

ON COMMUNITY COHESION

Andrew Garford Moore and Father Daniel Joseph

2009

Introduction

This article is the work of two authors. The author of the first part is Andrew Moore an administrator at the University of Derby. The author of the second part is The Very Revd Archpriest Daniel Joseph, a cleric of the Russian Orthodox Church, and a lecturer and chaplain at the University of Derby. His principal interest is also in Philosophy in which he gained qualifications at the University of Keele (1971 and 1978). Both Andrew and Daniel are involved in facilitating a philosophical discussion group, 'Get Real' which meets weekly at the Multi Faith Centre. This is a recently built and significant place of dialogue, learning and exploration, located in the grounds of the Kedleston Road Site of the University of Derby. This article grew out of various themes raised at 'Get Real' developed further by regular conversations between Andrew and Daniel.

The authors explore the phenomena of differentiation, distancing and potential conflict within society. They are, however, optimistic about the possibility of resolution. The collaboration between Daniel and Andrew (who is a sceptical physicalist) is itself an example of how people with widely differing viewpoints can come to a broad agreement on social matters through rational discussion.

In the first half of the article (1) Andrew discusses the aims of a liberal society and the cohesion problems that can occur within it, and Daniel's contribution (2) largely focuses on the area of resolution. The authors hope that this article may be helpful to people who are involved in the areas of community development, inclusivity, and widening participation.

1 Diagnosing the problem

The first half of this article (1) will uncover some of the causes of community alienation within a multicultural liberal society such as Great Britain and how that can result in what I call social ghettoisation. In the first section (1.1) I shall briefly describe the guiding philosophy of the liberal state and the nature of the ties that bind its members. I will then describe how society can contain many different communities providing individuals with multiple identities. In the second section (1.2) I will describe how in certain situations an individual feels it necessary to choose one identity above others and how this can cause alienation of a community and the social ghettoisation of society.

1.1 Liberalism and Civic Nationalism

Liberalism is the dominant political ideology of the western world, despite its many forms it can generally characterized by its system of individual rights and the promotion of autonomy. Liberalism was originally developed as a response to the wars of religion that tore Europe apart in the 16th century. After much bloodshed it was eventually recognized that so long as the state tried to impose a single religion on all citizens, peace was impossible. The answer was the separation of church and state, effectively removing religion from the political sphere and granting freedom of religion to all members of society. Liberalism is the extension of this model of depoliticization to all areas of social life in which disagreement is inevitable. In order to prevent conflict, rather than promote a particular concept of the good the state should provide a neutral framework in which it is possible for each individual to pursue the good life as he sees it. Individual rights such as freedom of religion, conscience and assembly are a method of safeguarding this fundamental right of an individual to freely pursue his own ends so long as they do not harm others. This is summed up in John Stuart

Mill's (1998 [1859] p14) famous line "the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others." In this sense the neutral framework can be seen to be culture free or more accurately *culture light*¹ in that each individual is free to follow their chosen religion or culture, without interference, as long as they do not negatively affect others ability to do the same. The liberal state aims to provide a neutral framework within which the interests of individuals within various communities can be mediated and a fair distribution of rights, opportunities and benefits achieved (See Rawls, 1999). The neutral framework of liberalism therefore represents the fairest way in which to run a modern multicultural society, with members of all cultures and religion free to live their lives as they choose.

Societal cohesion is the extent to which individuals within society are bonded by ties of affinity. Such ties occur between individuals that share a common purpose or interest, that may or may not have a shared history. This sense of 'we are in it together' engenders individuals with a willingness to make certain compromises or sacrifices for other members of that society. In the liberal state, the higher purpose is a stable and prosperous society and the feeling of solidarity and willingness to sacrifice for the good of society as a whole is what Brian Barry (2001 p80) calls "civic nationality". As the liberal society is a culture light entity in that individuals are free to follow and maintain their own culture, individual's from very different cultures are able to share a common civic nationalism. This contrasts with the more common sense of nationalism, in which ties of affinity are based on a shared history or culture. Societal cohesion is the extent to which this feeling of civic nationality is shared by the individuals that make up a society. A society with high levels of civic nationality is characterised by its individual member's willingness to cooperate and compromise with other members of society, for the greater benefit of society as a whole and thus the individuals that make up that society.

It has been claimed by some (e.g. MacIntyre, 1999) that liberalism, in not recognising politically the ties of culture, is unable to foster a sufficiently strong sense of national identity, and hence sufficient societal cohesion necessary for the long term viability of a state. What MacIntyre does not take into account is that multicultural societies are a fact. His communitarian vision may well be effective in the homogenous communities of the past, but are no way to run a modern multicultural society. I suggest that a sufficiently strong sense of identity can be based on a culture light *civic nationality*.

There is a tendency in modern liberal multicultural society for what Iris Marion Young (1989) called *group differentiation*. Certain members of society feel a particular affinity with one another, this affinity leads to mutual identification, when multiple individuals mutually identify, the result is a social group or a community. A modern society, while itself a type of community bonded by the ties of civic nationality, can contain many sub communities and can be viewed as a collection or a community of communities. Young defines the concept of a social group by comparing it with two other forms of collectivities of people: aggregates and associations.

An aggregate is a collection of people that share a particular arbitrary attribute for example age, religion, race, gender or sexuality. Though the possession of one of these attributes may be a prerequisite for membership of a social group, it is not the common attribute that defines the group. A social group is defined in terms of mutual identification caused by a shared history, which gives its

¹ It is impossible, or at least extremely difficult, for example to accommodate all religious holidays as national holidays. In this case it seems to make sense to keep the national holidays traditional to the nation in question.

members a “sense of history, understanding of social relations and personal possibilities, his or her mode of reasoning, values and expressive styles” (Young, 1989 p225). In contrast to an association, one does not join a social group voluntarily. One joins a voluntary association with an already formed identity whereas a social group member’s identity is in part formed by his membership to the social group. A social group should therefore not be understood in terms of possession of a particular attribute (although all members of a social group may share one particular attribute) but in terms of intra group affinity and solidarity. In this essay Young’s concept of a social group will be referred to as a community.

Members of communities share common interests and individuals within a group will work to further the shared interests of the group within society. It has been noted (Barry 2001; Kuthukas 1998) that any one individual can have multiple identities, they can be simultaneously a member of one or more communities and also a member of society as a whole, feeling an affinity to both.

1.2 Problems for societal cohesion

In her essay Young does not explore the question of whether group differentiation is a good thing². It undoubtedly fulfils a human need to belong and provides an identity for individuals. I will also not answer this larger question. What I will suggest however, is that in a multicultural society and with a high level of group consciousness, it is inevitable that some interests of different communities will conflict and it will be necessary for the state to arbitrate between conflicting claims. When an individual’s allegiance to a particular community is stronger than their allegiance to society as a whole and the state is perceived as treating a community unfairly in arbitration or even directly acting against the interests of that community, societal cohesion can suffer. An example of the latter is Britain’s involvement in the “war on terror”, an action that was considered by many to be a war against Islam. Where a perceived conflict of interests arises between an individual’s community and society as a whole, some often feel that a choice must be made. Often the community identity wins out, and the interests of a group within society are given precedence over the interests of society as a whole. A community given precedence to all others in the case of conflict I shall refer to as the individual’s *primary community* or *primary identity*. Allegiance to society will be reduced or in the extreme case, withdrawn completely. This reduction or withdrawal of allegiance is mirrored by a decrease in the feeling of affinity, solidarity and other bonding ties that constitute civic nationality. Therefore any action of the state that is perceived as being against the interests of a particular community is liable to have a negative effect on societal cohesion to a greater or lesser extent dependant on the seriousness of the perceived injustice. In this case a community and the individuals that constitute that community can be said to become *alienated* from the society.

The alienation that results from the clash of identities as discussed above is a feeling of isolation from the rest of society and a feeling of exclusion from the decision making process. This can lead to communities becoming increasingly insular and result in its constituent individuals preferring to mix more exclusively with members of their own community. This distancing of individuals of a particular community from the rest of society is a process of *social ghettoisation*. This is not necessarily a purely geographical phenomenon in the traditional sense of the word in that individuals of a certain

² Young accepts group differentiation to be a social fact and argues – unsuccessfully in my opinion - that special rights and differentiated citizenship are needed to prevent the oppression of minority groups in society.

community live in a certain location, although this geographical ghettoisation is often a consequence of the type of social ghettoisation that I am describing. Social ghettoisation is characterised by individuals almost exclusively socialising with fellow members of their primary community and by members forming institutions for the sole benefit of members of their primary community. Social ghettoisation is a result of alienation and in turn can contribute to the factors that give rise to alienation and hence social ghettoisation, in this way social ghettoisation is a self reinforcing social phenomenon. As social ghettoisation increases, individuals feel an increasing affinity to their primary community at the expense of civic nationality. An example of the self reinforcing effect of social ghettoisation can be seen in the case of single faith schools. Faith schools reinforce social ghettoisation by constraining the peer group of pupils to members of their own faith. Pupils mix exclusively with members of their own faith and will have limited interaction with children of other faiths. As well as academic learning within the classroom, schoolchildren also learn the essential social skills needed in their adult life. A lack of exposure to individuals with different religions, cultures and points of view can prevent a child's realisation that they also share interests with individuals outside their primary community. Patterns formed at this early stage are repeated later in life and a homogenous peer group at this young age results in a reinforcement and acceleration of social ghettoisation when these children become adults.

The neutral framework of Liberalism provides a way in which different individuals can live together while maintaining a culture or way of life of their choice. The system however is not perfect, the freedom provided by liberalism can result in a decrease in societal cohesion. We have seen how individuals within a liberal society can mutually self-identify resulting in group differentiation. In certain situations the interests of groups will conflict with the interests of another group or the interests of society. In such situations we have seen how the bonds that tie individuals to a group within society can be stronger than the ties that bind individuals to society as a whole and individuals will choose to further the interests of a group rather than the interests that all within society share. This clash of identities can be self reinforcing, leading increasingly to social ghettoisation which further exacerbates the problem.

If individuals recognise societal cohesion as something valuable, then they must also accept the need to compromise, the interests peculiar to individuals of certain groups must be tempered by the interests that all members of society share. Such compromises can only be agreed through constant dialogue or conversation between individuals and representatives of groups, each putting forward their case in a reasonable discussion. The second half of the essay will show how such a conversation should proceed.

2 Towards a solution

It is important to explore the possibility of working towards resolution. The crucial issue is how, if at all, it is possible both to value and uphold difference whilst at the same time develop effective communications across the whole spectrum of difference. It is easy to speak in terms of 'unity in diversity', but precisely how is this to be achieved, and its stability maintained even under stress?

In recent years there has been much reflection upon the notion of our society as an entity which is 'multicultural' and 'multifaith'. Such reflection has not always been as well informed, analytical, and sober as one might hope. To be sure, the process has not been facilitated by events such as '9:11'

and '7.7' as they have come to be known. However, in my opinion, such catastrophic events only underline the need for what I call 'The Philosophical Café' – a safe environment in which to come together within the discipline and high standards of philosophical analysis, in order productively to address serious issues.

It also seems to me that when the 7.7 disaster on London Transport happened, some people were only too happy to denounce the very idea of British society as a 'Community of Communities'. It is my contention that no such structure in fact exists, or ever has; and that this is one reason for the instability within our society which generated these very acts of terrorism.

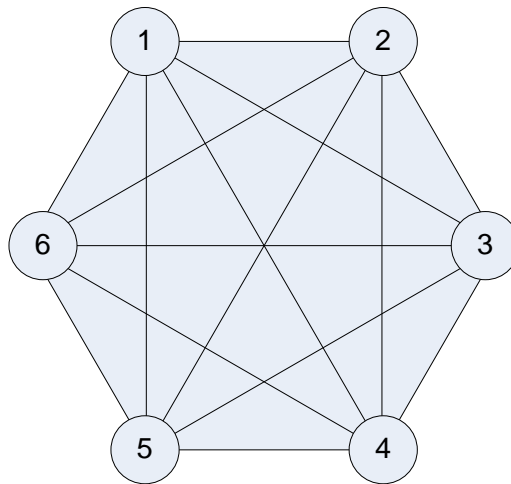


Figure 1 - Each Community speaks to all others

My simple model of a 'Community of Communities' is given in the diagram, Fig 1. My intention is to illustrate that communities which define themselves by religion or culture can coexist within a society providing that each community is prepared to work for genuinely reciprocal cooperative relations based on mutual respect, with ALL the other communities, and not just a preferred few. The question of how much independence within society a particular community should be accorded is precisely one of the main issues to be negotiated within the Community of Communities.

It might be argued that at least some features of the religions and cultures involved are so blatantly different as to render any negotiation or cooperation, for all practical purposes, impossible, and that any such notion of society is either a broken-backed act of appeasement, or a mask for bitter Darwinian struggles. I firmly contend that such views are incorrect. However, any apparent plausibility they may offer should be taken as a warning signal that the basis for communication between communities must be thought through very clearly.

I would suggest that essential common humanity and common courtesy constitute worthwhile starting points. We all have our hopes and fears, our strengths and weaknesses, our knowledge and skills; and some notion of personal growth grounded in a sense of our existence and personal history as human subjects. We all laugh and cry. We love. We grieve over losses. We are all born, and all being well, go through childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and so on, until our death. We share a

sense of family, and we value friendship. We are all concerned for the safety and welfare of children, whether our own or the other person's. In addition, the various cultures and religions clearly value education, and there is at least some degree of toleration of difference built into most religious world views. All the major world religions have the 'Golden Rule' enshrined in their scriptures. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that both pure and applied mathematics, science, and philosophical analysis itself can be viewed as common languages which are not skewed to any particular culture or religion. In the development of science, to consider but one, it can be demonstrated that all cultures have made, and continue to make significant contributions; and it is obvious that scientific progress is facilitated by cooperation between scientists across the world, who, incidentally, share the common language of SI units when expressing and analysing data, not to mention the common language and procedures of the so-called 'scientific method'.

I would suggest that there is sufficient common ground to enable people of good will from the different communities within the 'Community of Communities' to address effectively issues of custom, practice, and localized law which may from time to time arise. I furthermore contend, having learned from my own experience that it is what might be termed 'The Ongoing Conversation', itself, that can provide a very strong basis for unity. I have learnt this as a result of working within an extremely diverse group of people who constitute the University of Derby Chaplaincy. We did not initially work as cooperatively as we should have done until we learnt to participate in an 'Ongoing Conversation' in which all people had an equal stake based on mutual acceptance of difference. Within this conversation it was possible to learn more about how each other 'ticked' in a non-threatening, non-invasive manner. The 'Ongoing Conversation' almost took on a life of its own as some kind of higher authority which should be both protected and respected. It certainly prevented conflict and facilitated cooperation. We began to observe that, just as Christian doctrine teaches that the Holy Trinity is three persons in one essence, so we were nine chaplains in one conversation. There came a point where the somewhat paranoid felt need for 'self preservation in the face of the enemies' evaporated because trust was invested in the value of the 'Ongoing Conversation' as a good in itself, as well as an effective facilitator. I always think of this when I reflect upon the notion of the 'Community of Communities'.

I believe it is instructive to reflect upon the nature of the 'Authority of the Ongoing Conversation' just mentioned. After studying Analytical Philosophy for 35 years I quite suddenly developed a view of its purpose. Being convinced that what I call the 'Human Subject' is defined in part at least by being the owner of a specific train of experience, I then proceeded to list other criteria which would enable me to pick out a given subject as human as opposed to, say canine or feline. One of those criteria was best expressed as 'storyteller'. By this I mean that human subjects tell stories about/at reality. By 'reality' I understand, 'what is I + what is not I'. Such stories include science, religion, mythology, poetry, social science, etc. One could also add music, dance, drama, fine art, and so on. Now it seemed to me then, and still seems to me now, that the purpose of Analytical Philosophy is to evaluate such stories. The process of evaluation is summed up, in my view, by the following three stage process:

- 1. Is the story coherent – i.e. free from contradictions?**
- 2. What claims, if any, does the story make?**
- 3. If so, how, if at all, are these claims supported by evidence?**

Stage 1, it seems to me, is a function of deductive logic, whereas stages 2 and 3 are to be understood in terms of inductive logic. This three stage process is obviously of considerable importance, but, significantly, I do not believe it is alien to any culture or religion, and is seen as what one might call 'refined common sense' across the whole spectrum of human groups and communities. I will go further. I claim that the very act of communication would be utterly impossible without adhering to the law of non-contradiction, and, along with this, accepting the need for discipline and constancy in the use of words as policed by the community of speakers of the language game within which the speaker is operating at any one time. Furthermore, we all employ the notion of evidence for claims as a normal part of discourse and reflection.

My point is that the 'Authority of the Conversation' resides within these strict disciplines, not in some transient 'niceness'. Indeed, from these elements, what I call the 'Philosophical Cafe' can be constructed. Because the elements are culturally and faith neutral: no one is excluded, no one is disadvantaged. Each and all can enter on an equal basis in virtue of common humanity as outlined above, and dialogue rationally and courteously about anything. This, I contend, is the facilitator of the 'Community of Communities'.

It then becomes possible to construct a logic of living with difference. Let us grasp the nettle of difference in religion, which many people consider to be an insurmountable obstacle to harmony within a multicultural society such as ours, to the point at which they speak of religion as the source of all division and conflict. Let us think the unthinkable. Let us think of the different religions as different stories, pictures, narratives about reality. Each story is a collection of claims, presumably supported by a body of evidence. It is a fact that the body of evidence in each case is dwarfed by the pacific nature of the relevant story. In terms of confirmation theory, the probability value of any given story on the basis of the relevant body of evidence, is very low indeed. In terms of decision theory, one group of people will commit to one story, another will commit to another. There is nothing irrational about this. The phenomenon of 'underdetermination' runs right through the philosophy of science, and the world wide scientific community has lived with it over all the years that developed theoretical science has been in existence within human minds. In no way is any religion denigrated by looking at the phenomenon of religion in this way. It is simply a way of understanding that one person can believe that one story is the best, and another person can believe that another story is the best. The only irrational step in all this is the first step on the road to abuse, persecution, and violence.

If we are prepared to adopt such a model, such a modus operandi, we then move to the territory of shared values within which a community of communities could move forward together. This body of values has been mentioned at the beginning. It could well be sufficient to underpin constructive acts of rational communication within and between communities.

In the end, for a nation to consist of a 'Community of Communities', as opposed to a chaotic muddle of alienated groups of people, a deal has to be struck. The more sophisticated term is of course 'Social Contract'. There has to be acceptance, for the good of all, of some kind of trusted and trustworthy authority in which all communities are stakeholders. In such a social contract, individuals, and of course the communities with which they identify, invest a certain amount of their freedom in a body of agreed law and its accompanying institutions of formulation, maintenance, modification, and enforcement. The inter-community conversation is precisely the right mechanism

by means of which a social contract is to be facilitated and safeguarded over time, and through challenges. This implies that acceptable local meeting places in which the conversation can take place – venues for the Philosophical Cafe – must be provided. I contend that the Multi Faith Centre at the University of Derby is already proving itself to be one such venue, and is recognized as such.

Among the issues which should be high on the agenda is the search for ways in which the 'Community of Communities' at the local level can make constructive contributions for the benefit of all local people. It is such initiatives as these which could enable the building of one diverse, multicultural, multifaith nation, at peace with itself; and at the same time dynamic and energetic; well poised to play a useful role in the world.

References

Barry, B (2001) "Culture and Equality" Polity Press: Cambridge

Kukuthas, C (1998) "Liberalism and Multiculturalism: The Politics of Indifference" *Political Theory* vol. 26 no.5 p686-699

MacIntyre, A (1999) "Is Patriotism a Virtue?" Reprinted in Matravers, D and Pike, J (2003) *Debates in Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology*, Routledge p286-300

Mill, J. S. (1998 [1859]) "On Liberty and Other Essays" *Oxford University Press*

Rawls, J (1999) "A Theory of Justice Revised Edition" Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts

Young, I. M "Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship" Reprinted in Matravers, D and Pike, J (2003) *Debates in Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology*, Routledge p219-238