PUBLIC Philosophy

Essays on Morality in Politics

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The re-election of President George W. Bush prompted a new wave of soul-searching among Democrats. Exit polls found that more voters based their presidential vote on "moral values" than on any other issue—more than terrorism, the war in Iraq, or the state of the economy. And those who cited moral values voted overwhelmingly (80 to 18 percent) for Bush over his opponent, John Kerry. Commentators were perplexed. "Somewhere along the line," a CNN reporter confessed, "all of us missed this moral values thing."

Skeptics warned against over-interpreting the "moral values" issue. They pointed out that the majority of voters did not share Bush's opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage, the most morally charged issues in the campaign. Other factors helped explain the Bush victory: Kerry's campaign had lacked a compelling theme; it is not easy to defeat an incumbent president during wartime; and Americans were still reeling from the terrorist attacks of September 11. Still, in the wake of the 2004 election, Democrats found themselves casting about for ways to speak more convincingly to Americans' moral and spiritual yearnings.

It was not the first time that Democrats had missed the "moral values thing." In the four decades following Lyndon Johnson's landslide victory in 1964, only two Democrats won the presidency. One was Jimmy Carter, a born-again Christian from Georgia who, in the wake of Watergate, promised to restore honesty and morality to gov-

ernment; the other was Bill Clinton who, despite his personal foibles, displayed a keen instinctive grasp of the religious and spiritual dimensions of politics. Other Democratic standard-bearers—Walter Mondale, Michael Dukakis, Al Gore, and John Kerry—eschewed soul talk, cleaving instead to the language of policies and programs.

When Democrats in recent times have reached for moral and religious resonance, their efforts have taken two forms, neither wholly convincing. Some, following the example of George W. Bush, have sprinkled their speeches with religious rhetoric and biblical references. (Bush has employed this strategy more brazenly than any modern president; his inaugural addresses and State of the Union speeches mention God more frequently than even Ronald Reagan did.) So intense was the competition for divine favor in the 2000 and 2004 campaigns that a Web site, *beliefnet.com*, established a "God-o-meter" to track the candidates' references to God.

The second approach Democrats have taken is to argue that moral values in politics are not only about cultural issues, such as abortion, school prayer, same-sex marriage, and the display of the Ten Commandments in courthouses, but also about economic issues, such as health care, child care, education funding, and Social Security. John Kerry offered a version of this approach in his acceptance speech at the 2004 Democratic convention, using the V-words ("value" and "values") no less than 32 times.

Though the impulse is right, the hortatory fix for the values deficit comes across as stilted and unconvincing, for two reasons: First, Democrats have had trouble articulating, with clarity and conviction, the vision of economic justice that underlies their social and economic policies. Second, even a strong argument for economic justice does not by itself constitute a governing vision. Providing everyone a fair opportunity to reap the rewards of an affluent society is one aspect of the good society. But fairness isn't everything. It does not answer the hunger for a public life of larger meaning, because it

does not connect the project of self-government with people's desire to participate in a common good greater than themselves.

Notwithstanding the outpouring of patriotism in the immediate aftermath of September 11, and the sacrifices being made by the soldiers in Iraq, American politics lacks an animating vision of the good society, and of the shared obligations of citizenship. A few weeks after the terrorist attacks of 2001, President Bush, who insisted on his tax cuts even as he led the nation into war, was asked why he had not called for any sacrifices from the American people as a whole. He replied that the American people were sacrificing by enduring longer lines at airports. In a 2004 interview in Normandy, France, on the anniversary of D-Day, NBC's Tom Brokaw asked the President why he was not asking the American people to sacrifice more so that they would feel connected with their fellow citizens fighting and dying in Iraq. Bush seemed mystified, replying, "What does that mean, 'sacrifice more'?" Brokaw offered the example of World War II rationing and restated his question: "There's a great sense, I think, that there's a disconnect between what American military people are doing overseas and what Americans are doing at home." Bush replied: "America has been sacrificing. Our economy hasn't [been] as strong as it should be, and there's—people haven't been working. Fortunately, our economy's now strong, and it's getting stronger."

That Democrats did not seize the theme of sacrifice, and that Bush scarcely understood the question, testifies to the dulled civic sensibilities of American politics in the early years of the twenty-first century. Without a compelling account of the public purpose, the electorate settled, in a time of terror, for the security and moral certitude they associated with the incumbent President.

The essays in this volume explore the moral and civic dilemmas that animate American public life. Part I, "American Civic Life," offers an overview of the American political tradition. It shows that the

citizenship, community, and civic virtue, and that grapples more directly with questions of the good life. Liberals often worry that inviting moral and religious argument into the public square runs the risk of intolerance and coercion. The essays in this volume respond to that worry by showing that substantive moral discourse is not at odds with progressive public purposes, and that a pluralist society need not shrink from engaging the moral and religious convictions its citizens bring to public life.

Many of these essays blur the line between political commentary and political philosophy. They constitute a venture in public philosophy, in two senses: they find in the political and legal controversies of our day an occasion for philosophy, and they represent an attempt to do philosophy in public—to bring moral and political philosophy to bear on contemporary public discourse. Most of the essays in this volume originally appeared in publications aimed at an audience beyond the academy, such as the *Atlantic Monthly,* the *New Republic,* the *New York Times,* and the *New York Review of Books.* Others appeared in law reviews or scholarly publications. But all are addressed to citizens as well as scholars, and seek to shed light on contemporary public life.

The essays in this section seek in the American political tradition sources of civic renewal for our time. Chapter 1, "America's Search for a Public Philosophy," is an essay in retrieval though not, I hope, in nostalgia. It shows that our political debates have not always focused on the size and distribution of the national product; nor is the consumerist, individualist understanding of freedom so familiar in our time the only way of conceiving liberty. From Thomas Jefferson to the New Deal, a more demanding, civic conception of freedom has also informed American political argument. The scale of political life in a global age complicates the civic project; we cannot invigorate self-government simply by reviving civic virtue as traditionally conceived. But recalling the civic strand of our tradition can help us reimagine present possibilities. At the very least, it can remind us of questions we have forgotten how to ask: How can powerful economic forces be brought to democratic account? Is self-government possible under conditions of a global economy? In a pluralist age marked by multiple identities and complex selves, what forms of commonality can democratic societies hope to inspire?

Chapters 2–7 are shorter essays that explore the changing terms of American political discourse in recent decades. "Beyond Individualism: Democrats and Community" was first published as Michael Dukakis and Gary Hart competed for the 1988 Democratic nomination. I argued that the Democratic Party had ceded to Ronald Reagan the language of community, and had lost its moral and civic voice. Not long after the article appeared, I received an appreciative letter from a reader in Little Rock. Bill Clinton, then the Governor of Arkansas, wrote that he had been making speeches around the country

sounding similar themes, and was struck by two points in particular: "one, that we have something to learn from Reagan's conservative vision and his success in 'speaking the language of self-government and community,'" and second, "that we must focus less on macroeconomic issues and more on 'questions of economic structure' and 'building communities capable of self-government on a manageable scale.'"

Chapters 3–5 are essays written eight years later, in the midst of Clinton's presidency. They reflect on his partially successful attempt to wrest from Republicans the language of community and moral values and on his somewhat less successful attempt to articulate large governing themes for progressive politics at the end of the twentieth century. Both efforts were disrupted by the impeachment proceedings of 1998–99, touched off by a Clinton sex scandal involving a White House intern. Chapter 6 contrasts the largely partisan attempt by House Republicans to impeach Clinton with the more sober impeachment hearings that led to the resignation of Richard Nixon, hearings I had witnessed as a young journalist.

The section concludes with an essay recalling the civic voice of Robert F. Kennedy, drawn from a talk I gave at a gathering at the John F. Kennedy Library in 2000, celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of Robert Kennedy's birth.

one

AMERICA'S SEARCH FOR A PUBLIC PHILOSOPHY

LIBERAL VERSUS REPUBLICAN FREEDOM

The central idea of the public philosophy by which we live is that freedom consists in our capacity to choose our ends for ourselves. Politics should not try to form the character or cultivate the virtue of its citizens, for to do so would be to "legislate morality." Government should not affirm, through its policies or laws, any particular conception of the good life; instead it should provide a neutral framework of rights within which people can choose their own values and ends.

The aspiration to neutrality finds prominent expression in our politics and law. Although it derives from the liberal tradition of political thought, its province is not limited to those known as liberals, rather than conservatives, in American politics; it can be found across the political spectrum. Liberals invoke the ideal of neutrality when opposing school prayer or restrictions on abortion or attempts by Christian fundamentalists to bring their morality into the public square. Conservatives appeal to neutrality when opposing attempts by government to impose certain moral restraints—for the sake of workers' safety or environmental protection or distributive justice—on the operation of the market economy.

The ideal of free choice also figures on both sides of the debate over the welfare state. Republicans have long complained that taxing

the rich to pay for welfare programs for the poor is a form of coerced charity that violates people's freedom to choose what to do with their own money. Democrats have long replied that government must assure all citizens a decent level of income, housing, education, and health care, on the grounds that those who are crushed by economic necessity are not truly free to exercise choice in other domains. Despite their disagreement about how government should act to respect individual choice, both sides assume that freedom consists in the capacity of people to choose their own ends.

So familiar is this vision of freedom that it might seem a permanent feature of the American political tradition. But as a reigning public philosophy, it is a recent arrival, a development of the past half century. Its distinctive character can best be seen by comparison with a rival public philosophy that it gradually displaced: a version of republican political theory.

Central to republican theory is the idea that liberty depends on sharing in self-government. This idea is not by itself inconsistent with liberal freedom. Participating in politics can be one among the ways in which people choose to pursue their individual ends. According to republican political theory, however, sharing in self-rule involves something more. It involves deliberating with fellow citizens about the common good and helping to shape the destiny of the political community. But to deliberate well about the common good requires more than the capacity to choose one's ends and to respect others' rights to do the same. It requires a knowledge of public affairs and also a sense of belonging, a concern for the whole, a moral bond with the community whose fate is at stake. To share in self-rule therefore requires that citizens possess, or come to acquire, certain civic virtues. But this means that republican politics cannot be neutral toward the values and ends its citizens espouse. The republican conception of freedom, unlike the liberal conception, requires a formative politics, a politics that cultivates in citizens the qualities of character that self-government requires.

suited to self-government. "Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God," he wrote—the embodiments of "genuine virtue." The political economists of Europe claimed that every nation should manufacture for itself, but Jefferson worried that large-scale manufacturing would create a propertyless class, lacking the independence that republican citizenship requires: "Dependance begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition." Jefferson thought it better to "let our work-shops remain in Europe" and avoid the moral corruption they brought; better to import manufactured goods than the manners and habits that attended their production. "The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body," he wrote. "It is the manners and spirit of a people which preserve a republic in vigour. A degeneracy in these is a canker which soon eats to the heart of its laws and constitution."

Whether to encourage domestic manufacturing or to retain the nation's agrarian character was the subject of intense debate in the early decades of the republic. In the end, Jefferson's agrarian vision did not prevail. But the republican assumption underlying his economics—that public policy should cultivate the qualities of character that self-government requires—found broader support and a longer career. From the Revolution to the Civil War the political economy of citizenship played a prominent role in American national debate. In fact, the civic strand of economic argument extended even into the twentieth century, when Progressives grappled with big business and its consequences for self-government.

THE CURSE OF BIGNESS

The political predicament of the Progressive Era bears a striking similarity to our own. Then as now, Americans sensed the unraveling of community and feared for the prospects of self-government. Then

vision of labor' makes men more interdependent and human by drawing them together into a unity of purpose." But whether this unity of purpose is achieved depends on whether the participants take pride in their common project and regard it as their own; "the mere mechanical fact of interdependence amounts to nothing."

Political debate in the Progressive Era focused on two different responses to the power of big business. Some sought to preserve self-government by decentralizing economic power and thus bringing it under democratic control. Others considered economic concentration irreversible and sought to control it by enlarging the capacity of national democratic institutions. The decentralizing strand of progressivism found its ablest advocate in Louis D. Brandeis, who before his appointment to the Supreme Court was an activist attorney and an outspoken critic of industrial concentration. Brandeis's primary concern was with the civic consequences of economic arrangements. He opposed monopolies and trusts not because their market power led to higher consumer prices but because their political power undermined democratic government.

In Brandeis's view, big business threatened self-government in two ways—directly, by overwhelming democratic institutions and defying their control, and indirectly, by eroding the moral and civic capacities that equip workers to think and act as citizens. Brandeis brought long-standing republican themes into the twentieth-century debate: like Jefferson, he viewed concentrated power, whether economic or political, as inimical to liberty. His solution was not to confront big business with big government—that would only compound "the curse of bigness"—but to break up the trusts and restore competition. Only in this way would it be possible to preserve a decentralized economy of locally based enterprises amenable to democratic control.

Brandeis favored industrial democracy not for the sake of improving workers' incomes, desirable though that was, but for the sake of improving their civic capacities. For him, the formation of citizens

capable of self-government was an end even higher than distributive justice. "We Americans are committed not only to social justice in the sense of avoiding . . . [an] unjust distribution of wealth; but we are committed primarily to democracy." The "striving for democracy" was inseparable from a "striving for the development of men," he said. "It is absolutely essential in order that men may develop that they be properly fed and properly housed, and that they have proper opportunities of education and recreation. We cannot reach our goal without those things. But we may have all those things and have a nation of slaves."

THE NEW NATIONALISM

The other branch of the Progressive movement offered a different response to the threat posed by corporate power. Rather than decentralize the economy, Theodore Roosevelt proposed a "New Nationalism" to regulate big business by increasing the capacity of the national government.

Like Brandeis, Roosevelt feared the political consequences of concentrated economic power. Where Roosevelt disagreed with the decentralizers was over how to reassert democratic authority. He considered big business an inevitable product of industrial development and saw little point in trying to recover the decentralized political economy of the nineteenth century. Since most big corporations operated in interstate or foreign commerce, beyond the reach of individual states, only the federal government was suited to the task of controlling them. The power of the national government had to grow to match the scale of corporate power.

Like republicans since Jefferson's time, Roosevelt worried about the civic consequences of economic arrangements. His aim was not only to reduce the domination of government by big business but also to enlarge the self-understanding of American citizens, to instill what he called "a genuine and permanent moral awakening," "a spirit

of broad and far-reaching nationalism." More than a program of institutional reform, the New Nationalism was a formative project that sought to cultivate a new sense of national citizenship.

Roosevelt was the leading spokesman for the New Nationalism; Herbert Croly was its leading philosopher. In *The Promise of American Life* (1909), Croly laid out the political theory underlying the nationalist strand of progressivism: given "the increasing concentration of American industrial, political, and social life," American government "demands more rather than less centralization." But, according to Croly, the success of democracy also required the nationalization of politics. The primary form of political community had to be recast on a national scale. This was the way to ease the gap, felt so acutely in the Progressive Era, between the scale of American life and the terms of American identity. Given the national scale of the modern economy, democracy required "an increasing nationalization of the American people in ideas, in institutions, and in spirit."

Although Croly renounced Jefferson's notion that democracy depends on dispersed power, he shared Jefferson's conviction that economic and political arrangements should be judged by the qualities of character they promote. For him, the project of nationalizing the American character was "an essentially formative and enlightening political transformation." American democracy could advance only as the nation became more of a nation, which required in turn a civic education that inspired in Americans a deeper sense of national identity.

The decentralizing and nationalizing versions of Progressive reform found memorable expression in the 1912 contest between Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt. In retrospect, however, the greater significance of that campaign lies in the assumptions the protagonists shared. Brandeis and Wilson on one side, and Croly and Roosevelt on the other, agreed despite their differences that economic and political institutions should be assessed for their tendency to promote or erode the moral qualities that self-government re-

quires. Like Jefferson before them, they worried about the sort of citizens that the economic arrangements of their day were likely to produce. They argued, in different ways, for a political economy of citizenship.

The economic arguments of our day bear little resemblance to the issues that divided the Progressive reformers. They were concerned with the structure of the economy and debated how to preserve democratic government in the face of concentrated economic power. We are concerned with the overall level of economic output and debate how to promote economic growth while assuring broad access to the fruits of prosperity. In retrospect it is possible to identify the moment when our economic questions displaced theirs. Beginning in the late New Deal and culminating in the early 1960s, the political economy of growth and distributive justice displaced the political economy of citizenship.

THE NEW DEAL AND THE KEYNESIAN REVOLUTION

As the New Deal began, political debate continued to reflect the alternatives defined in the Progressive Era. When Franklin D. Roosevelt took office, in the midst of the Depression, two traditions of reform offered competing approaches to economic recovery. One group of reformers, heirs to the philosophy of Louis Brandeis, sought to decentralize the economy through antitrust laws and other measures aimed at restoring competition. Another group, indebted to the New Nationalism of Teddy Roosevelt, sought to rationalize the economy through national economic planning. Despite their differences, both the antitrusters and the planners assumed that overcoming the Depression required a change in the structure of industrial capitalism. They also agreed that the concentration of power in the economy, left to its own devices, posed a threat to democratic government.

The competition between these approaches persisted, unresolved,

omy of citizenship gave way to the political economy of growth and distributive justice.

KEYNESIANISM AND LIBERALISM

The advent of the new political economy marked a decisive moment in the demise of the republican strand of American politics and the rise of contemporary liberalism. According to this liberalism, government should be neutral as to conceptions of the good life, in order to respect persons as free and independent selves, capable of choosing their own ends. Keynesian fiscal policy both reflected this liberalism and deepened its hold on American public life. Although those who practiced Keynesian economics did not defend it in precisely these terms, the new political economy displayed two features of the liberalism that defines the procedural republic. First, it offered policymakers and elected officials a way to "bracket," or set aside, controversial views of the good society, and so promised a consensus that programs for structural reform could not offer. Second, by abandoning the formative project, it denied government a stake in the moral character of its citizens and affirmed the notion of persons as free and independent selves.

The clearest expression of faith in the new economics as a neutral instrument of national governance was offered by President John F. Kennedy. In a commencement address at Yale University in 1962, he argued that modern economic problems could best be resolved if people set aside their ideological convictions. "The central domestic issues of our time," he observed, "are more subtle and less simple" than the large moral and political issues that commanded the nation's attention in earlier days. "They relate not to basic clashes of philosophy or ideology but to ways and means of reaching common goals. . . . What is at stake in our economic decisions today is not some grand warfare of rival ideologies which will sweep the country

proclaimed. "For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life." We would "pay any price, bear any burden," to assure the success of liberty.

Beyond the bounty of American power, the promise of mastery in the postwar decades had another source in the public philosophy of contemporary liberalism itself. The image of persons as free and independent selves, unbound by moral or communal ties they have not chosen, is a liberating, even exhilarating, ideal. Freed from the dictates of custom or tradition, the liberal self is installed as sovereign, cast as the author of the only obligations that constrain. This image of freedom found expression across the political spectrum. Lyndon Johnson argued the case for the welfare state not in terms of communal obligation but instead in terms of enabling people to choose their own ends: "For more than thirty years, from Social Security to the war against poverty, we have diligently worked to enlarge the freedom of man," he said upon accepting the 1964 Democratic presidential nomination. "And as a result Americans tonight are freer to live as they want to live, to pursue their ambitions, to meet their desires . . . than at any time in all of our glorious history." Welfare-rights advocates opposed work requirements, mandatory job training, and family-planning programs for welfare recipients on the grounds that all people, including the poor, "should have the freedom to choose how they may express the meaning of their lives." For their part, conservative critics of Johnson's Great Society also made their arguments in the name of the liberal conception of freedom. The only legitimate functions of government, Barry Goldwater insisted, were those that made it "possible for men to follow their chosen pursuits with maximum freedom." The libertarian economist Milton Friedman opposed Social Security and other mandatory government programs on the grounds that they violated people's rights "to live their lives by their own values."

And so for a time the special circumstances of American life obscured the passing of the civic conception of freedom. But when the

moment of mastery expired—when, in 1968, Vietnam, riots in the ghettos, campus unrest, and the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy brought a shattering of faith—Americans were left ill equipped to contend with the dislocation that swirled about them. The liberating promise of the freely choosing self could not compensate for the loss of self-government more broadly conceived. Events spun out of control at home and abroad, and government seemed helpless to respond.

REAGAN'S CIVIC CONSERVATISM

There followed a season of protest that is with us still. As disillusionment with government grew, politicians groped to articulate the frustrations that the reigning political agenda did not address. The most successful, at least in electoral terms, was Ronald Reagan. Although he ultimately failed to allay the discontent he tapped, it is instructive nonetheless to consider the source of his appeal and the way it departed from the prevailing terms of political discourse.

Reagan drew, in different moods and moments, on both the libertarian and the civic strands of American conservatism. The most resonant part of his political appeal derived from the second of these, from his skillful evocation of communal values such as family and neighborhood, religion and patriotism. What set Reagan apart from laissez-faire conservatives also set him apart from the public philosophy of his day: his ability to identify with Americans' yearnings for a common life of larger meanings on a smaller, less impersonal scale than that the procedural republic provides.

Reagan blamed big government for disempowering citizens and proposed a "New Federalism" that would shift power to states and localities, recalling the long-standing republican worry about concentrated power. But Reagan revived this tradition with a difference. Previous advocates of republican political economy had worried about big government and big business alike. For Reagan, the curse

of bigness attached to government alone. Even as he evoked the ideal of community, he had little to say about the corrosive effects of capital flight or the disempowering consequences of economic power organized on a vast scale.

Reagan-era Democrats did not challenge Reagan on this score, nor did they otherwise join the debate about community and self-government. Tied to the terms of rights-oriented liberalism, they missed the mood of discontent. The anxieties of the age concerned the erosion of those communities intermediate between the individual and the nation—families and neighborhoods, cities and towns, schools and congregations. But Democrats, once the party of dispersed power, had learned in recent decades to view intermediate communities with suspicion. Too often such communities had been pockets of prejudice, outposts of intolerance, places where the tyranny of the majority held sway. And so, from the New Deal to the civil-rights movement to the Great Society, the liberal project was to use federal power to vindicate individual rights that local communities had failed to protect. This unease with the middle terms of civic life, however honorably acquired, left Democrats ill equipped to attend to the erosion of self-government.

The civic strand of Reagan's rhetoric enabled him to succeed, where Democrats failed, in tapping the mood of discontent. In the end, however, Reagan's presidency did little to alter the conditions underlying the discontent. He governed more as a market conservative than as a civic conservative. The unfettered capitalism he favored did nothing to repair the moral fabric of families, neighborhoods, and communities and much to undermine them.

THE RISKS OF REPUBLICAN POLITICS

Any attempt to revitalize the civic strand of freedom must confront two sobering objections. The first doubts that it is possible to revive republican ideals; the second doubts that it is desirable. The first ob-

jection holds that given the scale and complexity of the modern world, it is unrealistic to aspire to self-government as the republican tradition conceives it. From Aristotle's polis to Jefferson's agrarian ideal, the civic conception of freedom found its home in small and bounded places, largely self-sufficient, inhabited by people whose conditions of life afforded the leisure, learning, and commonality to deliberate well about public concerns. But we do not live that way today. To the contrary, we live in a highly mobile continental society, teeming with diversity. Moreover, even this vast society is not self-sufficient but is situated in a global economy whose frenzied flow of money and goods, information and images, pays little heed to nations, much less neighborhoods. How, under conditions such as these, could the civic strand of freedom possibly take hold?

In fact, this objection continues, the republican strand of American politics, for all its persistence, has often spoken in a voice tinged with nostalgia. Even as Jefferson exalted the yeoman farmer, America was becoming a manufacturing nation. And so it was with the artisan republicans of Andrew Jackson's day, the apostles of free labor in Abraham Lincoln's time, and the shopkeepers and pharmacists Brandeis defended against the curse of bigness. In each of these cases—or so it is argued—republican ideals found their expression at the last moment, too late to offer feasible alternatives, just in time to offer an elegy for a lost cause. If the republican tradition is irredeemably nostalgic, then whatever its capacity to illuminate the defects of liberal politics, it offers little that could lead us to a richer civic life.

The second objection holds that even were it possible to recover republican ideals, to do so would not be desirable; given the difficulty of instilling civic virtue, republican politics always runs the risk of coercion. This peril can be glimpsed in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's account of the formative undertaking necessary to a democratic republic. The task of the republic's founder or great legislator, he writes, is no less than "to change human nature, to transform each individual . . . into a part of a larger whole from which this individual receives,

seau's politics to coercion. It is, moreover, an assumption that republican politics can do without. As America's experience with the political economy of citizenship suggests, the civic conception of freedom does not render disagreement unnecessary. It offers a way of conducting political argument, not transcending it.

Unlike Rousseau's unitary vision, the republican politics Tocqueville described is more clamorous than consensual. It does not despise differentiation. Instead of collapsing the space between persons, it fills this space with public institutions that gather people together in various capacities, that both separate and relate them. These institutions include the townships, schools, religions, and virtue-sustaining occupations that form the "character of mind" and "habits of the heart" a democratic republic requires. Whatever their more particular purposes, these agencies of civic education inculcate the habit of attending to public things. And yet given their multiplicity, they prevent public life from dissolving into an undifferentiated whole.

So the civic strand of freedom is not necessarily coercive. It can sometimes find pluralistic expression. To this extent the liberal objection to republican political theory is misplaced. But the liberal worry does contain an insight that cannot be dismissed: republican politics is risky politics, a politics without guarantees, and the risks it entails inhere in the formative project. To accord the political community a stake in the character of its citizens is to concede the possibility that bad communities may form bad characters. Dispersed power and multiple sites of civic formation may reduce these dangers but cannot remove them.

WHERE LIBERALS FEAR TO TREAD

What to make of this complaint depends on the alternatives. If there were a way to secure freedom without attending to the character of citizens, or to define rights without affirming a conception of the good life, then the liberal objection to the formative project might be

best understanding of the highest human ends? Don't arguments about justice and rights unavoidably draw on particular conceptions of the good life, whether we admit it or not?

The problems in the theory of procedural liberalism show up in the practice it inspires. A politics that brackets morality and religion too completely soon generates its own disenchantment. Where political discourse lacks moral resonance, the yearning for a public life of larger meaning finds undesirable expression. The Christian Coalition and similar groups seek to clothe the naked public square with narrow, intolerant moralisms. Fundamentalists rush in where liberals fear to tread. The disenchantment also assumes more secular forms. Absent a political agenda that addresses the moral dimension of public questions, attention becomes riveted on the private vices of public officials. Political discourse becomes increasingly preoccupied with the scandalous, the sensational, and the confessional as purveyed by tabloids, talk shows, and eventually the mainstream media as well. It cannot be said that the public philosophy of contemporary liberalism is wholly responsible for these tendencies. But liberalism's vision of political discourse is too spare to contain the moral energies of democratic life. It creates a moral void that opens the way for intolerance and other misguided moralisms.

A political agenda lacking substantive moral discourse is one symptom of the public philosophy of the procedural republic. Another is a loss of mastery. The triumph of the voluntarist conception of freedom has coincided with a growing sense of disempowerment. Despite the expansion of rights in recent decades, Americans find to their frustration that they are losing control of the forces that govern their lives. This has partly to do with the insecurity of jobs in the global economy, but it also reflects the self-image by which we live. The liberal self-image and the actual organization of modern social and economic life are sharply at odds. Even as we think and act as freely choosing, independent selves, we confront a world governed by impersonal structures of power that defy our understanding and

control. The voluntarist conception of freedom leaves us ill equipped to contend with this condition. Liberated though we may be from the burden of identities we have not chosen, entitled though we may be to the range of rights assured by the welfare state, we find ourselves overwhelmed as we turn to face the world on our own resources.

GLOBAL POLITICS AND PARTICULAR IDENTITIES

If the public philosophy of contemporary liberalism fails to address democracy's discontent, the question remains how a renewed attention to republican themes might better equip us to contend with our condition. Is self-government in the republican sense even possible under modern conditions, and if so, what qualities of character would be necessary to sustain it?

A partial, inchoate answer can be glimpsed in the shifting terms of contemporary political argument. Some conservatives, and recently some liberals, have gestured toward a revival of civic virtue, character formation, and moral judgment as considerations in public policy and political discourse. From the 1930s to the 1980s conservatives criticized the welfare state on libertarian grounds. Since the mid-1980s, however, the conservative argument has focused on the moral and civic consequences of federal social policy. Welfare is at odds with freedom, many conservatives now argue, not because it coerces taxpayers but because it breeds dependence and irresponsibility among recipients and so deprives them of the independence that full citizenship requires.

Liberals came more reluctantly to the revolt against the procedural republic, but they too have begun to articulate civic themes. In November of 1993, speaking in the Memphis church where Martin Luther King Jr. preached the night before his assassination, Bill Clinton ventured onto moral and spiritual terrain that liberals of recent times had sought to avoid. Restoring work to the life of the in-

ner city was essential, he explained, not only for the income it would bring but also for its character-forming effects, for the discipline, structure, and pride that work confers on family life.

But suppose that the civic intimations present in our politics did find fuller voice and succeeded in reorienting the terms of political discourse. What is the prospect that a revitalized politics could actually alleviate the loss of mastery and the erosion of community that lie at the heart of democracy's discontent? Even a politics that engaged rather than avoided substantive moral discourse and managed to revive the formative project would confront a daunting obstacle. This obstacle consists in the formidable scale on which modern economic life is organized and the difficulty of achieving the democratic political authority necessary to govern it.

The difficulty actually involves two related challenges. One is to devise political institutions capable of governing the global economy. The other is to cultivate the civic identities necessary to sustain those institutions, to supply them with the moral authority they require. It is not obvious that both these challenges can be met.

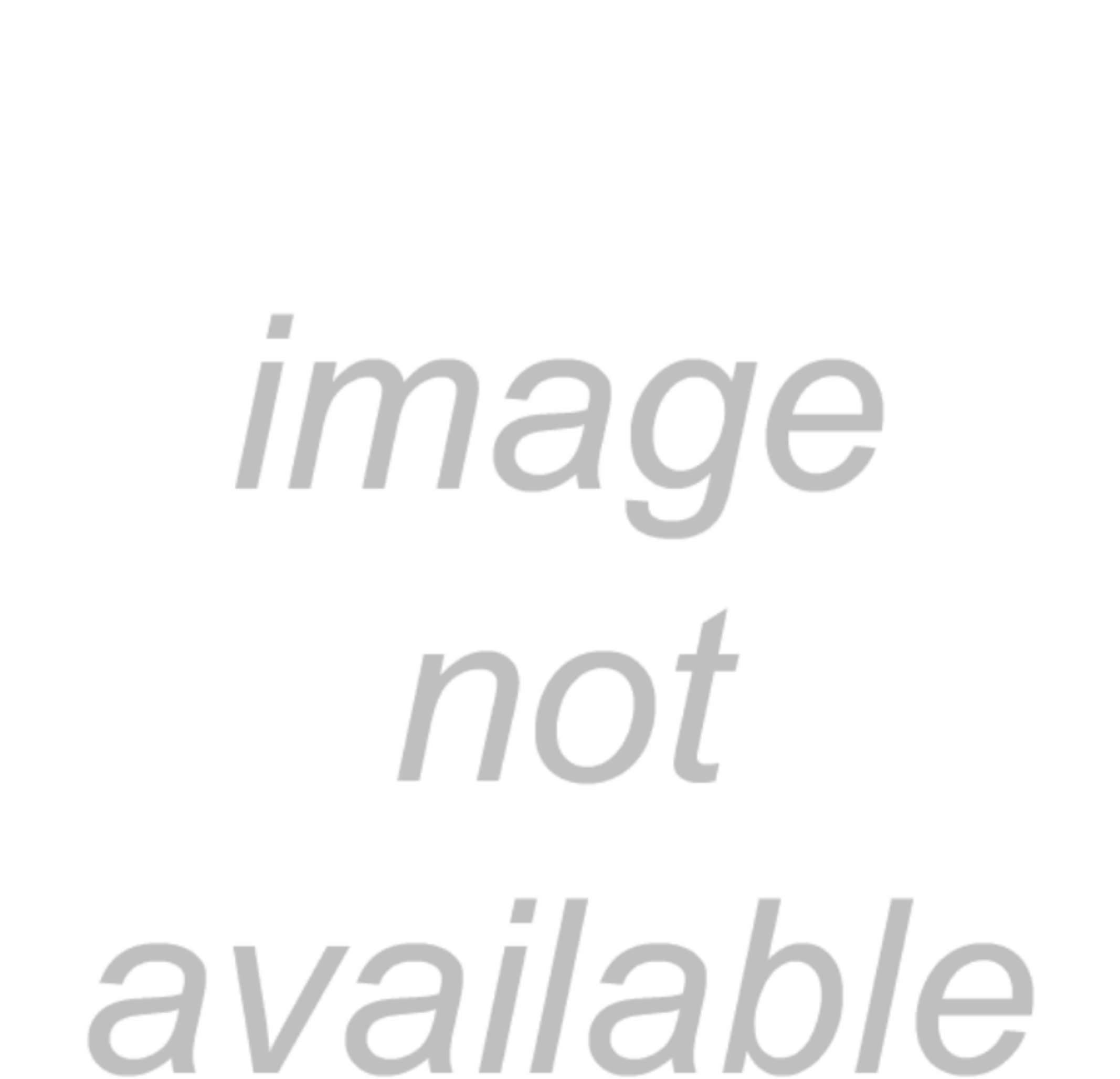
In a world where capital and goods, information and images, pollution and people, flow across national boundaries with unprecedented ease, politics must assume transnational, even global, forms, if only to keep up. Otherwise, economic power will go unchecked by democratically sanctioned political power. Nation-states, traditionally the vehicles of self-government, will find themselves increasingly unable to bring their citizens' judgments to bear on the economic forces that govern their destinies. If the global character of the economy suggests the need for transnational forms of governance, however, it remains to be seen whether such political units can inspire the identification and allegiance—the moral and civic culture—on which democratic authority ultimately depends.

In striking ways, the challenge to self-government in the global economy resembles the predicament American politics faced in the early decades of the twentieth century. Then as now, new forms

of commerce and communication spilled across familiar political boundaries and created networks of interdependence among people in distant places. But the new interdependence did not carry with it a new sense of community. Jane Addams's insight, that "the mere mechanical fact of interdependence amounts to nothing," is no less apt today. What railroads, telegraph wires, and national markets were to her time, satellite hookups, CNN, cyberspace, and global markets are to ours—instruments that link people without necessarily making them neighbors or fellow citizens or participants in a common venture.

Given the similarity between their predicament and ours, it is tempting to think that the logic of the Progressives' solution can be extended to our time. If the way to respond to a national economy was to strengthen the national government and cultivate a sense of national citizenship, perhaps the way to respond to a global economy is to strengthen global governance and cultivate a corresponding sense of global or cosmopolitan citizenship. Internationally minded reformers have already begun to articulate this impulse. The Commission on Global Governance, a group of twenty-eight public officials from around the world, recently published a report calling for greater authority for international institutions. The commission also called for efforts to inspire "broad acceptance of a global civic ethic," to transform "a global neighborhood based on economic exchange and improved communications into a universal moral community."

The analogy between the globalizing impulse of our time and the nationalizing project of the Progressives' time does hold to this extent: We cannot hope to govern the global economy without transnational political institutions, and we cannot expect to sustain such institutions without cultivating more-expansive civic identities. Human-rights conventions, global environmental accords, and world bodies governing trade, finance, and economic development are among the undertakings that will depend for public support on inspiring a greater sense of engagement in a shared global destiny.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onance, but not for the reasons conservatives articulate. The American welfare state is politically vulnerable because it does not rest on a sense of national community adequate to its purpose. The nationalizing project that unfolded from the Progressive Era to the New Deal to the Great Society succeeded only in part. It managed to create a strong national government but failed to cultivate a shared national identity. As the welfare state developed, it drew less on an ethic of social solidarity and mutual obligation and more on an ethic of fair procedures and individual rights. But the liberalism of the procedural republic proved an inadequate substitute for the strong sense of citizenship that the welfare state requires.

If the nation cannot summon more than a minimal commonality, it is unlikely that the global community can do better, at least on its own. A more promising basis for a democratic politics that reaches beyond nations is a revitalized civic life nourished in the more particular communities we inhabit. In the age of NAFTA the politics of neighborhood matters more, not less. People will not pledge allegiance to vast and distant entities, whatever their importance, unless those institutions are somehow connected to political arrangements that reflect the identity of the participants.

BEYOND SOVEREIGN STATES AND SOVEREIGN SELVES

The growing aspiration for the public expression of communal identities reflects a yearning for political arrangements that can situate people in a world increasingly governed by vast and distant forces. For a time the nation-state promised to answer this yearning, to provide the link between identity and self-rule. In theory at least, each state was a more or less self-sufficient political and economic unit that gave expression to the collective identity of a people defined by a common history, language, or tradition. The nation-state laid claim to the allegiance of its citizens on the ground that its exercise of sovereignty expressed their collective identity.

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BEYOND INDIVIDUALISM

DEMOCRATS AND COMMUNITY

This essay appeared as the 1988 presidential primary season began. Michael Dukakis won the Democratic nomination that year, and was defeated by George H. W. Bush in the general election.

For half a century, the Democratic Party was sustained by the public philosophy of New Deal liberalism. Democrats and Republicans debated the role of government in the market economy, and the responsibility of the nation for the collective provision of basic needs. The Democrats won that debate, and elected every president but Eisenhower from 1932 to 1964.

In time the Republicans stopped attacking the welfare state and argued instead that they could manage it better. But the New Deal agenda continued to define the terms of debate, and the meaning of liberalism and conservatism. Liberals favored a greater federal role in the social and economic life of the nation, conservative less.

Between these alternatives flowed the rhythms of American politics. Arthur Schlesinger Jr. has written that American politics moves in cycles, from activism to quietude and back again. Since progress demands passions that cannot last for long, liberalism advances by seasons, punctuated by conservative interludes that set the stage for further reforms.

Thus the complacent Republican '20s gave way to the activism of

FDR and Truman, which receded in turn to the languid years of Eisenhower. A time of consolidation prepared the way for renewed political exertions, for Kennedy's call to "get the country moving again," and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. By the end of the '60s, exhausted and divided, the country collapsed into Richard Nixon's awkward embrace.

This account of the political pendulum explains the predominance of the Democratic Party in recent times. Although it assigns to each party a distinctive vocation—the Democrats reform, the Republicans repose—it casts the Democratic Party as the primary agent of moral and political improvement. And so, for half a century, the Democrats have been. The welfare state took shape under Democratic auspices, and the great issues of the 1960s—civil rights and the Vietnam War—were fought out not between the parties but within the Democratic Party.

If the cycles of American politics hold up, 1988 should be a Democratic year. If the world turns as the conventional wisdom suggests, eight years of Ronald Reagan will have left a country ripe for reform.

But there is reason to think that the cycle has stalled, the pattern dissolved. By the 1970s the New Deal agenda had become obsolete. The alternatives it posed lost their capacity to inspire the electorate or animate meaningful debate. Voter turnout steadily declined from the '60s to the '80s, party loyalties eroded, and disillusion with government grew. Meanwhile, politicians groped to articulate frustrations and discontents that the reigning political agenda did not capture. From the left and the right came a politics of protest. In the 1972 primaries, pollsters found to their surprise that many supporters of George Wallace favored George McGovern as their second choice. Despite their ideological differences, both appealed to a tradition of populist protest.

In 1976 Jimmy Carter brought the Southern and progressive strands of populist protest together in a single candidacy. Like Wal-

lace and McGovern, he campaigned as a political outsider, a critic of the federal bureaucracy and the Washington establishment. But Carter's presidency only deepened the discontent he had tapped as a candidate. Four years later another self-described political outsider, Ronald Reagan, ran for president by running against government, and won.

In different ways, both Carter and Reagan spoke to anxieties that the New Deal agenda failed to address. Both sensed a growing fear that, individually and collectively, we are less and less in control of the forces that govern our lives. Despite the extension of rights and entitlements in recent decades, and despite the expansion of the franchise, Americans increasingly find themselves in the grip of impersonal structures of power that defy their understanding and control.

By the 1970s a generation weaned on ever-rising standards of living and unrivaled American power suddenly confronted a world it could not summon or command. A decade of inflation and declining real wages undercut Americans' confidence that we could shape our personal destinies. Meanwhile, events in the world at large symbolized the loss of collective mastery—in Vietnam, a war we could not win, in Iran, a hostage-taking we could not avenge, and in 1987, a stock market crash that even the experts could not explain.

To make matters worse, the flow of power to large-scale institutions coincided with the decline of traditional communities. Families and neighborhoods, cities and towns, religious and ethnic and regional communities were eroded or homogenized, leaving the individual to confront the impersonal forces of the economy and the state without the moral or political resources that intermediate communities provide.

It is clear by now that Ronald Reagan's presidency has not addressed the worries and longings his candidacy so effectively evoked. For all the talk of "America standing tall," it neither restored our sense of self-mastery nor reversed the erosion of community. The

"No matter what your politics are, you will find Michael Sandel's *Public Philosophy* exciting, invigorating, discerning, and encouraging. Conservatives will discover a liberalism they didn't know existed: profoundly concerned with responsibility, community, and the importance of individual virtue. Liberals and Democrats who know their side needs an engaging public philosophy will find its bricks and mortar, its contours and basic principles, right here in these pages. To a political debate that is too often dispiriting and sterile, Sandel has offered a brilliant and badly needed antidote."

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