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## The Liberal Common Good

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## The Liberal Common Good

*J. O. Famakinwa*

### The Aim

The paper challenges the traditional conception of ‘the common good’ as primarily communitarian. Two positions are argued: (i) that to define communitarianism as a philosophy of the common good is to define it in a way that liberalism could also be defined; normative liberals need not reject the communitarian common good, conceived as ‘shared values’, and (ii) that the liberal ‘liberty’ is conceivable as a common good. A liberal society is capable of possessing a common good, in contrast to the private goods of its members. ‘Liberty’ needs not be seen as an individual good, it could be a community good. The thesis of the paper is not new. The same point was once argued by Will Kymlicka when he writes that:

[...] there is a ‘common good’ present in liberal politics as well, since the policies of a liberal state aim at promoting the interest of the members of the community.<sup>1</sup>

Linda C. Reader also makes the same point akin to Kymlicka’s:

If individual liberty is both the product of a liberal society and the source of that society’s continuing progressive evolution, then personal liberty and the pursuit of the common good are not only compatible but, in a sense, inseparable.<sup>2</sup>

The primary aim here is to make a more forceful claim. Liberty and the common good are not only compatible; the former is definable in terms of the latter. The new direction of scholarship in liberal/communitarian debate concerns with the reconciliation of liberal/communitarian traditional positions. The paper starts with the liberal and communitarian minimums.

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<sup>1</sup> Kymlicka [1990].

<sup>2</sup> Reader [1998].

### **Normative Liberalism – What is it?**

Normative liberalism offers recommendations on how what John Rawls describes as the basic institutions (economic and social institutions) ought to be organized. Traditionally, the basic liberal value is liberty. Though liberals value liberty, there are variations in the degree of values placed on liberty by different liberals. Mill's liberalism permits liberty to be limited only by the liberty of others. Someone's right to stretch his or her hands ends where other person's right to defend his or her nose begins. The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant.<sup>3</sup> Mill's position has attracted different interpretations.

The word 'others' need not be interpreted as referring to each individual in the society. The use of 'others' could also refer to corporate interests e.g. community interest. The interpretation finds confirmation in Mill's utilitarian resolution of the possible conflict between liberty and authority. The general welfare of some group of individuals is the main focus of the utilitarian principle of right and wrong, not specific individuals. Mill's use of the word 'others' could be interpreted in two ways i.e. each member of the society or the society as a whole. John Rawls rejects the utilitarian solution to the possible clash between liberty and the general welfare of the society. The liberalism of Ronald Dworkin focuses on equality rather than liberty. Though liberals do not share common views on the value of liberty, they share certain minimums.

The core liberal claim is about the individual capacity for self-determination. The liberal notion of self-determination is expressed through the neutrality thesis – the claim that the individual should or ought to be the sole determinant of the good life. Liberal neutrality thesis suggests that the community, in whatever form, ought not promote or dictate to the individual any particular conception of the good life. The neutrality thesis expresses, in part, the liberal primacy of individual rights to liberties.

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<sup>3</sup> Mill [1989].

The liberal priority thesis makes rights to liberties primary, and other social values, especially the communitarian common good, secondary. Placing priority on X over Y, does not amount to rejecting Y. Someone might place priority on reading novels in the evening over and above watching an evening television programme, it does not amount to rejecting the very act of watching an evening television programme. The philosophical problem between liberals and communitarians concerns with how to make a moral choice between individual rights and the community common good.

The liberal primacy thesis suggests the preference for citizens' rights to some liberties over other values, especially, economic and social gains. Rawls' serial order of principles recommends the satisfaction of the principle of equal liberty before the satisfaction of the difference principle. The serial order of principle requires that 'a departure from the institutions of equal liberty required by the first principle cannot be justified by, or compensated for, by greater social and economic advantages. The distribution of wealth and income, and the hierarchies of authority, must be consistent with both the liberties of equal citizenship and equal opportunity'.<sup>4</sup> When there is a moral clash between the individual and the community good, the latter morally weighs less. According to Rawls,

Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. For this reason justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others. The rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests.<sup>5</sup>

The whole business of liberty is about stressing the individual capacity to choose without constraint. Most liberals endorse the negative conceptions of liberty as absence of constraint.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, equipping an individual with the capacity to choose does not necessarily guarantee his or her liberty. A choice freely

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<sup>4</sup> Rawls [1995].

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. iii-iv.

<sup>6</sup> Berlin [1991].

made by an individual could also constrain him or her. A marriage between a man and a woman is a product of choice, prompted by either party's right to choose his or her spouse. The man freely chooses the woman and vice versa. However, the choice itself introduces some constraints on either party. In a monogamous society, the liberty which an individual has to enter into a marriage with someone limits his/her liberty to enter into another marriage with someone else.

The religious liberty which an individual possesses to go to church on Sunday, limits his or her liberty to stay in door, on the same day, and listen to good music. The individual liberty to choose to be a Reverend Father imposes some limits on his possible choice of some other ways of life. The political liberty an individual possesses to vote for a particular candidate, during the election, limits his or her liberty to vote for any other candidate in the same election. The point, then, is that liberty and constraint are not really mutually exclusive. The distinction between 'freedom to' and 'freedom from' was once made by Hayek. He says,

The former, 'freedom to', does not adequately express the original idea of liberty because it is possible for a person to abuse his or her 'freedom to' vote by willingly voting for a tyrant. The fact that 'freedom to' could be used to undermine freedom relegates it from the fundamental sense of freedom.<sup>7</sup>

Whatever liberty one thinks he or she possesses, limits other numerous liberties he or she could also claim. Liberty and constraint are two sides of the same coin. Liberty cannot be achieved without some self imposed constraint. The negative conception of liberty, as absence of constraint, includes too much. Liberty is a form of constraint. The liberal attempt to set each individual free, through the priority thesis, is not successful. Free choices, which an individual makes, exclude some other choices. The incompatibilities of certain choices make such exclusion inevitable. However, the question is, do liberties constrain in the sense just suggested? Does the argument really succeed in demonstrating the similarity between liberals and communitarians? The argument about the ability of liberty to impose some constraints is a position most liberals will not accept. The very fact that there

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<sup>7</sup> Hayek [1990].

are other choices available to him, out of which the individual makes his or her choice, does not impose any constraint. A possible argument liberals could make is that free choice is a product of deliberation. A free choice, which is informed by deliberation, cannot be said to impose any constrain on the individual who makes the choice.

On the other hand, communitarians will agree with the position that the exercise of liberty does impose some constraints on the individual. A possible explanation is that the choices, which an individual makes, are externally limited by community values. Liberals and communitarians will offer different conception of liberty. Liberal theories and practices offer to promote individual freedom as liberating force, frequently supported by a political action, capable of undermining and, when possible, upturn community values. For liberals, individual liberty can change values, while for communitarians; individual liberty is bound by values. If this is the case, then the thesis here needs to be argued in a more sophisticated way. This will be pursued after the consideration of the communitarian minimum.

### **The Communitarian Minimum**

There are at least two formulations of communitarianism. First, communitarianism affirms the superfluity of rights (liberal) in a society characterized by intimate relationships.<sup>8</sup> This interpretation is a denial of liberal rights in a community regulated by mutual love. A community organized on a family model needs not make reference(s) to rights of each individual to liberties. The relationships between a husband and a wife are primarily defined by love, not by rights. The less emphasis placed on rights, within the nuclear family structure, is necessitated by the need to preserve the common good of the family. The formulation not only sounds utopian, it generates some problems.

First, a human society is more complex in structure than the human nuclear family. Communal and family relationships are not generated in the same way; neither do they share the same goals, in case there is anything like community goals. The goals of an actual human society are not as obvious as goals pursued by

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<sup>8</sup> Sandel [1983].

specific individual. A man chooses his wife, and a woman chooses her husband. No one chooses his her community; he or she is born into it.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, the survival of a society regulated by love depends on the nature of love. Love is a value that could go sour. A society regulated by love still need to put an alternative structure in place to deal with likely social and political contingencies. Members of such a community, regulated by love, could suddenly become mutually disinterested in one another. The communitarian attempt to build the community on the family model is not successful. Love might not necessarily be a tool for social regulation because it is capable of being used for the satisfaction of private interest. Members of a community may regulate their relationship by love for the purpose of private interests. A person may show love towards someone else for personal gain. If psychological egoism is true, then all human actions are meant for the satisfaction of personal gain. Love could be natural; it could also be socially influenced.

Moreover, love and rights are not mutually exclusive. The presence of love among members of a particular community is only a necessary, but not a sufficient condition, for regulating it. The fact that a certain relationship is regulated by love need not diminish the liberties of all the parties in such a relationship. A marriage between a man and a woman is primarily motivated by love; it does not mean that both the husband and wife would not respect the basic rights of each other. Respecting the rights of a person might just be one of the ways to demonstrate such love.

A communitarian community, primarily regulated by love among members, can still make use of rights to reinforce the love members have for one another. Hence, love and rights are compatible values. There is no absurdity in combining the communitarian love and liberal rights in the regulation of the basic social institutions. Hence, communitarianism could be formulated to accommodate individual rights to some liberties. Therefore, communitarianism could be interpreted as a position that does not really deny rights; it only regulates rights for the sake of the common good. It is a corrective measure which places some limits on

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<sup>9</sup> Walzer [1983].

individual rights to some liberties, for the sake of the common good – the good of the community as a whole. In case of a moral clash between the community good and the individual good, the latter must be sacrificed.

The second formulation, like the first, is also philosophically problematic. The talk about limiting rights to liberty, required by the second formulation, is not peculiarly communitarian. The liberalism of L. T. Hobhouse and Ronald Dworkin suggest the limiting of citizens' rights to some political liberties. The fact that somebody is controlled does not mean that his or her liberty is suspended. There is no intrinsic conflict between liberty and compulsion especially where such compulsion is necessitated by mutual need.<sup>10</sup> Ronald Dworkin's liberalism recognizes the limit of individual liberty. The conception of liberty as absence of constraint implies licence.<sup>11</sup> According to Dworkin,

Of course a responsible government must be ready to justify anything it does, particularly when it limits the liberty of its citizens. But normally it is a sufficient justification, even for an act that limits liberty, that the act is calculated to increase what the philosophers call general utility – that is calculated to produce more over-all benefits than harm.<sup>12</sup>

Liberalism is not antithetical to the common good, just as communitarianism is not to individual rights. According to Etzioni, 'we need to reset a legal thermostat to afford a climate more supportive of public concerns, without melting away any of the basic safeguards of individual liberties'.<sup>13</sup> The Lockean state of nature was a state of liberty; still it was not a state of licence, it was regulated by the law of nature. It may be necessary to state that some of the points made so far need not suggest that liberals and communitarians agree in all cases. There is a significant difference between them, both at the level of theory and practice. However, the present goal is to argue that the notion of the common good need not be communitarian, it could be liberal.

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<sup>10</sup> Hobhouse [1964].

<sup>11</sup> Dworkin [1977].

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. cxci.

<sup>13</sup> Etzioni [1995].



### **The Common Good – what is it?**

The word ‘common’ is definable lexically. The Cambridge International Dictionary of English defines the word ‘common’ in terms of sameness. The word ‘sameness’ suggests the idea of ‘shared properties or values’. Sameness, in relation to identical twins, expresses the idea of certain properties, which are shared by the twins. For example, identical twins may share the same skin colour or a particular character trait.

Second, the word ‘common’ expresses availability or presence or ontological existence of a thing. Something is common if it is readily available either universally or, at least, in a certain locality. ‘Air’, for instance, is owned in common by all living things – human or non-human. Third, the word ‘common’ could be used to express desirability. Every person, for instance, desires some good health. Hence, the desire for good health could be said to be common. Communitarian conception of the word ‘common’ is not far, semantically, from the lexical definitions suggested above.

Communitarian ‘common good’ refers to ‘shared attribute(s)’ of a people. Such ‘shared attributes’ manifest in specific language; peculiar historical experiences, unique cultural practices, and distinct traditions shared by a people, which define their peculiar identity. The conception of the common good as ‘shared values’ may include the value of strong commitment to democracy, maintaining a strong constitutional framework for government and the need for citizens to respect the tenets of tolerance and mutual respect.<sup>14</sup> The common good enjoins individuals to rise above their own self-interest, join together with others to form public policy and work in concert to bring the community vision to fruition.<sup>15</sup>

The commitment to the common good demands the pursuit of the virtues of responsibility, accountability, participation and support. The communitarian principle of the common good empowers the community with the right to pursue, through teaching and education, what promotes the interest of the community as a whole. The common good is not only definable as intangible; non-concrete val-

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<sup>14</sup> Amitai [1996].

<sup>15</sup> Daly [1994].

ues, shared by a people, it is also definable as tangible concrete goods, owned by the community. Concrete public goods such as the community road network, educational institutions, community dam (for the provision of portable water for the entire community), educational institutions (for the teaching of communal values), hydro electric power station and community specialist hospitals are examples of concrete common goods. The 'shared values' (intangible common good) of a people usually promote the existence of tangible common good.

Basically, the community itself is the primary communitarian common good. A community, as a common good, 'presupposes a bounded world within which distributions take place: a group of people committed to dividing, exchanging, sharing social goods, first of all among themselves'.<sup>16</sup> No single individual owns the community, at least, in the primary sense of ownership. Therefore a communitarian community is a common good that does not belong to any individual. The same point could also be made of a liberal community/society. A liberal community is a common good because such a community will not belong to a single or set of individuals. There is no liberal community that belongs to a single or set of individuals. Each community, communitarian or liberal, is a common good.

A community conceived politically, represents a world of common meaning, common language, common culture and shared historical experiences.<sup>17</sup> A human community is a territory where the attributes shared by a people receive same meaning. Besides the community, 'membership' of such a community is also a common good. According to Michael Walzer,

Membership, as a social good, is constituted by our understanding; its value is fixed by our work and conversation; and then we are in charge (who else could be in charge?) of its distribution. But we don't distribute it among ourselves; it is already ours...<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Walzer [1983] p. xxxi.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxviii.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxxii.

Communitarian treatment of 'community' and 'membership' (of a community) as common good, does not make such a treatment peculiarly communitarian. A liberal community/society is a common good. Membership of a liberal society is not automatic for non-members. Distribution of membership is done by those members who own it in common.

The liberal idea of the individual good does not really clash with the communitarian idea of the common good. The moral choice made between individual good and the common good, are resolvable to the satisfaction of each position, without compromising the original position. The imposition of a dusk-to-dawn curfew (common good) may be inevitable to check an intra communal disturbance. Though the imposition itself restricts individual freedom of movement, it secures some personal good for each member of the community whose rights to life and properties are secured under the atmosphere of peace gained through the imposition.

A personal financial contribution towards a community water project is capable of promoting both the individual private good and the community good as a whole. The water project, when completed, is a common good that simultaneously satisfies the individual and the overall community good. Besides the fact that he or she, and possibly other members of his or her family would have access to clean water, his or her personal good would be enhanced if prevented from the possible attack of cholera that may occur if such provision is not made. (The underlying assumption here is that the individual cannot single-handedly make such provision for himself or herself). So, through his personal access to clean water, he will be able to realize more of his personal good i.e. the good of being healthy.

An academic scholarship offered an individual by the community has a way of promoting, simultaneously, both the individual and the community good. The skills and knowledge acquired by the benefactor of such a community scholarship serve as means of livelihood to him or her; at the same time, the skills and knowledge could produce new inventions and creativity that might yield significant development of the entire community. A farmer who engages in large scale farming is both promoting his or her private good and the community good. The

excess over what he or she needs for his or her subsistence adds to the quantity of food available in the whole community. Adam Smith's notion about 'Invisible hand' is applicable here.

A subsistence farmer, who ordinarily appears promoting his or her private interests, through the provision of food for his or her consumption, is indirectly promoting the overall good of the community. The food he or she produces for his or her consumption brings about the marginal increase in the quantity of available food in the community. On the other hand, the marginal increase in the supply of food items might bring about the fall in the price of goods, which may also bring about a downward trend in the overall cost of living in the whole community. The deduction is that most of the things that promote the common good are also, directly or indirectly, capable of promoting the individual good, and vice versa.

### **The Liberal Common Good**

Ordinarily, liberal individual good seems to contrast with communitarian common good. The state neutrality thesis demands that the state should not reward or penalize any particular conception of the good life. Rather, the state should provide a neutral framework within which different and potentially conflicting conceptions of the good can be pursued.<sup>19</sup> Three formulations of liberal notion of state neutrality are suggested by John Rawls. State neutrality means:

- (i) First, that the state is to ensure for all citizens equal opportunity to advance any conception of the good they freely affirmed.
- (ii) That the state is not to do anything intended to favour or promote any particular comprehensive doctrine rather than another, to give greater assistance to those who pursue it.
- (iii) That the state is not to do anything that makes it more likely that individual accept any particular conception rather than another unless steps are taken to cancel or to compensate for, the effect of policies that do this.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Kymlicka [1992].

<sup>20</sup> Rawls [1993].

There are, at least, two deductions from liberal notion of state neutrality as suggested above. First, there is the identification of the individual, as opposed to the society, as the determinant of the good life. This could be interpreted as the strong sense of liberal state neutrality. If the individual is the sole determinant of what is the good life, then there is the possibility of clashes of different conceptions of the good life among different individuals in the society. The regulation of different conceptions of the good life is inevitable for the well-ordering of the society.

The second deduction is that state neutrality affirms the liberal conception of the individual as a being capable of rational activity. The conception of state neutrality, in the strong sense, clashes with communitarian notion of the common good. The communitarian commitment to the common good, as interpreted above, enjoins individuals to rise above their own self-interest; join together with others to form public policy, and work in concert to bring the community vision to fruition.<sup>21</sup> This is a position liberals need not reject. A liberal society, like a communitarian society, is a society with some visions, recognized by all members. Members of a liberal society will also share some visions, which hold all of them together. The target of Rawls' notion of the overlapping consensus, among different incompatible but reasonable comprehensive doctrines, is akin to the communitarian idea of the common good.

A person's conception of the good life is determined by what is, for him, the most rational plan of life given reasonably favourable circumstances.<sup>22</sup> Liberal state neutrality is conditional. Every person is assured an equal liberty to pursue whatever plan of life he or she chooses on the condition that such liberty is in conformity with the basic requirement of the principle of justice. Though liberalism advocates the pluralism of values, methodologically, it favours universalism. David Gauthier denies the independent ontological status of values. According to Gauthier:

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<sup>21</sup> Daly [1994] p. xiii.

<sup>22</sup> Rawls [1995].

Value is then not an inherent characteristic of things or states of affairs, not something existing as part of the ontological furniture of the universe in a manner quite independent of persons and their activities. Rather, value is created or determined through preference.<sup>23</sup>

However, the principles for the regulation of different individual values must be universal. One of such favoured universal principles is reason. Though individuals are the originators and designers of their conceptions of good life, such conceptions must be rationally formed. A good doctor is the one who possesses the minimum appropriate skills, abilities and capabilities, which meet the rational expectations of his or her patients.<sup>24</sup> For Gauthier, 'what is good is good ultimately because it is preferred, and it is good from the stand point of those and only those who prefer it.'<sup>25</sup>

Liberals do not accept the objective conception of goodness partly because to say that something is good does not necessarily mean that it is right. We can talk of a good assassin; a good knife, a good gun, a good armed robber, and a good spy, etc. The criteria for defining the goodness of each vary. The new orientation in liberalism is gradually shifting the liberal focus from the traditional commitment, in the strong sense, to state neutrality. Rawls' *Political Liberalism* stresses the need to achieve overlapping consensus through the tolerance of, and solidarity among different incompatible but reasonable comprehensive doctrines. Besides the recognition of each person's peculiar conception of the good life (neutrality about aim), liberals are not indifferent to the means of achieving the good life (neutrality about procedure). Hence, liberalism is not procedurally neutral. Neutrality about procedure complements neutrality about aim.

Liberalism is, in part, a recognition of plural (possibly incompatible) values, the principles for regulating such different and possibly incompatible values ought to be universal in nature.<sup>26</sup> Immanuel Kant's principle of universalizability,

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<sup>23</sup> Gauthier [1987].

<sup>24</sup> Rawls [1995].

<sup>25</sup> Gauthier [1987].

<sup>26</sup> Bellamy [1999].

John Rawls' contractarianism expressed in the original position and David Gauthier's principles of rational choice are all grounded in reason. Methodologically, liberals are committed to the notion of reasonableness. State neutrality thesis does not suggest licence. The fact that individuals are free to pursue their conceptions of good life does not mean that anything goes in a liberal society. Liberalism is not antithetical to the idea of a well - ordered society.

The argument in support of orderliness in a liberal society would be grounded on the need to respect the common good of the entire community. A well - ordered society is that which is regulated by the public conception of justice [...] it is a society in which 'everyone accepts and knows that the others accept the same principles of justice, and the basic social institutions satisfy and are known to satisfy these principles'.<sup>27</sup>

The recognition of the condition of reasonableness in one's conception of good life is a direct admission of the existence of a preferred sense of goodness.<sup>28</sup> Though methodology issues between liberals and communitarians are not the focus here, we need to quickly respond to Gauthier's above mentioned position. The ability of a patient to know, with some degree of objectivity, the minimum qualities of a good doctor need not be determined by reason alone. He or she might be able to discover such minimum qualities through social education and community set standards. There is a difference between values as individual preferences and values as constraints. The criterion for arriving at preferences is not limited to reason, as suggested by Gauthier. Community values (as constraints) influence preferences made by an individual. Reason, as a standard of social regulation, needs not be universal. Reason could be contextual.<sup>29</sup> Values, as products of community reason, could affect individual preferences. While it is true that liberals and communitarians disagree on methodology, their differences could be used to reinforce the thesis being argued here.

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<sup>27</sup> Rawls [1993].

<sup>28</sup> Avnon and de - Shalit [1999].

<sup>29</sup> MacIntyre [2000].

The point is that each individual in a liberal society recognizes, not only the need for such a society to be well-ordered, he or she recognizes such orderliness as a common good. Besides, the liberty of each individual to pursue his or her conception of good life, in a well-ordered society, is also a common good. If 'the common good' is definable as 'shared values' then liberal liberty is definable as the common good. The need to respect liberty, as a political value, could be shared by members of a particular society. Besides the atomistic conception of liberty, the communal conception of liberty could also be recognized. The liberal notion of ethno-cultural neutrality suggests the need to respect the peculiar identity of a people.<sup>30</sup>

The UN commission on Human Rights (sub-commission on prevention of discrimination and protection of Minorities), recognized the liberty of a people. The commission affirms, among other things, the right of the 'indigenous people' to be treated as equal in dignity and rights to all other peoples, while recognizing the right of all peoples to be different, to consider themselves different, and to be respected as such'.<sup>31</sup>

Article 3 of the declaration states:

that Indigenous peoples have the right of self- determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

Article 4 of the declaration also states:

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, economic, social and cultural characteristics, as well as their legal systems, while retaining their rights to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State.

At the level of international relations, the liberty of a community, as a whole, is a common good – the good that expresses the 'shared value' of such a

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<sup>30</sup> Kymlicka [2004].

<sup>31</sup> *United Nations Document on the Right of the Indigenous People.*



people. The struggle for political independence from colonial rule, when and where it occurred, was carried out on the platter of the common good. The communal conception of liberty, as just suggested, could be challenged by liberals. The liberty of a nation does not necessarily amount to the liberty of each of the members of such a nation. To think otherwise is to commit a fallacy of division, liberals could argue. A fallacy of division is committed when it is argued that the property which is peculiar to the whole must, necessarily, be shared by the parts. The fact, in case it is a fact, that a nation is free (politically and economically) does not necessarily mean that each member of such a nation is free. Political and economic freedom of a nation cannot be reduced to political and economic freedom of members of such a nation. Liberals could argue that the object of liberal liberty is the individual, not the society. Though the arguments appear plausible, such arguments will not affect, significantly, the thesis of the paper.

The crux of the matter is not only that liberty, as conceived by liberals, may be a common good, it is also argued that in a liberal community, the liberal values (whatever they are) would be treated as common goods. Liberty and common good are not mutually exclusive. To define communitarianism as a philosophy of the common good, on the one hand, and liberalism as a philosophy of rights to liberty, on the other hand, is arbitrary. This is not to suggest that liberals and communitarians would agree on all issues, they need not to.

Suppose an economically-ravaged community plans to adopt the old Malthusian theory of population, considering the termination of some lives among its citizens, in order to address some inflationary trends. Liberals and communitarians will reject the adoption of such a theory. It is doubtful whether communitarians would value the common good to the point in which the human life is sacrificed, for the purpose of securing such a common good. It is doubtful because respecting human life is capable of promoting the common good. In the contemporary society, argument in support of human sacrifice for the purpose of achieving some community (spiritual) common good will be unpopular, even among communitarians. Communitarians need not deny the necessity to respect, on some occasions, individual rights to some liberties.

Likewise, the recognition of the need to respect each person's capacity for his or her conception of the good life is capable of promoting the common good of the entire community. The common good of each community is dictated by its fundamental values. State neutrality could be a 'shared value' by members of a society. The common good is not something fixed – it varies in different societies. The common good in a community in captivity would be the freedom of those held in captive.

In a multi religious secular country, the rights of citizens to practise any religion of their choice are capable of securing the common good. In a liberal community, it could be argued; the rights granted each member to pursue his or her conception of good life, could be grounded on the need to pursue the common good. According to Anthony Arblaster, 'no society, even the most liberal, can dispense with some conception of the common good, which will be an expression of its collective value'.<sup>32</sup>

Liberals need not deny the common good. Liberal liberty, as a political value, could be a 'shared value' of a people. The new approach in the resolution of liberal/communitarian debate is found in Amitai Etzioni's suggested I and WE paradigm. The paradigm suggests that both the individual and the community have a basic moral standing, neither is secondary nor derivative.<sup>33</sup> While respect for the common good is inevitable, the respect should not be extended to limiting individual right to privacy.<sup>34</sup> Whatever constitutes the basic value of a liberal society constitutes its common good. Liberty is definable as a common good.<sup>35</sup> The thesis here raises a fundamental question. If liberty is a common good, as suggested, how will such values be taught in a liberal society? Suppose there are certain members of such a society who do not subscribe to the basic values in such a liberal society? For the society to advocate the teaching of such values, through education, would amount to an encroachment on individual liberty.

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<sup>32</sup> Arblaster [1996].

<sup>33</sup> Etzioni [1990].

<sup>34</sup> Etzioni [2006].

<sup>35</sup> Llewellyn [2001].

Liberals will not accept this; they will consider social education as a form of indoctrination. However, if the thesis argued here is correct, it may just turn out that, at a more theoretical level, liberals need not reject communitarian notions of social education and patriotism. This is a matter for future discussion.

## Conclusion

The major point argued in the paper is that liberal liberty and the communitarian common good are not mutually exclusive. The attempt to define communitarianism as a philosophy of the common good, on the one hand, and liberalism as a philosophy of rights, on the other hand, fails. The priority placed on liberty in a liberal society could achieve the common good, conceived as a 'shared value' among a people. The recognition of citizens' liberty in a communitarian society could as well serve the common good of the society.

Furthermore, liberals need not reject the common good. The need for a society to be well-ordered is one of the major liberal values. Liberal liberty and the communitarian common good are the different sides of the same coin.

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