

the libertarian position accurately, then the appearance of conflict critics charge exists between libertarian individualism and the interests of community dissolves (pp. 76–80). Elsewhere, in a particularly illuminating, though brief, discussion of Richard Rorty’s philosophical pragmatism, Machan attempts to mitigate the skeptical implications of Rorty’s work for the possibility of an objective conception of human nature (pp. 132–136). This is just one of Machan’s several lucid excursions into epistemology that are particularly effective in pointing out the connection between contemporary work in pure philosophy and political theories, like libertarianism, which claim universal validity.

My overall impression is that Machan’s main conclusions will not strike those familiar with libertarian literature as particularly new. The book’s chief virtue is the sheer number of critical positions Machan engages thoughtfully, informatively and in a manner that challenges the reader to think hard about the kind of arguments libertarians propound in support of their familiar conclusions. If Machan is right that libertarianism has lately received short shrift in intellectual circles, he is quite successful in presenting a work that warrants better treatment, whether or not readers are ultimately persuaded by his arguments.

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## **Community and conflict: The sources of liberal solidarity**

Derek Edyvane

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This is an immensely stimulating and thoughtful book, and one of the most engaging works of political theory that I have read for some time. It is a lucid and discursive work, and although broadly in the analytical tradition, it is



neither footnotes to Rawls (notwithstanding some gestures in that direction) nor an exercise in parsing multiple varieties of egalitarianism. And while Edyvane makes extensive and deft use of a wide range of imaginative literature, this elucidates the political theory, and is neither a form of mystification nor a substitute for argument.

Edyvane's problem is familiar enough: it is about how to reconcile political community with pervasive and deep conflict. However, both his approach and his conclusion are altogether less so. In brief, his conclusion is that, 'Conflict is no barrier to community. On the contrary, disagreement and mutual disapproval may even serve to provide important routes into political association with one's fellow citizens' (p. 1). His approach is 'to develop a new vocabulary for the discussion of political community which draws on the insights of literature' (p. 35). This involves developing the idea of 'a shared life' in terms of 'fictional journey narratives'. He does this by utilising a rich array of literary works that serve not as examples of independently conceived theories, but are instead intended 'to remind us of the variety of ways in which it is both possible and common to understand and live a shared life' (p. 39). Edyvane is primarily concerned to understand some central features of our political predicament, and he rightly sees his book as a contribution to a political philosophy that displays 'a more active engagement with the political realities it seeks to address' (p. 13) than is common in most contemporary political philosophy.

One valuable feature of Edyvane's approach is his resistance to the more hysterical claims in this area. Thus, beginning with MacIntyre's seductive post-apocalyptic picture of liberal modernity, he reminds us that 'it is just not true that modern society resembles nothing more than a collection of self-interested atoms' (p. 3). He does not deny that critics of modernity like MacIntyre capture an aspect of it, but he draws our attention to how trust and confidence in strangers, everyday acts of kindness and such like are also integral features of our experience of modernity. Rather, one might be struck by the ease with which we all daily entrust our fate to strangers. However, he is also resistant to the overly sanguine view of liberal modernity of those like Iris Marion Young. Her emphasis on 'difference' disguises the degree to which this designation can function as a euphemism for conflict.

The central part of Edyvane's argument, to which I cannot possibly do justice here, involves his exploration of understanding political community in terms of three fundamentally different types of fictional journey narrative, which he labels 'pilgrimage', 'escape' and 'quest'. In short, 'the shape of life suggested by the pilgrimage narrative is that of a life spent moving towards a common goal upon the nature and value of which fellow pilgrims agree' (p. 63), and the exemplar here in relation to liberal political community is William Galston. By contrast, 'escapes are journeys which are structured by and

primarily focus upon their origin which is conceived as some fairly substantial evil or threat that must be evaded or otherwise resisted' (p. 83). This is basically the idea that informs 'the liberalism of fear'. Finally, 'quests are journeys structured by and primarily focused upon the process of travelling itself, a process which it is thought will yield some great, though uncertain, good or discovery' (p. 105). Edyvane argues that the kind of narrative understanding of community appropriate for the conditions of liberal modernity cannot be a pilgrimage but is a combination of escape and quest, with the emphasis being very much on the latter.

Most of the last two chapters are taken up with elaborating and defending the idea of a quest in terms of a relationship of 'political friendship', rather than in terms of relationships as consumers or citizens. The special strength of conceiving of liberal political community in this way is its relatively capacious accommodation of conflict, although I found the unfavourable comparison with the citizenship model unconvincing in this respect. However, much of the discussion of friendship is genuinely profound, including a wonderfully sensitive and nuanced discussion of Graham Greene's *Monsignor Quixote*, even if Greene's Catholicism is more important to understanding what is going on than Edyvane acknowledges.

All of this is, I think, immensely thought-provoking, even when it is less than convincing. Of course, he is not the first theorist to want to give a narrative account of political community, but how he does it is distinctive and refreshing. However, although I very much like the way that fictional narratives are deployed, I feel that the argument might have been strengthened if he had also drawn on more empirically oriented work, like Rogers Smith's *Stories of Peoplehood* (Cambridge University Press, 2003). I was also surprised that Schmitt's famous friend–enemy account of politics did not figure at all; and although Edyvane may reasonably feel that enough has been written about that already, it is the 'friend' dimension of that polarity that has been notably under-theorised. Others may feel that more of an engagement with the literature of republican political theory might have been beneficial.

While convinced that there is much of value in his idea of a shared life, especially to the role within that he attributes to common vulnerabilities and mutual dependence, and sympathetic to the narrative thrust of his argument, I think that there is more to be said for the escape narrative (even if it may not support a uniquely liberal polity), and the quest narrative (perhaps inevitably) remains somewhat elusive. I also wonder whether he should have said something about the issues that the existence of a plurality of political narratives gives rise. My main problem, though, is that I simply do not find the account of political friendship at all convincing. Although in the final chapter Edyvane bravely faces up to several powerful objections, his responses are not



always compelling (as in fairness he sometimes admits). There are also other difficulties that he does not address. Thus, to give one example, the instances of mutual care and concern he mostly cites – typically of the form of aiding or not taking advantage of distressed strangers – entirely fail to connect with a distinctively *political* conception of friendship (and, arguably, with friendship at all). For these are actions we think it right to perform, whether or not the person is a fellow-citizen: we do not in these cases seek to determine the political standing of the beneficiary. I am wholly on Edyvane's side about the importance and validity of political community, but his actual examples of political friendship are strained and, more worryingly for his argument, often seem to point in a cosmopolitan direction. He says almost nothing about the boundedness of political community, helping himself to what may be seen as the question-begging assumption that we think of a liberal political community as 'a group of people who are already, and basically, related as friends' (p. 131). Nor does he consider the darker side of his account of political friendship – if not enmity (à la Schmitt) then at least the consequences for those excluded from this relationship. I suspect that it is a mistake to opt for the friendship model and that greater mileage could probably be found by tweaking the more familiar idea of citizenship. But I hope that he will say more about some of these matters in the future, and perhaps show that these objections are shallow.

There is also some doubt as to how far his argument really supports his claim about the positive relationship between conflict and political community. There is a strong and a weak version of that claim. The strong version is that conflict can actually facilitate political community, but there seems to be very little in the book to back this up. The weaker claim, less bold but still interesting and important, is that conflict 'need be no bar to political community'. On this, he probably does make headway, but more so in relation to some kinds of conflict than to others.

Although in my view we are ultimately led astray, the journey is endlessly fascinating; and, if we think of political theory as a quest, should we expect much more? Certainly, Edyvane makes an unusually rewarding companion, even if a less than entirely reliable guide.

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