

# THE PRINCIPLE OF SELF-INTEREST PROPERLY UNDERSTOOD IN THE VIRTUOUS POLITY\*

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## ABSTRACT

*The attainment of a “virtuous polity,” in which citizens interact with one another in accordance with public virtues, occupies an important place in civic republican thought. To a great extent, contemporary republicans believe that such a virtuous polity can be created and maintained through a civic education that emphasizes what is common among citizens and makes individual citizens prefer public interest to their material self-interests. However, the contemporary republican view of civic education seems to be inadequate to provide a selective incentive. This article argues that the virtuous polity that republicans want to create displays characteristics similar to those of public goods in that once it is created it benefits everybody regardless of personal contributions to the provision of it. To the extent to which it displays features similar to those of public goods, a virtuous polity is subject to one particular problem of collective action: free-ridership. Mancur Olson’s (1971; 1982) solution to this specific problem, namely, selective incentives, can provide us with a way to deal with this problem. Here, it is argued that a selective incentive can be found in the principle of self-interest properly understood. In this view, the private interests of individuals give them concrete stakes in the well-being of the republic. In this sense, citizens’ stakes can be seen as selective incentives.*

**Key words:** *virtuous polity, civic republicanism, communitarianism, public goods, free-riders, self-interest properly understood, selective incentive.*

## “ERDEMLİ REJİM”DE DOĞRU ANLAŞILMIŞ ÖZ-ÇIKAR İLKESİ

### ÖZET

*Vatandaşların kamusal erdemler temelinde birbirleriyle karşılıklı etkileşimde oldukları bir “erdemli rejim” yaratmak yurttaş cumhuriyetçi düşüncede önemli bir yer işgal etmektedir. Çağdaş cumhuriyetçiler böyle bir erdemli rejimin, vatandaşların ortak değer ve çıkarlarını vurgulayan ve onların kendi maddi çıkarlarının yerine kamusal çıkarları tercih etmelerini sağlayan bir vatandaşlık*

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*eđitimiyle yaratılıp idame ettirilebileceđine inanmaktadır. Ancak, çağdaş cumhuriyetçilerin yurttaşlık eğitimi anlayışı bir seçici teşvik sunmakta yetersiz görünmektedir. Bu makalede, cumhuriyetçilerin yaratmak istedikleri erdemli rejimin, bir kez yaratılması halinde onun yaratılmasına katkıda bulunsun ya da bulunmasın herkesin faydalanmasına açık olması anlamında kamu malları ile benzer özellikleri sergilediđi ileri sürülmektedir. Kamu mallarıyla benzer özellikler sergilediđi ölçüde, erdemli rejim spesifik bir kolektif eylem sorunu içermektedir: bedavacılık. Bu spesifik soruna Mancur Olson'un (1971; 1982) getirdiđi çözüm seçici teşviklerin bize bu problemle başedebilmek için bir yol sunabileceđidir. Bu makalede, doğru anlaşılış öz çıkar ilkesinde bir seçici teşviđin bulunabileceđi ileri sürülmektedir. Bu görüşe göre, bireylerin özel çıkarları onları kamunun refahında çıkarı olan kişiler haline getirir. Bu anlamda, bireylerin menfaatleri seçici teşvikler olarak görülebilir.*

**Anahtar kelimeler:** *erdemli rejim, yurttaş cumhuriyetçiliđi, komüniteryenizm, kamu malı, bedavacılık, doğru anlaşılış öz-çıkara, seçici teşvik.*

The attainment of a "virtuous polity" occupies an important place within civic republican thought. A virtuous polity, from a civic republican perspective, is a polity in which the citizens interact with one another in accordance with public virtues. The public virtues that are emphasized by civic republicans are dutifulness, civic mindedness (public spiritedness), and readiness to self-sacrifice for the public cause. A virtuous polity, in which there is ideally no room for corruption, helps citizens become virtuous. Particularly those contemporary civic republicans with a communitarian orientation place great weight on the belief that such a virtuous polity can be created and maintained through a civic education that emphasizes what is common among citizens and makes individual citizens prefer public interest to their material self-interests.

This article will argue that the virtuous polity that the republicans want to create displays characteristics similar to those of public goods in the sense that once it is created it benefits everybody regardless of personal contributions to the provision of it. To the extent to which it is similar to a public good, a virtuous polity also is subject to one particular problem of collective action: free-ridership. Mancur Olson's (1971; 1982) solution to this specific problem, namely, selective incentives, can provide us with a way to deal with this problem. On the other hand, the prescription that is favored by the communitarian-oriented republicans, i.e., a civic education that emphasizes wholehearted devotion to the public cause, seems inadequate to provide a selective incentive in the form of either a negative or a positive incentive. Here, I will argue that the notion of "self-interest properly understood" comes close to a selective incentive. In this view, self-interest gives individuals concrete stakes in the well-being of the polity. By making individuals stakeholders, self-interest may serve as a selective incentive. Hence, contemporary republicans, especially those with communitarian orientations who despise the pursuit of self-interest, should review their attitude. In this respect, a program of civic education that is combined with an emphasis on the positive aspects of the pursuit of self-interest would serve better their goal of attaining and maintaining a virtuous polity.

## THE REPUBLICAN TRADITION

Richard Dagger (2004: 167) opens his presentation on communitarianism and republicanism by stating that, "[they] are closely related schools of thought – so closely related that friend and foe alike

sometimes conflate them. The relationship is evident in their Latin roots: communitarians are concerned with *communitas*, the common life of the people, and republicans are devoted to *res publica*, the good of the public.” Thus, when I use communitarianism and republicanism together to designate a group of people, i.e., republicans with a communitarian orientation (communitarian-republicans from now on), some readers may be tempted to conclude that I am conflating them - without knowing whether I am a friend or a foe.

In fact, in the literature, there is disagreement as to whether all contemporary republicans are communitarian and vice versa. There are those who think that communitarians are the latest representatives of the civic republican tradition. For example, Ronald Terchek (1997a: 1) argues that communitarianism is “the latest expression of republicanism.” On the other hand, Jurgen Habermas (1996) thinks that contemporary civic republicanism is communitarian. Similarly, Adrian Oldfield (1990: 145) states that “[c]ivic republicanism is communitarian. It stresses not that which differentiates individuals from each other and from the community, but rather what they share with other individuals, and what integrates them into the community.” In this article, following Dagger, I will argue that these two groups are not identical. That is to say, there may be some republicans who are not communitarians and there may be some communitarians who are not republicans. Yet, I will also argue that these two groups are not necessarily exclusive of one another and there is an overlapping group of people whom I will designate as communitarian-republicans.

The roots of civic republicanism go back to ancient Greece, specifically, to Aristotle’s writings (Oldfield, 1990: 5). In modern times, Machiavelli and Rousseau emerged as influential proponents of this tradition (Held, 1996). The core of the republican tradition that these thinkers represent is, “... the belief that government is a public matter to be directed by the members of the public themselves” (Dagger, 2004: 168). Dagger identifies two cornerstones of republicanism: *publicity* and *self-government*.

*Publicity* denotes “the condition of being open and public rather than private or personal” (Dagger, 2004: 168). Accordingly, two implications follow from this principle. First, politics is not a personal matter, but the public’s business, and as a result, “[it] must be conducted openly, *in public*” (Dagger, 2004: 168). Secondly, the public is not just a totality of a group of people but more than that. “[I]t is an aspect or sphere of life with its own claims and considerations... Something is public when it involves people who share common concerns that take them out of their private lives and beyond ...” (Dagger, 2004: 168).

*The rule of law* and *civic virtue* are the two republican values that follow from publicity. Accordingly, publicity in the sense of conducting politics openly is not only a matter of convenience, but also a bulwark against *corruption*. Republican citizens must be ready to give up their private interests and inclinations, when the common good of the republic is in question. Acting in this spirit of public responsibility is to display civic virtue. In order for citizens to manifest this virtue, they must be bound by the rule of law. After all, as the public’s business, politics will be conducted on the basis of deliberation in the public sphere. This deliberation will take place in the public sphere not according to the arbitrary whims of this person or that group, but through clear and publicly promulgated rules (Dagger, 2004: 168-169).

As Dagger points out, such republican values as a concern for *freedom, equality, and civic virtue* again spring from *self-government*. For a republican, self-government itself is a form of freedom. The meaning of the concept of freedom takes a shape different from that of the liberal meaning of this concept. Republicans believe that all other forms of freedoms, such as civil liberties of liberalism, “. . . are secure only in a free state, under law” (Dagger, 2004: 169). Using Isaiah Berlin’s (1969) conceptualization, whereas liberals generally subscribe to the negative understanding of liberty which protects individuals from external interference, republicans possess a positive understanding of liberty which stresses “self-mastery in a *collective context*.”

The equality that is peculiar to republicanism has legal, political and economic aspects. The legal aspect is concerned with equality under the law. Each and every citizen must bend equally before the law. Here the relationship of self-government to equality in the legal sense is evident: The citizens will respect the law equally because they themselves created that law equally. This last aspect can be depicted as political equality in the sense that all citizens should have an equal share in and, ideally equal, impact on the process of the creation of the law. However, maintaining this equality also entails economic equality. Unlike the liberal conception of equality of opportunity which is not concerned with the end results but with securing a fair framework within which every individual will pursue her or his life plans freely (see Holden, 1988: 31), republican equality aims at least at a rough equality of the distribution of resources. In this sense, from Aristotle to the American founders, civic republicans held the belief that extremes of wealth and poverty were not compatible with republican government (Bellah et al., 1985: 285).

Finally, civic virtue is the willingness to get involved in public matters with common interest in mind. For republicans, self-government would be an empty ideal without citizens who are not eager to take part in public matters. As Oldfield (1990: 8) puts it, “. . .to be a citizen means to be politically active. . . .” In this sense, the republicans see political participation as an obligation as well as a right. Moreover, for some republicans, individuality is a function of participation in the process of making the laws by which we are ruled. Thus, Benjamin Barber<sup>(1)</sup> (1984: xxiii) claims that “without participating in the common life that defines them and in the decision-making that shapes their social habitat, women and men cannot become individuals.” In Quentin Skinner’s words, “. . .we can only hope to enjoy a maximum of our own individual liberty if we do not place that value above the pursuit of the common good. To insist on doing so is to be a corrupt as opposed to be a virtuous citizen; and the price of corruption is always slavery. The sole route to individual liberty is by way of public service” (quoted in Terchek, 1997a: 53).

In sum, the virtues that are emphasized by the contemporary republicans are dutifulness, civic mindedness, and readiness to self-sacrifice for the public cause. These are all public-oriented virtues. Seen from this perspective, citizenship for contemporary republicans corresponds to “acknowledging the community’s goals as one’s own, choosing them, and committing oneself to them” (Oldfield, 1990: 8).

## COMMUNITARIANISM

Michael Walzer (1990) presents communitarianism as a critique of liberalism.<sup>(2)</sup> It was Michael Sandel who first initiated the communitarian critique of liberalism through his *Liberalism and the*

*Limits of Justice* (1998 [1982]). More specifically, Sandel's book was designed as an explicit critique of J. Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1999 [1971]). The aspect of Rawls' book that has been criticized by Sandel and other communitarians is its "commitment to the freedom of individual embodied in the standard liberal support for civil liberties" (Mulhall and Swift, 1997: xvi). Thus, one of the basic criticisms by the communitarians is directed at liberalism's commitment to individual freedom, which is understood as autonomy, and the related understanding of the rights-based citizenship (Oldfield, 1990: 2).

Liberals, who built their theory on autonomy, think that happiness comes from leading a good life: "Our essential interest is in leading a good life, in having those things that a good life contains" (Kymlicka, 1989: 10).<sup>(3)</sup> However, even though liberals may have *personal* views of what a good life looks like, they insist that: ". . . government must be neutral on what might be called the question of the good life" (Dworkin, 1978, reprinted in Sandel, 1984: 64). It is up to individuals to "choose" among different, and in a sense, competing understandings of the good life. Thus, liberals emphasize "freedom of choice" (Kymlicka, 1995: 75). In Ronald Dworkin's (1991: 50) words, "no component of [a persons' life] may even so much as contribute to the value of a person's life without his endorsement . . . no event or achievement can make a person's life better against his opinion that it does not" (quoted in G. Dworkin, 1996: 363). As Will Kymlicka puts it, ". . . a life only goes better if led from the inside" (Kymlicka, 1989: 12).

Finally, since we are fallible, autonomy implies the right to examine, revise, and even drop that understanding of the good life that was accepted previously by the individual. There is a difference between "leading a good life," and "leading the life we *currently believe* to be good" (Kymlicka, 1989: 10). Accepting that we may be mistaken about the content of the good life, an individual should have not only the possibility but also the *opportunity* to revise and change it. In this sense, "autonomy is a second-order capacity of persons to reflect critically upon their first-order preferences, desires, wishes, and so forth, and the capacity to accept or attempt to change these in light of higher-order preferences" (G. Dworkin, 1996: 360).

One of the cornerstones of such an understanding is the acceptance of the self as prior to its ends. Accordingly, the self is not constituted by the ends of life given to it by the community in which it is situated, but it constitutes those ends itself by rationally evaluating, revising them, and dropping them if necessary. In a sense, the self is independent of its social environment in creating its own understanding of the good life. The self cannot be obliged to appropriate the prevalent ends in its community. According to Rawls (1999), there are two sorts of obligations that liberal justice can require of an individual: "natural duties" to all human beings, such as respect for human dignity, and voluntary obligation which we incur by our own agreement. Sandel (1998: 179) argues against this position by stating that,

. . . we cannot regard ourselves as independent in this way without great cost to those loyalties and convictions whose moral force consists partly in the fact that living by them is inseparable from understanding ourselves as the particular persons we are – as members of this family or community or nation or people, as bearers of this history, as sons and daughters of that revolution, as citizens of this republic. Allegiances such as these are more than values I happen to have or aims I "espouse at any given time." They

go beyond the obligations I voluntarily incur and the “natural duties” I owe to human beings as such. They allow that to some I owe more than justice requires or even permits, not by reason of agreements I have made but instead in virtue of those more or less enduring attachments and commitments which taken together partly define the person I am.

Thus, for the communitarians, the rights of the individual do not have a privileged position over society’ claims, since, according to the communitarian view, an individual can gain “individuality” only in a social context (Sullivan, 1982: 21). In C. Taylor’s (1989b: 35) words,

One is self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it.

. . . My self-definition is understood as an answer to the question Who I am. And this question finds its original sense in the interchange of speakers. I define who I am by defining where I speak from, in the family tree, in social space, in the geography of social statuses and functions, in my intimate relations to the ones I love, and also crucially in the space of moral and spiritual orientation within which my most important defining relations are lived out.

The ontological basis of liberalism is individual. As Charles Taylor (1989a: 66) puts it, “[t]he ontological questions concern what you recognize as the factors you will invoke to account for social life. Or, put in the ‘formal mode,’ they concern the terms you accept as ultimate in the order of explanation.” In Bhikhu Parekh’s (1993: 157) words,

[u]nlike the Greeks, and indeed all the premodern societies which took the community as their starting point and defined the individual in terms of it, liberalism takes the individual ultimate and irreducible unit of society and explains the latter in terms of it. Society “consists” or is “made up” of individuals and is at bottom nothing but the totality of its members and their relationships.

This “overly individualistic” view of society by liberals is unacceptable to communitarians. According to them, such an individualistic view leads to the fragmentation of community (Walzer, 1990: 9). In the absence of a generally accepted understanding of morality, the relationships among individuals lack meaning. They become isolated and totally materialistic. This is not what being human is all about. Thus, Taylor (Kymlicka, 2002: 245) argues that, “many liberal theories are based on ‘atomism’, on an ‘utterly facile moral psychology’ according to which individuals are self-sufficient outside of society.” Similarly, Parekh (1993: 158) states that,

[liberalism] abstracts the person from all his or her “contingent” and “external” relations with other people and nature, and defines the person as an essentially self-contained and solitary being encapsulated in, and unambiguously marked off from the “outside” world by his or her body... Their [individuals’] constant concern, therefore, is to preserve their

separateness, to construct all kinds of high walls around themselves, and to ensure that nothing enters, let alone settles, in their being without their knowledge and scrutiny.<sup>(4)</sup>

According to communitarians, we are more than interest-seeking materialistic, rationally autonomous creatures depending for our existence solely on the market's operation. We are social and political animals. It is human beings' natural tendencies more than their material interests that bring individuals into common life. The pursuit of self-interest cannot be the guiding principle of human life. In order to realize our essences we need a firm, cohesive, and moral society (Bellah, 1998). In this respect, communitarians do not accept the neutrality of the state towards different understandings of the good life. For them, a democratic society needs a commonly defined understanding of good life (Taylor, 1989a: 160).

One answer from liberals to these charges by communitarians is provided by Kymlicka (1989, 2002), who argues that insistence on the priority of the self over her or his ends does not correspond to saying that individuals are self-sufficient and do not need community. On the contrary, liberals do believe that individuals' identities are shaped within the culture in which they are situated. However, what such an insistence means is that in the pursuit of the good life, human beings are free to adopt whichever good life they want out of the different understandings of the good life that are provided by society. Individuals are not bound by society's traditional understanding of the good life. They can question and, if they want, reject the traditional understanding. In Kymlicka's (1989: 52) words, "[w]hat is central to the liberal view is not that we can *perceive* a self prior to its ends, but that we understand ourselves to be prior to our ends, *in the sense that no end or goal is exempt from possible re-examination*" (Quoted in Dagger, 2004: 172, the emphasis in original). Accordingly, the absence of such a possibility may correspond to the individual's being captive to the understanding of the good life of the community in which she or he is situated. Given that some understandings of the good life are very oppressive and demeaning, Kymlicka does not give up on the principle of the rational revisability of any understanding of the good life, i.e., autonomy.

Another answer to the communitarian critique can be found in political liberalism. For a political liberal, the task of liberalism is to provide a justification of a political order that will be endorsed by all members of that order, regardless of their understandings of the good life (Kukathas, 2003: 16). As J. Rawls (1996: xx) puts it, the problem of political liberalism is: "How is it possible that deeply opposed though reasonable comprehensive doctrines may live together and all affirm the political conception of a constitutional regime?" In this respect, a political liberal thinks that the principles of the political realm should not be based on any comprehensive moral value. In fact, autonomy is such a comprehensive value in that it provides the basis for a distinctively liberal understanding of the good life: "the good life is a freely chosen life, and so the good life is a free life . . ." (Gaus 2004: 104). Thus, political liberals avoid taking autonomy as the basis of a liberal political order.

In *Political Liberalism* (1996), Rawls distinguishes between two sorts of autonomy: political and moral. While the first form of autonomy denotes "the legal independence and assured political integrity of citizens and their sharing with other citizens equally in the exercise of political power"; the second form expresses ". . . a certain mode of life and reflection that critically examines our deepest ends and ideals . . ." (Rawls, 1996: xlv-xlv ). Such a distinction was absent from *A Theory of Justice*. It had taken moral autonomy as the only form of autonomy (see footnote 8 in Rawls, 1996:

xliii). In his later work, Rawls concedes that there are different understandings of the good life and moral autonomy is not valued by all understandings: “Many citizens of faith reject moral autonomy as part of their way of life” (Rawls, 1996: xlv ). In order to prevent from imposing a “liberal” way of life on those groups that do not value individual moral autonomy, in *Political Liberalism* (1996), Rawls places political autonomy as the basis on which a political consensus would be built. In this new approach, autonomy is not seen as a concept that defines the relationship between the self and its ends in all areas of human life, but only as a political principle that is employed to determine our public rights and responsibilities.

A more recent example of political liberalism is presented by Chandran Kukathas’ *The Liberal Archipelago: A Theory of Diversity and Freedom* (2003). Kukathas builds his model on the assumption that the fundamental value is freedom of conscience, not freedom of choice based on autonomy: “. . . the most important feature of human conduct is its attachment to the claims of conscience. It is this aspect of human nature that reveals what is preeminent among human interests: an interest in not being forced to act against conscience” (Kukathas, 2003: 17). Accordingly, “[l]iberty of conscience is enjoyed when the individual can indeed live his life under the guidance of conscience (which identifies right and wrong conduct) and is not impeded by others from doing so” (Kukathas, 2003: 114).

The freedom of conscience leads to two other freedoms: those of association and dissociation (Kukathas, 2003: 115). Thus, for Kukathas, free individuals must be able to freely associate with their like-minded fellows. In this sense, the groups that exist in civil society are formed voluntarily by individuals and their existence is dependent on their members’ continuous support. Kukathas accepts that there are groups, e.g. cultural groups, to which membership is often not voluntary. The exclusive membership of such groups is obtained by being born into them. However, the membership in such groups can be deemed as voluntary as long as “. . .members recognize as legitimate the terms of association and the authority that upholds them” (1995: 238). In this respect, Kukathas (2003: 25) argues that, “a society is a liberal one if individuals are at liberty to reject the authority of one association in order to place themselves under the authority of another; and to the extent that individuals are at liberty to repudiate the authority of the wider society in placing themselves under the authority of some other association.” Thus, the individual is at liberty to leave the groups whose practices and/or values do not appeal to her or him (2003: 96).<sup>(5)</sup> To the extent to which it accommodates in the greater liberal society not only those groups that accept such comprehensive liberal values as autonomy, but also those who do not, this is a political theory of liberalism: “a liberal society can tolerate illiberal groups and individuals” (Kukathas, 2001).

In this sense, political liberalism is immune from the communitarian charge that liberals abstract individuals from their natural setting and, making them rational choosers, impose on them a liberal understanding of the good life. For a political liberal, cultural groups with different understandings of the good life, which may or may not be compatible with the liberal value of autonomy, may exist along with other cultural groups insofar as they do not force individuals to become and/or remain as their members. This approach takes value pluralism as a fact of contemporary societies and the principle of toleration as the main principle by which peaceful coexistence can be achieved.



## COMMUNITARIAN-REPUBLICANS

Communitarian-republicans are communitarian in the sense that they think that the ends of the good life are given by society. Individuals are not rational choosers, but a reflection of the values of the community in which they are situated. They are not unencumbered atoms. They are in the image of their communities. They do not have only rights, but also a moral obligation into which they do not enter through their consent. The individual thinks and acts according to the symbols of the world of meaning in which she or he was formed: “We will need to remember that we did not create ourselves, that we owe what we are to the communities that formed us . . .” (Bellah et al., 1985: 295). At the same time, they are republicans in the sense that the community that they envision preaches its members such republican values as dutifulness, public spiritedness, and gives priority to the common good over the private good, in short, civic virtue. Stated differently, their community is one whose “common life” contains republican tradition as well.

It is true that not all communities are republican in that some of them do not encourage their members to be active, questioning and challenging issues that concern the whole community, but rather expect their members to be submissive and follow the leader(s) who govern according to the established values of the community. However, there are also communities that require their members to have public virtuous citizens. Aristotle’s Athens, Machiavelli’s Florence, Rousseau’s Geneva, and Alexis de Tocqueville’s New England are examples in point. In these polities individuals were inculcated not only with such moral virtues as generosity, courage and trustworthiness, but also such public virtues as political friendship and magnanimity, i.e., generosity in public spending. These thinkers believed that citizens not only passively inherit the values by which they live and act, but at the same time they collectively revise, improve and transmit these values to future generations. For these thinkers, there is an interaction between politics and ethics.

Who are the contemporary followers of this mode of thinking? The names that come to mind at once are Robert Bellah, Robert Putnam, Michael Sandel, William Sullivan and Charles Taylor. This is not an exhaustive list. They are among the North American communitarians who criticize liberalism, and at the same time, strive to re-establish, or restore a republican political community that they believe was eroded by the individualism and consumerism of liberal capitalist order (Sullivan, 1982; Bellah et al., 1985; Sandel, 1996; Putnam, 2000): “The liberal attempt to construe all obligation in terms of duties universally owed or obligations voluntarily incurred makes it difficult to account for civic obligations and other moral and political ties that we commonly recognize” (Sandel, 1996: 14).<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, in the same spirit as their classical forerunners, these thinkers also believe that republican politics do not take place in a vacuum but on the basis of the values or, to use the republican jargon, “mores,” that are provided by the common life of the community: “Political community depends on the narratives by which people make sense of their condition and interpret the common life they share; at its best, political deliberation is not only about competing policies but also about competing interpretations of the character of a community, of its purposes and ends” (Sandel, 1996: 350). This spirit can be detected also in what Bellah and his colleagues (1985: 143) have to say about the individualism of liberalism and its effects on both private and public lives:

The question is whether an individualism in which the self has become the main form of reality can really be sustained. What is at issue is not simply whether self-contained individuals might withdraw from the public sphere

to pursue purely private ends, but whether such individuals are capable of sustaining either a public *or* a private life. If this is the danger, perhaps only the civic and Biblical forms of individualism – forms that see the individual in relation to a larger whole, a community and a tradition – are capable of sustaining genuine individuality and nurturing both public and private life.

In this sense, it is not misleading to call these people communitarian-republicans. Thus, the republican ideal of creating and maintaining a polity in which ideally there is no room for corruption and in which citizens display civic virtue in the public realm, i.e., the ideal of “virtuous polity,” is shared by the communitarian-republicans as well.

At this point, one expects the republicans to prescribe how to achieve such an elevated order of citizenship. Simple observation shows that, most of the time, the number of dutiful and public spirited citizens is a small fraction of the whole citizenry. How would the republicans break this negative tendency towards indifference? Indeed, the republicans themselves accept that “the practice of citizenship is unnatural to human beings” (Oldfield, 1990: 8). Furthermore, historically, the social and economic environment in which citizens interact with one another in today’s world makes it difficult for citizens to achieve the ideals of a virtuous citizen. As Sullivan (1982: 21) puts it, “the practices of citizenship and self-government . . . run counter to the commercial ethos . . .”

Another insight into the difficulties of the practice of citizenship can be derived from Mancur Olson’s (1971; 1982) well-known theory of the logic of collective action. In this theory, Olson draws our attention to the difficulties of the provision of public goods. In Olson’s (1971: 14-15) words,

[t]he common or collective benefits provided by governments are usually called “public goods” by economists . . . A common, collective, or public good is here defined as any good such that, if any person  $X_i$  in a group  $X_1, \dots, X_i, \dots, X_n$  consumes it, it cannot feasibly be withheld from the others in that group. In other words, those who do not purchase or pay for any of the public or collective good cannot be excluded or kept from sharing in the consumption of the good, as they can where non-collective goods are concerned.

Thus, one particular feature of a public good is the property of non-exclusion. Non-exclusion means that once a public good is produced it is provided to everybody regardless of whether one particular beneficiary does or does not contribute to the provision of it. For example, a non-resident legal alien who does not pay income tax to the US government may benefit from national defense as much as a US citizen who pays federal taxes benefits from it. In addition to the property of non-exclusion, the other fundamental property of public goods is that of non-rivalry. The property of non-rivalry points to the fact that a person’s consumption of a public good would not reduce anybody else’s amount of consumption of the same public good. Using the national defense example, it can be said that however much a foreigner benefits from the service of national defense, there would be the same amount of security from external threats left for others as well (Olson, 1971: 15).<sup>(7)</sup>

The virtuous polity that the republicans want to create displays characteristics similar to those of public goods that once it is created it benefits everybody regardless of personal contributions to the provision of it. In this regard, the practices of citizenship that the republicans have in mind can be seen as collective actions in the service of a “public good” in a broader sense, namely, a virtuous polity.<sup>(8)</sup> From the perspective of Olson, the creation of such a virtuous polity would be hard to achieve. The reason for that lies in what Olson calls the free-rider problem. Rational individuals are quick to realize that, most of the time, their personal contribution to the public good is relatively small. Furthermore, because of the non-exclusion property of public goods they cannot be excluded from the benefits of a public good once it is provided. Against this background, there is “little or no incentive” for individual citizens to share the costs of collective action.<sup>(9)</sup> In Olson’s (1982: 18) words, “[s]ince any gain goes to everyone in the group, those who contribute nothing to the effort will get just as much as those who made a contribution. It pays to ‘let George do it,’ but George has little or no incentive to do anything in the group interest either, so there will be little, if any, group action.” The upshot of this argument is that the creation of a virtuous polity through citizen initiatives in which individual citizens can realize their potentials to the full extent is difficult to achieve. Using J.J. Rousseau’s (1993: 195 [1762 Book I, Ch.7]) words, there always may be those who “wish to enjoy the rights of citizenship without being ready to fulfill the duties of a subject.”

The question now becomes how to overcome the commercial ethos of the modern world and the problem of free-riders which stands in front of the foundation and maintenance of a virtuous polity. In fact, according to Michael Walzer (1990: 16), “[c]ommunitarianism is the dream of a perfect free-riderlessness.” And as Oldfield (1990: 161) points out, some social pressure would be helpful to achieve that dream. For example, Philip Green thinks that what free-riders need is “a good talking-to from neighbors.” Similarly, William Galston believes that non-contributors, i.e., free-riders, will usually quickly come into line once they feel the scorn or disapproval of their fellow citizens. Of course, nobody really thinks that social pressure by itself would be enough to achieve this. A more substantial answer can be found in “civic education.” As Dagger (2004: 170) points out, “[i]f the balanced constitution is the characteristic form of the republic, civic virtue is its lifeblood. Without citizens who are willing to defend the republic against foreign threats and to take an active part in government, even the mixed constitution will fail. . . . Replenishing the supply of civic virtue through *education* and other means will thus be one of the principal concerns of a prudent republic” (emphasis added). Thus, the republic will engage in what Sandel calls *formative politics*: “The republican conception of freedom, unlike the liberal conception, requires a formative politics, a politics that cultivates in citizens the qualities of character self-government requires” (Sandel, 1996: 6). According to Oldfield (1990: 153), because civic virtue is unnatural, it needs to be cultivated through life-long education. In this understanding, thanks to civic education individual citizens will learn to take their republic as a good in itself (Terchek, 1997a: 48). In short, contemporary republicans place great weight on the normative and ideological consciousness of citizens.

One historical example of this republican strategy can be found in what Benjamin Rush said in his proposal for public schools in Pennsylvania in 1786: “Let our pupil be taught that he does not belong to himself, but that he is public property. Let him be taught to love his family, but let him be taught at the same time that he must forsake and even forget them when the welfare of his country requires it” (quoted in Sandel, 1996: 129). As a contemporary republican, Sullivan (1982: 7) states that “the practices of citizenship and self-government, precisely because they run counter to the commercial ethos, do require conscious, collective cultivation to flourish under modern times.” The most crucial

step in that direction is to make citizens realize that they do not exist in a vacuum and their identities are shaped through the communities of which they are a part, such as family, neighborhood, university, church, and union (Bellah, 1998:18). They share many values with other members in these groups, and in that regard, they owe service to the communities to which they belong.

The second answer to that problem can be found in Alexis de Tocqueville's principle of "self-interest properly understood." De Tocqueville develops this principle in *Democracy in America* (Vol. II, Chapter 8). Accordingly, "self-interest properly understood" is not a civic virtue *per se*. It is rather an "incomplete" virtue in that one does not embrace the common good as her or his good directly. In this understanding, one accepts common good to the extent to which she or he can establish a link between her or his private well-being and that of the common good. At the expense of making a long quotation, let's see this point in de Tocqueville's (1988: 526-527) words:

The Americans . . . enjoy explaining every act of their lives on the principle of self-interest properly understood. It gives them pleasure to point out how an enlightened self-love continually leads them to help one another and disposes them freely to give part of their time and wealth for the good of the state. . . .

Self-interest properly understood is not at all a sublime doctrine, but it is clear and definite. It does not attempt to reach great aims, but it does, without too much trouble, achieve all it sets out to do. Being within the scope of everybody's understanding, everyone grasps it and has no trouble in bearing it in mind. It is wonderfully agreeable to human weakness, and so easily wins great sway. It has no difficulty in keeping its power, for it turns private interest against itself and uses the same goad which excites them to direct passions.

The doctrine of self-interest properly understood does not inspire great sacrifices, but every day it prompts some small ones; by itself it cannot make a man virtuous, but its discipline shapes a lot of orderly, temperate, moderate, careful, and self-controlled citizens. If it does not lead the will directly to virtue, it establishes habits which unconsciously turn it that way.

....I am not afraid to say that the doctrine of self-interest properly understood appears to me the best suited of all philosophical theories to the wants of men in our time and that I see it as their strongest remaining guarantee against themselves. Contemporary moralists therefore should give most of their attention to it. Though they may well think it incomplete, they must nonetheless adopt it as necessary.

. . . Every American has the sense to sacrifice some of his private interests to save the rest" (de Tocqueville 1988: 526- 527).

A contemporary interpretation of de Tocqueville's principle of self-interest properly understood can be found in the concept of stakes. This concept draws individual's attention to the connection between her or his well-being and the common well-being. One version of this thinking can be found in Ronald Terchek's – a liberal republican (see Dagger, 2004: 175) – *Republican Paradoxes and Liberal Anxieties*, (1997a). According to Terchek (1997b: 5), “the issue of stakes fuses a concern for the common with a concern for the self.” In this view, private ownership and individual's self-interest in preserving what belongs to her/him gives her/him *concrete* stakes in the well-being of the republic that normative or ideological consciousness fail to give. On the basis of his reading of strong republicans, i.e., Aristotle, Machiavelli and Rousseau, Terchek traces the connection between private property ownership and self-interest and the well-being of the republic. Accordingly, first, private property provides individual with autonomy: “[I]t is impossible to be fully autonomous without being ‘your own person’ and being no body else's person,” and this is not possible if persons are economically dependent on others” (Terchek, 1997b: 4).

Second, “. . . ownership is expected to demonstrate to citizens that their own well-being is closely associated with the vitality and well-being of their republic and they have a stake in preserving it.” Third, citizens who have their own property and satisfied with it will not attempt to further their material wealth by politics (Terchek, 1997b: 5). In this respect, Terchek would not have any problem with de Tocqueville's comment that what prompts Americans to participate in public affairs is not civic virtue *per se*, but the “self-interest properly understood” (de Tocqueville, 1988: 525-528). For Terchek, “enlightened interest” is not something to be scorned. Thus, Terchek combines the normative and ideological emphasis of the communitarian-republicans that citizens should take their republic as a good in itself with the notion that the republic is valuable because it provides a secure environment in which citizens can attend their multiple needs, of which a civic life is only one (Terchek, 1997a: 48).<sup>(10)</sup>

At this point, it must be indicated that, in a similar vein to the pioneers of civic republicanism, contemporary republicans do not reject private property in principle either. Two contemporary examples are J.G.A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner. Accordingly, although they do not confer the moral value conferred by liberals to the institution of private property, they accept citizens' having property on utilitarian grounds. Depending on their reading of Machiavellian republican politics, they reach the conclusion that in order to prevent corruption in the republic, it is imperative to make sure that all citizens have economic independence; and economic independence, in turn, is secured through private property. However, these contemporary republicans also believe that citizens are ready to sacrifice their private property and self-interest whenever they are required by the republic to do so (Terchek, 1997a: 52). Moreover, most contemporary republicans would be irritated with the idea that private property and self-interest can be seen as stakes for the well-being of the republic. As Terchek implies, especially those with a communitarian orientation would be uncomfortable with such an idea. In Terchek's (1997a: 47-48) words, “[t]he strong republican [i.e. classical republicans] approach to private property distinguishes its view of citizenship from those communitarians who draw a sharp distinction between the self and society. Many communitarians seem uninterested in the way citizens live their individual lives and are stuck on the argument that in the good polity, citizens are always ready to subordinate their own interests to the common good.”

To the extent that contemporary communitarians associate property and self-interested behavior with selfish individualism and greedy consumerism, they have distaste for the institution of private

property and the pursuit of self-interest. They see any society elevating these values as the antithesis of a virtuous society. A citizen, for the communitarian-republican, can be either a virtuous person and transcend the pursuit of self-interest and devote herself/himself to the public cause, or a corrupt one who follows the dictates of her or his desires. From this perspective, we cannot find a person who values her or his possessions and yet remains a good citizen (Terchek 1997a: 47-54). For the communitarian-republicans, a citizen should not take part actively in the public realm for the sake of the perceived benefits such as protecting what belongs to him/her, but out of the belief that doing so is his/her duty. For example, C. Taylor (1989a: 175) thinks that citizens who are involved in politics on the basis of an “enlightened interest,” cannot be trusted fully. In his words, “. . . those who support a society because of the prosperity and security it generates, they are only fair-weather friends and are bound to let you down when you really need them.” Similarly, in *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (1985), R. Bellah and his colleagues argue that citizens who take part in the public realm on the basis of a perceived benefit are not acting out of *the habits of the heart*, i.e., truly civic virtue, but rather out of what they call “utilitarian individualism.” A similar distaste towards enlightened interest can be detected in Michael Sandel. For Sandel, self-interest is not something to be seen as a potentially beneficial means in the service of the public good. It is rather something to be curbed, “disempowered.” Thus, Sandel puts his faith in the formative aspects of republican politics that inculcate civic virtue in citizens out of a moral devotion to the public cause (Sandel, 1996). In this regard, most of the contemporary republicans, and particularly the ones with a communitarian orientation, force citizens to make a hard choice between public and private causes. And, they believe that a continuous civic education will be the key to reach the desired outcome, namely, a virtuous polity inhabited by virtuous citizens. However, such a plan lacks the material aspects of life. It does not take into consideration the economic anxieties and the needs of citizens.

Based on Olson’s logic, I would like to argue that the ideal of creating a “virtuous polity” is very unlikely to be reached through the route prescribed by communitarian-republicans. Even in situations in which the members of a group anticipate the potential benefits of collective action to all, if the group is very large and the contribution to the common cause by each individual group member is relatively small, they will fail to cooperate. It pays to “let George do it.” As Olson (1982: 26) put it, “[t]he typical citizen is usually ‘rationally ignorant’ about public affairs.” The solution, for Olson, lies in the existence of *selective incentives*. In Olson’s (1982: 21) words,

[a] selective incentive is one that applies selectively to the individuals depending on whether they do or do not contribute to the provision of public good. . . . A selective incentive can be either negative or positive; it can, for example, be a loss or punishment imposed only on those who do not help provide the collective good.

That is, there must be a concrete reward (a positive selective incentive) to be gained from cooperation and/or a solid price (a negative selective incentive) to be paid in the case of non-cooperation.

In contrast to the communitarian-republican position, we can find in the institution of private interest the properties that Olson calls selective incentives. As indicated earlier, the institution of private property and the pursuit of self-interest paradoxically provide the citizens with concrete stakes in the well being of the republic (Terchek, 1997a: 48-54). Accordingly, citizens can enjoy the products of

their labor to the full extent with their families among their friends only in a firm and cohesive polity. In a polity which is vulnerable to external enemies and weak in establishing the public order domestically, however rich a person may be, she or he cannot feel fully secure yet. In this sense, there is a heavy price to be paid by everybody, rich and poor, in the case of the collapse of the republic: our property rights in a Lockean sense.<sup>(11)</sup>

Employing Olson's terms, the citizen's stakes can be seen as selective incentives. Through a civic education that is not neglecting or belittling the institution of private property and the pursuit of self-interest, but rather emphasizing the connection between the private and the common well-being, i.e., self-interest properly understood, the citizens will understand that if they want to have their private interests preserved, they should take their public responsibilities seriously. Stated differently, every citizen should ". . . sacrifice some of his private interests to save the rest" (de Tocqueville 1988: 527).

In conclusion, it can be said that the common good does not need to be secured only through the constant sacrifice of the personal to the communal, through the continuous commitment of individual members of the community to public cause, and through minimizing differences among individuals. It is not necessary to sacrifice the individual to the community for the sake of saving the integrity of the latter. Instead, the acceptance of the multi-dimensionality of human needs and respect for the pursuit of self-interest besides the common interest serves the republican aim better.

It is natural for human beings to have both private aims that emerge out of their unique existence in terms of skills, natures and properties and public concerns. As Aristotle indicates, human beings naturally possess more interest in what is theirs (*Politics* 1261b 33-35). Paradoxically, this self-interest provides us with the means that is necessary for the preservation of what is common. It can be seen as an incentive for individuals to be concerned about the public. In that regard, rather than trying to make citizens indifferent towards self-interest, the aim of civic education should be to make citizens understand the connection between their own well-being and that of the republic. It may be argued that citizens who understand this positive connection between their well-being and that of the polity would get an additional motivation towards taking public issues seriously.

## NOTES

1. While B. Barber can be seen as a republican, he might reject being called a communitarian. Like Habermas, he thinks that the communitarians base political activity in the public realm on the pre-political assumptions that are given by society's understanding of "common life." He calls this kind of democracy "unitary democracy." On the other hand, he favors an understanding of democracy which he calls "strong democracy," according to which politics is not shaped by a prior understanding of common life, but rather it shapes this very understanding of common life (Barber, 1984). Bill Brugger (1999) identifies him as a pragmatist-republican.
2. My presentation of liberalism in this paper follows the arguments in my article, Şahin (2007).
3. A historical precedent of this idea can be found in John S. Mill's defense of toleration in *On Liberty* (1859). Especially the third chapter of this work, which carries the title of "Of

Individuality, as One of the Elements of Well-Being,” is devoted to the elaboration of this argument. Accordingly, a person attains happiness by developing his or her nature, which is “...[a] tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing.” In fact, for Mill, individuality is dependent on this development (1978: 60-61). Thus, in order to gain individuality, and as a result happiness, one needs to be free and tolerated with his or her life experiences that deviate from the customary ways.

4. However, in a footnote, Parekh (1993: 175) adds that “[t]hat human beings have the capacity to rise above their circumstances and critically to reflect on themselves is not in question. What is in question is the liberal view that this capacity alone constitutes human essence and that everything else is merely contingent.”
5. In another place, Kukathas (1995: 238) claims that “[i]f there are any fundamental rights, then there is at least one right which is of crucial importance: the right of individual to leave a community by the terms of which he or she no longer wishes to live.”
6. With regards to the liberal understanding of citizenship, it is possible to talk about citizens’ rights, rather than their duties to state and society. In this approach, although citizens are furnished with the right of political participation, they are not obliged to take part in political activities. As Oldfield (1990: 2) puts it, “[t]he function of the political realm is to render service to individual interests and purposes, to protect citizens in the exercise of their rights, and to leave them unhindered in the pursuit of whatever individual and collective interests they might have.” Likewise, Sandel (1996: 14) states that, in this view, “there is no political obligation, strictly speaking, for citizens generally.” This lack of political obligation will be explained by Rawlsian account of obligation according to which we owe two obligations to others: “natural duties” to all human beings, such as respect for human dignity, and voluntary obligation which we incur by our own agreement. From this perspective, political obligation in the form of active participation in public matters can not be a natural duty but a voluntary obligation. While a politician who runs for office incurs such a political obligation voluntarily on her or himself, an ordinary citizen does not (Sandel, 1996: 14). Thus, for the liberals, politics is seen just as a practice of making collective decisions, not a way of life. According to William A. Galston (2002: 4), “[a]n instrumental rather than intrinsic account of the worth of politics forms a key distinction between liberalism and civic republicanism.”
7. An interesting example of public goods can be found in what Joseph Stiglitz (2000: 149) states about “efficient government as a public good.”

One of the most important public goods is the management of the government: we all benefit from a better, more efficient, more responsive government. Indeed, ‘good government’ possesses both of the properties of public goods we noted earlier: it is difficult and undesirable to exclude any individual from the benefits of a better government.

If the government is able to become more efficient and reduce taxes without reducing the level of government services, everyone benefits. The



politician who succeeds in doing this may get some return, but this return is only a fraction of the benefits that accrue to others. In particular, those who voted against the politician who succeeds in doing this gain as much as those who worked for his election, and the individual who did not vote, who attempted to free ride on the political activities of others, benefits as much as either.

8. The aim here is not to prove that “virtuous polity” is a public good in the strict sense of the term. Rather the aim is to show that the creation of such a polity also is subject to the difficulties of the provision of public goods. For example, one objection to accepting virtuous polity as a public good may argue that public goods are the common benefits and goods that are provided by *the government*. Since virtuous polity is provided not by the government but created and maintained by the public at large, virtuous polity does not qualify as a public good. However, when we take into consideration the republican belief (Dagger 2004: 168) that “. . . government is a public matter to be directed by the members of the public themselves,” even this distinction between the government provision and the public provision gets blurred.
9. Norman Barry (2000: 21) indicates that a similar criticism is valid for Marxists, who expect an individual worker to make sacrifices for the sake of the working class as a whole. However, since the individual worker is not sure that her or his fellow workers are as public spirited as s/he is, there is not much incentive for her/him to make any sacrifice.
10. Terchek accepts that citizens’ stakes in the vitality and well-being of the republic can take other forms besides private property. These other forms of stake may or may not be compatible with private property. One such stake can be provided in the form of a welfare state. For example, Terchek (1997a: 85) refers to Frank Michelman, who “. . . calls on contemporary republicans to strive ‘through public law for the broadest feasible distribution of whatever property in whatever form is considered minimally prerequisite to political competence.’” However, even though Terchek is not against the welfare state in principle, he thinks that it is “. . . inadequate for the job at hand. The welfare state . . . attempts to assist individuals meet their basic necessities, but it is unclear whether it promotes autonomy or civic regard or whether it helps to undermine such goods” (Terchek, 1997b: 36). Robert Bellah et al. (1985) also criticize the welfare state on the grounds that it takes the individual as its ontological basis. In this respect, it is not very different from “neo-capitalism.” The US “welfare state” is neutral towards different understandings of the good life of the citizens. In this sense, the justification of welfare state is not to empower the individual to participate in the communal life but rather to provide her or him with the means of creating an autonomous life.
11. According to Locke, prior to the emergence of society, human beings lived in what he calls, “the state of nature” where they possessed inalienable rights to live, to be free, and to have property. Locke ([1690] 1980: 66) collects these rights under the general name of *property*. Thus, in the collapse of the republic, what will be lost is not only the property in the strict sense, i.e., movable and immovable goods, but also the right to the pursuit of happiness, i.e., life and liberty. In this sense, even those who do not have much property and who are not rich have stakes in the well-being of the republic.

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