

# Ethics and Group Conflict: Between Marxism and Liberalism

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I

Consider the following case: As Jones is driving home from a union meeting, he sees an injured motorist lying in the ditch. He stops to help, but as he steps into the ditch he realizes that the person he is about to help is Smith, the owner who has been waging a bitter and protracted campaign to break Jones's union. How should Jones respond? Should he be moved by an obligation to do what will advance the interests of workers or should he be moved by an antagonism-blind obligation to help another person in distress? In what follows I will argue that Jones will be attracted, at least initially, by both of these answers and the radically different views of ethics they express. But I will also argue that he will see serious problems with both views. Thus, the last sections of this paper will be concerned with sketching a third view of ethics, one that promises to incorporate the attractive features of the first two answers while avoiding their problems.

It should be noted at the outset that I won't be trying to give a fine-grained analysis of the obligation to help another person in distress. Rather, my concern is to use Jones's (admittedly special) case to bring out a deep tension in our thinking about the role of ethics in the face of group conflict. Thus, my discussion will move very quickly to a rather global contrast between Marxist and liberal approaches to ethics. This does not mean, however, that I will be trying to provide yet another abstract characterization of the difference between Marxism and liberalism. Instead, I will be trying to see how the various moves and counter-moves between and within these traditions are reflected in the concerns and deliberations of White male workers such as Jones. In short, my aim is to use Jones's real life situation to get clearer on the theoretical impasse between Marxism and liberalism and to see if there is any hope of moving beyond it. One final introductory note - I've made Jones a White male worker rather than, say a Black activist who discovers that the person he is about to help is the leader of a local racist group or a woman coordinator of a women's health center who discovers that she is about to help the person who was behind the recent bombing of the center, for three reasons: first, by making Jones a worker and Smith an owner we engage directly the Marxian intuition concerning the primacy of economic domination; second, by making Jones a White male we set the stage for a careful examination of the tension between orthodox Marxism (and liberalism) on the one hand, and the movements for sexual and racial equality on the other hand; third, by making Jones a White male worker we will

be grounding our reflections in the daily life of a group that will surely play a strategic role in any significant challenge to the status quo.

II

Consider, first, the following gloss on the case for saying that Jones should try to become the kind of person who is moved by an obligation to do what will advance the interests of workers:

(A) We live in a society where the interests of one group of people (workers) are sacrificed to the interests of another group (owners). A key factor in stabilizing such a social order is the notion that ethics should transcend the interests people have as members of particular groups. This view of ethics leads workers to ignore their long-term interests in bringing about a radically different social order. It also leads workers to downplay the conflict between the immediate interests they have as workers (e.g., the interest in defeating automation proposals that would eliminate their jobs) and the immediate interests of owners (e.g., in using automation to gain greater control of production processes). Furthermore, it leaves the stage open for owners to fill in abstract moral claims in ways that serve their own interests (e.g., the call to respect individual autonomy becomes the call to respect, above all else, individual property rights). Thus, in a society such as ours the role of ethics should be to clarify and make historically effective the interests workers have in creating a radically different social order. To be sure, workers yearn for a time when ethics will have the task of enunciating moral claims that rest on universal interests, but the fact is that we'll never get to such a social order if we attempt to base present obligation on such yearnings. This doesn't mean, however, that such yearnings can have no purchase at all in our daily lives. Indeed, these yearnings might provide the basis for such things as an obligation to help strangers in distress. Then we could say that Jones should try to become the kind of person who is initially moved by the obligation to help a stranger in distress (an obligation that prefigures a time when class antagonisms will no longer exist), but who undergoes a shift in motivation when he recognizes the person to be helped is his adversary. At that point he should be moved by an obligation to advance the interests of workers [1].

Consider, next, the following gloss on the case for saying that Jones should try to become the kind of person who is moved by an antagonism-blind obligation to help

another person in distress:

(B) We live in a society where different groups of people have different interests and different visions of the good. To be sure, there is always the danger that the interests of some group will have a disproportionate influence on the overall direction of the society. But this doesn't mean that ethics should take sides. Rather, the role of ethics should be to enunciate, and make effective, overarching norms that members of all groups can accept as setting out a mutually acceptable framework for life in such a society. Since differing group interests and visions of the good seem to be enduring features of modern society, it is unlikely that we will ever achieve a society where ethical obligations can be based on universal interests. Thus, even when we incorporate a future-looking dimension into the role of ethics, we should not presuppose a social order without differing group interests. What we need from ethics when we look to the future is the same as what we need from ethics when we try to deal with present conflict, viz., overarching norms that contain conflict within mutually acceptable bounds. This means that Jones should determine how he should act by asking what obligations would clarify and make effective the consensus needed for life together when groups have different visions of the good. Once he sees ethics in this way, he will set aside as misguided the distinction between obligations we have toward strangers (where one presupposes ignorance of potential conflicts between group interests) and obligations we have toward people regardless of whether or not we recognize them as members of groups whose interests conflict with ours. Only the latter kind of obligation is relevant to the task of enunciating the consensus needed in our present society and in any future modern society. Thus, Jones should try to become the kind of person who is moved from the beginning by an antagonism-blind obligation to help another person in distress. Since such an obligation is not affected by group differences - recognized or not, it will lead him not only to go into the ditch in the first place but to follow-through on the helping mission even though he recognizes Smith as his adversary.

Here it would be well to pause briefly to show how both (A) and (B) could have at least some purchase on Jones. Consider, first, what might attract Jones to (A). Suppose that as the strike drags on, some union members are beginning to consider giving up and moving to another town where there seem to be more jobs. Others are thinking of pursuing an early retirement strategy. Old personal quarrels are beginning to show themselves when union meetings take up difficult questions such as how to distribute shrinking strike benefits. Younger workers are starting to argue with older workers on how long-term a view the union should take. ('Should we settle in a way that might get us in trouble in ten years?'). Most important of all, perhaps, Jones himself is beginning to feel that a union defeat is possible, especially in view of the current technological and political climate (Reaganism/Thatcherism, deskilling due to automation, etc.). Perhaps all these problems could be met without (A)'s appeal to ethics. (Indeed, Jones yearns for the time when co-workers lived in the same part of town, went to the same churches, etc., and didn't need ethics to promote solidarity at the plant.) Perhaps new forms of solidarity will emerge if things get bad enough, but this strikes Jones as a risky bet. What worries him most is the possibility that if workers don't find a basis for unity now, it may soon be too late for any effective resistance [2]. For all these reasons, then, Jones will be attracted to (A), with its call for each worker to put group interests above private interests. Such an ethic would help people stick out the struggle rather than leave town, greatly reduce petty squabbles, and give hope to individual workers.

How about (B)? What might attract Jones to it? Here we need to consider other parts of Jones's life, say, his work with the local veterans group (which brings together people of different classes, religions) and his family life. Suppose that in these other aspects of his life Jones tends to adopt a 'live and let live' approach. (As he says at veterans' meetings, 'Though we might not agree on religion, we simply have to find a way to get along together.') Suppose Jones has gone even further with this kind of thinking. Suppose, e.g., he's come to think that contemporary 'religious wars' between Catholics and Protestants, between various branches of Islam, etc., are simply crazy, that these groups have got to begin to get along just as he and his cronies learned many years ago to get along with soldiers of different backgrounds. Suppose that this kind of thinking sometimes seeps into his views of owners. (Try as he might to resist it, he finds himself thinking 'They're people too - just trying to do well by their family, etc.')

Add to all this the growing feeling on Jones's part that it's just possible that the union might lose this struggle. Maybe, then, it's time to hold out the olive branch a bit. When thinking along these lines, Jones will be attracted to (B) because it makes ethics a matter of consensus around mutually acceptable norms rather than a matter of one point of view winning out. This pull toward (B) would also be supported by Jones's life as a parent if, say, he'd been trying of late to be fairer to his teenage son on things like what kind of music gets played in the house. (He's been allowing punk music on the record player at certain agreed times even though he hates it with a passion.)

### III

Suppose it is granted that both (A) and (B) would have at least some purchase on Jones's deliberations. How might Jones begin to deal with the obvious tension this creates? He might well, I now want to suggest, try to strengthen the case for (A) by fixing on a problem with (B), or vice



versa. So that important questions aren't begged, he might begin to focusing on internal objections to (A) and (B), objections that require only that one take seriously the basic ideas of (A) and (B).

Consider, first, the following objection to our initial case for saying that Jones should try to become the kind of person who is moved by an obligation to do what will advance the interests of workers: (A) assumes that ethics can play a progressive role only if workers see ethics as grounded in the interests they have as workers. But if ethics is to be made relative to worker interests, there can be no objection to other groups doing the same. Now this may not worry proponents of (A) when they are considering the case of owners. Here they might say: 'Let them have their own obligations, etc. If that's the price we pay for workers beginning to focus on their own interests, so be it.'

Nothing will change without class struggle and this struggle can only be aided by a view of ethics that clarifies the class basis of all ethics. (A bit of 'truth in advertising' won't hurt in this case!) But such a manoeuvre won't work for another, much more disturbing possibility, viz., that a group-relativist approach to ethics will create conflicts between workers and other non-owner groups. Suppose that in some important contexts the interests people have as women point in different directions than interests people have as workers. Now group relativism begins to look problematic, at least when it's justified by reference to its ability to unify the historical forces needed to radically change the social order. To say obligation should be based on interests once has as a member of a group how begins to look like a recipe for conflict between various non-owner groups and within individuals who are members of several such groups. (E.g., how should a woman respond to her union's position on an issue when it is not clear that the interests of women and workers coincide?) It seems, in short, that (A)'s group-relativist approach to ethics will subvert rather than promote the unity needed for an effective struggle against the status quo.

Consider, next, the following objection to our gloss on the case for saying that Jones should try to become the kind of person who is moved by an antagonism-blind obligation to help another person in distress: (B) presupposes that people can distance themselves from the interests they have as members of certain groups. It assumes that they can step back from such interests and critically endorse ethical norms that do not presuppose any particular vision of the good. Furthermore, this answer presupposes that people can actually be moved by such norms once they are intellectually endorsed - even when those norms require behaviour that goes against the interests they have as members of particular groups. In short, this answer presupposes what has been called a 'Kantian' theory of the self. But such a metaphysical view of the self cannot serve the purposes for which it is introduced: first, such a self is too bare a self to be able to produce determinate, non-arbitrary norms; and second, even if it could produce such norms, it would be a mystery as to how they could move real people when the interests they have as members of particular groups pull them in conflicting directions. Thus, the seemingly liberatory vision of a morality based on critical choices of 'unencumbered selves' flounders on an unacceptable metaphysical theory of persons [3].

Let me try, in the spirit of this paper, to summarize how these objections might take hold in Jones's deliberations. Suppose, first, that Jones has picked up signs from his sister, who also works at the plant, that she might not go along with more militant union tactics if they were likely to lead the general populace to repeal the recently-passed program for free child care for all families. (Suppose people are beginning to pay more attention to those who say that women shouldn't be in the factory or on picket lines - that they belong at home with their children.) This worries Jones in a way that the views of his male cousin, who's an officer at the local bank, do not. Not only is his sister a co-worker, but she is part of a group (women) that Jones realizes must be taken seriously in this day and age. If workers do not take the interests of women seriously, there's a real danger that the bosses will win by playing the groups off against one another. (Knowing his sister, Jones places little hope in getting women to simply give up their struggle for sexual equality and return to being 'good wives, good mothers'.) All this would give the above objection - which stresses the divisive potential of an ethics that focuses on group interests, at least some purchase in Jones's thinking.

Would the above objection to (B) also have at least some purchase on Jones's deliberations? Suppose Jones has also picked up signs - again from his sister but also from his wife and her woman friends, that they don't think

that questions about what is the right thing to do can be separated from questions about what it is to be a woman in this day and age. He knows that women 'get their backs up' when male union members say 'Let's leave family matters out of this discussion, they will only confuse issues.' Plus, he's noticed that there is a special kind of solidarity that women share when they talk about their children on the picket line. He senses that the kind of unity women and male workers are going to need if they are to succeed can't be got in the way the army used to get 'unity' between, say, Jewish and Protestant soldiers when he was in the army. In fact, when thinking about these issues, Jones is inclined to think the latter 'unity' was forced and superficial. What (B) needs, but doesn't seem able to deliver, is a unity between women and male workers that does not require women to downgrade 'the women's point of view'.

#### IV

So far I have resisted the temptation to make Jones either a Marxist or a liberal. My concern has been to try to show that regardless of any theoretical orientation he would, first, be attracted to both (A) and (B); and second, see the internal problems with both. I now want to consider how contemporary Marxist and liberal theorists have tried to deal with the issues we've raised so far. Once these refined versions of (A) and (B) are in hand, I'll go on in the next section to consider the feminist critique of both these refined positions. In the final section I'll try to relate these theoretical moves and counter-moves to Jones's situation as a White male worker.

The Marxist tradition has an answer to the above objection to (A). It goes as follows: Class conflict is not just one form of conflict existing alongside others. Class conflict is primary in the sense that it is the basis for all other forms of conflict. Milton Fisk puts this as follows:

The centrality of class polarity does not mean merely that class domination is a reason, but that it is the reason for other forms of domination. Hence, the sexist attitudes of men are not themselves sufficient to sustain women's oppression. Attitudes exist and change only in relation to a social context. Thus, in a capitalist context, sexist attitudes are intermediate factors in getting at the reason for women's oppression [4].

So we can set aside the worry that grounding ethics in interests persons have as members of particular groups will lead to irresolvable and damaging conflicts between non-owner groups and within individuals who belong to several such groups:

Class domination is the linchpin of the entire present system of domination. Implicit in the aim of liberation of any non-class group must then be the aim of doing away with the current form of class domination. The ethical codes valid relative to non-class oppressed groups will be consistent with the interests of those groups themselves only if they are consistent with the interests, and hence the ethical codes of dominated classes. Without implying that there is a genuine conflict, one can then say that in ethics class has precedence over other groups [5].

The liberal tradition also has a reply to the objection we raised against (B). It goes as follows: A consensus around overarching norms doesn't require a 'Kantian' theory of persons, where one's core identity is independent of interests one has as a member of a particular group. Indeed such a consensus needn't presuppose any metaphysical theory of the self at all because we don't have to view a political system as expressing some ideal of the person. As Charles Larmore has recently noted, we can look at the consensus needed in a pluralistic society as a 'modus vivendi among people having different ultimate commitments (often at home in different sub-environments), a system of mutual advantage, to which we

primarily adhere, not because it represents our deepest self-understandings, but rather for the more prudential reason that it serves our other values' [6]. So it's just false that such a consensus rules out a 'constitutive role for the interests we have as members of particular groups. All that is required that in the public realm we abstract from those interests that constitute our identity in the private realm. Once we set aside the notion that a political order must express some ideal of the person, we can see why deep differences in such ideals don't subvert the project of enunciating and making effective a consensus for a society such as ours.

Rawls makes just this point when he says that the 'original position' - his favoured device for enunciating a public consensus about justice, no more 'commits us to a metaphysical doctrine about the nature of the self than our playing a game like monopoly commits us to thinking that we are landlords engaged in a disparate rivalry, winner take all' [7]. All that his approach presupposes, Rawls now argues, is that as citizens we can step back from those loyalties that are constitutive of our identity in our private lives:

It is essential to stress that citizens in their personal affairs, or in the internal life of associations to which they belong, may regard their final ends and attachments in a way very different from the way the political conception involves. Citizens may have, and normally do have at any given time, affections, devotions, and loyalties that they believe they would not, and indeed could and should not, stand apart from and objectively evaluate from the point of view of their purely rational good. They may regard it as simply unthinkable to view themselves apart from certain religious, philosophical, and moral convictions, or from certain enduring attachments and loyalties. These convictions and attachments are part of what we may call their 'nonpublic identity'. These convictions and attachments help to organize and give shape to a person's way of life, what one sees oneself as doing and trying to accomplish in one's social world. We think that if we were suddenly without these particular convictions and attachments we would be disoriented and unable to carry on. In fact, there would be, we might think, no point in carrying on. But our conceptions of the good may and often do change over time, usually slowly but sometimes rather suddenly. When these changes are sudden, we are particularly likely to say that we are no longer the same person. We know what this means: we refer to a profound and pervasive shift or reversal, in our final ends and character; we refer to our different nonpublic, and possibly moral or religious, identity. On the road to Damascus Saul of Tarsus becomes Paul the Apostle. There is no change in our public or political identity, nor in our personal identity as this concept is understood by some writers in the philosophy of mind [8].



## V

Are these replies adequate? I think not; for both confront serious external objections, objections put forward most forcefully by feminists and spokespersons for the various movements for racial equality. Although I will concentrate on showing how the women's movement challenges the refined versions of (A) and (B), it is important to note that parallel challenges are implicit in the various movements for racial equality. (As we shall see in the final section, the various movements for racial equality not only offer confirmation of the feminist critique of the refined versions of (A) and (B), they also express a point of view which, like that of women, must be taken into account by people like Jones if a third approach to ethics is to take hold in history.)

There is at present a serious debate within the women's movement as to how the struggle for sexual equality relates to workers' struggle for economic equality. Both sides in this debate agree that women's struggle for sexual equality must be seen as autonomous, that the goal of equality for women is to be pursued for its own sake and not just as a means to ending economic inequality. But feminists differ as to what this means for the orthodox Marxist claim concerning the primacy of economic conflict. Some argue that honouring the autonomy of the struggle for sexual equality demands nothing short of a total rejection of the Marxian claim and its replacement by the claim that patriarchal forces are primary [9]. Others argue for a 'dual systems' approach, granting equal force to economic and patriarchal factors. It is this last position that brings out most clearly the feminist challenge to (A) as we have developed it so far. The problem cannot be glossed as follows: On the one hand, it seems that one cannot preserve the autonomy of the struggle for sexual equality if one makes it an aspect of a larger struggle for economic equality; on the other hand, it seems that the struggle for sexual equality can't be a historically effective struggle unless it is seen as part of a larger economic struggle. Granted, writers such as Juliet Mitchell have tried to soften this tension by claiming that 'the social conditions of work under capitalism potentially contain the overthrow of the exploitative conditions into which they are harnessed and it is these same social conditions that make potentially redundant the laws of patriarchal culture' [10]. But it is unclear whether her political point - that 'There is no question of either political movement taking precedence,' is compatible with her theoretical point that 'the social conditions of work under capitalism' hold the key to progress in the struggle for sexual equality [11]. Indeed, just this worry is behind Iris Young's critique of the dual systems approach. She therefore calls for a view of historical materialism that employs new categories, categories that don't assign primacy to either economic or patriarchal forces but which instead capture the dynamics of 'capitalist patriarchy'. To be sure, the Marxian feminist would at this point reassert the intuition that feminists can't afford to blur Marx's insights by trying to find new categories for understanding 'capitalist patriarchy' [12]. But my aim here is not to try to say who has won this particular debate within feminist theory. My aim is much more modest, viz., to show that an important strand in feminist thought presents a serious challenge to (A) as we've developed it so far [13]. Suppose it turns out that the best explanation of sexual inequality does not presuppose the primacy of underlying economic structures. Then the interests people have as workers may not point in the same direction as the interests women have due to their sex/gender position.

Certain features of feminist theory also cast doubt on the refined version of (B) we considered above. To set the stage for this part of my argument I want to consider briefly Charles Taylor's analysis of what is involved in critical agency. To Taylor, such agency must build on, rather than transcend, certain 'horizons' or 'fundamental

evaluations' of the person:

Our identity is ... defined by certain evaluations which are inseparable from ourselves as agents. Shorn of these we would cease to be ourselves, by which we do not mean trivially that we would be different in the sense of having some properties other than those we not have - this would indeed be the case after any change however minor - but that shorn of these we would lose the very possibility of being an agent who evaluates; that our existence as persons, and hence our ability to adhere as persons to certain evaluations, would be impossible outside the horizon of these essential evaluations, what we would break down is persons, be incapable of being persons in the full sense.

The notion of identity refers us to certain evaluations which are essential because these are the indispensable horizon or foundation out of which we reflect and evaluate as persons. To lose this horizon, or not to have found it, is indeed a terrifying experience of disaggregation and loss. This is why we can speak of an 'identity-crisis' when we have lost our grip on who we are. A self decides and acts out of certain fundamental evaluations [14].

Sandel makes a similar point when he says: 'While the notion of constitutive attachments may at first seem an obstacle to agency - the self, now encumbered, is no longer strictly prior - some relative fixity of character appears essential to prevent the lapse into arbitrariness' [15]. But Sandel does not stop with Taylor's general claim that a reflective agent must build on his or her constitutive attachments. He goes on to make the more specific claim that such an agent must build on her or his group loyalties. Sandel acknowledges the need to ground critical agency in group loyalties in his discussion of what is involved in having character or moral depth:

To imagine a person incapable of constitutive attachments ... is not to conceive an ideally free and rational agent, but to imagine a person wholly without character, without moral depth. For to have character is to know that I move in a history I neither summon nor command, which carries consequences none the less for my choices and conduct. It draws me closer to some and more distant to others; it makes some aims more appropriate, others less so. As a self-interpreting being, I am able to reflect on my history and in this sense to distance myself from it, but the distance is always precarious and provisional, the point of reflection never finally secured outside the history itself. A person with character thus knows that he is implicated in various ways even as he reflects, and feels the moral weight of what he knows [16].

It is important to note that Taylor and Sandel are not making metaphysical claims about what it is to be a person. Rather, they are bringing to the fore certain psychological facts about reflective agency. Thus, it won't do to say that their points only cut against those views of ethics that presuppose a 'Kantian' self. They are psychological claims that have implications for any theory that takes ethical norms to be the result of critical reflection. To be sure, they would have no purchase against a view that is so bold as to say that it doesn't matter how individuals come to accept societal norms. But I take it that even on a 'modus vivendi' account of a liberal consensus, we don't want this consensus to be a result of indoctrination or just a consequence of passive, unthinking acquiescence. Rawls himself wants a consensus around 'justice as fairness' to be result of an affirmation by critical agents:

... justice as fairness tries to present a conception of political justice rooted in the basic intuitive ideas found in the public culture of a constitutional democracy. We conjecture that these ideas are likely to be affirmed by each of the opposing

comprehensive moral doctrines influential in a reasonably just democratic society [17].

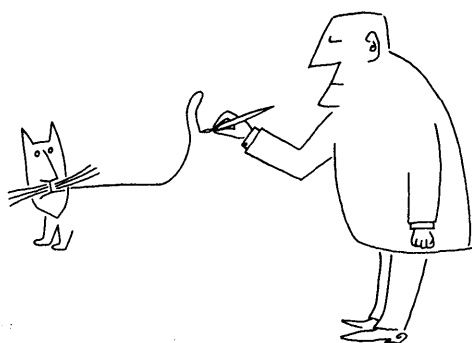
It is significant that Rawls does not contrast the consensus he seeks with an unthinking acceptance of overarching norms. The latter is not for him a serious contender. Instead, Rawls contrasts his consensus with one that is based on agreement as to the good. Rawlsian citizens affirm similar norms, but do not do so on the basis of a shared vision of the good:

In justice as fairness, a social unity is understood by starting with the conception of society as a system of cooperation between free and equal persons. Social unity and the allegiance of citizens to their common institutions are not founded on their all affirming the same conception of the good, but on their publicly accepting a political conception of justice to regulate the basic structure of society [18].

Different groups will affirm justice as fairness for different reasons - but none simply go along with it for no reason at all. Indeed, what stability there will be will rest on the fact that there are various bases of affirmation:

As for the question of whether this unity is stable, this importantly depends on the content of the religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines available to constitute an overlapping consensus. For example, assuming the public political conception to be justice as fairness, imagine citizens to affirm one of three views: the first view affirms justice as fairness because its religious beliefs and understanding of faith lead to a principle of toleration and underwrite the fundamental idea of society as a scheme of social cooperation between free and equal persons; the second view affirms it as a consequence of a comprehensive liberal moral conception such as those of Kant and Mill; while the third affirms justice as fairness not as a consequence of any wider doctrine but as in itself sufficient to express values that normally outweigh whatever other values might oppose them, at least under reasonably favorable conditions. This overlapping consensus appears far more stable than one founded on views that express skepticism and indifference to religious, philosophical, and moral values, or that regard the acceptance of the principles of justice simply as a prudent *modus vivendi* given the existing balance of social forces. Of course, there are many other possibilities [19].

Rawls's last remark, where he rejects a modus vivendi approach to justice, seems to suggest that Rawls wants to take a middle position between what Sandel calls 'deontological liberalism' (which makes critical agency problematic) and a purely prudential liberalism (which leaves no room for non-prudential commitments). Larmore, by the way, suggests such a middle ground when he says that the modus vivendi approach can find room for values that do not themselves have a prudential basis: 'In the midst of disagreement about the good life it not only preserves civil peace, but also protests our own particular view of the good and, because of the variety it permits, enriches our sense of its value. (These other values need not themselves have a prudential basis.)' [20]. The question remains, however, as to whether such a manoeuvre can succeed: does such a middle ground provide arguments for the greater stability of the liberal consensus as Rawls suggests; or does it undercut such a consensus by smuggling-in the notion that one's own view of the good is after all the best view of the good? But again, my aim is not to show that we have a knock-down external objection to our refined version of (B). My aim is simply to show that there is a serious challenge here. That challenge, to summarize the above, goes as follows: Taylor and Sandel's point that critical agency must build on group loyalties seems to generate a conflict between the Rawlsian requirement that we transcend such loyalties



and the Rawlsian requirement that we affirm (as critical agents) the norms constituting the consensus around 'justice as fairness'. It seems, then, that either the defender of (B) must give up the notion of a consensus between people with different constitutive ties or she must give up the claim that such a consensus is affirmed as the result of critical reflection. Lest all this strike the reader as a bit of philosophic slight-of-hand, I want once more to suggest that this challenge is implicit in contemporary feminist theory. Feminists make Sandel's point about the importance of 'constitutive attachments' when they argue that the struggle for sexual equality requires a 'feminist standpoint' [21]. Thus, despite their differences feminists seem to agree with Nancy Hartsock when she says that 'consciousness raising groups' are important because they teach women to 'build their analysis from the ground up, beginning with their own experience' [22], and with Naomi Scheman who says that 'Rather than claim the right ... to transcend our experiences as women, I would urge us to speak out of that experience, as part of a way of changing it, but also out of a recognition of what there is to learn from the perspectives on human life that have been distinctively ours' [23]. None of this should be taken as suggesting that feminists argue that affirming the 'constitutive attachments' one has as a woman is all that there is to becoming a critical agent. As Jane Flax has argued, it is only a necessary component in such a process:

It is necessary to develop an autonomous feminist viewpoint ... But women's experience, which has been excluded from the realm of the known, of the rational, is not in itself an adequate ground for theory. As the other pole of the dualities it must be incorporated and transcended... Feminist theory and practice must thus include a therapeutic aspect, with consciousness raising as a model and an emphasis on process as political [24].

The point that emerges from this focus on a 'feminist viewpoint' as a necessary starting point is that it may be difficult to get the critical agents needed for a Rawlsian consensus if each of us is required to see our constitutive loyalties as something that we could abandon. While there is a sense of personal identity in which he who was called 'Saul of Tarsus' is the same person who came to be called 'Paul', the feminist point makes it unclear whether such a tolerant sense of personal identity promotes critical agency. It may instead rob potential critical agents of the necessary starting point for realizing that potential.

## VI

What does all this mean for Jones? I want to conclude by suggesting that Jones will reject the refined versions of (A) and (B) insofar as the women's movement has had a positive impact on his concerns and deliberations. This last qualification is important. If contemporary history has passed Jones by - if he simply refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of his sister's concern with day care, if he stomps out of the house whenever his wife raises the issue of sharing household chores, if he flies into a rage every

time his teenage daughter talks about getting birth control pills, the above objections will have no purchase on his thought. Let's suppose, then, that while Jones has not become a thorough-going feminist, he has come to realize that conflicts between workers' interests and women's interests cannot be resolved by persuading women to downplay their interests or to abandon the 'woman's point of view'. Does this mean that Jones won't be able to salvage anything at all from (A) and (B)? I think not; for Jones may come to see that there is a way of drawing on the attractive features of (A) and (B) while avoiding their problems. Here again I want to separate my argument into two stages. First, I will abstract from the specifics of Jones's situation (who, as we've been assuming, has been exposed to only one of the contemporary movements for equality, viz., the women's movement) and sketch a third approach to ethics that calls for a consensus amongst all dominated groups (racial minorities as well as women and workers). Then I will return to Jones's situation (as we've characterized it so far) and consider whether this third approach stands any chance of taking hold in the lives of people like Jones.

Since I'll be suggesting that there is something to be salvaged from (A) and (B), it would be helpful to review briefly what is attractive about them. (A) is attractive because it is realistic without being pessimistic concerning the role of ethics. It begins by granting that an appeal to overarching norms has often been used to stabilize a social order where the interests of one group are sacrificed to those of another. But it goes on to suggest that if ethics were grounded in the interests of dominated groups, ethical norms could be used to marshal the historical forces needed to change such a social order. They could do this by encouraging individuals to put group interests above the purely private interests that subvert the group unity needed to challenge existing inequalities. To be sure, there is a strand in Marxist thought that rejects any role at all for ethical motivation, but this claim has never been entirely convincing and to the degree that it fails to convince, to that degree we are attracted to (A) [25]. The appeal of (B) can also be seen as resting on a kind of realism. While it conveys a general optimism regarding what ethics can do, it also insists that ethics can't do everything. In particular, it can't create a shared vision of the good when, due to the centrifugal forces of modern society, diverse ways of life give rise to diverse visions of the good. What ethics can do is much more modest, viz., help contending groups work out a mutually acceptable compromise. While the norms that make up such a consensus will not be the best possible norms from the point of view of any particular group, they will be the best that can be got in a modern society. Granted, some theorists have argued that it is possible to create a shared vision of the good even under modern conditions and so it is possible for us to move beyond ethics as a mutually acceptable compromise [26]. But again this claim has never been entirely convincing and so (B) has at least some attraction.

How might these features of (A) and (B) be used to avoid the problems raised in the previous section? Consider, first, the sorry that claims about the primacy of economic domination would subvert the autonomy of other contemporary struggles against inequality. This worry could be addressed by drawing on (B)'s notion of ethics as enunciating a consensus amongst groups that differ as to their ultimate commitments. This view of ethics would differ from (B) in that the scope of such a consensus would be limited to the various groups which, through their particular struggles for equality, are challenging the status quo. It would make no pretence of enunciating norms that would be acceptable to all groups, including those whose interests are served by existing inequalities. Such a consensus would still be a compromise, however, in that no dominated group would take it to be an adequate expression of their particular vision of the good. But the



point to be stressed is that such a view of ethics would put the various struggles for equality on an equal footing - something a claim about the primacy of economic domination (or sexual or racial) would not do. Consider, next, the worry that the goal of creating a consensus around overarching norms would flounder on the fact that individuals who are asked to transcend their constitutive loyalties would be incapable of critically affirming any norms at all. On the modified view we're now considering, this worry would be met by drawing on (A)'s notion that ethics should be grounded in the interest dominated groups have in ending their domination. On this third view, members of dominated groups begin by affirming the constitutive loyalties due to their group memberships and the idea is that as a result of this first affirmation they will go on to a second affirmation, viz., of the need to work together with other dominated groups if any struggle against domination is to succeed. That is, affirming one's constitutive ties as a worker, a woman or a member of a racial minority is a necessary first step toward participating in the historical process whereby the needed inter-group solidarity will be created.

Suppose it is granted that this third approach looks promising at the theoretical level. This would mean little if it didn't also look promising at the practical level, if it didn't also promise to engage the concerns and deliberations of people like Jones. I want to conclude, therefore, with some highly tentative remarks about the practical prospects for this third approach. Here I think it is important to resist two temptations. The first has to do with my suggestion that the women's movement has had at least some impact on White male workers like Jones. Our third approach requires that Jones will be equally influenced by the movements for racial equality. But it seems to me that our racially segregated society makes this more problematic than the claim that Jones has been forced to take more seriously the interests of women. I do not in any way mean to suggest that racism is 'deeper' than sexism in some abstract sense. Rather, my point is that existing social arrangements push White male workers toward acknowledging the 'woman's point of view' in a way that they do not force them to acknowledge, say, the 'Black person's point of view' [27]. The first temptation to be resisted, then, is the temptation to ignore crucial differences between the opportunities for progressive interactions between men and women on the one hand, and

between Whites and members of racial minorities on the other hand. Perhaps all this will change as economic factors force White workers to interact with minorities (in, say, trips to welfare offices by unemployed White workers or by the latter being forced to move into low-rent areas of the city), but for now these differences are serious obstacles to the third approach taking hold in the lives of people like Jones. The second temptation that needs to be resisted is to argue for the viability of our third approach (for people like Jones) by pointing to its viability for a quite different kind of person, viz., a person whose constitutive ties span all three strategic groups. Take, e.g., the case of the Black woman worker. Such a person has a special reason for adopting the third approach to ethics: it promises a way of creating a coherent self without downplaying any of her constitutive loyalties. So while it is encouraging to see minority women calling for something very close to this third approach [28], one can't simply assume that people like Jones will be attracted to it.

None of the above should be taken as indicating that I believe it is unlikely that this third view will take hold in history. (Indeed, I believe that if the situation of White male workers continues to worsen, and if the other movements for equality continue to press their cases, there will be significant movement toward this third view of ethics.) Rather, my point is that we have no guarantee that it will take hold in the lives of enough people to usher in a new social order. Just here is where one begins to sense anew the attractions of (A) and (B). (A) now attracts us because a primary source of domination would seem to guarantee that sooner or later all dominated groups will see the need to band together in fighting the root cause of domination. (B) now tempts us because a consensus that sets aside the question of who dominates whom might be easier to achieve than a consensus amongst dominated groups. (Dominated groups might endorse such a consensus in the hope that it would take the rough edges off of existing inequalities and lead sooner or later to a 'withering away' of domination itself.) In this paper I've tried to get out some reasons why we should resist falling back on a version of (A) or (B). I am inclined to think that if the alternative is deep pessimism as to the possibility of radical social change, then some version of (A) or (B) would be the lesser of two evils.

## Notes

- 1 This way of introducing a forward-looking dimension into the first answer is developed by Milton Fisk in Ethics and Society: A Marxist Interpretation of Value (Harvester Press, Sussex, 1980): '... I am driving along a deserted street and come across the victim of a hit-and-run accident who needs immediate medical care; or I am playing baseball with my son in the park and play expands into a game as we are joined by a group of strangers. Each of these cases represents a gap in my class existence. Each provides a foretaste of life apart from the conflict resulting from the relations of domination within class society... The rights and obligations of people during such gaps are different than they are elsewhere. Though Rockefeller of Exxon is owed nothing by me, Rockefeller the unidentified hit-and-run victim or the unidentified second baseman is' (p. 12).
- 2 For a recent discussion of this worry, with particular reference to the need for active resistance to automation, see David Noble, 'Present Tense Technology', Democracy (Fall 1983). To Noble, 'the same technology that has extended capital's reach and range of control has also rendered it more dependent upon highly complex, expensive, and precarious systems and thus more vulnerable to worker resistance and especially to disruption through direct action.' But it is 'becoming increasingly apparent that this "window of vulnerability" of capital will not stay open forever. At some point, the situation will become stabilized, the new systems will be sufficiently debugged and the opportunities for opposition will be foreclosed. Moreover, in light of the current trend toward an ever-weaker labor movement, more people are beginning to understand that, however weak it might be now, labor is at present more powerful than it is likely to be in the future' (p. 76). [Note: This essay is part of Noble's forthcoming book, Smash Machines, Not People (Singlejack Books, Box 1906, San Pedro, Calif 90733, USA).]
- 3 Michael Sandel develops these points in his critique of what he calls 'deontological liberalism' (Liberalism and the Limits of Justice,

Cambridge University Press, 1983): '... the deontological self, being wholly without character, is incapable of self-knowledge in any morally serious sense. Where the self is unencumbered and essentially dispossessed, no person is left for self-reflection to reflect upon. This is why, on the deontological view, deliberation about ends can only be an exercise in arbitrariness... When I act out of more or less enduring qualities of character, by contrast, my choice of ends is not arbitrary in the same way... I ask, as I deliberate, not only what I really want but who I really am, and this last question takes me beyond an attention to my desires alone to reflect on my identity itself... Although there may be a certain ultimate contingency in my having wound up the person I am - only theology can say for sure - it makes a moral difference none the less that, being the person I am, I affirm these ends rather than those, turn this way rather than that. While the notion of constitutive attachments may at first seem an obstacle to agency - the self, now encumbered, is no longer strictly prior - some relative fixity of character appears essential to prevent the lapse into arbitrariness which the deontological self is unable to avoid' (p. 180).

- 4 Fisk, Ethics and Society, p. 50.
- 5 Ibid., pp. 51-52.
- 6 Charles Larmore, 'Liberalism and Limits of Justice', Journal of Philosophy, vol. LXXXI, No. 6 (June 1984), p. 338.
- 7 John Rawls, 'Justice as Fairness: Political Not Metaphysical', Philosophy and Public Affairs, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Summer 1985), p. 239. It should be noted that although Rawls seems to endorse this 'non-expressivist' (in Larmore's terms) view in 'Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory', it is not until 'Justice as Fairness: Political Not Metaphysical' that he explicitly sets himself to the task of showing that 'Justice as fairness can be understood as political not metaphysical' (p. 224). Rawls sets aside Sandel's critique of his work by saying: 'I think Michael Sandel mistaken in supposing that the

original position involves a conception of the self "... shorn of all its contingently-given attributes", a self that "assumes a kind of supra-empirical status, ... and given prior to its ends, a pure subject of agency and possession, ultimately thin" ... I cannot discuss these criticisms in any detail. The essential point (as suggested in the introductory remarks) is not whether certain passages in *Theory* call for such an interpretation (I doubt that they do) but whether the conception of justice as fairness presented therein can be understood in the light of the interpretation I sketch in this article and in the earlier lectures on constructivism, as I believe it can' (p. 239n).

- 8 *Ibid.*, pp. 240-41.
- 9 Perhaps the clearest statement of this position is due to Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex* (Bantam, New York, 1970).
- 10 Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Vintage Books, New York, 1975), p. 412.
- 11 Issac Balbus develops such a critique of Mitchell in *Marxism and Domination* (Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 178-88.
- 12 Young develops her position in 'Socialist Feminism and the Limits of Dual Systems Theory', *Socialist Review*, Nos. 50-51, March/June 1980. For a Marxian critique of Young's position see Milton Fisk's 'Feminism, Socialism and Historical Materialism', *Praxis International*, July 1982. Fisk calls for an historical materialism that distinguishes between stimulus causes and the underlying structural causes. On Fisk's view, this would allow us to say that 'Neither economics events nor related class phenomena have primacy as stimulus causes. But the economic is primary as a structure within which both patriarchy and racism can act as stimulus causes' (p. 124).
- 13 Similar debates occur within other liberation movements. E.g., Harold Cruse sees the orthodox Marxian claim as to the primacy of class conflict as subverting the autonomy of the movement for equality for Blacks: '... desiring to see the Negro group as an appendage to the main body of white workers, the Marxists have been unable, theoretically and practically, to set the Negro off and see him in terms of his own national minority group existence and identity inclusive of his class, caste, and ideological stratifications. (*Rebellions and Revolution*, Apollo Editions, New York, 1968, p. 229.)
- 14 Charles Taylor, 'What Is Human Agency', in *The Self: Psychological and Philosophical Issues*, ed. T. Mischel (Blackwell, Oxford, 1977), p. 125.
- 15 Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, p. 179.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 179.
- 17 John Rawls, 'Justice as Fairness: Political Not Metaphysical', p. 246.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 249.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 250.
- 20 Larmore, 'Review of Liberalism and the Limits of Justice', p. 338.
- 21 Malcolm X makes a similar point when, in explaining why he was

drawn to Black Nationalism, he says: 'Well, in competitive American society, how can there even be any White-Black solidarity before there is first some Black solidarity? ... Even when I was a follower of Elijah Muhammad, I had been strongly aware of how Black Nationalist political, economic and social philosophies had the ability to instill within black men the racial dignity, the incentive, and the confidence that the black race needs today to get up off its knees, and to get on its feet, and get rid of its scars, and to take a stand for itself' (*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1963, p. 374).

- 22 Nancy Hartsock, 'Feminist Theory and the Development of Revolutionary Strategies', in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, ed. Z. Eisenstein (Monthly Review, New York, 1978), p. 59. Teresa de Lauretis supports this point when she says: 'the fact that today the expression "consciousness raising" has become dated and more than slightly unpleasant, as any word will that has been appropriated, diluted, digested and spewed out by the media, does not diminish the social and subjective impact of a practice - the collective articulation of one's experience of sexuality and gender - which has produced, and continues to elaborate, a radically new mode of understanding the subject's relation to social-historical reality' (*Alice Doesn't*, Macmillan, London, 1984, p. 185).
- 23 Naomi Scheman, 'Individualism and the Objects of Psychology', in *Discovering Reality*, ed. S. Harding and M. B. Hintikka (Reidel, Boston, 1983), p. 242.
- 24 Jane Flax, 'The Patriarchal Unconscious', in *Discovering Reality*, ed. S. Harding and M. B. Hintikka, p. 270.
- 25 For a recent interpretation of Marx's own position on this issue and a critique of the view that the revolutionary project need not appeal to ethical motivation, see Allen Buchanan, *Marx and Justice: The Radical Critique of Liberalism* (Rowman and Littlefield, Towowa, N. J., 1982).
- 26 Roberto Unger holds out for this possibility in *Knowledge and Politics* (Free Press, New York, 1975). Unger warns, however, against using this possibility as an excuse for downplaying, here and now, the various struggles for equality. 'Until ... the central problem of domination is resolved, the search for community is condemned to be idolatrous, or utopian, or both at once' (p. 252).
- 27 This is even more true, I believe, for White academics. Typically we live in White neighbourhoods and have little opportunity to interact at a daily level with members of racial minorities as they struggle to deal with crime, absentee landlords, etc.
- 28 For a survey of some recent work in this area, see E. Frances White, 'Listening to the Voices of Black Feminism', *Radical America*, Vol. 18, No. 2-3; Margarite Fernandez Olmos, 'Sex, Color, and Class in Contemporary Puerto Rican Women Authors', *Heresies*, 15, pp. 46-47.

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