

## Liberalism and Practical Philosophy

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### Summary

*The author presents the central postulates from the latest works by John Rawls and Michael Walzer as the most prominent representatives of liberalism and communitarianism in the contemporary American political philosophy and points to their predecessors and parallels in political philosophy, from Kant and Hegel to Mill and Dewey. Since liberals and communitarians of today do not any longer advocate a "society" or a "community" in the traditional sense, but the "posttraditional" liberal-democratic community in which liberal principles of justice and human rights can be realized, their thinking is interesting also to those peoples who have set out to build liberal-democratic societies outside the states of developed West. Naturally, the realization of freedom and human rights depends on the cultural tradition of each people and on the historical "lebenswelt" in general, but also on the virtues of liberal citizens who, in a communal political life, realize "postulates of communality comprised in liberalism" (Walzer) and thus foster a free and good human life.*

As a political slogan, liberalism emerged as late as the 19th century; as a cultural phenomenon it has had a long history, particularly in the history of European philosophy. This is corroborated by the fact that some liberals still refer to idealism, from Plato via Descartes to Kant. In the early 1930s, Edmund Husserl was able to set forth and expostulate the primal *lebenswelt* as a free pre-scientific life by reverting to Descartes and the modern-age philosophy of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Today's liberals have tried the same by reverting to Kant's transcendental philosophy and developing it further by means of the contemporary philosophy of intersubjectivity. It is well-known that these attempts in a way represent the last transcendental fundament and that liberals have been forced to develop the philosophy of intersubjectivity as a means of overcoming the Cartesian egological and Kantian transcendental consciousness. This intersubjectivity, however, has remained at the level of inner intersubjectivity which only shows the political and historical intricacies of human practical life instead of showing how people can politically realize their freedom and concretely and historically materialize it in the form of a good and free life.

The creation, realization and materialization of a good and free human life has always been a subject of practical philosophy. In that sense one has to agree with Wolfgang Kersting when he says that the present-day debate between the "liberals" and the "communitarians" belongs to the history of practical philosophy and that "both the contemporary liberalism

and the communitarianism... are theoretical achievements of limited originality", since both represent "renaissance phenomena".<sup>1</sup> Of course, the central issue is what is being renewed, restored, and rehabilitated and which traditions these separate developments of contemporary political philosophy and culture in general continue. One should agree with Kersting's conclusion: "If we wanted to describe the historical precursors and the parallels of this debate" between the liberals and the communitarians "we would have to include almost the entire history of practical philosophy of modern age" and that "the consistently most exacting manifestation of that paradigmatic rivalry is undoubtedly the controversy between the Kantian and the Hegelian philosophy."<sup>2</sup>

This is not the time to go deeper into Kersting's assessment of neo-Kantian and neo-Hegelian philosophy, though it is extremely important, both for its evaluation of liberalism and communitarianism as theories of contemporary political philosophy and for their attitude towards concrete politics. Truth to tell, liberalism as a concept should not be restricted to a single period of political history and culture of the world or Europe, even less to another continent's, or to a trend of modern political thinking and living, and particularly to a political party or politics. However, regarding the concrete politics in our century it could be said that at the beginning of the 20th century some liberals adopted the "idea of political cooperation with social democrats",<sup>3</sup> while at the end of that same century the theoreticians of liberalism opened themselves to the concept of contemporary liberal society as pluralist i.e. liberal and democratic society as the political community of the developed western world. In that context one should view the thesis about the "second round" of the showdown between liberalism and communitarianism today, which Axel Honneth describes in the following manner: "Liberals, if they have gone through Rawls' contextual reversal, agree with communitarians when they say that the functional ability of modern democracy cannot be guaranteed without a certain degree of communal linkage to the all-inclusive values, i.e. to the cultural community or a way of life."<sup>4</sup>

In accordance with this view, today neither liberals nor communitarians can be viewed as "opposing camps" that solely and exclusively advocate either "a society" or "a community" in the traditional sense, since both

<sup>1</sup> W. Kersting, "Die Liberalismus-Kommunitarismus-Kontroverse in der amerikanischen praktischen Philosophie", in: *Jahrbuch für Politisches Denken*, 1991, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> See S. R. Vierhaus, "Liberalismus", in: O. Brunner (ed.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, vol. 3, Stuttgart, 1982, p. 783 and on.

<sup>4</sup> A. Honneth (ed.), *Kommunitarismus. Eine Debatte über die moralischen Grundlagen moderner Gesellschaften*, Campus, Frankfurt, 1993, p. 16.

groups in their theories espouse the “concept of posttraditional, democratic community” as “a common value horizon” of liberal-democratic societies in which liberal principles of justice, human rights and freedoms are realized. In that way the differences between the original liberal and communitarian attitudes had been outlined, but they no longer hold water. These differences can no longer be “measured simply by the way in which somebody answers the question whether normatively the advantage is on the side of the liberal principle of freedom or the concept of collective good, but only by the way somebody answers the question which common values should serve as the necessary prerequisites for implementing liberal principles of freedom and justice”.<sup>5</sup> Even John Rawls forwent his *Theory of Justice* of 1971, though Uwe Justus Wenzel challenged that claim with a recent statement that Rawls’ attempt was not “a complete success”.<sup>6</sup> In his work “The Idea of Political Liberalism” Rawls admits that the original theory of justice was a “utopian notion of a well-ordered society”. Honneth and Wenzel point out that in some of his works from the eighties Rawls did make certain corrections of his earlier opinions and thus enabled liberals and communitarians to meet halfway in their definition of “the type of collective values” which are able to morally sustain the institutions which guarantee civil freedoms. Nevertheless, they are still bickering about the issue “which moral resources must be regarded essential for keeping a modern, differentiated community alive”.<sup>7</sup>

Instead of general reflections on liberalism and communitarianism, several thoughts from the latest works by John Rawls and Michael Walzer, the major representatives of these two developments in the contemporary American political philosophy, will be outlined in this text. Also, the prospects of the reception of this type of thinking in European practical philosophy are to be dealt with.

In his recent essay “The Ideal of the Public Use of the Reason”, John Rawls points out that his purpose is to “formulate the idea of the public use of reason in an acceptable form as an element of the liberal political concept of justice.” He emphasizes that the public use of reason is an idiosyncrasy, a “peculiarity of democratic nations” and that the term “use” means “the use of reason of equal citizens directed towards public good”.<sup>8</sup>

Rawls distinguishes the forms of the public use of reason from “non-public use of reason in churches, universities and other associations of

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> U. J. Wenzel, “Liberaler Glaube. John Rawls’ Idee des politischen Liberalismus”, in: *Jahrbuch für Politisches Denken*, 1993, p. 191.

<sup>7</sup> A. Honneth (ed.), *Kommunitarismus*, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> J. Rawls, “Das Ideal des öffentlichen Vernunftgebrauchs”, in: *Information Philosophie*, 1/1994, p. 5.

civil society”, since the public use of reason expresses its ideals and principles “by means of the political concept of justice and because of that these ideals and principles have to be understandable to all” citizens in a state. In that sense, the public use of reason of equal citizens in a “constitutional democracy” is directed towards “public good” as the good of all citizens and thus could be called the practical-political use of the reason, as opposed to its technical, aristocratic and autocratic abuse. Rawls says: “If aristocratic and autocratic regimes reflect on the public good at all, this occurs solely among the rulers, and not publicly”. Contrary to that, the ideal of the public reason “by its essence and its content” is to be public; according to Rawls, public reason describes “what a well-ordered society motivates and emboldens its members to do”. The public reason of a politically liberal society manifests and confirms itself as “reason of equal citizens, who as a collective mutually exercise political pressure in the sense of the last resort by passing laws and effectuating constitutional changes”. Thus, according to Rawls, public reason in “a constitutional democracy is not a regulation” from above but depends on “the abilities of its members” as true citizens and on the ways in which they realize their “intellectual and moral faculties”.<sup>9</sup>

That “intellectual and moral faculty” of the public use of reason in a liberal society is even more prominent in Rawls’ definition of “the citizens’ obligation”<sup>10</sup> as a civility. By this he means “the liberal principle of legitimacy” of exercising political power and clout, which is, according to Rawls’ political liberalism, “appropriate only when accompanied by a constitution for which we may reasonably expect to be recognized by all the citizens as comprising the principles and the ideals they have affirmed”.<sup>11</sup> Rawls’ distinction between the legal and the moral obligation is rather interesting since in exercising legitimate political authority our “moral (but not legal) obligation, on the basis of the ideal of the public use of the reason, is to explain to others to what extent political principles and programmes which we advocate in fundamental precepts rely on the political values of public reason”.<sup>12</sup> This recognition by all citizens of the confirmed ideals and principles as the moral foundation of our political activities puts us, as reasonable and moral individuals, in the position that we can “reasonably” count on the “agreement of other” citizens as individuals, though they may “be proponents of different religious and philosophical views”<sup>13</sup> which “rightfully play an important part” in political life, since “the variety of intellectual, religious and moral teachings which

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

abound in democracy is not a transient historical phenomenon but a permanent trait of the public culture of a democracy".<sup>14</sup>

From this last statement it ensues that it is possible for somebody to believe that political values can be more broadly based but that it does not mean that "he/she has not acknowledged these values or that he/she would not recognize them as the conditions for the public use of reason".<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, this makes it clear "why not all those situations in which 'citizens as the last resort mutually exercise coercive authority', but only political basics which are linked with 'the collective power of free and equal citizens' are subjected to public reason. Hence, he goes on to say, "the limits of the public use of reason" do not apply solely to civil servants but to citizens as well "when they take a stance before public forum".<sup>16</sup> Thus, on the one hand there is the "obligation towards the citizenship together with the major values of the political sphere" as "the ideal of the self-directed citizenship in the way thought of by everybody to be acceptable by everybody for good reasons",<sup>17</sup> while on the other there are "the limits to the public use of reason" which citizens must generally respect because "it is demanded by certain fundamental rights and freedoms or because it is central for the realization of a major value".<sup>18</sup>

Rawls is keen on proving that citizens accept the ideal of the public use of reason "not as a compromise or *modus vivendi* but on the basis of their own intellectual, comprehensive beliefs".<sup>19</sup> By admitting the obligations towards the citizenry and the limits to the public use of reason in "the key constitutional precepts and the issues of fundamental justice", he rightly distances himself from both the commonsensical pragmatic understanding, according to which it is perfectly in order if "citizens vote in accordance with their social preferences and economic interests", and from the ideological aristocratic or autocratic understanding, according to which citizens should vote first hand "on the basis of their comprehensive beliefs" without taking into consideration "public arguments". By referring to Rousseau, according to whom we ideally give our vote to the alternative "which best serves common good", Rawls eventually justifies his ideal of the public use of reason since "citizens have *volonté général* aimed at the

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

common good which, in turn, is defined by the basic interests which are common to all citizens".<sup>20</sup>

On the basis of only these few thoughts from Rawls' latest work we could conclude that the dispute between the liberal and the communitarian understanding of the principles of freedom and justice, basic interests of citizens and common good is finally behind us. However, Rawls' "liberal political concept of justice in its broadest sense" does not define only the basic principles but "the content of the public reason" as well. In this way certain fundamental rights, freedoms and opportunities, known in liberal-democratic societies of the west are fostered; for example "equal political and civil liberties, equality of opportunities, social equality, economic reciprocity, common good and everything necessary for the realization of these values". Rawls termed these values "the values of political justice" since they form the basic structure of liberal political concept. Besides this basic structure of the justice principle, the liberal political concept includes "the guidelines and the criteria by means of which citizens may decide whether certain material principles have been applied and which laws serve them best". Rawls calls these guidelines and criteria "the values of the public use of the reason"; they are, of course, "accompanied by the corresponding political virtues of sagacity and the readiness to fulfill the moral obligation towards citizenship".<sup>21</sup>

It is extremely important to keep in mind this difference between the "basic structure" and "the guidelines and the criteria" of the liberal political concept since it can help smoothing out the "differences of the opinions regarding which principle is most suitable to the public use of the reason" so that it is possible "to have a different opinion about the principles and yet agree on the more general aspects of a concept. Thus we agree that citizens, freely and equally, participate in political power and they, as reasonable and rational beings have the duty to avail themselves of the public reason, though we might disagree as to which principles of justice make the most reasonable foundation for public justification".<sup>22</sup> Naturally, "the purpose of the ideal of the public use of reason is to enable citizens to ground their basic argumentation within the framework of what each of them regards as the political concept of justice, i.e. as the concept which relies on the values for which it may be reasonably expected that others accept them and that people are truly ready to defend them. Thus each of us has to be able to state the criterion underlying his/her decisions, and which principles and guidelines allow us to reasonably expect the agreement of others".<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10–12.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*



Of course, Rawls knows that the public use of reason often does not lead to a single but a plethora of answers and rightfully points out that it should not be given up on as soon as there are differences of opinion. On the other hand, getting a full answer does not mean that the sphere of the political should be thrown aside and the key constitutional aspects and the issue of basic justice infringed upon, since according to the fundamental principles of political liberalism, our wranglings and “expostulations must occur within the framework of political concepts and we must sincerely hope that our views are based on the political values which reasonably give rise to the expectation that others agree with them”.<sup>24</sup> In such a way we do not only realize the “elementary democratic values” but, by fulfilling our obligations towards the citizenry we maintain “the alliance of political friendship”.<sup>25</sup>

Here it is not possible to delve further into Rawls’ political liberalism or his focus on the “alliance of political friendship” which semantically is reminiscent of Aristotle’s notion of political friendship.<sup>26</sup> As an example of typical modern thinking, Rawls’ understanding of “political friendship” as well as of politics in general is different from that of classical Greek philosophers and particularly from Aristotle’s concepts. Now let us look into Walzer’s “communitarian critique of liberalism”.

Instead of analyzing Michael Walzer’s major work *Spheres of Justice*, we shall outline only his central postulate and the differences between him and Rawls. He writes about this in his Foreword to the German edition of *Sphären der Gerechtigkeit* of 1994: “Simply, there is not a single fair rule of distribution or a consistent attitude to the rules of distribution according to which all goods which are in high demand today could be distributed. This is my point of divergence with John Rawls and other philosophers, whose ‘principles of justice’ should serve as the grounds for the distribution of all major goods. Contrary to this, I advocate the authenticity of the principles of justice and the autonomy of individual spheres of distribution. None of the rules of distribution can claim universal applicability; nevertheless, there is the universal procedural rule: each good should be allocated according to the criteria valid in its own ‘sphere’”.<sup>27</sup> From the political standpoint the most important aspect of this is that not only the same goods in different societies require different rules of distribution but also that “different goods within the same society require different distribution rules”. Due to this Walzer concludes

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>26</sup> Concerning Aristotle’s practical philosophy and friendship, see my work on “Ethics and Friendship” in: *Filozofska istraživanja*, 52, Zagreb, 1994, pp. 5–25.

<sup>27</sup> M. Walzer, *Sphären der Gerechtigkeit. Ein Plaidoyer für Pluralität und Gleichheit*, Campus, Frankfurt, 1994, p.12.

that we have to separate various social spheres and take care as much as possible that “their boundaries do not overlap”.

These Walzer's attitudes regarding the uniqueness and separateness of individual spheres and spheres of social goods and the “valid criteria” according to which these goods should be allocated, link his theory not only to Anglo-Saxon empiricist and pragmatist tradition, from John Locke to John Dewey (which Walzer himself admits) but also to the grand tradition of European continental practical philosophy, primarily with that of Aristotle and Hegel and their concept of the ultimate good as the human good. More about this later, since we are more interested in Walzer's critique of liberalism.

Regarding the present-day controversy between liberalism and communitarianism, Axel Honneth correctly noticed that the open problems in that dispute have “nowhere been better defined” than in Michael Walzer's paper “Communitarian critique of liberalism”, published in his anthology of works on communitarianism. Of special interest is the fact that Walzer “in his attempt to justify liberal social system tries to put forth some empirical arguments”. Honneth underlines the significance of that empirical argument in Walzer's political theory with the following sentence: “The fact that liberal social systems have proved resistant to those processes of individualization and disassociation which were triggered off by their own principles is due to the fact that in the meantime the orientation towards the ethic good of individual freedom has become the core of the collective value linkage in modern Western societies.”<sup>28</sup>

For us in Central Europe, who of lately have increasingly been adopting not only abstract moral postulates but “ethic good of individual freedom” as well, it is of great importance to become aware that such an “orientation towards empirical argument” means that our societies can become “the core of collective value linkage” only if liberal social systems “actually” prove resistant to their own “processes of individualization and disassociation”. So, if we are true partisans of “ethic good of individual freedom”, Walzer's political theory of justice is of interest to us as well, though we still lag behind the developed societies of the West. Despite this, or perhaps due to this, on the basis of our own cultural traditions and history we have a possibility to shorten the developmental “processes of individualization and disassociation” and, even more important, modify them in accordance with our historical tradition and the increasing multiculturalism of today's world.

Walzer illustrates the situation in modern societies of the West by using American social life as an example. He describes what has happened to numerous variations of liberalism and communitarianism, two major theories of contemporary (at first American but now worldwide) practical

<sup>28</sup> A. Honneth (ed.), *Kommunitarismus*, op. cit., p. 17.



philosophy. He lists “their advantages which we should think through to see whether something could be plausibly constructed from different parts”.<sup>29</sup> He begins his reflection by claiming that “finally there could hardly be any doubt that we (in the USA) live in a society in which there is a relatively high level of detachment among people; in other words, individuals constantly separate one from another, caught in an often solitary and seemingly fortuitous mobility as if in imitation of the so called Brown’s motion. In other words, we live in a profoundly unstable society. The forms that this instability can take is best illustrated by the four most prominent types of mobility”.<sup>30</sup>

Walzer analyses these four variations of the mobility in American society and says that the first, the so called geographical mobility, shows that Americans move house more frequently than other nations. Americans are not “refugees but voluntary migratory birds”. Walzer deduces that “through this extensive geographical mobility, their ties to home and homeland have, in fact, grown enormously loose”.<sup>31</sup> The second, the so called social mobility, among other things implies the precariousness of “the communal heritage, i.e. handing down of beliefs and customs”. Closely linked with the geographical and social mobility is the marital mobility which leads to the erosion of the identity since, due to divorces and remarriages, many children do not get an opportunity to “listen to permanent or identical life histories about people they live with”.<sup>32</sup> The fourth is the political mobility which is the consequence of the fact that “place of abode, social status and family have lost their central value in the formation of personal identity. Being outside all political organizations, liberal citizens vote for the groupings which seem to them the best advocates of their ideals or interests”.<sup>33</sup>

Naturally, the mobility and the growth of an individual cannot be reduced to these four types of mobility, while liberalism as “the theoretical foundation and justification” of individual development and orientations should take into consideration the influence of other causes and instances of the “ever ponderable motion of individuals”,<sup>34</sup> so that their development would not be left at the mercy of the “outcomes of free will”. Walzer states that “in a liberal society, like in any other society, people are born into different, socially extremely distinct groups, they are born

<sup>29</sup> M. Walzer, “Kommunitaristische Kritik am Liberalismus”, in: A. Honneth (ed.), *Kommunitarismus*, op. cit., p. 164.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

with certain identities, male or female, catholic or Jewish, black, democratic, working-class, etc. Many of their later associations (as well as their later careers) are a mere reflection of these basic identities, which are less self-chosen than predetermined". Walzer goes on to say that his aim is not to set forth "a deterministic argumentation" and that liberalism facilitates the escape from the inherited worlds unlike "preliberal societies". Thus he rounds this complex subject matter by the latest definition of liberalism: liberalism is to a lesser extent defined by "the freedom of individuals to lock themselves into groups based on their identities than by the freedom to leave these groups and even the identities behind".<sup>35</sup>

Walzer has been trying to modernize liberalism and develop its potentials. In order to free liberalism from its own "self-destructive teaching", he advocates an occasional communitarian correction of liberalism as a "selective strengthening of those values" (which make the essence of liberalism) or as an effort to realize "the communal postulates through these liberal values".<sup>36</sup> Naturally, it is important not solely for the theory of liberalism but for the practice of liberalism as well whether "the desire for the association of ordinary citizens and the long-term benefits of this association outlive the four major types of mobility and whether they are up to the challenges of pluralism". Walzer's opinion is that this cannot be carried out without the mediation of the state. In this case the state is "the agent of mediation".<sup>37</sup>

However, that agent of mediation cannot be just any state or state alone, but only "a liberal state that considers itself a socially purposeful alliance" and which provides for the existence of an infinite number of other groupings, apart from or — even better — "despite the triumph of individual rights, despite the four types of mobility which are the manifestation of that triumph". According to Walzer, since these groupings are "continually threatened", the state must, "if it wants to remain a liberal state, protect and promote some of them, primarily those which in their appearance and objectives best correspond to the common values of liberal society". Walzer is, of course, aware that some serious problems ensue from that, but insists that he did not arrive to this conclusion "solely for theoretical reasons" but that "the history of the best liberal and the best social-democratic states (which are becoming identical) shows that they have been pursuing exactly these policies, though often in a very unsatisfactory manner".<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.172.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

In accordance with his theory of liberal, social democratic state, Walzer illustrates with concrete examples that, on the other hand, trade unions, religious communities and neighbourhoods rely on “feelings and beliefs” which are “in general older than the liberal state”. Naturally, there is the open question of “how strong these feelings and beliefs are and whether they are worth preserving” but “it seems that the feelings of communality and the common faith are much more stable than it was previously thought”.<sup>39</sup> By referring to John Dewey, Walzer advocates “the new decentralized and participatory image of liberal democracy”, which necessitates a “major strengthening of local authorities with the aim to stimulate the development and the spreading of civic virtues in the pluralist variety of social systems. This would mean trying to implement the postulates of communality which exist *within* liberalism since it has more to do with John Stuart Mill than Rousseau”.<sup>40</sup>

In accordance with such Walzer's thinking, the important thing, therefore, is the “development and spreading of civic virtues”, which will, within the contemporary liberal pluralist society, together with the major strengthening of local administration, realize the “postulates of communality inherent to liberalism” and thus continue the tradition of political thinking and political culture from Mill to Dewey. This distinguishes Walzer from John Rawls, who is more in line with Rousseau and Kant. As we have pointed out at the beginning, it is not unimportant which line or tradition of liberal and democratic thinking the contemporary renewal and development of political liberalism follow. Regarding Walzer's critique of liberalism, it is important to note that, owing to, first of all, his theory of liberal and social democracy, the gap between liberalism and communitarianism has been bridged so that liberalism does not advocate an “atomic society” nor mere “self-constitution” while communitarianism does not advocate an empty “communality thinking” nor a mere “self-socialization”.

The overcoming of the one-sidedness of liberalism and communitarianism is most obvious in the last chapter of the mentioned Walzer's study in which he says that “neither the liberal nor the communitarian theory need the precepts” which in the past brought about the opposition between liberalism and communitarianism. “What today's liberals are advocating is not the pre-social self, but only the self which is capable of a critical reflection upon the values which have defined its socialization, while critics of communitarianism, who have been doing just that, can hardly go on claiming that socialization is everything”. Walzer concludes: “The central topic of political theory is not the constitution of the self but the

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175. On Dewey's understanding of liberalism see Ivan Babić, *Politička teorija liberalizma*, Biblioteka politička misao, Zagreb, 1971, particularly pp. 127–130 which brings Dewey's critique of old liberalism.

ties formed among the many self-conscious selves, i.e. the pattern and the structure of their social relations".<sup>41</sup>

Regarding the right of the individual to "free association" and the withdrawal from the existing relations and social forms of conduct, which are illustrated in the contemporary pluralist liberal-democratic societies of the developed Western world by the already mentioned types of mobility in American society, Walzer cautions that "the more unstable our relations are, the easier they change. The four types of mobility pull us into their orbit, the society never stops its motion, so that the real subject of the liberal practice is not a pre-social but almost a post-social subject, an individual finally liberated from all permanently ingrained infinite set of ties".<sup>42</sup> The major bone of contention between the liberals and their communitarian critics now appears in a different light of the "fragmentation of liberal society" which is, according to Walzer, directly reflected "in the liberal self", which is "deeply subdetermined, split from within and thus forced to reinvent itself at every public occasion. Some liberals praise that freedom and the possibility of continual self-reinvention, while communitarians shed bitter tears over it, though at the same time they insist it does not exist since such a state cannot be *condition humaine*".<sup>43</sup>

In such novel circumstances, however, one should start from the modern liberal society and its types of mobility, since it is "the only society" that most communitarians really are familiar with, i.e. the very "liberal association of associations, whose composition is increasingly uncertain and threatened". So, communitarians "cannot triumph over such liberalism; what they can do is from time to time increase its inner capacity for association. This increase is always only temporary since the capacity for disassociation is no less firmly internalized and highly appreciated. This is the reason why communitarian critique is doomed to a perpetual reversal — perhaps after all not such a terrible fate".<sup>44</sup> In that conjecture the liberals and the communitarians of today, and probably of tomorrow, find common ground, since they are probably going to argue about which values and capacities for association in the contemporary liberal-democratic society to nurture, which injustices and capacities for disassociation to repress in order not only to preserve the modern communal life but to ensure its free and varied development and promotion as the contemporary human existence.

<sup>41</sup> M. Walzer, *ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

The most important outcome of the debate about American political philosophy of the last decade for us Europeans — at least for those who in that same period discussed in Zagreb, Dubrovnik and at European international symposiums and congresses about practical philosophy and political life in Greek polis and modern democracies, about the relation between the state and the civil society, about morality and tradition, about morality and the public property of reason and political life — is precisely the question about this new, modern and in that sense contemporary “posttraditional” way of coexistence which is in various forms achieved by free individuals in their states in accordance with their cultural tradition, liberal-democratic practice and the state of the world history. As is already known, historically developed and really free political life cannot be founded solely on modern civilization, its individualizations and disassociations, since, as a contemporary communal life it presupposes the entire historical *lebenswelt* (in Husserl’s words) and requires a “new form of communality”, as was recently said by Henning Ottmann. Ottmann envisages the new patriotism and virtues of citizens who will, in their liberal-democratic states and on the basis of their respective historical tradition, realize their individual rights and (in Walzer’s words) “postulates of communality inherent to liberalism”. Thus citizens will avoid “breaks” in the process of modern emancipation but will preserve their newly created freedoms and develop them further in order to foster not only safe, but free and good life.

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