

Identity, Relativism, and the Liberal State

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Strange to say, there is health in hostility. For centuries the relations between European Christendom and Islam, vilifying in word and violent in deed, nevertheless displayed a respect for one another, trading in diverse material products, and engaged in a prolonged and most fruitful mutual intellectual and artistic collaboration and influence; all of which, when viewed from the thoroughly revised circumstances of modernity, can only seem enviably robust and healthy. For those many hundred years prior to the consolidation of Western colonial rule, both cultures were feudal and pastoral, and, despite local differences in religious doctrine, which was in large part the avowed ground of the antagonism, there were *shared* intellectual premises that governed these differences. In fact, paradoxically, it is really the shared element which was the indirect source of the hostility. The more ancient religions of the East, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, were not only more removed in space, but were intellectually too remote to be palpably threatening to Christianity, in the way that Islam, with its many shared assumptions, was. The Crusades were thus fought less in the cause of recovering the Cross for Palestine from some *altogether foreign* emergence, but more to eradicate the heresy represented by the Muslims in Arabian lands.

Napoleon's invasion of Egypt and the British conquest of India, however, gradually gave rise to an era defined by a quite different tone of relations. Hostility was of course still there on both sides, but it was not the key to future relations. It was the new tenor of colonial domination that mastery required attitudes of condescension, and were felt to be so by the subject people, breeding not so much a robust sense of hostility, but one of alienation and resentment. This new psychology that accompanied colonial relations was of course undergirded by an altering of the material relations which had held for centuries. The growing mercantile and industrial forces of the most powerful Christian lands were, as we know, steadily destroying the pastoral societies in their own terrain, but their effect on the lands and economies of their colonial subjects was altogether different. What feudal structures it destroyed to recreate new and vibrant economies in its own midst, it left well alone in these other lands, taking only that which was necessary for its mercantile and industrial requirements. By transforming its own political economy while extracting surpluses but leaving structurally unchanged its conquered lands, European colonialism thereby laid the foundation for an abiding material differential, which would continue until today to be the underlying source of the ideological rhetoric of superior progress, not only material but also civilizational. The health of hostility by more or less equal foes had by these material agencies now deteriorated to the alienating effects of condescension and defensive resentment among increasingly unequal ones.

Decolonization, though it once seemed an achievement, did not do much to change these relations, since it was followed by political domination and manipulation by the superpowers as well as substantial economic control of one salient commodity by foreign companies and the elites of client states such as Saudi and Kuwait.

More interestingly, since decolonization, the same set of problems began to be transplanted.

Islam's theological vision had always presented itself as a *world* religion. And the Ottoman empire had set out with considerable success to give that theological vision substantial practical instance for a very long period. But after World War II, Islam began to be a world religion in a quite different sense, one which made a vital difference to the life and politics of European nations. In the long

aftermath of the war, many of these nations were reconstructing economies devastated by it. Initially the rebuilding of the industrial base and the service sector was able to absorb the population, but as the base grew and services needed fuller replenishment, there was a seriously growing labor shortage in these countries, most especially in the more menial services to which local populations turned last or not at all. It was during this period, the 1950s and 60s, that Britain, France, and Germany threw open their doors to immigration in order to cope with this shortage, and naturally the largest numbers of immigrants for the jobs that most needed filling were from the ex-colonies or, in the case of Germany, from Turkey, where economic conditions did not always absorb their own local populations into fruitful employment. Very large sections of these immigrants were Muslims and by the 1970s, this immigration was quite substantial. And since the immigration to a large extent consisted of illiterate and semiliterate populations from the countryside of these ex-colonies seeking to be absorbed elsewhere than the glutted metropolises in their own countries, and since they were finding employment in the least desirable jobs in the European nations, it became apparent that even after almost total decolonization, something rather similar to colonial relations between the same peoples was being replicated, only now *inside* of European nations, and not by conquest but by immigration. The psychology of these relations became entrenched when, once the labor shortages eased, local populations often resisted allowing the full and equal assimilation of migrant workers. So to many immigrants it seemed as if history had brought no progress: the colonized remained colonized, their masters too remained masters, it is just that the latter were now the natives and the former the outsiders.

I have rehearsed these familiar historical points to bring out why Islam seems a renewed source of dignity and autonomy not only in Muslim nations but also for Muslim populations in Europe, where their marginalization and failure to be assimilated have reinforced those feelings of vulnerability. Identities are formed most strongly when the source of identity promises dignity and self-respect in the face of such a long and continuing sense of defeat, and the present rise of absolutist elements of Islam in Europe as well as of course in the Middle East and elsewhere is to a very large extent explained by this.

Let us explore this very theme within one specific context: the long and continuing aftermath of the publication of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*.¹ All those who have witnessed the episode and written about it have testified to how it mobilized toward Muslim identity not just in Britain but elsewhere in Europe. Let us put aside the *fatwa*, which was preposterous even by the tenets of Islamic Law, which gives no sanction for passing a death sentence on a denizen of Darul-harb or non-Muslim land. Terrifying as it must have been and must be for the author, it is a red herring as far as the deeper issues are concerned. It is enough to consider the more domestic and domesticated European phenomenon of Muslims in Britain and elsewhere in Europe in very large numbers demanding that the book be banned.

What issue does this raise? Of course it raises the issue of the first freedom, the right to speech and writing. But the complicating factor is that it does so in the context of liberal states in nations where there are vast immigrant populations demanding that a liberal principle of free speech be put aside. What Rushdie unintentionally succeeded in doing was to galvanize large numbers of Muslims, who for two decades at least had sought, unsuccessfully, to integrate themselves into British society, to start saying that it is precisely integration that they did *not* now want. They began to demand that the Muslims in Britain be allowed to live under their *own* laws, and deal with blasphemy as *their* laws see fit. In fact, interestingly, they were demanding a revival in reverse of the legal policies of the Ottoman state, under what was called the *millet* system, where, for example, communities of Greek and Russian Orthodoxy were allowed to live under their own system of laws by their Muslim rulers. European nations, as militant British Muslims now envisioned it, could continue to be governed by

liberal states, but they demanded that there be a special twist to the liberal states' own idea of minority rights, whereby such rights should now precisely permit Muslim minorities to live by their own *sharia* or legal code on a range of issues of importance to them. Islamic identity in Europe therefore raises a familiar basic paradox at the heart of the European liberal ideal. It is this. The liberal ideal of minority rights can grant status to minorities (say, immigrant Muslims) in forms that are susceptible to minorities demanding the right to various laws and practices and customs to live by which can, as it turns out, amount to illiberalism in various respects, ranging from the banning of books to practices reflecting gender injustice in the details of marriage, divorce, alimony, and inheritance.

Now one may think that allowing such illiberal outcomes within liberal doctrine is a harmless paradox, easily resolved even if one granted such a right to Muslims, because if it led, say, to gender injustice for Muslim women in one or other respect, then all one needed to do was to grant to Muslim women who were affected by a particular circumstance of injustice *the right to exit* from their communities and its personal law. The paradox thus would be resolved by a certain nesting of rights, that is, by supplementing minority rights that grant autonomous laws to communities with a further embedded right, the right to exit to individuals within those communities whenever they felt the illiberalism and the injustice of those laws. This is a most inadequate response. The fact is that such a solution — the right to exit — is academic and nominal. The idea that a traditional Muslim woman may just up and exit her community if confronted with an unjust law is absurdly unrealistic, since traditional women have wellknown material and other sources of inhibition that tie them to family and community. It is utterly unrealistic for women in the first generation of immigration, and not obviously realistic for second-generation women either.

Failing this facile solution, there seems to be no easy way for the liberal states of Europe to accommodate this particular formulation of the idea of minority rights that surfaced so strongly in the aftermath of the Rushdie crisis. Even so, all sorts of theorists, not just philosophers, have argued that liberal theory and practice must now transform itself to accommodate this new phenomenon. Much of this discussion has gone on in a more general vein under the label of "communitarianism" and a number of political theorists have made an extensive critique of standard liberal theory from a position bearing that name. I will focus on one particular argument raised by the anthropologist Talal Asad because it focuses on the particular context of the liberal reaction to Rushdie's book. However, what Asad has to say echoes in much detail what is often said in general by communitarians and much of what I have to say in response will obviously be relevant to that general position.

In his conceptual and historical study of Europe's experience of Christianity and Islam, called *Genealogies of Religion*,² Asad closes by speaking directly to the effects of the Rushdie crisis on European liberalism, arguing that Britain and other liberal states in Europe have congratulated themselves on making many superficial concessions to Islamic dress, cuisine, and even school curricula in the name of "multiculturalism," but as soon as their religious tradition began to get *politicized* in the wake of the Rushdie crisis, the liberal state cracked down on the grounds that this was now transgressive of British liberal and secular identity. Asad questions this as an unfair exercise of *state* power in the name of *liberalism* which will not give to immigrants more than a nominal concession to their ways of life and thought. It is important, as we shall see, to understand this as criticism of both liberal doctrine and the liberal *state*, which these critics of the Enlightenment see as highly integrated.

I have now, in very broad stroke, set up the hard issue — I should say "a" hard issue — of identity in the context of an integrated conceptual framework spanning (liberal) politics and (colonial) history and (immigrant) culture. What might a philosopher contribute to this issue? One thing a liberal theorist might do is to accept Asad's advice and fashion a liberal doctrine that embraces his conception of minority rights. Something like that is indeed the communitarian's response. This seems to me and

others to offer up a liberalism that is so concessive to the communitarian tendency exemplified in Asad's work that it is hardly recognizable as continuous with the original doctrine. So I want to give a methodological diagnosis of how we have come to this pass, and explore how, if at all, we may cross it.

We can begin by noticing that Asad's argument fails to notice a gap in its own steps. It is a gap that allows two separate questions to be compatibly raised together, but which in fact Asad does not raise because he fails to notice the gap. The first question which arises for any European liberal in the context of our present discussion is how to defend his or her liberal commitments, whether to free speech or gender justice: in other words, how to refuse the argument from minority rights which demands diverse communitarian legal codes that may clash with liberal principles. And the second question is, how to refuse this while at the same time assuring these Muslim voices that liberal principles are not nonnegotiable givens of the Enlightenment tradition, which they must either accept or leave. I think that there are theoretical resources and practical efforts possible by which both these tasks can be attempted. The first question is about how a liberal can retain the substance of her liberal position. The second question is about how such a substantive liberalism can be established without being subject to Asad's charge against the liberal state that it has failed to respect the fact that the Muslims have their own point of view which may not on matters of substance (particular legal issues) conform to the substance of liberal laws. But why should one assume that one could not defend one's own commitment to substantive liberal principles (such as, say, free speech or gender justice) and repudiate Muslim hostility to these things in particular European contexts, without respecting the Muslim point of view? This question does not even so much as occur to Asad and to some others who take his sort of position.

To respect someone else's point of view is not necessarily and always to capitulate to *all* their particular substantive commitments. One can still be respecting another's point of view if we try and get them to capitulate to *one's* commitments by appealing to some of *their* own commitments. I will, following Bernard Williams, call this *internal* argument or internal reasoning.³ It is perfectly possible for a liberal state to adopt such an attitude toward antiliberal elements in a community within its purview. Now, I do not doubt that Asad is right when he says that European states, including Britain, may have failed to respect the point of view of its Muslim immigrants in the aftermath of the publication of Rushdie's book. The gap in his own argument that escapes Asad's notice is that the fact that liberal states in Europe may have actually failed to respect the Muslim point of view in answering the first question (i.e., in trying to retain one's substantive liberal position against Muslim opposition) does not amount to saying that it is *built into* the nature of anyone wanting to retain such a substantive liberal position that they *cannot but* fail to respect the Muslim point of view. Only an impoverished conception of the philosophical options would lead one to think so.

A first stab at doing better than Asad might be to say this. The liberal state in Europe must retain its laws and principles via a negotiation with its Muslim communities. In order to do this it must provide arguments for its principles which have appeal even to Muslims, arguments, that is, which are internal to Muslim values and commitments, rather than external arguments which simply appeal to the grand liberal tradition of the Enlightenment into which the immigrant Muslims have landed, and so which they must now accept.

The word *negotiation* here is fraught with the possibility of misunderstanding and it will become clear at the very end of this paper that I do not necessarily have in mind anything like entering into some sort of canonical across-the-table discussion with a view to providing such internal arguments. Communities do not usually have a structure of representation such that its "representatives" could enter into such dialogues and "negotiations," in some *strict* sense of that term. And besides, as I will

argue, those among Muslims who take the line that Muslims should be governed by the *sharia* are not in any case, even loosely speaking, the most representative of the community at large. The idea of a "negotiated" secular liberalism in the context of these clashes is, rather, the much broader idea of how the state can get the Muslims to autonomously see from some aspects of their own value commitments the point of not insisting on the illiberal aspects of their own legal codes. How exactly that autonomous perception on the part of Muslims is brought about by the state is a matter worth discussing in far greater detail than I will be able to do here, though I will say something about it at the very end. And I believe it is a matter that is unusually neglected in political theory. But the point for now is that it does not have to be achieved by negotiation in the strict sense in order to be a negotiated liberalism in this broad sense of the term. In any case, a liberal secularism so arrived at could not possibly be subject to Asad's criticism that liberal states simply impose secular liberalism on communities on the grounds either that that is how we live here (Margaret Thatcher) or that it is the more demonstrably and objectively true doctrine.

Attempts at a sort of archimedean philosophical demonstration of the truth of liberal principles are familiar in the classical liberal tradition from Mill⁴ to Rawls⁵ and after. In this paper, I shall assume what I have tried to argue elsewhere,⁶ that these demonstrations have a philosophical fault line which makes them quite incapable of coping with a philosophically rigorously defined notion of identity. But these difficulties with classical liberalism need not lead to Asad's communitarian version of minority rights. The constant conceptual oscillation between the postures of the British liberal state and Asad's position, consolidated theoretically in the oscillation between classical liberalism and communitarianism, is as intolerable as it is uncompulsory. Philosophy should have rich enough resources in this region to help us halt this pendulum swing.

Let me begin with a simple diagnosis and complicate it in stages. The simple thought is that the resources needed here may need to be only as rich as those needed to repudiate a certain recognizable version of cultural relativism. For, it is a concealed and confused commitment to something like relativistic assumptions which gives Asad the impression that if there are no archimedean or external arguments that will show the Muslim denial of free speech to be wrong, then a nonoppressive liberalism should allow Muslims to live by their own laws. And Asad's impression is recoverable, I am saying, as an echo of a philosophical one, i.e., if, following Williams, we say that there is no external argument that will ever show one party in a moral or evaluative disagreement to be wrong, this gives philosophers (the "classical liberals," as I have labeled them) the impression that in some sense relativism would have to be true. That impression is wrong. If relativism is true, then two inconsistent-seeming value judgments would not be inconsistent because they could be seen as judged relative to certain points of view. Nothing I say in this paper commits me to denying that, of two contradictory value judgments, only one can be true. But I will insist that to say only one can be true, to say there is a fact of the matter as to which is true, is of no help in the matter of reasons and reasoning since we still have to give reasons to those with whom we are in conflict. To that extent, issues about truth and issues about reasoning are separable issues whether in morals or in science. I will say a word more about this later, but for now, putting abstract points about truth aside as not directly relevant, a question might arise in someone's mind as to what the philosophical equivalent of relativism would be for reasoning rather than truth. I am not sure that I can quite make sense of this question, but let me pretend for a moment that I do. I would still answer it by saying that Williams's claim that internal reasoning is all we have is not sufficient to erect what would be philosophically equivalent to relativism in the matter of reasoning. What more is needed to erect it?

At least this: relativism would hold of reasons not merely because internal reasoning and argument is the only reasoning there is, but because of that plus the further claim that internal argument is impossible. I say "impossible" and mean it. It will not be enough to point to cases of disagreement

in which internal argument is difficult at a given time. Relativism is, after all, a philosophical position, not a vague pointer to how conflict sometimes can prove to be a very hard problem for politics and morals. It would be foolish for any philosopher to deny that the moral and political life throws up hard cases of disagreement. But it would be equally foolish of her to assume that such difficulty generates a conceptual position in which we have to say that moral values are relative to points of view in a way that reasoning is inapplicable. This latter claim defines relativism as a philosophical position. And such a position is only generated if it is demonstrable that it is impossible not merely difficult, and difficult at the moment, to provide internal arguments. It is a recognizable mistake of a common sort in the writings of some anthropologists to fail to see this point. Their sentimental reification of difference is precisely this recognizable mistake. What I am claiming, then, is that relativism is a threat to liberalism *only* to the extent that *internal* argument over values with another (say, with immigrant Muslims) is *impossible*. But why should we think that to be so?

Let us take the problem first as a general one in philosophy and ask: What in general would have to be the case such that one would be forced to say that internal argument with someone with whom one disagrees about some values is impossible?

To answer this question, let me set up just a bit of apparatus. Let us terminologically stipulate for the moment that a person's or group's values are a subset of her desires. (This is a harmless, analytic philosopher's way of talking — thus one can desire that one work for social justice as much as one can desire that one drinks a glass of water.) Our question, then, is about the scope of rationality, of the possibility of giving reasons, in the realm of desires. In a person's or group's psychological economy there are both desires and beliefs. The relations between beliefs have been widely studied in philosophy and we are fully aware of the codified forms in which these relations constitute various forms of rationality (deductive rationality, inductive rationality...). The relations between desires and beliefs have also been widely studied in philosophy, initially in Aristotle's practical syllogism, and then in subsequent recent refinements of Aristotle in decision theory and surrounding disciplines. What is much less studied is the relations between desires themselves. Part of this neglect is due to the fact that both of two highly influential opposing positions which have dominated the study of rationality (Kantian and Humean positions) have been skeptical that any rationality can attach to relations between desires. Holding beliefs steady for the moment, let us ask all the same: are there relations between desires themselves which are of interest to those interested in reason-giving and rationality?

First of all, there could be consistency and inconsistency among desires. This is hardly controversial, and even Humeans and Kantians could hardly deny it. But if that was all that rationality between desires amounted to, that would not be interesting or particularly useful for our purposes. After all, consistency among desires merely requires that they be mutually implementable. Two desires may be consistent with one another in this sense and have nothing to do with one another in a psychological economy. My desire for tea happens to have nothing to do with my desire to do philosophy, and they are both mutually implementable. But it is surely arguable that there may be a richer relation between desires that might lead to a richer notion of rationality regarding desires than that they be consistent rather than inconsistent. Take the following pair of desires: my desire to do philosophy and my desire to be respected by my intellectual peers. These are (in my case) related by more than mere consistency, they are more than merely mutually implementable. We can label this further relation as "reinforcement." These two desires reinforce each other. However, though reinforcement is in this way more than mere consistency, it ought not to be confused with another relation between desires, which is the means/end or instrumental relation. Reinforcement is not a means/end relation because if I were asked whether I pursue my desire to do philosophy *in order to* fulfill my desire to be respected by my peers my answer might well be "no."

I am spending some time on this point because it is an important one to make against those who think that any serious and intrinsic conception of rationality is not applicable to such things as desires, but is restricted only to beliefs. As I said, despite their well-known antagonism, both Humean and Kantian traditions of thinking about human behavior and moral psychology (for very different reasons) share such a skeptical attitude about allowing desires to be the subject of a rich notion of rationality. And since so much of current thinking about this subject sees itself as broadly influenced by one or other of these two opposing traditions, this skeptical attitude is very widespread. According to this widespread picture, desires may be subject to an instrumental rationality but they do not possess any *intrinsic* rationality except for the very thin notion of consistency among desires (which, as I said earlier, amounts only to their mutual implementability). The notion of reinforcement, by contrast, brings with it a thicker conception of rationality and allows us to think of desires (and not just beliefs) in terms of a coherentist conception of rationality, where coherence is something stronger than consistency. That is why the idea of reinforcement allows us to get beyond the narrowing Kantian idea that our moral rationality cannot traffic in anything so contingent and nonuniversal as desires, at the same time as it surpasses the equally narrowing Humean idea that the only rationality to which motivating states (what he called the "passions") are subject is instrumental.

The crucial bit of apparatus that needs to be added to these simple points is this. If there can be reinforcement among desires, there can also be the lack of it. The opposite of the relation of reinforcement between desires is, let us call it, the relation of "infirmity" between them. Infirmity stands to reinforcement as inconsistency stands to consistency. Just as desires may be inconsistent with other desires, so they may be infirmed by their relations with other desires. And thus we may find a person irrational not only if one finds his desires inconsistent but also, more interestingly, if one finds some of them infirm.

Now, with all this in place, we can return to our question: What would have to be the case for us to be forced to say that internal argument with another is impossible? Or, in particular, that internal argument with Muslims in Europe is impossible? Internal argument, remember, is the idea that we can give reasons to another from within his own point of view for adopting a value (free speech, say) which he presently shuns but which we embrace. For such internal argument to happen, there would obviously have to be some conflict within the other's evaluative economy. That is to say, for this to happen some of the desires in his evaluative economy will have to stand in *infirmiting* relations to his commitment to shun free speech. If that were so, we could appeal to those desires to construct an argument to persuade him to come around to embracing free speech. We can now answer our question as follows. Internal argument would be *impossible* only if we thought that Muslims' psychological economy (which contains the desire to ban certain sorts of publications) is totally and perpetually without conflict. And with our apparatus in place, we now know that the notion of conflict is not only to be characterized as simple inconsistency within values (which may be harder to find) but infirmity as well, which is very much more likely to be found in most groups and individuals. So to the extent that we think that Muslims, like any community, are not monsters of consistency *and coherence*, so long as we do not think of them as some sort of rational automata, to that extent there is always scope for internal conflict within them which leaves scope for liberals to engage in internal argument with them. To the extent that this is possible, relativism is held at bay. Relativism is only plausible under the very unlikely scenario that two individuals (or groups) who are in disagreement both have psychological economies which are made up of perfectly consistent and *maximally* "reinforced" desires. Anyone who has followed what I meant by "reinforcement" would have gotten the point that it is unlikely in the extreme that creatures, such as human beings anyway, possess desires that are maximally reinforced in some perfect equilibrium.

As I threatened, the picture is more complicated than this simple one. I have said that Asad rightly criticizes European liberal states for appealing only to the values and arguments of their Enlightenment tradition, which they take to be established by philosophical argument. But I am resisting any effort to conclude from these criticisms, as he does, that these states should capitulate to the demands of Muslim minorities on the matter of free speech or gender justice by granting them minority rights to live by their own laws on questions such as blasphemy, etc. Why does Asad not see that it is resistible? I have just discussed the ersatz and hidden relativism in the thinking which makes him blind to the possibility of resisting it. But there is another closely related blind spot, which Asad and others like him simply inherit from a recent critique of Enlightenment thinking. This is a deep, almost a *priori* hostility to the modern state as a coercive institution. What is the close relation between these two blind spots? One way of bringing it out is to invoke certain ideas of Foucault.⁷ Foucault's notion of "governmentality," for instance, is introduced by him centrally to make a critique of a certain conception of sovereignty revolving around the modern state. It is well known that for Foucault, the state assumes a position of authority and power issuing from an archimedean Enlightenment conception of Reason, i.e., of what is rational and universal in politics. And so the Foucauldian advice to communities would generally be to resist entering the discursive space of reasons where the technologies of governmentality operate. As one recent Foucauldian has memorably put it: "The only way [for a community] to resist submitting to the powers of sovereignty is to literally declare itself *unreasonable*."⁸ The picture here is quite simply that if the archimedean arguments for liberal principles are unconvincing to those holding communitarian commitments (say, Muslims in European nations), then there are *no* arguments possible and so, from the point of view of communities, the state must *necessarily* — not as a matter of fact in contemporary Britain and Europe — but necessarily become something coercive because it is *incommensurate*. That is the deep connection between the relativism and the antistatism of Foucault's thinking, and it is precisely what surfaces in Asad's communitarian response to the issues we have been discussing.

But notice a curious thing. There is a crucial assumption that is *shared* here by the bitterest of dialectical foes — the liberal of the classical tradition and his Foucauldian critic. Because of their dialectical opposition, the shared assumption will get expressed differently by each of them, each with different rhetoric putting the blame on the other. But that should not hide the fact that the deeper common assumption exists. From the point of view of the classical liberal, the assumption is expressed as: "If there were no external and universal and archimedean points of reasoning which justify Liberal principles (which we believe there are), then nothing will justify a secular liberalism, and we can expect nothing but communitarian mayhem." From the point of view of the critic of the Enlightenment, the same assumption gets expressed as: "If there are no archimedean points of reasoning which will justify secular liberal principles (which we believe there are not), the Liberal state is founded on a false ideal and revealed to be the coercive institution it really is." The common assumption is clear and evident. Both sides, despite their bitter opposition to one another, believe in common that it is "External Reasons or Bust!" No doubt, descriptions like "communitarian mayhem" and "coercive Liberal state" will be found by their respective targets to be tendentious. And no doubt these hostile descriptions reflect genuine disagreement with one another on important issues in politics and the philosophy that underlies it. But none of that cancels the fact that this disagreement is the disagreement it is only because there is agreement on a philosophical issue which could in the end matter a great deal more to the politics of state and its relation to community than the disagreement itself. For a quite new and liberating politics in this domain could be generated by questioning that common assumption since to question it would be to question an entrenched disjunction between state and community. It is this common assumption that makes for the endless oscillation between classical liberalism and communitarianism that I am seeking to halt. And it would seem that there is no way to halt it but to question the shared assumption. That is what I have been trying to do in trying to show that it is possible for the *state* to engage in *internal* reasoning with communities. (I emphasize both

"state" and the "internal" here deliberately and will return to the significance of this in a moment.) A state which did so would not fall prey to the charge of governmentality as Foucault deploys it. And if it succeeded in this internal reasoning, it need make no concessions to any substantive communitarianism of the sort that goes deeply against liberal principles (such as free speech, for instance, or gender justice).

Internal reasoning, I have said, is always possible so long as disagreement is not between maximally "reinforced" systems of value. And systems of values to which human agents are likely to subscribe are most likely not to be such. Their desires and values are often in internal conflict, and certainly they are permanently in *potential* internal conflict since agents and communities live in an environment that is changing, and such changes will often inject conflict into their values. This is just what Hegel called History and the dialectic it engenders. If we keep firmly in mind the cautionary anti-Whiggish point that there is nothing historically inevitable about liberalism or any other consummation, one very useful way of reading Hegel's primary insight here is precisely to see History as the movement and sway of internal reasoning in society, with the State as the moral agent which is the seat and source of such reasoning. What Foucault fails to see, despite some extraordinarily acute specific historical diagnoses of various social institutions, is that the success of these historical analyses yield him his heated relativist conclusions in political philosophy only because he is deaf to this Hegelian insight about History.

There is a further point of nuance that needs to be added at this stage of the argument. It is an implication of antistatist communitarian conclusions which are drawn by Asad and others influenced by Foucault, that something like free speech cannot be insisted upon by the British government in the aftermath of the Rushdie crisis. So if Muslims came to accept free speech they should do it by reforming internally among themselves and it is not something that should issue from the state. But the use of the word "internally" in the last sentence is not what I have in mind by "internal" in internal reasons and internal argument. To say that communities must change their conceptions only internally is a communitarian conclusion. To say what I have been saying, viz, that *the state* can give internal reasons to a community to change, is not a communitarian conclusion because it insists on the agency of the state in coming to liberal conclusions; it just says that the state should reason with the communities along *internalist* lines. This is a more nuanced distinction than we have made so far but it is essential to the point I want to make about the possibilities for a substantive liberalism, which is not communitarian. The communitarian sees "internal" liberalization and reform as meaning reform coming from within the agencies of the community. The liberal picture that I am offering as an alternative to both archimedean liberalism and communitarianism has as central to it the idea that liberal reform takes place on a statist site but it does so via internal reasoning with the community. To put it paradoxically, on my liberal picture *internal* reform of a community happens not necessarily *within* a community on intracommunity sites alone, but also can and should happen on a *statist* site. (An aside: Not that I think that it is a bad thing if it happens within the community alone by internal change. I am only disputing that it must happen that way and must not happen by the agencies of the state. In other words, I am disputing the neurotic antistatism of the critique of the Enlightenment which goes from observation of particular wrongs of particular states of the modern period to erecting antistatism into a *philosophical* doctrine issuing from its critique of an Enlightenment conception of Reason working itself out in politics. For me the wrongs done by the modern state lead to the instruction: Let us struggle to improve the state! For the Foucauldian critique of the Enlightenment, that instruction is necessarily bogus.) To see things this way is to see the liberal state as being able to provide a field of force of internal reasons addressing different communitarian perspectives from within their own internal substantive commitments and unsettling them into awareness of their own internal inconsistencies so as to eventually provide for a common secular outcome, each on different internal grounds.

Such a theoretical view of the liberal state is of course dramatically different from the way in which the liberal state appears in Rawls and Mill. That much is perhaps obvious. But it is not merely different from the classical tradition, it is also measurably different from the face-saving retreat of recent political theorists such as Steven Lukes, who in the face of communitarian attack take all the content out of liberalism in order to save some of its universalism. Thus for instance, pointing out that even the communitarians talk in the idiom of rights when they demand rights for minorities, they find in this idiom a universalist discourse that is essentially liberal, even if not the full prestige of secular liberalism. It is liberal in the sense that it is minimally neutral between the different contested claims of ethnic and communal identity.

But why should we allow the difficulties raised by identity to cause us to abandon full secular outcomes for such manifestly skimpy universals in liberal politics? To see the state as a possible field of force for internal reasons is precisely not to adopt the strategy of retreating to thinner and thinner neutral ground that all communities and particular identities must minimally share. It is, rather, precisely not to rest with a base of *neutral* common agreement which is likely to be necessarily thin gruel in a multicomunal society, and instead for the state to seek for the thicker brew of a fully secular outcome via a signing up of communities to such a thick secular-liberal agenda for different, and therefore nonneutral, reasons given by the state from within the communities' own very different substantive value economies. To put it in terms I have set up here, the power of the strategy of internal reasons is to get to a thick secular-liberal ideal by looking for different "infirmities" in the different communities' antiliberal commitments, and thereby internally transforming their commitments to more liberal ones. It is worth repeating here that the very fact that it can be for *different* reasons (coming from within different communitarian perspectives) that various communities may agree on a common secular outcome is proof that the grounds for secular liberalism need *not* be neutral.

I would add here that this idea, which is one way to read Rawls's later idea of an overlapping consensus — as I have argued elsewhere, Rawls himself is much too unclear about what he has in mind by this idea — has within it the ingredients to characterize an ideal of pluralism that makes no concession whatsoever to the highly influential but theoretically incoherent remarks one finds about pluralism in the much-admired writings of Isaiah Berlin.⁹ Berlin speaks of pluralism as a philosophical doctrine about value which respects value-conflict to the extent that it theoretically allows for contradictory evaluative judgments among different groups to be unthreatening to the very idea of value judgment. But in this he is simply wrong. Values are no different from cognitive states, even scientific beliefs, in this respect, and no one should deny the idea that of two imperatives (all things considered imperatives, of course) which are inconsistent, only one can be true. So pluralistic tolerance should not make reckless theoretical concessions. What pluralism nevertheless could define itself as is the ideal (not perhaps always achievable, but in that it is like all ideals) that when a state embraces a doctrine or point of view, its tolerance consists not in admitting that there may be conflicting true doctrines, but rather in promoting what it takes to be the true doctrine as something that recalcitrant groups must be brought around to embracing by providing reasons from within *their* values. Such a sane notion of pluralism should be brought to center-stage in any liberal ideal coping with the sort of identities we are discussing.

Before I bring this very abstractly made claim to an end, let me return to what I started this paper with and say something a little more concrete about the case of Muslims.

Here is a plain empirical fact. Everywhere in the world, whether in Bradford or Kreuzberg, or even in Tehran, the majority of Muslims are either against the fundamentalist or absolutist elements in their society or too busy with their occupations or preoccupations to be anything more than indifferent to them. It is only a shrill minority in any Muslim community anywhere that has absolutist Islamist com-

mitments. Yet it is this minority which seems to everyone to be the representative voice of the community. The failure of the liberal state therefore has been its inability to establish to the community itself that this shrill minority is precisely that, a *minority*, an *unrepresentative* voice in the community, most of whose members are either against or indifferent to Islamic fundamentalism. In a word, the failure of the liberal state in Europe has been *its failure to democratize* its immigrant communities, so that the representative voices are the voices of its overwhelming majority of ordinary Muslims, who have no particular developed absolutist commitments.

In the polarity between the classical liberal on the one hand and Asad and other communitarians on the other (both sides of which I have opposed here), there is grotesque theoretical neglect of the possibilities of the liberal state to democratize the communities in its midst. Ever since the authoritarian aftermath of the French Revolution, the possibilities of the state to be the agent of democratization have raised the specter of mass movements that has so filled liberal theorists with reticence that potentially a whole field of theoretical possibilities has passed unnoticed. Given the ubiquitous empirical fact which I mentioned at the beginning of the last paragraph, how to theorize the possibilities of such democratization without the descent into Jacobin-style authoritarianism ought to be a theme of the highest importance and urgency in political theory, if the subject of cultural identities in politics is to be adequately treated.

What such a democratization would have the effect of doing is to exploit an *internal conflict* within the communities between the absolutists and their opponents. It would give the opponents of absolutism the confidence to speak openly against the minority absolutist voices, *when they were ready to do so*. Of course, what it will take to make it possible for them to be ready to do that will be no easy thing to achieve. But no Hegelian process is easy. In any case, an essential step in the "negotiation" of what I called a negotiated secular liberalism is therefore a determined effort by the state to democratize its communities. But part of what makes this a difficult process is that the conflict is not just between the minority of absolutists in the community and those who oppose them, i.e., the majority of ordinary Muslims who have no particular absolutist agenda. There is a further conflict in the hearts of the latter, for they themselves often do have some unarticulated desires and values that are in effect inchoately sympathetic to the absolutists even as they have yet other desires that strongly infirm these desires. Obviously it is the former desires that make them unready to come out and openly oppose the absolutists. But the fact is that those desires are infirm. They genuinely are made infirm by the latter desires. It is this internal conflict that the liberal state also has to deal with in the process of what I am misleadingly calling "negotiation." Since it is here that the sources of infirmity in such antiliberal values lie, it is here that the state must find its targets and focal points for internal reasoning with the community.

What will give these ordinary, nonabsolutist Muslims in Europe the confidence to fully embrace one side of their conflicted commitments and combat the absolutists in their community is of course a large and difficult question about which I have written elsewhere, and cannot possibly rehearse at length here. But the general direction of answer was implicit in the historical stage setting I have given. The moral psychology of defensive resentment so bound up with the history of colonial relations, and which continues in local replications within Europe as well as in neocolonial relations between Europe and Muslim countries since decolonization, is precisely the psychology which primarily stands in the way of developing this confidence in the communities. The prospect of openly criticizing the absolutists in the community, or conceding to liberal demands in the face of blasphemy, often seems even to these ordinary and moderate Muslims to be a surrender to a longstanding domineering and pernicious Western culture. And it seems so, even when it is often dictated by some of their own values and their own dislike of fundamentalists. This defensiveness among moderates is what the fundamentalists have consistently exploited, and the liberal state has been unable to create

the conditions to allow them to overcome the defensiveness, thereby giving them the confidence to be self-critical enough to resolve these conflicts in their own desires and values. Self-criticism in the face of the historical circumstances I sketched at the beginning of this paper is not a capacity that is easy to come by. It is of course possible and correct to blame Islamic communities in Europe for having failed to cultivate the temperament to be self-critical. But it is obvious that the failure is in part the failure of the state to create conditions whereby that cultivation might be psychologically possible. It is in these terms that we must criticize Europe's inability to address Islamic identity, and not in terms of an uncritical valorization of community over the liberal state.

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