been calling "community" - are "concepts to help us understand the various kinds of human interdependence which are part of the life of both families and polities." (Shanley in Dietz:6)

In feminist critique, women are not included in this definition of

the individual. In my (our) experience, any *category* of persons from which individuals gain a major definition of their identities, tends to be excluded from full participation in citizenship: whether gender, age, ethnicity, etc., so long as this group identity seems to overshadow individuality. When does category-identity overwhelm individual-identity: and why? How can category-identities gain in importance - or be overcome - without threatening the individual realms in which American democratic (and liberal) liberty seems to maintain itself?

Dialogue...absent, still.

#### Equality, Access, and Morality-Community

The major difficulty in critiquing the prevailing definitions of liberty, individual rights and so on, is that they have been couched in terms of equality of access...to the prevailing definitions of individual liberty. It has been a question of *joining* rather than of criticism; from lack of access rather toward any analytic rethinking.

Can everyone taste of liberty and individual rights and be able to pursue "happiness" with the real possibility of achieving it, within these particular definitions of liberty? If the prevailing model of individual rights is intrinsically competitive (and splintering), does it even allow for that possibility? Or will it necessarily construe any questioning or critique either as anti-competitive in general, or as directly and personally attacking in every particular case experience?

Can we really move toward equality and community without subverting liberty...at least as we understand it, so far? And are we "talking" a market-economic, psychological-motivation concept, or some other way in which we can overcome the Adam Smith notion of an economy or society which is like a "closed box" limited-goods world? Can there be more winners without there being more new losers?

Or can we dispense, in this American land of abundance, with the equation of community, context, and communism, and move toward some syncretism of the formerly conflictual? Can we afford to be "decent" in the context of freedom, without being weak and self-defeating? Do ideas of compassion and mutual understanding and empathy fit in any way with noblesse oblige and pity? Must we, as Bloom avers, move back toward an aristocracy in order to assure liberty?

Well, as Dietz agrees, the question of "equal access" to the prevailing definitions of liberty is not to critique these definitions, but to enter into their thinking. "...once in the domain of 'equal access talk,' we are tied into a network of liberal concepts--rights, interests, contracts, individualism, representative government, negative liberty...[which]...open up some avenues of discourse but at the same time block off others." (6) For feminists and others who feel "outside," this is not a critique, and does not provide or "illuminate a vision of politics, citizenship, and 'the good life.'" (6) While such criticism has, so far, opened up new opportunities for women and some others, it is not creative or syncretic. It reveals that current definitions of individuality and human nature are problematic and political in their very formulations, but it does not provide new vision. As much of the recent criticism has been from feminists, it is particularly illuminating to probe a feminist critique of (other) feminist critiques. \*

The two principal feminist critiques thus far articulated fall into what Dietz dubs the "Marxist" and the "maternalist," neither of which she finds sufficient. The Marxist critique presumes that a *category* argument of the haves versus those who have not (minorities and women, particularly, in America; the working-class in other cultures, but less here), will rise up and change capitalist ownership into the realization of "true citizenship...the collective ownership of the means of production and the end of oppression in the relations of reproduction." (9) The patriarchal state will disappear, somehow. Dietz is suspicious that this picture of (feminist) Marxism is incomplete, "for what emerges is a picture of economic, not political freedom and a society of autonomous and fulfilled social beings, not a polity of citizens...Is there more to feminist politics than revolutionary struggle against the state," she asks plaintively. (9)

The "maternalists" reply, "Yes," to this question, a move towards a "conception of female political consciousness that is grounded in the virtues of woman's private sphere, primarily in mothering." (9-10) Women become part of the polity, the public realm, controlling the future in a variety of deep senses; and not "just as members of the social and economic orders." (10)

\*"Negative liberty" is a notion elaborated by political theorists which Berlin (in Dietz:3) "in his classic essay on freedom characterizes as 'the' area within which a man can act unobstructed by others." That is, negative liberty defines freedom by the "absence of obstacles to possible choices and activities. What is at stake here is not the 'right' choice nor the 'good' action but simply the freedom of the individual to choose his own values or ends without interference from others and consistent with a similar liberty for others." (3) This is precisely why I (we) claim that morality is simply absent from our liberal concept of liberty.

Here, morality (re-)enters the political discussion as an argument against the notion of the amoral, economic, competitive individual who is totally self-interested. The maternalist argument is elaborated by Elshtain who states: "...no substantive sense of virtue, no vision of political community that might serve as the groundwork of a life in common, is possible within a political life dominated by a self-interested, predatory, individualism." (Elshtain in Dietz: 10).

The third term in our title - community - is brought, critically, back into this discussion under the rubric of the anti-liberal notion of the individual with all his(!) attendant rights. And it becomes clear that the notion of morality enters clearly, and for the first time, the discussion which has until now focused upon (individual) liberty: the "need" to seek equality for all (other) individuals. But there has been a paucity of concern for context, for mutuality, for towardness and responsibility of any for all others - except through the mechanism of an abstract government of representation. True community has been given short shrift while we have voted for a very few others to represent the individualism we live out. It is not, in this view, any deeply felt, interactive, dialogic, moral representation. Indeed, Dietz argues trenchantly that a true, participative democracy is not much in our thinking and being in this era.

In maternalist conception, the notion of the encapsulated individual would no longer apply to all persons (as, the feminist critique points out - it does not now!). Instead, it claims that women, through the experiences of early childhood, are different from men: as a class or category of persons. Women are more moral, and possess a "more mature and humane set of moral values than men's." (11) The maternalists are, in Dietz' view, deserving of "appreciation for making citizenship a matter of concern in a movement that...is too often caught up in the psychological, the literary, and the social rather than in problems of political theory...[they] remind us of the inadequacy and limitations of a rights-based conception of the individual and a view of social justice as equal access... [they] would rehumanize the way we think about political participation and recognize how, as interrelated 'selves,' we can strive for a more humane, relational, and shared community than our current political circumstances allow." (12)

The error-problem here is that these critiques devolve into category arguments. They tend to "universalize" the categories into oppositional arguments: women against men; society against the individual; community versus the competitive individual; intimate private versus statist public. These categories, even when they seem to rely on particular experience, quickly become abstracted as we are urged to choose sides. The critical

difficulty with such formulations is that they urge us to be enemies arguing over the approximately the same turf, using the same arguments. From the dialogic other: "Know thy enemy, because one is likely to become just like s/him!"

The very grounds of the discussion remain hidden from view. Any new vision of a moral and just politics seems to remain caught up in fairly academic arguments of the *form* of a government or of the *form* of the political economy: with the difference between these and other academic battles - that winning in this realm may have powerful consequences in our lives.

Toward a dialogue?

Toward a Participatory Democratic Polity: Community? Dialogue?

Having cadged a narrative critique from Mary Dietz, I (we) find it to be untrue and not a little hypocritical that the "narrative-I" has become abstracted and universalized into the fiction that "I" the writer-thinker-author sit at the top of Mount Olympus: spouting sage sayings and pondering prophetic poesies. Instead, *we* find it more useful, in considering the issues here, to place ourselves more at the feet of the Oracle at Delphi who (she!) urged us to "know ourselves."

Earlier, we (she and he) argued over a distinction which he wanted to argue categorically and somewhat defiantly: that there is a difference between the terms "cannot" and "do not"...live alone. She argued that our notion of community may be conceptualized (and lived) very differently depending on how we approach this distinction:

HE: The idea of "cannot" presumes already that we are primarily and intrinsically individuals. For various reasons ("needs" = biological, or "desires" = psychological) we have some imperatives for living together. The polity is conceived basically as some congeries of individuals wandering, like Hobbes' depiction, in a primeval stew. We - in this picture - seem to bootstrap ourselves up into adulthood, and personhood. At some point, we seek "to" mate. But there is little in this notion of "cannot live alone" which implies that we are intrinsically social creatures. It is as if we are forever chanting Rousseau's hymn of "born free," and are bound into a dilemma in which our biology/psychology somehow forces us to live together, while simultaneously

bewailing the "chains" which keep us there. It is as if some form of hermitry, of monkery, were our true destiny; but we cannot help ourselves.

SHE: "Do not live alone," she repeats patiently, but with a tone and amplitude which rise in their intensity, "is a whole 'nother thing! We are not born from nowhere. We do not show up, as in Hobbes vision, as fully developed individuals who have "needs and desires." We are children of others who raise us, teach us. Our notions of conscience, of shame, of morality, of love, of independence and of dependence, are framed and shaped within the context of other persons. We are not 'born free' in the Rousseauian sense. And we have learned, in recent studies of other species in nature, that we are all - by this thing called nature - we are all social creatures. Individuality develops - better, emerges - from our relationships with others."

HE: "B-b-but," he sputters, "why do we have so much trouble then in finding community? Marriage, family are difficult and complicated enough to find and to sustain. How, community? Aren't others a threat to any marriage? Won't we be weakened in any personal areas of our being, if we give away our selves to others? What of a Marxist vision which would define individuality away, as subservient to the community, only as some job, or some role, the community telling me what to do, how and what to be; like being some minor bureaucrat occupying my own life?"

SHE: "Always" (she...has the habit of sometimes to always, some to a huge amount...a tendency toward hyperbole), "always, you operate from some self-involved position, with everyone else an after-thought. Not critical. More defending your position. Listen! It's not a case of Either-Or; not like Kierkegaard's question of choosing to live Either aesthetically, Or ethically by embracing the deity. The fact is that we *do not* live alone. The fact is, that we are also individuals - but this individuality you embrace so deeply, derives from some prior notion of relationship. We live in both realms at once; not one primarily, and the other because we cannot help ourselves. Biologically, psychologically, in every way we exist within this dual role. Just because there is some ongoing tension between these aspects of our being, doesn't mean that any simple 'resolution' to this dilemma will make it go away. Your thinking is part of an ancient habit of thought, which makes it appealing to you to try to 'resolve' different aspects of being, as if they are at war."

HE: "Are you accusing me of being selfish, and justifying a bit of self-centeredness by concocting a theory of individuality which is self-serving? Because, if you are, what makes you think you aren't trying to win this argument, by fighting my position? Ha," he thinks not so quietly, his mind being

read, "Ha!"

SHE: "In your terms, I suppose, we can't discuss critically, only argue and oppose. But, never mind that. The facts are that our nature is social; we are social creatures. We can - only look at different political and economic and theological systems - think abstractly about things like individuality and sociality, about community and equality. We social humans are capable of refuting our own sociality - at least in theory - and living much of our lives abstractly. And we defend the removed and abstract nature of how we live, by claiming it is uniquely human. Bah!"

She glances at him slyly, playing to his ego, while, he's sure, subverting his arguments.

SHE: "I'm not trying to argue, but to ask you, us, to look at our lives. What's very interesting about humans, maybe some others too, is that we can live in various modes and dimensions; our imaginations are extraordinary; we are capable of great vision. But we are not always so good at looking in front of us. We are not always so good at living in the moment, loving what we experience of right now, but are tempted to withdraw only into the abstract, and to do it as individually, as independently as possible."

HE: "Alright," he has been quietly mulling over his strongest card, "alright, and who made us this way? Children of the women who raised their sons to be individualistic and independent? So we're social, critters who partake of community, but prefer to go our own way. Who made us this way? How can we, why must we overcome the very relationships which you now say have made us think we're purely individuals?"

SHE: "Yes, and much of it is a pity, too. Many women have not been very self-critical, having accepted external and abstract definitions of our own being, and have perpetuated them unthoughtfully. But, isn't it extraordinary that we can rethink? All of us can. We don't have to live only within old stories about our own lives which others concocted long ago. This story of liberty, this really weak notion of being which says we *cannot* live alone, is to have yielded much of the definition of our own being, not to nature, but to history. And it's not working so well, now. We, all of us, have to reengage ourselves, to explore the context of the present, see where we are, and to stop whatever it is that splinters us. We don't have to deny community, or deny individuality. They are parts of us. The problem in living is to be able to move beyond this history, to study critically our lives, and act within the contexts of the present; not just from the past. Men, too. The fact is, that we *do not* live alone, and the abstracting of individuality from community

has splintered us more than glued us together."

HE: "Well, I do admit that all is not so well here. I - probably out of my individualism, as you say - want to blame first, to look critically after that, and to seek understanding after that. I think you have some points. I think, too, that there was, at least there seemed to be a lot more community not so long ago. I blame the change, at least much of it on the fact that we have become even more abstract in our thinking than earlier. If I have to label or find a major culprit, I would name 'bureaucracy.'"

SHE: "What do you mean by 'bureaucracy?'"

HE: "I think that most of us, in this past thirty years or so, have become bureaucratic in our being and thinking. It was around 1960, I think. Maybe it had to do with the huge influx the 'baby boomers' brought into our institutions, and we adjusted quickly, but poorly. This seems to mean that we have shifted from thinking about ourselves in the frameworks of other persons, of community especially, toward thinking only of how we are going to survive individually, within the settings where we work. I think this includes a strong tendency to be *amoral* - to do what we do within the perceived policies and game plans in which we find ourselves - and uncritical; to have become remote from our own histories, to condense our view of time, and to have lost the kind of 'nerve' which the capitalist form of individualism had seemed to demand. Our tendency is to do nothing, to formulate our personal judgements of ourselves within external measures of success, and to celebrate celebrity and fame, rather than to judge the quality of our lives by more encompassing measures. Community, for the bureaucratic mentality, becomes a very diffuse concept. A focus on personal maintenance overshadows and diminishes any concern with community. Most worrisome is that we are very susceptible to changing because we are obsessed with maintenance, and can easily buy any new set of policies, as long as we can find our own sustenance within them. Unlike some others, I think the Nazi holocaust was less any direct anti-moral evil, and more an amoral carrying out of bureaucratic policy. Evil and the anti-Christ is much easier to grapple with than the awful banality of bureaucratic thinking."

SHE: "So you think our capitalist individualist orientation is less splintering than the psychology which we buy into when we become bureaucrats, whether corporate or governmental. And you seem to imply that we have so narrowed our judgements of self and others, that the move toward political individualism is much less powerful than what some people are calling 'narcissism.' (Lasch 1979) Narcissism seems much more personal and psychological than Dietz' view of political individualism. But it probably works

out to a similar political outlook. Well enough, you may have a very good point here. But how does this affect questions of equality and equal rights? Admit that women and minorities haven't fared all that well under either concept of the individual, and might be doing better now within the bureaucratic idea of the self."

HE: "A point well taken."

SHE: "To return to your ponderings about the effects of bureaucratic thinking on our relation to community...maybe this accounts for the appeal of "all you can eat" Sunday brunches just after we have watched the starving Sudanese on morning television; or why our response to growing evidence of a dying earth leads us to attacks on some vague industry rather than to grasp our personal complicity in social policy. Somehow the scale of the entire earth has so outgrown our ability to grapple with a diffuse "them," the "have-nots," as well as the makers and shakers of policies, of authority, that we have retreated into bureaucratic thinking. It seems too vast, conceptually. Our challenge is to engage in a continuing, vigorous dialogue in enlarging, overlapping, and changing concentric circles - with ourselves, families, local communities, and so on. Our lives, our communities, our institutions are in process."

HE: "Yes. Well stated. As we have withdrawn into our bureaucratic selves, we might be more aware of others doing the same. Are we up to the demands of continuing dialogue, and energetic enough to engage in our critical thinking throughout our lives? I hope the positive changes continue until the notion of equality has real meaning for each and every one of us. And don't forget age-ism, my dear, as we both look in our mirrors. Nonetheless, we are often splintered and lonely, and not always so happy within this narcissistic phase. Do you think that much of this is due to the facts of television being viewed by us, each in our own homes; gathering only seldom in any community forums? I'm worried, too, that we have become very cynical, tossed about by video images. And do you think that this splintering tendency has been exacerbated during the '80's; that we might be able to work more at community in the next decade?"

SHE: "I think all of these factors have contributed to the sense that we are pretty much alone. Perhaps there are others. Maybe there will be some issues or events which will tie us together in some new ways that I don't yet foresee. Oddly, sadly, it often 'helps' to have some common enemies or opposition, to get people to find one another; maybe that will develop. Most of all, I think we have to educate ourselves and others in new ways about what constitutes living a good life; one that includes others always in our

thinking and being. Whether or not the maternalists are correct, that women will educate all of us to these perceptions out of experiences that are particular to women, I hope we can find some ways to strengthen people sufficiently that the individualists and libertarians amongst us don't have to celebrate their own wonderfulness, and put-down the rest of us. In the present context, we need a sense that any of us can become and remain strong. Out of this will, I think, arise the sense that community is important and not at odds with our personal freedom or individualism. As Dietz points out to us, democracy is a more encompassing concept than we have been appreciating. But, in all senses of our being, we have to remain engaged in its practices, and not leave it all to others."

HE: "I like that. And I think I'm beginning to understand your distinction between *cannot* and *do not* live alone. But, as you have said more than a few times: 'when are you going to become real for me?' You suggest that I am so self-involved that no one else can penetrate the shell in which I have ensconced myself. I'm trying to understand all of this. Perhaps it will take a little changing on your part too. Gee! I'm never really clear whether, in this discussion, we're talking about you and me, or about the nature of politics in some universal sense."

SHE: "Yes. But why would you think it should be clear? Life is in the living, and, speaking of that, tomorrow is another day."

HE: "Goodnight. *Hasta manana~*"

SHE: "Goodnight."

### Epilogue

Given the notion that we *do not* live alone, the issues of a moral life gather themselves within the concept of a participatory democracy. The problematic aspects of this have to do with maintaining, all at once, a strong notion of the individual, each of us yielding this idea to others equally, and even joining together as an ongoing and viable community. They form, perhaps, a necessary balance, and a form of harmony. Yet each of these concepts, taken at all to any limits, opposes the others. Herein lies a major dilemma.

During this past decade (the 1980's), concentration has been on the strengthening of the concept of each individual - whether or not it has been

a narcissism, or an isolating of each individual, or some opposition to a perceived weakening of the thinking person - it has more created the libertarian, competitive person, than a person who is at once strong and considerate of all others. It has been bolstered, even, by a "biological" theory which supports the concept of human "selfishness" - communality being seen as extremely limited. (Wilson 1975; Dawkins 1976).

The facts of natural sociality of all humanly-related species have not been applied to humans except to raise the individual to the most central aspect of our being, or to diminish s/him to some unit whose place in the world is determined by a "grand" notion of society whose "life" supercedes any individual. Most of Western thought points us in these usually exclusive directions, concentrating as it has upon the notion of the individual.

As the conjoint title of this essay suggests, however, we are paradoxical creatures. We are, always and at once, both individual and social. We are children of parents whose concept of our being is wondrously paradoxical: we are individuals; and we are *their* children. The very notions thought of as moral reside within these relationships: conscience, shame, guilt, etc. They limit the extent of our being individuals by re-placing them into the sociality from which we derive.

In this context, it seems important to dance upon the distinctions between the idea that we are individuals who are truly "born free" or we are social person whose individuality "emerges" from and within our sociality. If we are born "free," then nature whose workings in us are non-stop, drives us to be individuals or risk opposing our very nature. If, as it seems clear, we are also social, rhetorical creatures in our very being, then the life-problem is in finding and maintaining some balance and harmony between and within the different paradoxical facets of being: not to yield to the extreme narcissism of the libertarian individualist in order to justify what we seem to desire; not to yield to some tendency within us to look toward external authority of church or of monarchical or totalitarian state, to tell us how we should be. And, it is necessary to have some sense that (all) others are aiming at living similarly: a complementarity, and in continuing dialogue.

Instead, we often seem caught within these two notions, of the Either/Or of individualisms or of social-isms. As we have stated this, it is either the individual or society-against the individual. Instead, if we can resist another desire: the wish to resolve the "paradox of being" and explore how we can be - at once - individual and social, then we can deal better with these ideas as complementary rather than opposed.

Perhaps, as Dietz suggests, any solution to an extreme individualism lies in "context": studying what is going on beyond our own small horizons; the forces and determinants which are larger and wider than ourselves. Perhaps it requires a more active involvement in democratic practices, at the level of personal and/or populist participation. Perhaps, as within feminism, as within some ethnic communities, there is a period of time required for people earlier defined by their gender or color or ethnic derivation, to gather the strength necessary to re-enter at whole strength into a wider concept of community. Perhaps a next time of re-gathering is upon us, if we can find some rallying voices perhaps within a new Humanism.

Nonetheless, the practical solution, a regathering of ourselves into some viable and productive concepts of community remains elusive. Even while we respect the wishes of others as individuals, of families, of cultures - all the pluralisms which flourish more or less well in America - the nagging of splintering plague us.

Liberty...Equality...Community...taken as a unifying concept wherein morality, responsibility, need we add "love" within dialogue, will re-engage us in a living destiny.

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