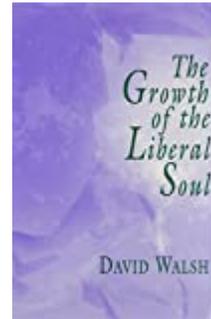




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Common ground is not enough

It is indeed puzzling, the existence of a social order the proponents of which cannot and nowadays will not account for its roots. According to David Walsh, liberalism as today's paramount political order finds itself in that position. Defenders of liberalism cover a wide spectrum. On the one hand, there are the "post-modernists" like Richard Rorty, who lets liberal order, so to speak, float in the air and thinks it only one stand on the big bazaar of life. On the other hand, there are traditionalists like the leader of the Dutch liberal party (and in the Dutch context, this is a party rather to the right of the center) who not so long ago asked for a deeper understanding of liberalism's roots in, among others, Christianity. Despite this confusion about the roots of liberalism, there is a definite appeal and endurance of liberal political order: historically, it has reigned for a couple of centuries in western civilization, and it now is the political order aspired to by most countries in the world. David Walsh has made this paradox the subject of his study *The Growth of the Liberal Soul*. I believe there will be many liberals and Christians who will not be enamored by its contents. That alone is a recommendation: Walsh has touched upon some very important issues con-

cerning our understanding of political and societal order. I will first give a summary of the main thrust of his argument, after which I will make some more critical remarks about Walsh's study.

Summary

Walsh observes that, despite the fact that after the collapse of communism there is no challenge to the liberal definition of what is politically right, we are further than ever from a consensus on the meaning and character of liberal political order. This confusing state of affairs is mirrored by the widening divides within liberal democratic society and politics (p. 1). On the surface it seems, according to Walsh, that without an opponent, liberalism loses its stability (p. 22). Despite this difficulty, liberal political order has survived and has a strong moral appeal (p. 2). That strong appeal stands opposed to, on the one hand, those critics and defenders who have abandoned the search for any foundation for liberal political order (e.g. Richard Rorty), and on the other hand, the communitarian and conservative reaction of wanting to restore a lost sense of community as a remedy for the problems caused by liberalism (p. 3).

The continuous disagreements about what the meaning of liberal is show in fact, according to Walsh, that there is an identifiable liberal tradition (p. 4). Freedom, dignity and self-determination are the central ideas within the liberal tradition, and the liberal specification of these ideas is not a break with earlier traditions but rather a further elaboration within the tradition of philosophy and Christianity. However, within liberalism, these ideas are formulated with more prominence and sacredness. The appeal of liberal democracy is that it speaks to our human dignity as rational, self-governing beings: “Today, more than ever, we are all liberals,” says Walsh (p. 50). If we are nowadays unclear about the roots of liberalism, we must try to discover in the liberal tradition the resources available to renew it from within (p. 101)—that is the task Walsh formulates for himself in this study.

Liberalism’s characterization as a more specific formulation of moral principles entailed in the longstanding philosophical Christian tradition can explain, according to Walsh, why liberal convictions can operate so well as a practice without a coherent theoretical formulation. Walsh wants to show how liberal practice “entails an understanding of human action and human nature as a reality that is constituted through the process of self-actualization but that can neither explain nor unfold itself apart from the struggle to follow the intimations of goodness already contained within” (p. 6). Walsh thus sets out on what he calls a “meditation” on the spiritual roots of liberalism.

The first sign of the crisis of liberalism Walsh observes is the existence of interminable and incommensurable disputes, due to the disappearance of a shared social and political world and understanding. Disintegrating forces have always been present in our political culture, but the absence of countervailing forces that unite, i.e., a shared conception of the common good, makes the destructive powers appear so strong (p. 15). Walsh’s idea here is roughly in line with the evaluation Alisdair MacIntyre so forcefully put forward in his *After Virtue*.

Secondly, Walsh sees this crisis as inherent to the liberal principles themselves. The neutrality liberalism preaches has turned towards itself. Liberalism is now also skeptical about its own principles, such as private liberty and self government (p. 16). Thirdly, so Walsh goes on, the crisis has become self-conscious: it is a crisis of liberal order itself, not attributable to extraneous factors (p. 18). Walsh sees the root of this crisis not in the lack of brilliant arguments for liberalism’s political order,

but in the neglect of the spiritual dimension—it has to do with, as he says in the words of Montesquieu, “The Spirit of the Laws” (p. 23). Walsh sees Dostoyevski and Nietzsche as the prophets of the liberal crisis. Nietzsche sees the more unreflective capacity of liberal tradition: The modest range of virtues that the liberal ethos promotes leaves no counterbalance to the seduction of materialism (p. 26).

Walsh sees this crisis most powerfully countered in the story Dostoyevski tells of the Grand Inquisitor (p. 31). It is Christ’s unconditional forgiveness that underpins human freedom: “Without the readiness to forgive, freedom would have a limit or value that when exceeded would justify its elimination” (p. 32).

Within liberalism, there are attempts to overcome the crisis concerning its roots. Walsh points to John Rawls’s theory of justice which has overcome some important problems for a rational and non-metaphysical vindication of liberal political order. Rawls showed how to construct a public order that does not presuppose a level of virtue in the citizens, and he found a way of giving concrete content to the moral principles defined by liberal order (p. 33). However, Rawls’s solution, which rests on the priority of the right over the good, is at the expense of conflicting conceptions of the good: not all conceptions of the good can coexist with Rawls’s order of society (pp. 36, 37). In the face of too great a pluralism or intolerance, liberalism does not yield to state-power but becomes itself the instrument of repression (p. 38). Thus, the attempt to give liberalism a foundation in itself leads eventually to the exclusion of certain individuals as agents in society.

The way Rawls brackets conceptions of the good in order to settle public peace leads, according to Walsh, to the disappearance of the barrier between the individual and the majority whose will happens to define the common task and possesses the necessary means of compelling cooperation. He finds in Michael Oakeshott’s non-foundational defense of liberalism a way to overcome this exclusion. Oakeshott shows how a liberal political order can be sustained without a theoretical foundation: it is (like all politics) a practice that must exist prior to all reflection on it. This performative dimension obviates the need for foundations (56): “happiness” or “the good life,” which are often seen as the goal of political order, are formal contexts. I cannot want happiness, what I want is doing particular things (pp. 60, 61). Such a non-instrumental understanding of morality is the key to Oakeshott’s conception of civil associations. The essence

of civil associations rest in the recognition of the authoritative application of rules; it is our recognizing that it obliges us—like making a promise we place ourselves under a rule. Walsh sees in this idea of civil associations the essence of societal life. Civil associations are based on the recognition that certain rules apply and do not impose a common goal as the unifying principle which might entitle a majority in society to force a minority to compliance.

The bracketing of philosophical and religious questions as a way of securing public peace is in line with the long-standing inclinations of the liberal tradition, but now this silence is mistaken for the absence of any underpinnings (p. 77). Liberalism finds it hard, not to say impossible, to acknowledge that it is drawn by a vision of the good (p. 79), but liberal order rests on a larger worldview that once met with such agreement that its assumptions and principles appeared to be self-evident (p. 81).

Liberalism, so argues Walsh, springs from the awareness of a crisis of order due to a breakdown of an underlying cultural consensus (p. 105). The splintering of Christianity following the Reformation was probably the greatest shock that the modern political order has had to absorb (p. 107). Compared with our current “pluralism,” this was a much greater difficulty; solving the religious conflicts did not as yet have the example of several centuries of the solution of liberal tolerance showing how a public order can be maintained in the absence of or agreement on fundamental questions (p. 108).

What, then, is the source of authority and order in a civil society? Walsh moves through the history of political theory in three concentric circles, moving each time closer to the spiritual dimension in liberalism he wants to lay bare. The first circle moves from the political theories of Hooker and Hobbes, where the liberal principle that all political authority is derived from the consent of the individuals involved is formulated (p. 118), to John Locke. He also argues that the sovereign is part of the social contract and that the government too is accountable. Locke, so shows Walsh, appeals to standards of justice prior to the creation of government, and a definition of the common good prior to the formulation of political order. The elaboration of that prevailing moral consensus is the continuity Walsh distinguishes in liberal democratic order (p. 127). The blind spot in Locke’s theory, according to Walsh, is that there is no concern for a majority which might through their representatives oppress a minority (p. 135). Locke is concerned with the existence of

consensus, but what are the limits of this consensus in relation to minorities?

John Stuart Mill takes up this problem of how to guarantee freedom for minorities (p. 137)—Walsh sees in Mill a liberal who has a keen consciousness of the oppressive and excluding tendencies in liberal order. Mill’s concept of liberty is meant to guarantee the security of minorities. Mill saw the detrimental effects of public opinion as a force in political action (p. 138). The principle of liberty preserves a realm of independence and, though it would not be able to insulate individuals from the more pervasive effects of public opinion, it would have the effect of promoting the recognition of the value of independence itself (p. 139). This is therefore not indifference: Mill envisages a community here there is mutual recognition (p. 141). Mill comes to realize that the liberal order of mutual respect rests on an existential order that is not simply a given within ordinary human experience, but he goes no further than to see it as an analogue of the role religion used to play. Mill, and likewise liberalism, are basically open to spirituality, but cannot articulate it, so is Walsh’s conclusion (p. 147).

The continuing vitality of liberal order is derived to a large degree from the tension of the search for its spiritual foundations. It is aware of what is lacking and what is needed to fill the void (p. 149). This search for its own soul, so argues Walsh, pervades the whole liberal tradition, and here he starts his second move through the history of liberal political theory.

Locke sets out on a search for “the principles of morality and revealed religion” (p. 150) and finds that all obligation springs from someone who has right and power over us—ultimately God (p. 152). Moral good and moral evil is in relation to a law given by a law-maker (p. 153).

Montesquieu’s “L’Esprit des Lois” already asks the question of the spirit that defines the whole character of political order, but Walsh sees in Rousseau the first to recognize the crisis which is contained herein for the liberal tradition (p. 159). Rousseau’s enterprise is directed toward the recovery of the moral sources of the self as the foundation of public order (p. 163). Following, or listening to, our nature brings us in deeper contact with the human community. That is the political implication of “back to nature” (p. 164). Religion safeguards the order of justice and brings about the inner order of acceptance of the human condition and conformity with the divine will (p. 165). But the problem with transcendent religions is that they detach Humanity too much from earthly things,

according to Rousseau (p. 167). He proposes a civil religion, unbelief in which is not impious, but anti-social; it fills the gap that transcendent Christianity opens with its detachment, and demands religious and civil toleration—otherwise the social unity would be broken. Rousseau thus sees, according to Walsh, most clearly that it is not possible to separate religion and politics. What he fails to emphasize is that the transcendent order is also a check on the political order (p. 169).

Rousseau ends up, however, with the totalitarian compulsion to freedom and the general will; he lacks an idea of an ordered structure of liberty to sustain a concrete polity. Walsh then turns to Hegel whose political theory is the first to recognize the necessity of such social structures (p. 173).

Hegel sees the radical insufficiency of the individual as the foundation of order. The political order is not a convenient afterthought, aimed at individual self-fulfillment, but the essence of what individuals are as individuals. Walsh observes the spiritual dimension in Hegel's political theory: Hegel's attempt to reconcile private and public is part of the reconciliation between God and Man (p. 174).

The family is a model for the unity in the state. It provides an example of a unity where the individual does not lose himself, but gains substantive identity and fulfillment—the individual is a member. The corporations are for Hegel a kind of “second family” which counteracts the disintegration in “civil society” due to individuals promoting their self-interest. The corporations protect the individual against poverty, provide education and give the individual an identification vis-a-vis the state (pp. 178, 179). The state is then the explicit unity of the different individuals of which the family and the corporations are foreshadows (p. 180). Walsh sees the Hegelian idea of the state as too far beyond the spirituality he is seeking. According to Walsh, the divine character of the state in Hegel's theory makes the relation of the individual and the state virtually invisible and incomprehensible for ordinary citizens (p. 183). In Mill and Tocqueville, Walsh sees two thinkers who look for the spiritual foundation of liberalism within more traditional religious resources. Mill, most surprisingly, turns to religion when seeing the need for a spiritual underpinning if the liberal integration of individual freedom and the common good is to be effective. The “social problem” is at its roots a spiritual problem (p. 185). Tocqueville most clearly sees the necessity for liberalism to deepen its spiritual roots. He saw both the enlargement of individuals' self-

responsibility and the dangers of an egalitarian mass society (p. 189). Tocqueville sees that a religion that is promoted as a means to attain satisfaction in this life will not have political utility. Spiritual utility takes priority: religion gives answers to fundamental questions of life (p. 192). People must be brought to think of their responsibility for something larger than their immediate selves. Concern for the future is no sufficient substitute but might bring men back to religion in a time when people are tuning away from religion; so goes Tocqueville (p. 194).

After Walsh has thus analyzed how religion was seen as necessary for liberal political order, he turns back to the roots of liberal order to show how it rests on Christian insights, thus completing the last and central circle in his historical research.

Within Christian experience, the infinite worth of each individual through the love of God is the foundation of freedom (p. 204). Locke sees Man as being made in the image of God (p. 207). Locke thus reveals the continuity between Christianity and liberal freedom; Kant and Rousseau then turn the liberal impulse into secular Christianity (p. 210). In Hegel's philosophy, liberal order is the culmination of Christianity. Hegel's immediate successors had an intimation of the connection between liberalism and Christianity, but lacked the philosophical resources to articulate it. “The rectification of that defect is the principle purpose of the present work,” summarizes Walsh as the purpose of his study (p. 219).

At its clearest, Walsh sees the connection between Christianity and liberal order in Tocqueville's observation that freedom and equality collide. Making people equally powerful makes them at the same moment equally powerless (p. 220). For Tocqueville, however, liberty and equality cannot be separated—both have their roots in the common human nature (p. 221). Liberty and equality can only go together in associations of citizens: they cannot throw off their problems onto the government or their social superiors; they must take initiative themselves (p. 223). The liberal problem is how to ensure that freedom is not abused and how to assert liberty as the highest value (p. 226). In this, so is Walsh's conviction, the liberal faith is equal to the Christian faith, i.e., that the value of a human being cannot be quantified (p. 231).

Liberal order cannot be maintained by immanent argument, by argument within the framework of liberal formulations. Liberal order is incomplete. Its moral sources reveal themselves more fully only as we par-

ticipate more fully within them. Walsh then wants to show that liberal order is indeed incomprehensible without some presuppositions that are not themselves established by the liberal framework (p. 239). Walsh recognizes in liberal order a heightening of the transcendent dimension of human finality that has been disclosed by Christianity: it is not so much liberalism's formulations that are incomplete, but the character of human existence that renders it so (p. 240). Recognizing the historical continuity of liberal theory, as Rorty does, does therefore not mean that it is indefensible. Its incompleteness, its resting on certain predispositions, merely mirrors all human reflection on order (p. 255).

For Walsh, we can only start within the traditions of which we are part, in which we are formed and in which we participate (p. 256). But all human deliberation rests on depths that can never be fully explicated (p. 257). The independent re-emergence of philosophy and Christianity, not as dominant public authorities but as credible existential and intellectual forces within the contemporary setting, is of incalculable importance for the liberal tradition (p. 259). Regaining the necessary spirit, so Walsh continues, we must realize that the divine *telos* provides little or no specific instructions as to what concretely ought to be done in the changing situations. That is a problem for the theist and the atheist in dealing with morality (p. 269). Participating in the practice of morality does not give rules as to how one should play, nor does it tell what the next move should be. A practice is about the quality of the person that is cultivated by the participation in it (p. 270).

The liberal framework was designed to avoid explications of the transcendent source of the human being's dignity, Walsh argues in his study. With that avoidance we do not know how to continue. The moral disorientation of liberal societies is what makes them seem powerless to prevent the progressive descent into incivility and lawlessness. Most serious social problems are largely impervious to programmatic solutions—they lie at the level of moral ethos, and character cannot be implemented through programs (p. 278).

Social discussion that realizes this situation generally adopts, regardless of their starting point, a conservative orientation. Rather, says Walsh, the heart of the matter is the lack of rational agreement and the resulting struggle for power (p. 279). Rational agreement, argues Walsh, seems so far out of sight because what is forgotten, also in the conservative reactions to liberalism's crisis, is the capacity of the soul to grow or even to un-

dergo a conversion (p. 280). The operating assumption is that differences and divergences are irresolvable because they are relatively fixed quantities that bounce off one another but won't undergo significant modifications. It is the assumption that the future will be very much like the past, that what is irresolvable in one set of premises will remain irresolvable under all foreseeable conditions (p. 281). It is therefore, so Walsh points out, that morality is seen as an additional or optional objective that can be added to the range of possibilities to be chosen. Morality, however, is the inescapable order that must be observed if we want to perform well in the role of human being (p. 288).

Central to the liberal tradition was that disagreements are not ultimate. Against the current despair of finding a resolution, Walsh wants to take seriously the liberal faith that differences are not fixed but merely the visible manifestations of a common human reality that can be explicated more fully but are never exhaustive (p. 292). That goes against current liberal practice, which avoids the demand for a resolution by shifting the disagreements from the public sphere to the private choice. Our sense of being lost might well be that we realize that all conviction of the right or the good is removed from the public realm.

The durability of liberal order, Walsh concludes, does not rest on the privacy of differences, but on a public consensus. Moral disagreements are often seen as a danger for liberal order. Rather, they are a great opportunity: they force reflection about what is at stake in our public square (p. 293). There is much more common ground between positions than current liberalism wants to admit. Only when we start to recognize common ground, can we retrieve the idea of a liberal order that flexibly draws on resources on which it has rested from its beginning—the philosophic Christian understanding of Humanity expressed in a just political order. That basis, finally, explains the durability and appeal of liberal political order.

Critical remarks

David Walsh has touched on some puzzling problems in liberalism's self-understanding. He shows convincingly how liberal democracy came into being within a Christian context and was inspired by Christian ideas. Further on, he shows how the necessity of religious roots, an articulation of the spirit behind liberal order, was recognized by its propagators or forced itself upon them. More important is that he shows that liberal democracy's soil was fertilized by religious disputes, whereas nowadays, with John Rawls's priority of the right over the

good, the public consensus is made immune from possible disruptions by placing contested issues in the private realm. Liberal order does not learn how to deal with conflicts anymore, but rather excludes conflicts from the public realm. As a result, our moral disputes are endless and irresolvable, not so much because of a lack of rationality or the incommensurability of the opposing positions, but because the positions are seen as unchangeable. We do not see that positions might change and that there might appear to be a strong common ground between opposing parties. What, above all, is not taken into consideration is the possibility of conversion.

One might wonder, however, whether Walsh's picture of the early days of liberalism is correct. Did liberalism in those early days grow from learning to live with disputes? Though the Reformation indeed shook Western civilization on its foundations by breaking the basic religious consensus which had reigned for centuries, the solution to this crisis existed in the settling of religious rather homogenized states: mainly Protestant (both Calvinist and Lutheran) in the North, mainly Catholic in the South of Europe. In those early days, keeping conflicts outside seemed the obvious strategy.[1]

Leaving this historical accuracy aside, Walsh's analysis deepens the kind of philosophy of crisis of which Alisdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* was a most provocative beginning. Walsh and MacIntyre see the same moral crisis—i.e. the disoriented nature of our current moral debates—and both see in Nietzsche the central philosopher who understands this looming crisis and forces us to choose: power or morality. Walsh's hypothesis that the exclusion of conflict from the public realm closes our minds, for the common ground that might overcome the apparently unbridgeable divides adds to our deeper understanding of our present political and moral problems. This, which I shall call, "remedial philosophy," makes fascinating reading: After a contemporary crisis is laid bare, the writer goes on to show where and how things have gone wrong in the history of philosophy and how a remedy would have to begin. But to what do these illuminating and powerful analyses of our western philosophical tradition lead us? Taking refuge in the cells of morality, waiting for another St. Benedict, as is MacIntyre's grim hope? Waiting for a conversion that might break the deadlock of moral disputes, as Walsh seems to imply? That conclusion is unfair concerning Walsh's study, because he goes further than most remedial philosophy. Still, there is the question whether Walsh succeeds in his task which he describes in terms such as "remedy" or "correcting" the turn liberalism has taken. His argument

is that a more brilliant intellectual vindication of liberalism is not a remedy for the crisis of liberalism, but that, rather, an idea of a practice, where rules *a priori* define the quality of our behavior, provide a way out.

There are these two lines in Walsh's study of the intellectual vindication of liberalism on the one hand, and the insight that morality has to do with participation in a practice on the other. The first line is developed in the search through the history of liberal political thinking which leads Walsh to the philosophical Christian roots of liberal order. That is the line on which we meet Locke, Rousseau and Mill, and Tocqueville. That is the line of forgetfulness and the meditation on the liberal spirit that Walsh follows in his study. Following that line, Christianity might become nothing more than conducive to public order.

I believe Walsh would not be satisfied with simply showing that Christianity or religion in general is useful for political order. A further case in favor of the authentic necessity of Christianity might be found along the second line, i.e., the idea that social order flourishes in practices or free associations. That is the line of Hegel, Oakeshott, and also Tocqueville. The lack of associations wherein people can learn and exercise the spirit of the order in which they live is indeed the root of the problem with public morality that makes this problem immune for programmatic solutions. Following that line of argument would point to the lack of action undertaken in realizing the potentials of these free associations.

Walsh's argument starts with both these lines together. He shows how in the development of liberal democracy the philosophical Christian roots of the dignity of the human person have actually formed the liberal order, and that this spirit keeps urging itself into our consciousness. However, Walsh's "meditation" leaves one behind with the suspicion of a fundamental ambiguity at the basis of its argument. He almost equates liberalism with Christianity when he states that the crisis of the modern world (which has embraced liberalism) is the crisis of Christianity (p. 27). Confronted with the crisis Walsh pictures, liberalism and Christianity indeed cannot easily distance themselves from one another or the crisis itself. But sometimes one has to make it clear where the one differs from the other, in order to give due recognition to each others' point of view and contribution. Conflating the spiritual origins with the practical builders of liberal order as Walsh does makes it unclear whom he is addressing: liberals or Christians? As a result, he misrepresents the intentions of both liberalism

and Christianity.

With the idea of a practice, taken from Michael Oakeshott, Walsh shows that the spiritual dimension behind the social order reveals itself in the free associations human beings form. Walsh rightly points to Hegel as one who first systematically argued for a structure of liberty to sustain concrete polities in society. Family and civil society are, in Hegel's philosophy, bonds by which the individual does not lose itself, but is recognized as the very individual he or she is. Hegel's political theory transcends the poles of individualism and collectivism.

When Walsh criticizes Hegel's philosophy for clothing the state with a divine character, I have the strong impression that Walsh's general assessment of Hegel's philosophy still suffers from the error in the translation T.M. Knox made of Hegel's "Philosophy of Law." Where Hegel wrote "Es ist der Gang Gottes in der Welt, dass der Staat ist," Knox incorrectly translates, "The march of God in the world, that is what the state is," thus changing an ontological characterization of the state into a description of the character of the state. Correctly translated, Hegel says: "It is the march of God in the world, that there is a state." After Hegel has painted a bleak picture of civil society as disintegrated morality and as the "system of needs," he so to speak gives thanks to God that there is a structural principle, the state, that can unify these otherwise atomized individuals (the "system of needs" is in this respect also the "need of the system"). The English translation changes the divine *principle* of the state as social structure into the divine *character* of the state. The way Walsh repeatedly refers to the divine nature of Hegel's state reflects this misunderstanding.

I do not believe that, after this correction of the image Hegel has in Anglo-Saxon political thinking, the interest in Hegel will become greater. The alleged divine nature of Hegel's state is not the real reason. Following John Locke, Anglo-Saxon political thinking and consciousness lack the feeling for the qualitative difference between on the one hand the state and government, and on the other hand civil society. "Hegelian" states, like Germany and The Netherlands, have proportionally-representative parliaments. "Lockean" states, like the British, have a parliament consisting of local representatives. In theory, the government is here seen as a continuation of the local interest. According to Hegel, this would still be a "civil society." One can hypothesize that if Tony Blair proceeds with electoral reforms in the United Kingdom towards proportional representation, there will be a higher interest in Hegel's political philosophy. The actual polit-

ical and social problems probably have more influence on which political theory will be in the picture than the academic corrections on misguided interpretations.

However this may be, both "Hegelian" and "Lockean" societies meet the same problem of the lack of social structures in which people can take responsibility for their own life. The individual is in both societies delivered to anonymous and uncontrollable forces, be it the state or the market. The crisis of liberalism is universal: both the (pace Hegel) more collectivist "Hegelian" states, and the (pace Locke?) more individualistic "Lockean" states meet the same problem of creating a space for free associations where the normative potential of society is cultivated. In that context, it is important that Walsh gives Hegel this important place in his argument. Without Hegel, the concept of free associations would be unintelligible.

Given the importance Walsh attaches to these free associations, it is strange that he does not include the critical theory of Habermas in his discussion. Especially after the discursive turn in Rawls's thinking, signified by the introduction of the idea of an overlapping consensus, this is an unfortunate omission. Habermas's project is the most consequent modern project: to create normativity on its own footing. Appealing to the human longing for open and honest communication, being a human longing from the first sentence ever spoken, his project builds on a long-term goal before us. Habermas's project raises the attention to the issue of the relation between public and private, and he is indispensable in finding a common ground in the current moral disputes. His categories of Labor, Interaction, and Communication reflect respectively the relations between Man and the natural world, Man and other human beings, and Man and himself—those very relations that, according to the Biblical story of the creation, were fundamentally disturbed following the fall. Liberalism's spirit indeed has the Christian elements and roots Walsh shows, but it also has its own faith: the faith that formal compliance will eventually induce moral internalization. Living under a just social order will eventually result in the appropriate sense of justice, according to Rawls's conviction. But this conviction is already present in Kant's reverence for the moral law and his hope that in establishing a just social order and through the meeting of other people through trade-relations, peace will eventually be achieved. This liberal faith is self-sufficient: it appeals to the inner spark within all human beings which only needs the right circumstances to illuminate all human relations. Though Kant sees that this faith needs the safeguard of the transcen-

dental ideas (God, Freedom, etc.), and Rousseau needs the support of a civil religion, we should not be fooled by these attestations of the function of (the Christian) religion. The Christian religion is neither useful nor a safeguard for morality. The Christian religion is certainly not the cement of liberal order. One should at least grant liberalism its own faith on its own footing. It is also this faith in the eventual reconciliation of Man with Man that carries Habermas's anticipation of an ideal speech-situation.

Walsh meets the problem that his study emphasizes the "meditation" on the liberals spirit at the expense of the moral value of practices. Walsh is more the meditator than the activist. Convincingly he argues for the similarities and kinship of liberalism and Christianity, but in so doing he not only fails to recognize liberalism's own faith, but also misses the character of Christianity.

Though Walsh sees in Christianity the spiritual root of liberalism's morality, he also sees a socially disruptive side of Christianity: first in challenging the social order with the breakdown of moral unity after the Reformation, and as a transcendent religion taking people away from their task in society. Though much of this criticism can be leveled against certain formulations of how Christianity applies to the political order, there is more to say about the role of Christianity in the development of Western society.

The Reformation was indeed a challenge to the moral unity, but also, in the person of Althusius, developed very important insights for the development of the "liberal" societies—even to the extent that some see a relation between the Reformation and the two great revolutions of the eighteenth century, the American and the French Revolution. But the lesson for peace in a pluralist society has yet to be learned, for the peace of 1648 which ended the Thirty Year's War divided Europe into religiously fairly homogenized states.

But above all, the Calvinist branch of Christianity has also shown that religion is something different than useful for social order, and that a transcendent religion can in fact activate people to work for a better society. This, as Wolterstorff has called it, "world-formative" kind of religion has also shown that civil peace does not necessarily rest on the finding of common grounds (See N. Wolterstorff, 1982). Dutch society, for example, has for a long time been characterized by the existence of relatively compartmentalized social groups founded on religious and humanist worldviews. This pluralist society has been well able to form a stable political and social or-

der. That the Dutch society is nevertheless suffering currently from much of the same problems as what Walsh describes as the liberal crisis, is in my opinion, not due to the retreat of Christianity from the public life, but rather the result of the lack of associations that can offer people shelter after traditional associations have lost their importance.

Walsh puts too much emphasis on liberal forgetfulness—I do not wish to deny that there is a spiritual crisis, but the solution does not lie in a meditation and in the finding of common ground, but in the restructuring of society itself. Walsh's treatment of abortion can clarify what I mean. (I also must say that I think this a rather unfortunate ending of his study: The debate about abortion is endless because it is a debate fed by different spirits; but it is impossible to say that either spirit is completely at fault.)

For Walsh, abortion (and euthanasia) is the beginning of the end: by allowing abortion (and euthanasia), we propagate the idea that life can be dispensed at will. Walsh seeks an escape from the impasse by pointing to the ambiguity in the criterion when "something" is a human being, worthy of our unconditional protection. Given this ambiguity, it would be better to be on the safe side, and not make final decisions when we are so prone to err.

But humankind has never hesitated in final decisions in the face of the likelihood of humans erring in making these decisions. Any society that endorses capital punishment endorses that in final decisions about life and death, humans can, and are allowed to err. Any society that constitutionally gives people the right to bear arms licenses its people to err on final decisions of life and death. Abortion is not a special case, or more serious disregard for life than the disregard we see in the history books, the newspapers, on film, and on the streets. Though it seems so obvious to blame the apparent disregard for life on allowing abortion, the call for legalizing abortion became possible in the light of a disregard for life that pervades the whole of society.

However, there is another side to the abortion-issue: the demand for abortion also shows the public disregard for the women's point of view. Not that abortion is a preferred solution for anything, but is society willing to remove the stigmatism of the mother and her "illegitimate" child? The issue of abortion in Western societies shows that the fabric of society already has become problematic, and that the problem is the lack of associations where people can take responsibility for their own life.

Liberalism has indeed become the paramount political orientation in Western societies. Its greatest challenge has to come yet: how to create a social order where people with diverse moral and religious beliefs can live in peace. Walsh does not make it convincingly clear that liberalism can take up this challenge. Liberalism came to its full development in culturally and religiously fairly homogenized states, and it never had to deal with deep moral divides within its own national borders. With the trends of secularizing in Europe and the privatizing of religion in the North American continent, I doubt whether a reflection on the roots of liberalism will be of much help. As was said above, Walsh's approach either makes religion conducive to society, or denies liberalism's attempts to stand on its own footing. One also should remember that the most influential periods of Christianity have been at times when there was a cultural transition happening: the collapse of the Roman Empire, the Reformation, and the Industrial Revolution. Authentic Christianity at these times did not rethink existing philosophies, but developed new institutions; it focused on the structural problems of society. Walsh's study lacks any sensitivity to these structural problems in society. The atomized individual who participates in irresolvable moral discussions is not only a result of "liberalism's forgetfulness," but has been a reality for some time due to the economic and industrial development of Western society. It is this realization that drove Pope Leo XIII to write "Rerum Novarum" and others (Calvinists) to form associations of people to ameliorate these problems. Their work was "world-formative," and directed against liberalism.

Walsh's study points to the common grounds there indeed are in Western society and to this goal, his study is invaluable. The next step is to realize the differences between liberalism and its Christian roots and make them fruitful by taking up the formation of associations where people can take their responsibility for making this world a better place for all members of the human family.

Notes:

[1]. See for example Stephen Toulmin, 1992: *Cosmopolis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) in relation to the religious wars, and Ernst Gellner, 1996: *Conditions of Liberty* (Harmondsworth: Penguin) for the North-South and the East-West divisions that separate Europe politically.

Other references:

J. Habermas, 1985: *Die Neue Unuebersichtlichkeit*. Frankfurt a Main: Suhrkamp (esp. Chapter 5).

A. MacIntyre, 1981: *After Virtue*. London: Duckworth. J. Habermas, 1985: *Die Neue Unuebersichtlichkeit*. Frankfurt a

N. Wolterstorff, 1982: *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans.

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