

I Reconstructing Political Pluralism

In the 1990s, political theory has moved beyond the debate between liberalism and communitarianism to explore possibilities which can avoid the putative excesses of both positions. Many of these possibilities are built upon the recognition that contemporary liberal societies contain a plurality of groups, communities, and associations, and that political theory should not aim at overcoming this plurality but rather should strengthen it. In these theories, culture, difference, and identity are crucial. Indeed, the heterogeneity of most societies in these respects is now the central focus of analysis. It is viewed, at the same time, as furnishing a recipe for oppression and as providing a reason for celebration. The aim of this book is to retrieve and reconstruct a legacy of political pluralism that illuminates these developments and clarifies the type of challenges concerning pluralism that are central to contemporary politics.

Striking similarities exist between the new theories of difference and identity and a number of theories dating back to the turn of the century which comprise the tradition of political pluralism in liberal-democratic thought. Political pluralism is usually thought to consist of a set of ideas in postwar political science which held that democracy consists of interest-group competition. This conventional view is mistaken, and this book aims at broadening and deepening our understanding of political pluralism. It does so by examining the resources in the history of political pluralism that are usually given insufficient attention. The main argument is that political pluralism is comprised of two intertwined themes: the distribution of power amongst groups, and the group's power to direct individual development. At the center of the pluralist tradition are the analytical means to understand clearly, within the context of liberal-democratic politics, the political relation between individuals and groups or communities and the relation between a plurality of groups and the state. The tools supplied

by political pluralism allow political theory to move beyond the remnants of the liberal-communitarian debate and to approach the new theories of identity and community politics with deeper insight aided by historical hindsight.

Generally, what I mean by political pluralism are theories that seek to organize and conceptualize political phenomena on the basis of the plurality of groups to which individuals belong and by which individuals seek to advance and, more importantly, to develop, their interests. This definition emphasizes political, not metaphysical, philosophical, sociological, or psychological pluralism. However, pluralist theories are found at the crossroads of political studies and other disciplines. So, to a large degree, these other dimensions cannot be avoided when exploring political pluralism. Here, all the dimensions of pluralism which are relevant to understanding it as a political tradition are examined.

In order to capture accurately the nature of the tradition, the definition of pluralism that I propose is quite broad. It encompasses the work of some theorists who may not recognize, as many do not, the pluralist tradition in which their work fits. For reasons I shall explain, some theorists may even eschew the pluralist label and discourse in spite of the affinity of their theory to it. At the same time, the definition is not so broad that it includes any theory which is merely consistent with a pluralistic organization of politics and society. If it did, then any type of politics which protects the individual's freedom to associate might be called pluralist because individuals who are free to associate tend to form groups and associations.¹ Freedom of association is a necessary condition of political pluralism. But pluralist theories go beyond merely accepting the legitimacy of free association and, instead, view association and multiple group affiliations as the central elements of the liberal and democratic aspects of politics. Pluralism is not just tolerated; rather, it is the very life pulse of a healthy polity.

In many political theories, including theories of political pluralism, groups are the key to understanding and reconstructing liberal-democratic politics. There are three reasons for this. First, individuals, when given the freedom, tend to organize themselves into groups. Theories which ignore this fact are criticized for lacking sociological realism. Most significantly, this sociological fact has important implications because it indicates that a politics opposed to the group basis of society must be prepared to coerce individuals to abandon their chosen asso-

¹ For an interesting discussion of the relation between freedom of association and the pluralist tradition, see Horn, *Groups and the Constitution*, chapter 1.

ciative ties. All pluralists recognize that coercion is the only alternative to political pluralism.

Second, groups have a privileged place in liberal-democratic politics because they are the means to vindicating individual interests. If individuals are not driven to form groups in order to appease their instincts, then they do so in order to acquire the resources necessary to address their interests. These resources can be internal or external to the group. Internal resources might include skills or knowledge that group members teach each other and that then can be used to meet the interests of the members as individuals. The "tricks of the trade" are resources often gained in this way. External resources are usually the focus of political pluralism. In pluralism, groups are viewed as the means to acquiring political power. The internal resources which a group possesses are organized in order to capture external resources or power. This power is then used, for instance, to change a governmental policy in a way that advances the interests of the group's members. The idea here is that, whereas the individual is relatively powerless to challenge or change state policy, the aggregation of individuals in a group presents to the state a more formidable contender.

The third reason why groups are the key to liberal-democratic politics is that they help to construct individual identity and are the means to individual development. As communitarians have argued, self-development occurs in a social context. The individual's identity is inexorably tied to the individual's attachments to others or to contexts in which the individual is situated. The role that groups, communities, and associations play in self-development is central to political pluralism as well. The preciousness of groups inheres not simply in the instrumental role they play to advance individual interests. Groups are centers of human interaction, and interaction is the means by which individuals develop their personality or identity. Groups shape the individual's personality; they are the contexts in which different aspects of individual identity are nurtured. The political salience of this developmental process has two sides. On one hand, groups are the means to the sort of self-development often identified as the *raison d'être* of democracy.² On the other hand, groups can stifle and distort development through socialization processes that seek to control and oppress the individual. To understand the power and significance of groups requires that both these

² See Mill, *The Subjection of Women*; Macpherson, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy*; Kariel, *The Eclipse of Citizenship*; and Gould, *Rethinking Democracy*, amongst many others.

possibilities are considered and more — often groups protect and defend those aspects of the individual's personality that they have developed. In this sense, groups can develop or distort individual identity and, in either case, will seek to protect that aspect of identity which they have helped to create.

These three reasons — (1) that groups are part of the fabric of sociological reality, (2) that they are the means to political power and thus are instrumental in the pursuit of individual interests, and (3) that they are the means to individual development — partly explain why political pluralism places such importance on groups. But pluralism is not the same as group theory. The political significance of groups in pluralist theory is contained in two additional elements. The first element is that *many* groups coexist in society. The second element is that individuals have *multiple* affiliations and memberships.

For instance, with regards to the first element, pluralism grapples with the need to form groups in order to vindicate interests while insisting that power not be concentrated in one group. The centralized state, the notion of absolute sovereignty, the power elite, are all nemeses of political pluralism. Centralized political power, with its attendant risk of tyranny, is the problem that pluralism seeks to solve without abandoning the group. Historically, part of the pluralist challenge has been to develop the analytic means to distinguish the illegitimate use of power by a group to dominate other groups from the legitimate use of power by a group to vindicate the interests of its members. This challenge is met by adopting a broad view of power that includes both the resources groups can acquire and their influence in shaping the individual's personality. Pluralists insist that in liberal democracy both types of power must be shared by a plurality of groups.

Second, healthy individual development relies on a pluralist context and not simply a group context. Similar to the pluralistic understanding of political power, the critical tools for analyzing the politics of personal development are not found by merely understanding that individuals develop their identities in a social context. Nor is it sufficient to incorporate into one's political theory the mere observation that groups have the power to shape individuals in healthy and unhealthy ways, although in light of contemporary communitarian analysis, a reminder of this fact is entirely apropos. Pluralism holds that the individual requires a multiplicity of developmental contexts in order to enjoy healthy development. Each context develops part of the individual's identity, and together the social contexts provide a critical perspective from which the individual can scrutinize her relation to each context.

It is important to emphasize that, in the pluralist process, the individual is the only agent with legitimacy to negotiate and shape her identity. Pluralists have been unwilling to approach personal development with the disposition of a moral psychologist who is willing to pick and choose among the different facets of the individual's identity those parts which are healthy and those which are diseased. Moreover, to empower the state to make such judgments violates the pluralist program because the power over individual development that this would vest in the state would be so vast as to undermine a pluralistic distribution of power. In order for the individual to have the power to shape her own identity, she must enjoy many affiliations and, crucially, no single group or community may dominate and direct her development. Each group provides for the individual a different vantage from which she can critically assess her attachments to other groups. Reassessing one's attachments requires that a multiplicity of contexts be accessible to the individual. The individual need not be conceptualized as unencumbered by all attachments at once in order to understand how she is the author of her life and identity.

I argue that political pluralism offers the means to resolve the familiar tensions between political power and individual development, between individual autonomy and group membership, and thus between individualism and communitarianism. It focuses on the relation between political power and individual development and seeks to offer the analytic resources to distinguish between the empowerment and domination of groups in society and between the healthy development and social control of individuals. It accomplishes this by (1) insisting that group power not be centralized in society, (2) ensuring that individuals can effectively transform their associational ties, and (3) understanding the relation between group power and individual development.

The Historical Resources

The historical resources of political pluralism can be categorized into three episodes. The first episode occurs in the United States from the turn of the century until the 1920s and involves the work of John Dewey and William James. The second episode overlaps the first but addresses a distinct set of themes. It includes the work of J. N. Figgis, G. D. H. Cole, Harold J. Laski, and Mary Parker Follett and enjoyed significant attention in Britain and the United States mainly in the 1920s and 1930s. The third episode, again centered in the United States, involves a host

of theorists but is chiefly captured here in the postwar pluralism of Robert Dahl.

These three episodes offer different ways in which various thinkers have explored the possibilities that political pluralism offers. They are not meant to represent an exhaustive survey of political pluralist thought. Rather, they have been chosen as vehicles by which to elucidate different ways in which the relation between the two central themes of political pluralism — (1) the distribution of political power to vindicate interests and, (2) the distribution of political power to facilitate individual development — has been conceptualized in political pluralism. Dividing the theories into three episodes is meant to distinguish theories that are historically and conceptually proximate with particular regard to their treatment of the two themes. The only theorist who is an exception to this general rule is Follett, who explicitly attempted to draw together the strengths of James's and Laski's pluralism. Her contribution bridges two episodes more clearly than it fits into either one.

In most cases, the pluralist thinkers examined here intellectually influenced each other. Part of the historical project which is pursued here traces these influences. It would be a mistake to suppose that these three episodes display an evolution of pluralist thought — particularly if by "evolution" one reads "improvement." The contributions of some pluralists, such as Laski and Dahl, have been chosen primarily because of the significant flaws found in their analyses. None of the thinkers examined in the context of the three episodes provides a theory of pluralism which is perfectly, or even nearly, suited to contemporary concerns. The claim here is that each of these three episodes and each theorist within a given episode offers a distinct perspective on the relation between political pluralism and democracy that is closely shaped by the political and philosophical preoccupations of their day. For example, Dewey's pluralism is born out of his pragmatic philosophy, while Dahl's pluralism is closely tied to behavioralism. Together, the episodes can be viewed as a tradition in which the two themes prevail despite other influences which distinguish the theories. They give rise to a critical perspective by which different theories of pluralism are seen as either sophisticated and clear or deficient and distorted accounts of the relation between the two themes.

For instance, Dewey found pluralism attractive partly because he saw in it an alternative to the absolutist conception of sovereignty. He also developed a political understanding of personal development in which, again, pluralism was key. But, his theory fails to trace the connection between these two elements and, as explained in chapter 2, leaves

itself open to being misinterpreted as politically absolutist, or, in more contemporary exegesis, communitarian. In light of the seemingly contradictory rhetoric that Dewey used to explain his ideas in the intellectual circles of the 1920s, the key to discovering how to reconcile various aspects of his work is found in the pluralist dimension of his project.

In contrast, Laski's pluralism, while again containing at least a hint of both themes, neglects personal development and comes to reflect an obsessive preoccupation with the consequences of concentrated political power. The thinness of Laski's pluralism and the explanation for why he ultimately abandoned it in favor of a more Marxist approach to state power lay partly in his neglect of the developmental power that groups possess. Cole also ignored the developmental consequence of political pluralism. In contrast, Follett reintroduced the resources of pluralist personal development in criticizing Laski's theory. Figgis offered a developmental variant of pluralism, but one with holistic implications which the pluralists of his time sought to avoid.

The postwar theory of pluralism, which is explored here mostly through the work of Dahl, made prominent both elements of the pluralist equation. But, it was beholden to the standards of political behavioralism and, consequently, attempted to extract the normative dimension from these elements, from the pluralist theory that they comprised, and from democratic theory in general. While this postwar episode contains the pluralism that is most often referred to in contemporary understandings of the doctrine, it offers a distorted purview of the tradition. Nonetheless, the distortions reveal a great deal; the empirical bent of postwar pluralism placed maximal emphasis on the sociological realism and contextualism of pluralism. Existing practices and goods, including existing groups, pathways of socialization, associative ties, and cross-pressures (e.g., multiple affiliations) are legitimized by the functional explanation of democracy offered in postwar pluralism. Conversely, the tradition's radical resources to transform society and improve individual well-being through pluralistic personal development are stifled. In spite of the distortions, the central elements of this episode are those which persist in the other theories as well, namely, the pluralistic distribution of political power and the way in which groups shape individual identity.

The interconnection between the two themes of pluralism is the central focus here and provides the justification for both the choice of thinkers and the course by which pluralist thought shall be analyzed. The theorists chosen do not include all political pluralists, nor do I claim that they made the most important contributions to the pluralist thought

of their day, even though in most cases they are remembered as central contributors. In some instances, the variants of pluralism explored are ones in which important mistakes and deficiencies are evident. The purpose of doing so is, again, to trace the treatment of the two themes in various pluralist theories and intellectual contexts in order to develop historical hindsight. This hindsight is critical for the purpose of reconstructing political pluralism so that it can address contemporary questions regarding the political relations between individuals, groups, and societies.

Contemporary Theory and the Resources of Political Pluralism

In addition to examining the historical resources and sketching the conceptual contours of political pluralism, this book addresses two additional needs in contemporary political theory. One need which has already been mentioned is to move beyond the liberal-communitarian debate. Pluralism has the resources to accomplish this, but persuading political theorists and political scientists that the resources discussed here are pluralism's resources requires that several misunderstandings about political pluralism be identified and that a broader historical understanding of the tradition replace the current one. The discourse of pluralism has been poisoned by being typecast as a theory merely about interest-group competition. So a second need, and one that must be addressed before the usefulness of political pluralism can be appreciated, is to resurrect theories of pluralism and reconstruct the tradition on the basis of a broader historical view.

Since it is significant to the historical perspective adopted in this book that political pluralism has been misunderstood in contemporary commentaries, some evidence of this misunderstanding should first be offered. Most contemporary political theorists see pluralism solely as a postwar doctrine about interest groups. Least surprisingly, this view emerges in commentaries which examine the various theories of the state and state power. Particularly when Marxist approaches are discussed, pluralism is introduced as the appropriate foil. Marxists were successful in exposing postwar pluralism "as a naive and/or narrowly ideological celebration of Western democracies."³ In *Analyzing Marx*, for example, Richard Miller launches his discussion of political power with the pluralist thesis. "Pluralists believe that no social group or minority

³ Held, *Models of Democracy*, 186.

coalition of social groups dominates government in the United States."⁴ Throughout his discussion, Miller identifies only one pluralist theorist, namely Robert Dahl. Because Miller is interested in the postwar pluralist theory of state power to which Marxists offered such compelling critiques, one could argue that there is no need for him to give a full account of pluralism. Nonetheless, Miller does not explain to his readers that, by pluralism, he only refers to the postwar rendition.

Nor should he feel compelled to include such a proviso given how the doctrine is construed in the vast majority of current democratic theory. In David Held's *Models of Democracy*, an entire chapter is devoted to pluralist theory.⁵ Here again, the postwar variant is taken as definitive of the tradition. "Classical pluralism," as Held calls it, is largely the construction of Dahl who is "one of the earliest and most prominent exponents of pluralism."⁶ It is a theory about interest group competition and about the distribution of power within the state. Held discusses the Marxist challenge to pluralism. He identifies Charles Lindblom and the more current Dahl as "neo-pluralists" who attempt to meet Marxist and other challenges to the postwar doctrine. Unlike most other theorists, Held also ventures to make some observations about the historical antecedents of pluralism. But, in doing so, he only highlights the narrowness of his approach to the doctrine. The "intellectual ancestry of pluralism" is found in Schumpeter and Weber.⁷ And its "intellectual terms of references" include Madisonian democracy and utilitarian concepts of interest satisfaction.⁸ In each case, these antecedents are directly tied to the particular pluralist theories of Dahl and David Truman. The pluralist theories of Dewey, James, and Laski — including, for that matter, the traceable influence of these theorists on Dahl — are not mentioned by Held.

If one ventures outside the terms of reference set by those keen to investigate only theories of state power, the understanding of pluralism does not get any broader. One of the most significant examples is Carol Gould's extensive analysis of pluralist political theory and pluralist ontology in *Rethinking Democracy*. Schumpeter and Dahl are the key pluralists who, along with other advocates, take "politics as an arena of the conflicting interests of groups in a society."⁹ Gould also under-

⁴ Miller, *Analyzing Marx*, 152.

⁵ Held, *Models of Democracy*, chapter 6, 186–220.

⁶ Held, *Models of Democracy*, 187.

⁷ Held, *Models of Democracy*, 186–87.

⁸ Held, *Models of Democracy*, 187.

⁹ Gould, *Rethinking Democracy*, 8.

stands pluralist doctrine as a whole to reflect only the themes found in the postwar variant of it. Moreover, as a description of the postwar variant, her interpretation emphasizes the weaknesses and faults of the doctrine, including faults that are questionably attributed even to postwar pluralism. For instance, Schumpeter is identified by Gould as a key proponent of pluralism whereas postwar pluralism is usually understood as the position which attempted to remedy the absence of intermediary groups in Schumpeter's conception of democracy.¹⁰ Furthermore, contrary to the interpretation of postwar pluralism offered here, and most interpretations of Dewey's work, Gould contends that pluralism "eschews any notion of a common good as anything more than a political myth."¹¹ Like most contemporary commentators, she characterizes pluralism as though only the postwar variant counts, as a position which primarily entails elite competition for political power, and thus, as a doctrine that denigrates representation and participation.¹²

The narrowness of Gould's characterization would be no different from those offered in most democratic theory if it weren't for the fact that in introducing her discussion of pluralist ontology she cites the proponents of pluralism to include Madison, Dewey, Schumpeter, Dahl and Berelson. She goes outside the narrow postwar choices of pluralists, yet bases the description of pluralist ontology, like the previous discussion of pluralist theory, purely on interest-group competition and interest articulation, both of which dominate only the postwar understanding of pluralism. So, in addition to taking a narrow view of pluralism and thus reaffirming the view taken in most democratic theory, Gould mistakenly ascribes this narrow view to scholars such as Dewey who were pluralists but whose theories barely resemble that of Dahl (and certainly don't resemble that of Schumpeter!).

Gould, in particular, makes the task of retrieving a broad understanding of pluralism and its resources especially relevant because she identifies self-development as the central goal of an adequate democratic theory yet finds nothing in pluralism that is helpful to attaining this goal. In a sense, this is hardly surprising given that she takes pluralism to be a theory mainly about the distribution of political power and interest-group competition. Yet, even the postwar theories are replete with observations about how individuals are socialized through

¹⁰ Held launches his chapter with precisely this contrast between Schumpeter and the post-war pluralists. See *Models of Democracy*, 186.

¹¹ Gould, *Rethinking Democracy*, 9.

¹² Gould, *Rethinking Democracy*, 9.

groups. Although, as I argue in the final chapter, socialization is distinct from self-development, Gould pays no attention to this facet of postwar pluralism nor, of course, to the theory of pluralist self-development in Dewey's work. On Gould's account, pluralism seems to have nothing to do with self-development.

One cannot help but suppose that pluralism occupies a central place in Gould's work, if only as a target of criticism, because she finds something attractive about the doctrine. Pluralism contains what she calls a "mixed ontology" based on individualism and holism.¹³ The mixed ontology is attractive to her because the general aim of her book is to reconcile individual freedom and social equality. The reconciliation requires an ontological framework which can overcome the "traditional antithesis between the individual and society."¹⁴ I argue that pluralist theorists have always aimed at overcoming this antithesis in developing their arguments. But given her view of pluralism, Gould finds the doctrine useless in this respect; "this theoretical model does not provide a ground for criticizing the inequitable relations of power and domination that may exist among individuals within a group, among groups and among individuals outside their group memberships."¹⁵ With a broader view of the doctrine, Gould might find more use for political pluralism.

One additional example, also drawn from contemporary political theory, is Iris Marion Young's characterization of pluralism in *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Young's book is an attempt to reorient theories of justice to address the oppression some groups experience which is caused by racism, sexism, homophobia, and the inequitable distribution of resources in society. The central challenge for Young is to construct a theory of political participation and representation that can include all groups in society while, at the same time, respecting their distinctive identities. Public deliberation, she argues, must take place in a diversity of groups and forums and from a variety of perspectives.¹⁶ Her solution has a pluralist ring to it, which is strengthened when she identifies, as pluralists in the past have, the inadequate resources of both atomistic individualism and communitarian theories (which she calls, the "republican revival"). But Young strictly avoids the discourse of pluralism to characterize her own theory, although she mentions "interest-

¹³ Gould, *Rethinking Democracy*, 99.

¹⁴ Gould, *Rethinking Democracy*, 26.

¹⁵ Gould, *Rethinking Democracy*, 100.

¹⁶ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 88.

group pluralism" mostly in order to dismiss the resources it offers as well. She describes pluralism as a theory based on the self-interested pursuit of policy objectives which uses the client-consumer relation to reconceptualize the citizen-state relation. The theory is said to fragment the "whole" citizen into various roles and interests. Moreover, because it views politics as the pursuit of private self-interest, it forestalls the emergence of public discussion and decision making. "The rules of interest-group pluralism do not require justifying one's interests as right, or compatible with social justice."¹⁷ Pluralism appears to be completely inadequate for her purposes, since it stifles public deliberation and depoliticizes political processes.¹⁸ Although Young does not identify any theorist who advances what she calls interest-group pluralism, the post-war political scientists appear to be the likely culprits if only because of the often-used label, *interest-group pluralism*.

As in the case of Gould, Young's book makes the job of retrieving a broader and more accurate understanding of political pluralism all the more important because she searches for resources that I argue are central to pluralism yet finds nothing useful in what she characterizes as pluralist theory. Her project is to find a means by which heterogeneous groups can engage in democratic politics without oppressing each other. As clearly as this is a project about pluralist politics of some sort, what she describes as pluralism is obviously deficient for her purposes. And this is the only pluralist theory at her disposal, I suggest, because this is nearly the only understanding of pluralism found in contemporary political theory.

While there are exceptions to the characterization sketched above, the view, that pluralism is an interest-group theory developed in the postwar period which has little to do with anything except competition and power politics, is represented in most contemporary political theory. I have mentioned four examples that together are exemplary of a broad range of contemporary theory: from Miller's contemporary Marxist theory, to Held's survey of democratic models, to new theories of democracy, such as those of Gould and Young, in which self-development and identity politics are central. Many more examples exist.¹⁹ But these are sufficient to illustrate the nature and pervasiveness of the narrow caricature of political pluralism found in contemporary theory.

¹⁷ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 190.

¹⁸ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 72.

¹⁹ For example, see Sunstien. "Beyond the Republican Revival"; Ward, "The Limits of Liberal Republicanism."

The Liberal-Communitarian Debate

Before exploring the richer alternative to this caricature, let me explain the second concern in contemporary political theory that this book addresses. In addition to improving our understanding of the historical legacy of political pluralism, a more complete understanding of pluralism's resources provides the means to move beyond the sharp disagreements between liberals and communitarians which dominated political theory in the 1980s.

Michael Sandel, Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor are the leading proponents of the communitarian critique of liberalism. Although the works of other communitarians are mentioned, I focus mainly on their influential contributions. The position of each of these communitarian theorists differs in some respects. But here their commonalities are of primary interest. What unites them is their broad diagnosis of the malaise suffered by contemporary liberal societies. In their view, the breakdown of a cohesive social fabric in Western democracies has been caused largely by the excessive individualism which pervades liberal philosophy and political practice. According to Sandel, who uses John Rawls as the exemplary liberal, liberalism crucially depends on a metaphysical notion of the self in which the self is conceptualized as isolated from all of its attachments and obligations. On this unrealistic basis, Rawls constructs an account of the requirements of justice. In a similar vein, Taylor argues that liberalism's fundamental premise is atomism. Atomism is a doctrine, most evidently displayed in the state-of-nature theories like those of Locke and Hobbes, that "affirms the self-sufficiency of man alone. . . ." ²⁰ From these starting points, liberals construct the ideal of liberal society — a society that is suited to self-sufficient and unencumbered individuals. In the communitarian account, political practices, such as entrenched individual rights, secure a distance between the individual and the society or groups to which she is affiliated. Liberal rights are seen as supposing an extravagant notion of self-sufficiency, and they reinforce the individual's ability to challenge and resist the claims her society or community might otherwise make upon her.

For both Sandel and Taylor, the use of an asocial notion of individuals as a starting point is precisely the wrong way to conceptualize the contours of justice. To begin with, the idea that individuals are self-

²⁰ Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, 189.

sufficient, or that they can be imagined as separate from all their attachments to others, is unrealistic. In this respect, communitarian theories seem to have some affinity with feminist arguments which hold that liberal theory conceptualizes the individual as non-nurturing and childless; as a being who is reputed to be denuded of particular characteristics, yet nonetheless seems to prize autonomy over inclusion and individuation over sociality.²¹ This conception of the individual is either completely unrealistic or, at least, it is cultural- and gender-specific. Communitarianism emphasizes the hazards of liberal individualism by highlighting the manifestly unrealistic conception of the individual at the heart of liberalism.

The second and more urgent problem for communitarians is that the atomistic or unencumbered individual of liberalism is the means by which liberals introduce values into their political theories that are inimical to the value of community. Liberal rights place strict limits on the pursuit by a community of shared communal ends. One need not be a communitarian to know that this is precisely what rights are supposed to do, especially those rights, such as freedom of speech, conscience, and religion, which have a historical legacy of protecting dissenters from their communities. Communitarians do not object explicitly to the right to dissent. Rather, they argue that the liberal culture of rights undermines the pursuit of the common good and is thereby self-defeating. Thus, the problem of liberal rights is presented in terms of the ideology of individual self-sufficiency that it promotes. Rights, according to Taylor, are intended to protect certain treasured human capacities. Yet, these capacities can only be developed within social contexts. Therefore, to be committed to the capacities, one must also be obligated to the social context in which the development of capacities is possible. Rights, which are thought to have primacy over community interests, accentuate the distance and separation of the individual from the social context in which valued capacities can be developed. The ideology of rights offers a portrait in which the individual is fully developed from the start, treasured capacities and all. All that rights need do is protect the fully developed, self-sufficient individual and her capacities from communal oppression. One central communitarian objection to the primacy of rights is that, in reality, individuals are not fully developed. As useful as rights might be to *protect* capacities, they are poor tools to *develop* these capacities. What is required for their development

²¹ Friedman, "Feminism and Modern Friendship," 105. Others mentioned by Friedman include Dorothy Dinnerstein, Nancy Chodorow, and Carol Gilligan.

are healthy communal contexts and attachments, notions of common purposes and goods. Liberal political theory and practice, because it promotes individual self-sufficiency and autonomy, succeeds in distancing the individual from these means to her development. It undermines the development of those capacities it seeks to protect. According to communitarians, political theory needs to be refocused on the connection between the individual and her community or social context. For MacIntyre, the virtues of membership in community and the common good offer the key values of a better theory. Similarly, for Taylor and Sandel, those values consist of the shared ends and attachments that constitute our identity.

As provocative and compelling as communitarians have been, various problems seriously compromise the usefulness of their critiques. These problems are rooted in the fact that communitarian analysis and conclusions are ambiguous.²² Communitarians are more forthcoming about their objections to the liberal conception of the self than about their alternative to it. On the basis of what is relatively clear in their analysis, two principal difficulties with communitarian politics merit special mention. First, communitarianism is undermined by its unrealistic understanding of individual development. Rosenblum argues that communitarians appear to have an affinity for a romantic conception of the self for which they search by focusing on the attachments that link individuals to the social context in which individuals are situated. The communitarian alternative promises to be more sociologically realistic than does the picture of the autonomous and self-sufficient individual that communitarians attribute to liberalism. But, in fact, the communitarian conception is beset with its own difficulties. First, communitarians seem dangerously disinterested in the possibility that the community's power to facilitate self-development also bestows on communities the means to social control. Second, the more expansive notion of selfhood that communitarians propose "lacks psychological realism" because it attempts to "float above the messy reality of pluralism."²³ Communitarians situate individuals in a community without recognizing that individuals have a plurality of attachments and that they may benefit from this pluralism.

A second limitation of communitarianism lies with its unsophisticated understanding of the nature of community. Communitarian theory harbors an unrealistic and naive notion of political power. For ex-

²² See, for instance, Rosenblum, "Pluralism and Self-Defense," 216.

²³ Rosenblum, "Pluralism and Self-Defense," 220.

ample, communitarians argue that the latent traditions and shared meanings which liberal practices repress ought to be resurrected. They prescribe this resurrection without, for a moment, entertaining the possibility, noted by Rosenblum and others,²⁴ that "repression serves a crucial need and that what is unconscious is repressed because it is dark, dirty, or dangerous."²⁵ At its worst, communitarians require us to suspend our disbelief about the nasty side of political power which is exercised by communities.

Although communitarianism may have exposed weaknesses in liberal theory, it also displays some fatal flaws. Its lack of psychological realism about the plurality of attachments and contexts in which the individual finds herself is surprising given that attention to the requirements of self-development comprises such a central part of its project. Its lack of sociological acumen regarding the potential oppression found in community and the sexist and racist nature of many repressed or sadly unrepressed traditions is truly remarkable, since it is precisely this charge against liberalism, individualism, and state-of-nature theories that launches the communitarian critique.

Contemporary Strands of Pluralist Theory

One explanation for why communitarianism suffers from these problems is that, in constructing their arguments solely to address the weaknesses of liberalism, communitarians quickly lost sight of the problems that liberalism purports to solve. As a result, one way of addressing the challenges posed by communitarianism is to reinvigorate and tinker with liberal commitments. Most of the actual responses to the communitarian critique do exactly this. Throughout the 1980s, theorists explored the resources that liberalism contains to meet the communitarian challenge.²⁶ In some measure, this book contributes to this project of liberal renewal. After all, pluralism is one of the key resources of liberalism and, moreover, one that figures prominently in current thoughts about liberalism.²⁷ "Reasonable pluralism," Rawls argues, signifies a plurality of reasonable comprehensive doctrines that are "part of the work of free practical

²⁴ See Gutmann, "Communitarian Critics of Liberalism," 319.

²⁵ Rosenblum, "Pluralism and Self-Defense," 217.

²⁶ See, for instance, Galston, *Liberal Purposes*; Gutmann, "Communitarian Critics of Liberalism"; Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*; Macedo, *Liberal Virtues*.

²⁷ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*.

reason within the framework of free institutions."²⁸ However, this work must be distinguished from other recent works in light of the special emphasis it places on the importance of mechanisms other than rights. In particular, pluralism, as a central value of liberal societies, contains the political resources to safeguard liberty and to facilitate self-development. By and large, recent liberal theory has not adequately recognized these resources and has, instead, depended heavily on liberal rights to perform these tasks. Even in Rawls's recent reflections, "reasonable pluralism" is not a tool. It is construed only as a sociological fact: the result of freedom, rather than the means to safeguard freedom.

There are a few theorists who have turned to a discourse in which pluralism, rather than liberal rights or liberal individualism, enjoys special recognition. Various theorists have found refuge from communitarian and liberal-individualist politics in something that looks like pluralism and, at times, is called pluralism by them. For example, Marilyn Friedman criticizes communitarianism for emphasizing the importance of only involuntary communities into which one is born or which one discovers. The potential oppressiveness of such communities, and the possible distortions of the identities that they help to create, is often revealed, according to Friedman, by communities of choice: ". . . some relations compete with others . . . provide standpoints from which others appear dangerous."²⁹ Friedman emphasizes, like so many pluralists do, that, realistically, the modern self belongs to a plurality of communities. And thus "[t]he problem is not simply to appreciate community per se but, rather, to reconcile the conflicting claims, demands, and identity-defining influences of the variety of communities of which one is a part."³⁰ Friedman seems to be searching for a pluralist discourse but her project does not provide, as this one does, an understanding of the historical roots of this discourse.³¹

Michael Walzer also places a type of pluralism at the center of his project. In *Spheres of Justice*, he argues for what might be called a pluralistic notion of distributive justice in which the distributive rules of fairness for different goods are said to depend on the good in question and the social context in which it is used. Walzer's pluralistic account of distributive justice is significantly different from the variety of pluralism discussed in this book. Nonetheless, there are points of common

²⁸ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 37.

²⁹ Friedman, "Feminism and Modern Friendship," 108.

³⁰ Friedman, "Feminism and Modern Friendship," 108.

³¹ Another example of this sort is Macedo, *Liberal Virtues*, chapter 7.

concern. Many of the pluralist theories examined here require that power and thus authority be distributed pluralistically. By doing so, one might consequently be distributing to communities the authority to establish distinct rules of just distribution which are based on needs and practices particular to the community, as Walzer advocates. Walzer connects this notion of what he calls "complex equality" to the identity-constituting features of goods and practices to be distributed. The identity of a people is tied to the way they conceive, create, possess, and employ social goods.³² From different identities there will arise different notions of just distribution. As in the reconstructed pluralism proposed here, ensuring that the identities of individuals can develop in a healthy manner is also linked by Walzer to dividing power pluralistically.

Throughout Walzer's work, the notion of pluralism is evident. In *Obligations*, Walzer discusses pluralistic association also in developmental terms. "Secondary associations" prepare individuals for citizenship by being forums in which one can learn how to rule and be ruled.³³ While writing about concerns very similar to those which animated British pluralism, Walzer argues that associations are forums whose size and scale are small enough to provide for meaningful participation. Groups can foster or challenge state loyalty and individual obligation to the state.³⁴ In a more recent essay, Walzer's idea of pluralism reemerges under the label of *critical associationalism*.³⁵ Critical associationalism holds that democratic politics and citizenship are dependent upon the "strength and vitality of our associations."³⁶ The state's role, under Walzer's formulation, is essential in both framing civil society and occupying space within it.³⁷ "It compels association members to think about a common good. . . ."³⁸ Because critical associationalism promotes small and more intimate forums for interaction, it is the means to efficacious political participation. It is the route to egalitarianism because it redistributes power and encourages the formation of groups for the purposes of empowerment. "Dominated and deprived individuals are likely to be disorganized as well as impoverished, whereas poor people with strong families, churches, unions, political parties and ethnic alliances are not likely to be dominated or deprived for

³² Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, 6–7.

³³ Walzer, *Obligations*, 219.

³⁴ Walzer, *Obligations*, 221–22.

³⁵ Walzer, "The Civil Society Argument."

³⁶ Walzer, "The Civil Society Argument," 98.

³⁷ Walzer, "The Civil Society Argument," 103.

³⁸ Walzer, "The Civil Society Argument," 103.

long."³⁹ And finally, a pluralized vision of civil society addresses the concerns of nationalism. The polarization of binational states can be prevented if nationalist politics and culture is pluralized.⁴⁰

Many different aspects of pluralism appear in Walzer's work. The themes of self-development and political power are repeatedly mentioned. And associations are considered central to these themes as well as to participation, production, and cultural politics. So Walzer's view is helpful in constructing a new pluralist theory. But, it falls short of *being* such a theory largely because many of the relevant strands of pluralism which he discusses are never gathered together into a theory of pluralism. The connections between self-development and political power are not systematically traced. Nor does Walzer locate his pluralism in relation to other pluralistic arguments that have been entertained in political theory. Establishing such a location is central to the present project.

Part of what Walzer's vision entails has received a sophisticated elaboration in Paul Hirst's work on associational democracy. In an essay entitled, "Retrieving Pluralism," Hirst defends Dahl's position against criticisms of it levied mainly by Marxists. He argues, in ways similar to my argument, that pluralism has been misunderstood and that it is worth retrieving. But by "pluralism" Hirst seems to mean only the post-war variant. Nonetheless, he concludes that pluralism responds to a central weakness of Marxist theory, namely that Marxism lacks an account of why the ruling class is divided and how this affects its rule. Any attempt to explain this division will lead radicals to pluralist theory.⁴¹ "[A]ccept that the 'ruling class' forms a large number, and the need, within Marxism, for a theory like pluralism becomes evident."⁴² Hirst's understanding of what constitutes pluralism actually extends beyond Dahl's work and also includes the work of Laski, Cole, and Figgis. What Hirst calls *associational democracy* is a normative theory of society whose central claim is that "human welfare and liberty are both best served when as many of the affairs of society as possible are managed by voluntary and democratically self-governing associations."⁴³ As in Walzer's work, associations are said to empower the disempowered. They offer citizens greater control over their affairs, again, be-

³⁹ Walzer, "The Civil Society Argument," 100.

⁴⁰ Walzer, "The Civil Society Argument," 101.

⁴¹ Hirst, "Retrieving Pluralism," 164.

⁴² Hirst, "Retrieving Pluralism," 173.

⁴³ Hirst, "Associational Democracy," 112.

cause in them participation is more efficacious than it is in the modern state. Associations also empower the communities which they often represent and in which individuals can live by the shared common standards which they have chosen.⁴⁴ Associations are the means to empowerment in two senses. First, they are the route through which the politics of identity can strengthen a common political culture. A state that celebrates associationalism will provide groups with a reason to opt into, rather than out of, its political culture.⁴⁵ Second, associationalism also provides the route to economic democracy by forging the path between collective ownership and planning and unregulated market individualism.⁴⁶

The richness of Hirst's analysis is compromised only by his insistence that the associations which ought to govern be voluntary ones. Associational relationships, he insists, must "arise from genuine cooperation . . . the idea of being *compelled* to join a voluntary association for any purpose is an absurdity. . . ."⁴⁷ While such an idea is absurd, his exclusive focus on voluntary associations allows Hirst to avoid some of the greater challenges of identity politics and self-development. Like Friedman, Hirst is primarily interested in communities that are chosen, whether they are economic or identity-based. With regards to identity politics, Hirst explains that "old and new identities are reshaped to be sources of social solidarity around *chosen* standards."⁴⁸ But it is an odd sense of choice that confronts women who fight against sexism or cultural minorities that fight against racism. The *absence* of choice in the construction of their identity partly shapes their efforts, and, to a large extent, it is the identities that they did not choose but that they nonetheless live with that they struggle against.⁴⁹ In this crucial respect, Hirst's retrieval of pluralism is incomplete. Although Hirst gathers together the strands of pluralism constructed by Dahl and by the British pluralists, his project does not provide a full reconstruction of a pluralist tradition in political thought.

Another contemporary attempt to reintroduce pluralism is found in the work of Kirstie McClure who explicitly seeks to reconstruct what

⁴⁴ Hirst, "Associational Democracy," 121.

⁴⁵ Hirst, "Associational Democracy," 119.

⁴⁶ Hirst, "Associational Democracy," 128. Another insightful attempt to resurrect British pluralism and the pluralist notion of economic democracy is found in Rainer Eisfeld, "Pluralism as Critical Political Theory."

⁴⁷ Hirst, "Associational Democracy," 131.

⁴⁸ Hirst, "Associational Democracy," 118.

⁴⁹ This argument is pursued in chapter 6.