RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT AND SECULAR REASON

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CONTENTS

v

Contents

PART THREE
CIVIC VIRTUE AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN A
RELIGIOUSLY PLURALISTIC DEMOCRACY

THE PLURALITY OF PATHS TO
LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

Democratic government is entirely dependent on the people it represents. Factions can cripple it. Indifference can undermine it. Fanatical consensus can pervert it into a tyranny of the majority. It thrives on the political commitment and mutual respect of its citizens, on fair competition among individuals and institutions, and on diversity in ideas, culture, and individual personalities. The present age is witnessing serious challenges to the historically strongest democracies and a multitude of forces that retard the development of new ones. There is political apathy among the citizens in many nations; self-serving governments are widespread; and in many other countries there is religious and political fanaticism. In and outside democratic nations, there is corruption among many who wield political power. In many parts of the world, there are structural injustices, both economic and political. A democratic society that does not effectively combat these evils – apathy, fanaticism, corruption, injustice, and other threats to democracy – is at best unstable.

This book addresses a clearly central aspect of the current challenge to democracy: the delicate problem of how a free and democratic society can achieve an appropriate harmony between religion and politics. As a source of human flourishing and as a stimulus to citizenship, religion has played a unique and powerful role in the development of democracy. Many religious traditions not only insist on preservation of liberty but also require their followers to be conscientious, constructive citizens. Religion can, however, be a divisive force in democratic politics. The impulse to pursue the Ultimate Good, particularly in an authoritative institutional context and with the support of others sharing the same religious outlook, can lead to a tendency, conscious or

unconscious, to dominate others. A holy cause can sanctify extreme measures.

Is there a way to structure democracy in general, and in particular a way to shape the framework of moral principles appropriate to it, that leads to sociopolitical standards by which people of differing religious views – or none – can cooperate as citizens in an atmosphere of mutual respect? One thesis of this book is that there is. The task of this chapter is to lay a basis for showing this. Unlike some writers on the topic, I do not proceed by proposing a highly specific theory of the basis of democracy. I prefer to indicate a number of ways in which one might defend democracy – liberal democracy in particular – as the most desirable form of government in the modern world. We can then see how all of them bear on religion and politics. I begin with some broad features of liberal democracy.

LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

Liberal democracy is properly so called because of its two fundamental commitments: to the freedom of citizens and to their basic political equality, symbolized above all in the practice of according one person one vote. Kant put this dual commitment of liberal democracy even more strongly:

> [I]t is a fundamental principle of moral politics that in uniting itself into a nation a people ought to subscribe to freedom and equality as the sole constituents of its concept of right, and this is not a principle of prudence, but is founded on duty.[1]

Here we have not only the classical liberal stress on both freedom – in a very wide sense of the term – and equality, but also the affirmation that they exhaust the concept of right that is central for political philosophy. This affirmation goes beyond some liberal democratic positions in its emphasis on duty, as opposed to prudence, as a basis of democratic politics. In addition, it may have been influential in leading some liberal theorists to take only a "thin" theory of the good to be appropriate to the basic commitments of a liberal state. I find Kant's view by no means implausible, but do not unqualifiedly endorse it, and this book will be largely neutral concerning the difficult question (addressed in some detail in Chapter 3) of just how rich a conception of the good may be properly built into the constitutional framework of a liberal democracy.

One of the great challenges to both the theory and the practice of democracy is how to balance the competing forces that tend to arise from the pursuit of its two central ideals. The ideals of freedom and equality can produce conflicts in a democracy, and in practice they tend to pull a society in different directions.[2] Even given an idealized starting point in which all are equally influential in political matters, the exercise of liberty by the ingenious or naturally talented can create disproportionate political power. This outcome cannot be avoided without rigid controls that are inimical to the spirit of democracy. In any form, and regardless of how its ideals may be expressed in constitutional or other governing documents, a democracy respects the integrity, autonomy, and liberty of persons. The result will be that some citizens become economically more powerful, others better educated, and still others – whether from natural talent or economic power or educational advantage – highly proficient in persuading their fellow citizens to agree with them in political matters.

The promotion of liberty – indeed, even its protection – and the preservation of basic political equality may require extensive social programs. Democratic theorists differ on the appropriateness of such programs, for instance concerning welfare measures and other governmental services. This book takes no position on the justifiable limits here; its main points are compatible with either a liberal democracy that approaches a more or less "minimal state" or one that, like the United States and Western European democracies today, has a multitude of social programs.[3]

The centrality of the democratic respect for persons embodied in the ideals of liberty and equality accounts for why it is only *basic* equality of political power that is crucial. In practice, it is understood that some citizens are to have more political power than others. Legislators are elected with this clearly in mind; and they have far more non-basic political power than a representative citizen. Nonetheless, they have no additional votes in general elections; and although the special votes they cast in governing bodies extend to matters not directly before the citizenry, they are responsible to the electorate and serve ultimately at the pleasure of voters at large. It is, then, equal basic liberty that is crucial for democracy: in freedom of speech and protection from criminal penalties, for instance, citizens are to be equal. But even then, not every forum is appropriately available to every citizen. The legislative chamber must be restricted in some ways, and the requirements for main-

taining a police force impose some limitations on the liberties of citizens and must extend a limited range of privileges to officers of the law.

I have spoken of democracy in general as respecting the autonomy and integrity of persons. It seems obvious that a liberal democracy must do this: if a vote is to represent the citizens' political will, it must be autonomous, which entails that it is not only uncoerced but free of the kind of manipulation that would prevent its appropriately representing the values of the voters; if freedom and political equality are to be preserved, this must be through the sorts of protections that maintain the integrity of persons.[4] I refer particularly to their bodily and psychological well-being, broadly construed. If we are thinking of democracy as developed in the United States or any other nation in which it may be conceived as a government of, by, and for the people, none of this should be controversial.

The 'for' here carries great weight. Conceiving a democracy as *for* the people suggests that in a certain way, a democracy – and certainly a liberal democracy – is *individualist.* It does not view the political structure of society as subordinated to the good of a sovereign, to the interests of a class of society, or even to the glory of God, though religious ideals and other normative standards may inspire it and may (as we shall see in Chapters 2–5) figure quite properly in major aspects of its development.

A liberal democracy does not even see the political structure of society as subordinated to the good of the "community" if this is an abstraction conceived as having ends that can be promoted without benefiting citizens in general. If, for instance, in the name of the community but at the expense of public health and basic education, one committed vast resources to building an army not required for defense, or to monuments not serving the aesthetic needs of the people, this would conflict with the ideals of liberal democracy. To be sure, there is more than one kind of conflict with those ideals. The deepest kind is *structural;* it pertains to the constitution of the state: roughly, to the operating rules, whether written in a constitution or not, that bind any government representing the state in question. A less deep kind of conflict occurs where a government adopts laws or policies that are not structurally prohibited yet, like building an army beyond defensive needs and at the expense of public health and basic education, tend to undermine the ideals of liberal democracy.

It is a special feature of liberal democracies that their structure pro-

vides sufficient freedom to allow policies that are significantly in tension with their underlying ideals. Overbuilding of an army, then, might be permissible by (reversible) democratic decision, but maintenance of an army larger than defense requires would probably be an inappropriate requirement to build into any constitution that meets liberal-democratic standards. The distinction is of course not sharp, and there are degrees of conflict in either case. Even where the distinction is clear, some citizens will be tempted to give maximal force to their preferences by building them into the constitutional structure. This is an additional reason, beyond the unclarity of the distinction, why, in the United States for instance, there is so much debate about whether certain policies should take the form of constitutional amendments. This book is concerned both with structural questions and with standards of conduct that apply where the laws or public policies under discussion are permissible under a sound liberal-democratic constitution.

The reference to a constitution may suggest that I am considering only a constitutional as opposed to proceduralist conception of democracy. I am assuming that a liberal-democratic society must have at least a set of unwritten structural standards for preserving liberty and basic political equality, but I do not assume that no proceduralist democracy can under any conditions achieve that end. Much of what I say, however, is most readily understood in relation to a constitutional democracy like that of the United States and other modern democracies, and it may often suggest the preferability of such a democracy over a procedural one, in which the majority rules by expressing its political will in voting, independently of constitutional restrictions on the outcome. Even on a proceduralist conception, however, there must be ground rules defining citizenship and voting. There will, then, be a de facto constitution even if it is alterable by simple majority vote. The points just made about political structure in a democracy as designed to be "for" the people can be applied either to the character of these ground rules or to a written constitution. I want to stress, however, that there is a spectrum of possible democratic structures running from the ideal of a pure proceduralism at one extreme to that of an unalterable constitution at the other.

Existing democracies have always fallen in between a pure procedural system and an unalterable constitutionalism,[5] and for good reason. If our only ground rules require just a simple majority vote on every issue that the people must decide (and identifying such issues is

itself a challenge for a democracy), then we have at best a system that is both inefficient because decisions must wait upon wide dissemination of the issues and unstable because fundamental changes can be made as fast as a majority can be swayed to vote them in. This could be very fast indeed given our developing computer technology, which makes it possible to vote regularly from one's own home or from a private computer account.

To be sure, the better educated the citizenry, the less the danger posed by eliminating representative government as a filter between the people and social policy. But in the world as we know it, settling every legislative question by popular vote would not be our best policy. If, on the other hand, a constitution, however democratically adopted it may be, is entirely beyond amendment by the people, then we have a kind of tyranny by the first generation.

My concern, then, will be chiefly with democracies which have a constitutional structure that provides for its own revision. This is in part because my main focus is liberal democracies that in fact are so constituted and in part because it is useful to be able to distinguish between standards appropriate for constitutional adoption and those appropriate in other settings, such as crafting legislative policy or simply voting in ordinary elections. The main points that emerge about liberal democracy, however, will be applicable to it even in settings in which there is no strong constitutional framework.

OUTLINES OF A CASE FOR LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

A full-scale case for liberal democracy as a form of government would have to be both lengthy and comparative. My purposes in this book do not require direct comparison with other political structures, but indirect comparisons will be implicit at many points, particularly where we consider the implications of religious domination of a democracy, in which case the resulting society would be at best a non-liberal democracy.[6] There is also no need here to mount the kind of defense of liberal democracy that would be required if I were addressing readers for whom it is controversial whether we should have a democracy at all. It remains highly desirable, however, to see a number of ways in which a liberal democracy can be plausibly grounded. This is particularly so if one wants to argue, as I do, that certain principles applicable to religion

and politics are justifiable from the point of view of *any* of the plausible groundings.

One might think that a plausible grounding of liberal democracy would have to be *moral.* Integrity and autonomy each seem to be moral ideals, and both suggest values that one might argue are best served in lives led under a liberal-democratic regime. I agree that a moral case for liberal democracy can be made plausible, but (as will be evident) I doubt that it is the only plausible kind of case to be made. Here and elsewhere in this book, moreover, I shall avoid assuming any sharp distinction between moral and non-moral values or standards. This is particularly appropriate to the first kind of grounding I want to consider, since it calls for a maximization of goodness conceived non-morally, but construes this very imperative as our basic moral requirement.

Utilitarianism

I refer, of course, to utilitarianism, and I propose to take John Stuart Mill's version in *Utilitarianism* (if indeed there is only one version there) as a basis of discussion. Since I am not endorsing the view in any form, I bypass consideration of the massive objections and replies to be found in the literature. I am assuming only that some version of the kind of view Mill presented is a serious contender that must be taken into account.

Before we explore the kind of grounding utilitarianism can provide for liberal democracy, we should distinguish two questions that can easily be run together in dealing with this issue. The first is the quasi-historical question of how, using whatever standard of good government is taken as basic, individuals who meet certain constraints – above all, being free, (fully) rational, and adequately informed – may be thought to have preferred liberal democracy over alternative forms of government.[7] The second is the structural question of how well liberal democracy, taken contemporaneously, say as embodied in a given nation as it is today, fulfills the standard. In part because of the influence of the social contract tradition, the former question has tended to dominate discussions of the grounding of liberal democracy. This is in some ways unfortunate, since the relevant contractual starting point is controversial and its conditions difficult to clarify and defend. In principle, however, the two approaches should yield the same answer: a free, rational, ad-

equately informed person should not choose a system of government in the light of a standard unless that system can be expected to fulfill that standard under specifiable conditions; and such individuals should not approve of an actual system of government on the basis of a standard unless they can reasonably think they would have chosen it in the relevant way.

It is true, however, that showing individuals why, as free, rational, adequately informed prospective citizens, they would choose a system can serve both to *motivate* them to cooperate in it and to suggest a basis of their *political obligation,* by which I mean roughly their obligation to obey the law. Showing the latter basis has been of the first importance in political philosophy at least since Hobbes. I do not believe that a good case for liberal democracy as the best form of government must automatically provide an account of political obligation, though it must be consistent with the existence of such obligation and should indicate something about how such an account might proceed.[8] In any case, I do not address the problem of political obligation in any direct way in this book. We can understand both the major kinds of grounding of liberal democracy and their implications for standards bearing on religion and politics without associating them with any particular account of political obligation. Utilitarianism, for instance, can account for our having (prima facie) obligations to obey the law in a liberal democracy *if* it can account for the desirability of liberal democracy in the first place. Let us turn to that question.

Although the fine details of our formulation of utilitarianism should not be crucial here, we need something concrete to refer to, and the following act-utilitarian formulation roughly captures the central principle common at least to Bentham and Mill: an act is right if and only if it contributes at least as much to the proportion of (non-moral) good to evil (say, happiness to unhappiness, as Mill has it) in the relevant population (say, human beings) as any available alternative (where the proportion in question need not be strictly quantitative and the criteria for availability are non-moral[9]).

Before noting any of the well-known difficulties with this principle, I want to bring out what is plausible in it that makes it a useful starting point for a consideration of ways to ground liberal democracy. Above all, utilitarians would have us choose a system of government that does the most good for people. As Mill put it in *Representative Government,*

> We have now . . . obtained a foundation for a twofold division of merit which any set of political institutions can possess. It consists partly of the degree in which they promote the general mental advancement of the community, including under that phrase advancement in intellect, in virtue, and in practical activity and efficiency; and partly of the degree of perfection with which they organise the moral, intellectual, and active worth already existing . . . A government is to be judged by its action upon men, and by its action upon things; by what it makes of the citizens, and what it does with them; its tendency to improve or deteriorate the people themselves . . .[10]

On the face of it, this position is highly consonant with the idea of a democracy as *for* the people. Moreover, where the good is understood in terms of happiness or anything like it, we get an irreducibly *pluralistic* notion; for happiness can come from a variety of experiences and activities. This pluralism favors the liberality – especially the tolerance – of liberal democracy. No kind of happiness is ruled out as without value; hence there is a prima facie case for allowing any activity that leads to happiness. Moreover, no one's happiness is better than another's just because of whose it is; this goes with utilitarianism's treating everyone as a candidate to realize the good – or indeed to realize the bad, through causing oneself suffering – a kind of experience in which we seem more alike than in what makes us happy. This recognition of our equality insofar as we can experience happiness or suffering favors giving recognition, as a liberal democracy does, to the importance of the life of each and every citizen.

Less abstractly, utilitarians can plausibly argue that according every citizen a vote also helps to overcome alienation, which is a cause of unhappiness and political unrest, and to enhance cooperation, which is a source of progress in enhancing the good and in eliminating the evils of disease and scarcity. Clearly, how good a case can be made for a liberal democracy from utilitarian premises depends in part on our factual assumptions; but the liberal democracies of the world have done well enough materially relative to other kinds of society to give utilitarians prima facie evidence from which to argue that at least in relation to some of the major elements in happiness – particularly in the reduction of suffering – liberal democracy is the best candidate form of government to maximize the good.[11]

Difficulties remain, however. One problem is how to determine what

population is relevant to our calculations. May a good utilitarian restrict consideration to a single nation, on the ground that a government will operate within its borders, or do all persons count equally? And how are we to count non-human animals? Worse still, can we, from utilitarian premises, do justice to questions of *distribution,* say by arguing, as surely Mill would, that what intuitively counts as unjust distribution will in the long run generate more suffering than happiness? And should the prevention and reduction of suffering not have priority over the production of happiness, in a way utilitarians cannot cogently account for? These and many other doubts about utilitarian distribution principles have been repeatedly expressed.[12]

To be sure, Mill might argue that suffering differs *qualitatively* from happiness in a way that gives it priority over happiness as a source of reasons for action, just as some pleasures, being higher than others, provide better reasons.[13] There are other ways to constrain utilitarianism to reduce or perhaps even avoid the difficulties just noted (and other difficulties). I cannot argue this, but I take it that by developing the points made here one can see how a liberal democracy can be supported from utilitarian assumptions and is probably the likeliest choice from that perspective, given what we now know about the conditions under which human society prospers in the ways that conduce to utility.

Instrumentalism

Utilitarianism presupposes some theory of the good. I have stressed the pluralism of a plausible utilitarianism, which enables it to avoid commitment to any narrow conception of the good. It may be argued, however, that a rational person need not recognize any *intrinsic* goods (things good in themselves, independently of their consequences), and that in any event it is best to ground liberal democracy from a perspective neutral with respect to the question of what, if anything, is intrinsically good. Might there be a point of view that any rational person may take, irrespective of any specific value commitments? It is natural to think so, and instrumentalism benefits from centering on what is often considered the least controversial standard of rationality. Let me explain.

A minimal condition for rationality, one might plausibly hold, is seeking means to one's own ends. For the tradition of Hume, instrumental rationality is indeed central for rational action: roughly, instrumentalists hold that an act is rational if, and only if, relative to the

agent's beliefs it is at least as good as (as instrumental as) any available alternative in contributing to the desire satisfaction of the agent (one might specify that only rational beliefs count here, but that complication will not affect our discussion). The relevant desires are of course non-instrumental, such as the desire to enjoy a swim *for its own sake;* and an action contributes optimally to desire satisfaction when it contributes at least as much as any alternative to the quantity of such satisfaction. This is the sort of thing Hume had in mind in his famous affirmation of the instrumental role of reason: "reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions."[14] Applying this to the basis of political philosophy, he said that "sense of justice and injustice is not derived from nature but arises artificially" and that since the rules of justice serve our basic social ends, "*the rules of justice are establish'd by the artifice of men.*"[15]

From an instrumentalist point of view, liberal democracy is attractive for some of the same reasons that make it attractive to utilitarianism. Being liberal, for instance, it leaves people free (within limits) to pursue what they want. On the assumption that what we naturally want *is* happiness, including the absence or elimination of suffering – an assumption that many accept in some form and that Mill took to represent a psychological law – it is not surprising that liberal democracy would appeal in similar ways to both traditions. To be sure, since instrumentalism does not take it as necessary that one have any desire for the things anyone *else* wants, the view does not fare as well as utilitarianism in justifying a social structure in which all have basic political equality. But if one assumes, as Hobbes and most later political theorists have, that people naturally have basic desires requiring peaceful coexistence with others, this disadvantage can be greatly reduced.

The contemporary philosopher who has done most to justify central principles for liberal democracy using largely (though by no means entirely) instrumentalist principles of rationality is John Rawls.[16] Embracing a contractarian approach constrained to eliminate biases, he argues that if, in specified conditions of ignorance of such biasing information as how wealthy they will be, rational persons choose a framework of social cooperation, it will be one in which the following two principles of justice are central. The first, which has priority and (in some version) is a standard basis for liberal democracy, requires allowing as much liberty to each of us as is consistent with a like liberty for others; the second principle requires that sociopolitical inequalities be

justified by attaching to positions open to all by fair competition and by being such that their existence can be reasonably expected to benefit the worst off.[17] The idea, in part, is that even the worst off can endorse the existence of a system allowing such inequalities because they will be better off under it than under alternatives. Since, given the priority of the equal liberty principle, basic liberties are not negotiable, basic political liberty is protected, including one person, one vote, yet all are free within this structure to compete for a better position.

To be sure, as Rawls seems willing to grant, his starting position is not a *pure* instrumentalism. He makes the special assumption, for instance, that rational persons do not suffer from envy and hence are not willing to accept a system, such as a rigid egalitarian one, that gives them less of what they seek (such as wealth) than a Rawlsian system, simply in order to prevent others from having more of it.[18] I agree that envy as he describes it is not rational, but this assumption must be seen as a significant departure from a central feature of instrumentalism: its neutrality toward the ends we may have. The assumption rules out certain desires with significant political potential – including the not uncommon desire that certain others not have higher economic status than oneself – as incapable of supplying good reasons for action. Still, it is plausible to suppose that if he begs any questions here, they are not major, or are in any case not major questions we need pursue here.[19]

On the positive side, Rawls assumes (consistently with instrumentalism) that every rational person can be "presumed to want . . . rights and liberties, powers and opportunities, income and wealth."[20] This is not to say these things are intrinsically good. Intrinsic goodness is an inadmissible category for instrumentalism (and, on Rawls's neutralist understanding of it, perhaps for any basic standards of liberalism). But the assumption does give primary goods a functional equivalence to what is intrinsically good conceived as providing reasons for action; for what one (non-instrumentally) wants *is,* for instrumentalism, the basis of one's reasons for action.

It is left open to what *extent* each of these primary goods is wanted by rational persons, but they are nonetheless each assumed to be among the goals that partly determine what constitutes social justice. Now it is surely plausible to hold that from either a Humean instrumentalist point of view or the constrained instrumentalist point of view Rawls takes as a starting point, one would want the kind of freedom and equality that liberal democracy is committed to *if* one wants to co-

exist with others under a political system and cannot foresee what sort of position one would occupy. One would want freedom to pursue one's plans and enough political power to facilitate this. But, being unable to get more (basic) freedom and power than others have, and being unwilling to settle for less, one would want the kind of equality a liberal democracy guarantees.

It may be that we must qualify instrumentalism still further if Rawls's constrained instrumentalist case for his liberal framework is to succeed. I think, however, that his will remain a plausible approach and that it is striking for its rejection of any dependence on a specific conception of the good as a basis for framing a conception of social justice in a liberal democratic framework. There is a list of primary *goods,* but no conception of *the good,* and the primary goods are plural and capable of diverse interpretations and realizations. The refusal to presuppose a specific conception of the good (a position reiterated in Rawls's *Political Liberalism*) bears directly (as we shall see) on the principles the position implies for balancing religious and political considerations.

Kantianism

Given how strongly Kantian much of Rawls's position is, one might wonder why his approach to grounding core principles of liberal democracy should not be considered (as indeed it sometimes is) chiefly Kantian rather than taken to be the application of a constrained instrumentalism. In at least two important respects it is Kantian. First, we are to picture rational agents considering what principles they can endorse for all humanity, and we are to countenance only the principles of justice they select as universalizable in this way. Second, the principles that emerge fit well with an overall version of Kantian ethics, particularly in protecting the integrity and autonomy of persons by giving priority to the equal basic liberty principle. But (with the sorts of qualifications introduced above) these agents are to work from instrumentalist standards, whereas Kant was not an instrumentalist. Not only did he take good will to be an unconditional and presumably intrinsic good; his second main formulation of his central ethical principle, the categorical imperative, makes explicit use of the idea of persons as ends in themselves, in a sense implying that they have intrinsic value (worth) or, minimally, that something about their experiences or about conduct toward them (say, just conduct) does.[21] Certainly Rawls's version of ba-

sic principles of liberal democracy is meant to be of a kind that a Kantian would endorse; but Rawls apparently believes he is able to justify it from less controversial, morally neutral assumptions.

We should, then, consider what constitutes a Kantian approach to grounding liberal democracy, as opposed to a Kantian conception of the principles of justice that such a society – or any civilized society – should adopt. There is doubtless more than one approach one might call Kantian, but I think it is reasonable to take the most relevant part of Kant's position to be his comprehensive moral theory as expressed in his *Groundwork.* Indeed, his third main formulation of the categorical imperative – the kingdom of ends formulation, which says that a "rational being must always regard himself as making laws in a kingdom of ends"[22] – readily lends itself to application to the structure of society.

If, moreover, we also take as central Kant's intrinsic end formulation of the categorical imperative, which enjoins us always to "*treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end,*"[23] then we find a basis for both the equal (and maximal) basic liberty and the basic political equality that are essential in liberal democracy. Limiting the liberty of others and treating them unequally (at least where this represents less good treatment than others receive) are both instances of failure to treat them as ends, except where this differential treatment is required by considerations of liberty and other basic values, in which case liberal democracy allows it. Indeed, Kantians take it that, as beings with dignity, we have a right not to be treated in these ways, and by developing this idea one may frame a *rights-based liberal theory,* on which citizens have rights against government, and against one another, that require preservation of both liberty and basic political equality.[24]

It must be granted that much work of interpretation is needed before one can find in Kantian ethics a detailed working out of a justification for liberal democracy. But, taken together, Kant's repeated emphasis on our autonomy, his insistence on treating ourselves no better than others (something that cannot be rationally universalized by Kantian lights), and his constant emphasis on the dignity of persons make it plausible to hold that only a liberal democracy can satisfy his ethical principles in the sociopolitical sphere.

From the point of view of using Kantian ethical theory to ground liberal democracy, it is risky to hold the theory to the rigors of some of Kant's examples, for instance to the apparently absolute prohibition of

suicide and promise-breaking.[25] It is noteworthy, however, that where Kant does best in connecting his examples with his categorical imperative, he argues for a (prima facie) duty of beneficence of a kind that would conduce to citizenship in the context of interdependence that characterizes working democracies. It is clear that in addition to the negative moral requirements of non-interference and non-injury, his framework is meant to imply positive duties of cooperation of a kind essential in a well-functioning democracy. These duties require sharing not only policy decisions but the burdens of conducting communal life.

Virtue Ethics

Contemporary political philosophy is quite properly concerned with democratic government in huge and populous nations that must be ruled by an elaborate network of laws and social policies. This concern with rules and policies may make it easy to overlook a virtue-theoretic account of the basic standards underlying liberal democracy. But in principle one can frame such an account for a society of any scope, and the work of Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, and, particularly in the past two decades, Alasdair MacIntyre has made virtue ethics an attractive option for many writers in ethics and political philosophy.[26] Plato and Aristotle, of course, were concerned with the virtues of statecraft and, more broadly, of citizenship; and their accounts of the just state can be adapted to apply to the present age. Let me briefly sketch how this might be done from a standpoint that draws selectively on Plato but also takes account of later developments in virtue ethics.

There is probably no richer paradigm of a virtue-theoretic approach to the theory of government than Plato's *Republic.* I believe that the *kind* of account he gives (a virtue-theoretic account in which the just state is appropriately parallel in governmental structure to the just individual) can be developed so that it leads to a liberal democracy rather than the oligarchy he favored. The ideal state is described as "wise, brave, temperate, and just" (Book 4, 427), and the "quality which makes it possible for the three . . . wisdom, courage, and temperance, to take their place in the commonwealth . . . would be justice" (Book 4, 433). Moreover, individual virtue is in a sense prior to virtue in the state: we are to understand justice at the level of the state in terms of justice in the individual. In general, "so far as the quality of justice is concerned, there will be no difference between a just man and a just society" (Book

4, 434), and "the same elements and characters that appear in the state must exist in every one of us; where else could they have come from? . . . states have . . . derived that character from their individual members" (Book 4, 435).[27] Proper civil government turns out to be virtuous self-government writ large.

A virtue-ethical grounding of a theory of government is also present in Aristotle, though his position is perhaps more complex than Plato's. In Aristotle's view that "the good is the same for a city as for an individual,"[28] however, he is in agreement with Plato. Virtue concepts remain basic for political theory as well as for individual conduct.

It is important to see that a virtue-theoretic approach to the foundations of the state can go a great distance toward liberal democracy. The broadest idea that makes this clear may be the conception of human nature as social and of good government as an exercise of civic virtue, conceived as the cluster of elements of character that conduce to a communal life in which people can achieve excellence. This ideal of good government can be plausibly argued to be best fulfilled in a liberal-democratic state (presumably republican in form). For such a state seems best fitted to encourage individual virtue in the sociopolitical realm; without freedom and political equality, citizens cannot exercise certain virtues at all and are severely limited in contributing to their common governance. Obedience will tend to overshadow autonomy.

The case I am outlining may be applicable even to much of the Platonic theory of the just state. One crucial element in civil government as Plato saw it can enable a theory like his to be used to undergird democracy as well as his own preferred form of government. He tells us that "real guardians" aim at "moulding our commonwealth with a view to the greatest happiness, not of one section of it, but of the whole" (Book 5, 465). Given the plurality and fluidity of the notion of happiness, this vision is adaptable to structuring the just state in a variety of ways, including some that yield a liberal democracy.

It has been widely argued that our concept of a virtue of character is dependent on prior notions of goodness, or of human flourishing, or of morally right action. For instance, many have thought that we can determine what constitutes good character only if we know what sorts of deeds people of good character tend to do.[29] There is no need to take a position on this matter here. The central point for our purposes is simply that the virtue-theoretic approach to establishing foundations for liberal democracy is historically significant and prima facie distinctive.

Suppose, however, that it is not independent of other kinds of normative theory. It might then be combined with one of the other ethical theories considered here, and I am confident that a consistent integration can be achieved in which the resulting view supports liberal democracy at least as well as either virtue ethics alone or the ethical theory on which it draws. Even apart from this, the notion of virtue is important in ethics and political philosophy (this will be especially apparent in Chapters 3 and 6). If a plausible notion of virtue in statecraft can even partially ground liberal democracy, that is significant.

Communitarianism

It should be plain that all the approaches to justifying liberal democracy so far considered accord a significant place to the social side of our nature. Utilitarians maintain that to maximize the good we must not only cooperate with others but also respect their rights, even when we have no ongoing relationship with them. Instrumentalists tend to hold a similar view concerning desire satisfaction: concentrate exclusively on your own and you will tend to get little of it. Kantians see us as properly aiming at coexistence in a kingdom of ends, and they insist, as do virtue theorists, on honesty with others and, within certain limits, beneficence toward them. It is not unnatural to go further and to maintain that human good itself is realizable only in a community. We might then see some form of liberal democracy as best constructed to foster human development, though if it is to be communitarian it must overcome the fragmentation that is a danger of excessive individualism.[30]

This communitarian conception of human flourishing may or may not be combined with the strong view that our very identity is social: that individuals are partly but essentially defined by their relations to others.[31] Whatever our biological independence of others, we are parents and children, teachers and students, buyers and sellers, and so forth. In what sense would the biological agent abstractable from all such relations in which I stand be me? And how can my life go well if those I care about suffer, and the institutions I believe in wither? If there is a sense in which I am not socially constituted, it is too thin to imply that my good is not in large part socially constituted.

Plato's *Republic* is a valuable source for communitarian ideas, as it is for virtue theory. In a vivid portrayal of an organic conception of the state, Socrates warns against disunity: