The Fraternal Conceit

Individualist versus Collectivist Ideas of Community

Chandran Kukathas

occasional papers

Multiculturalism Research Program

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CIS Occasional Papers 33

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THE CENTRE FOR
INDEPENDENT
STUDIES
1991

Published May 1991 by

The Centre for Independent Studies Limited

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National Library of Australia

Cataloguing-in-Publication Data:

Kukathas, Chandran, 1957-
The fraternal conceit: individualist versus collectivist ideas of community.

Bibliography
ISBN 0 *949769 64 9*.
1. Pluralism (Social Sciences). 2. Pluralism (Social Sciences) – Australia. I. Centre for Independent Studies (Australia). II. Title. (Series: CIS occasional papers; no. 33).

305.800994

Printed by Lindsay Yates & Partners Pty Ltd

Foreword

Whether in the struggles in Eastern Europe or in the hazards faced by the Vietnamese boat people, the recent history of the world amply supports Benedetto Croce's conception of history as 'the story of liberty' and shows that the attractions of liberty will drive men to peaks of heroism, enterprise and endurance in order to achieve it.

Few things are sadder than that people should be forced to leave their homeland and kinfolk in the quest for hope, liberty and a decent life in a strange country. Yet such has been the fate of millions of people during the 20th century.

The direction of migration has been overwhelmingly towards those countries where market economies, democracy, and their ancillary institutions — the rule of law, a free press, equal citizenship, freedom of worship and association, and property rights — prevail. It is under such conditions that men and women may work and live in their own way, secure in the knowledge that their privacy and autonomy will be respected if they act within the law and afford reciprocal respect to their fellow citizens.

'Multiculturalism' in this simple and minimal sense is an affirmation of that plurality and equality under the law which lies at the heart of liberty and which is concretely manifested in a variety of ways of life and religions. For them, no common observance is required beyond the support of those fundamental political and social processes and institutions that make such liberty possible and without which radical division, chaos and oppression would follow.

Yet, as Chandran Kukathas makes clear in this Occasional Paper (the first publication of the CIS Research Program on the Philosophy and Politics of Multiculturalism), this liberal ideal is being jeopardised by government policies that subvert the principles of a liberal society. Such policies will surely lead to injustices and social divisions diametrically opposed to their ostensible objectives. It is highly ironic, for example, that in the name of 'collective solidarity', 'fraternity' and 'community', policies should be proposed whose objectives are to politicise ethnic and cultural relations by erecting new political structures specifically in order to empower different ethnic groups, including Aborigines, through forms of 'affirmative action'. Such special treatment is inherently divisive and opens a Pandora's box of favour-seeking and resentment. Not surprisingly, such proposals are eagerly seized upon by political parties anxious to win ethnic votes. The

upshot has been rapid growth of ethnic group organisations enjoying public funding.

The predictable outcome of this is the crystallisation and entrenchment of multiple interest groups whose continued preferments depend upon emphasising separateness and alienation rather than diversity and legal equality in an open society that has a place for all but privileges for none.

There is a seeming paradox in arguing that social relations are improved if we don't seek deliberately (that is to say, **politically)** to foster them. Yet such is Dr Kukathas's conclusion:

> What we need are not further attempts to empower separate community groups so that they may take their places on the **political** stage. If the liberal standpoint is correct, then what is needed instead is a way of bringing the members of the various groups of the social order within the **economic and legal** 'community' called civil society. In the pluralist societies of contemporary liberal democracies this requires finding ways of enabling **individuals** to become independent economic and legal agents able to play a part in the life of their community.

There are heartening signs of disillusion in Australia with the directions that multicultural policies have taken, but so far relatively little has been written that gives a lead on alternative directions. In reminding us to 'trust our institutions and the liberty of the individual under the rule of law within a democratic polity, Dr Kukathas is pointing the way.

Barry Maley

Acknowledgements

A shorter version of this essay was presented at a regional meeting of the Mont Pelerin Society in Christchurch, New Zealand, in November 1989. I would like to thank the audience and my fellow panelists for lively discussion of the issues raised here. My thanks go also to Stephen Macedo for his comments on my written draft.

About the Author

Chandran Kukathas was born in Malaysia where he completed his primary education. He finished his schooling in Canberra and took his first degree in History and Politics at the Australian National University. He taught at the Royal Military College, Oxford University (where he completed a doctorate) and the Australian National University before taking up his present position as Lecturer in Politics at the Australian Defence Force Academy.

Currently a Research Fellow with the Centre for Independent Studies and Director of its Multiculturalism Research Program, he is the author of *Hayek and Modern Liberalism* (1989), and co-author (with David Lovell and William Maley) of *The Theory of Politics: An Australian Perspective* (1990) and (with Philip Pettit) of *Rawls: A Theory of Justice and Its Critics* (1990).

Part of our present difficulty is that we must constantly adjust our lives, our thoughts and our emotions, in order to live simultaneously within different kinds of orders according to different rules. If we were to apply the unmodified, uncurbed, rules of the micro-cosmos (i.e., of the small band or troop, or of, say, our families) to the macro-cosmos (our wider civilisation), as our instincts and sentimental yearnings often make us wish to do, ***we would destroy it.*** *Yet if we were always to apply the rules of the extended order to our more intimate groupings,* ***we would crush them****. So we must learn to live in two sorts of world at once.*

F. A. Hayek, **The Fatal Conceit**

The Fraternal Conceit
Individualist versus Collectivist Ideas of Community

Chandran Kukathas

I. LIBERALISM, SOCIALISM, AND CIVIL ASSOCIATION

In the modern world countless minorities press separate claims for recognition by their fellow countrymen, by their states and, in some cases, by the world. Many of these groups, such as the Australian Aborigines and New Zealand Maoris, describe themselves as indigenous peoples, while others identify themselves simply as ethnic or cultural minorities with legitimate grievances. The various demands made by such groups leave us in no doubt that there is a political problem. But there is also an important philosophical question to be addressed: a question about the terms of civil association.

The modern world has seen two great answers to the question of how civil association is to be conceived, although only rarely have they been offered in pure form. The answers go by the names 'liberalism' and 'socialism'.[1] The general thesis I wish to advance is that it is the liberal conception of human association that we should embrace.

Many sorts of arguments might be advanced to defend such a thesis. It can be argued that liberal market societies are superior to socialist planned ones because their mechanisms for economic coordination are superior and so more likely to produce growth and to eliminate poverty. F. A. Hayek and Milton Friedman are among the liberal heroes in this argument. It can be argued that the social and political institutions of a liberal society are less likely to foster the growth of tyranny since the right to hold private property works to disperse economic power and so supply the basis for opposition to any potential tyrant. Finally, it can be argued that only in a liberal society can the individual be reasonably assured that important liberties — of speech, religious worship, and association, for example — will be respected and defended against those who would violate them.

My concern, however, is with none of these arguments. I wish to

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1. Some prefer different names. Michael Oakeshott, for example, talks of two conceptions of the state as civil association and as enterprise association. See Oakeshott, 1975: 112-17.

concentrate instead on another, more fundamental, difference between these two ideologies: a difference that explains why we distinguish between liberalism and socialism as individualist and collectivist creeds respectively. These two political theories differ in their accounts of the nature of a political society. Liberalism conceives of it as an association of individuals bound by rules of just conduct which, by specifying the terms of cooperation, regulate their behaviour and ensure peace: civil association has no purpose other than to preserve order so that the individual might pursue his own (private) ends, together with others or alone. Socialism, on the other hand, sees political society as a form of association that has value only insofar as it serves to unite men in a community in which the bonds of social solidarity are strong: human freedom will be attained only when civil association ensures that individuals act collectively in pursuit of their common ends. It has long been a complaint of socialist thinkers (among others) that liberalism, in placing so much store by the autonomy of the individual, neglects the values of fraternity, community and social solidarity (see, for example, Wolff, 1968; Barber, 1984).

My contention is that liberalism has put these values in their proper place. Socialism, however, has sought to elevate them and to accord them an importance that is both unwarranted and dangerous. And we can see this, I want to suggest, in the problems we are creating for ourselves through much of government social policy that takes as its concern the character and composition of society. In dealing with the facts of ethnic and cultural diversity and the grievances of disinherited native peoples, governments have attempted to alter the terms of civil association in ways that will neither resolve the problems they perceive nor bring about the social harmony they desire. In this regard they have fallen victim to the 'fraternal conceit': the fanciful notion that community and social solidarity can be secured in extended societies by developing the bonds of political association. Yet this is not to say that fraternity and community are unimportant values, or that there is not something noble in the ideal of the brotherhood of man. They are and there is. But these values are best secured and promoted not by political means but rather through private forms of association.

It may, of course, be objected that I am operating with a very crude distinction between 'liberalism the good' and 'socialism the bad': after all, both ideologies are complex affairs, with complex histories, which cannot be reduced to one or two slogans. There is a good deal of truth in all this. Indeed, it is not at all difficult to find people who think elements of both doctrines attractive, and put forward philosophical arguments defending positions variously described as social democratic

or market socialist or even 'liberalism with a human face'. Yet while I do not wish to deny that the views people hold are seldom identifiable as pure versions of some particular ideology, I am concerned to draw out into the open a certain philosophical perspective on the values of fraternity and community. For I wish to show that the implications of this perspective are unacceptable both in principle and in practice.

To defend this argument I shall begin by offering a more detailed account of socialist aspirations with respect to fraternity and community. Then I shall turn to discuss the extent to which liberal thinking has come to share these same aspirations, and argue that this has led to the wrong approach to questions of social policy. I conclude with an attempt to sketch an account of a liberal view of community.

II. SOCIALISM, FRATERNITY AND COMMUNITY

Odd as it may seem, to understand the socialist view of community and the brotherhood of man it is necessary to look closely at what socialist thinkers say about freedom. Despite their protestations to the contrary, liberals have no monopoly on the use of the word freedom; yet they often understand freedom in a very different way from socialists. And accounting for these differences will help to make clear what is distinctive about socialist views of community.

J.-J. Rousseau

It would be appropriate to begin such an account with a look at the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the 18th-century French writer whose work *The Social Contract* has been described by Hayek as 'the chief source of the fatal conceit of modern intellectual rationalism'(1988:49). The question that bulks largest in Rousseau's political writings is deceptively simple: 'how can man be free in modern society?' This question posed a problem, in Rousseau's mind, because by entering society man gave up his independence. Society, by its very nature, constituted a complex set of restrictions on an individual's activity: restrictions that not only directed human conduct but also transformed human nature.

This view was first developed in two of Rousseau's early 'discourses' on *The Arts and Sciences* and *The Origin of Inequality*. Particularly in the latter essay, Rousseau argued that modern man was entirely the creature of society, shaped and ruled by its institutions. The most important of these, and also the most destructive of human freedom, were the institutions of private property and the division of

labour. While all man's natural instincts are good, living in society with others under such institutions brings out the desire for reputation and glory that is destructive of human happiness. It is in the second Discourse that Rousseau makes this point very sharply:

> I would observe to what extent this universal desire for reputation, honours, and promotion, which devours us all, exercises and compares talents and strengths, and I would show how it excites and multiplies passions: and how, in turning all men into competitors, rivals, or rather enemies, it causes constant failures and successes and catastrophes of every sort by making so many contenders run the same course: I would show that this burning desire to be talked about, this yearning for distinction ... is responsible for what is best and what is worst among men, for our virtues and our vices, for our sciences and our mistakes; for our conquerors and our philosophers — that is to say for a multitude of bad things and very few good things. (Quoted in Cranston, 1986:79)

The tragedy of modern man, as Rousseau sees it, is that he will never be able to find happiness because it is no longer open to him to live according to nature: because his own nature has been transformed by the demands of social life. He is forced to compete with others, to abase himself before those upon whom he depends for his livelihood, and to swallow his pride in the pursuit of honours and power. He is ruled by the opinions of others with whom he shares not the bonds of open friendship but the chains of bitter competition.

Unsurprisingly, there have been those who have found this grim and unflattering picture of modern man and modern society quite unattractive. Voltaire, on reading the copy of the Discourse on the Origin *of Inequality.* Rousseau had sent him, was prompted to reply: 'I have received, Monsieur, your new book against the human race, and I thank you'. Nor could he resist adding: 'No one has employed so much intelligence to turn men into beasts. One starts wanting to walk on all fours after reading your book. However in more than sixty years I have lost the habit' (Cranston, 1986:80). In a more serious vein, Hayek has complained that 'Rousseau gave intellectuallicense to throw off cultural restraints, to confer legitimacy on attempts to gain "freedom" from the restraints that had made freedom possible, and to *call* this attack on the foundation of freedom 'liberation' (1988:50).

Both these objections are misleading. Rousseau did not think it possible for man to leave society to return to some mythical state of

nature (indeed he doubted that there had ever been such a state, and insisted that his account of the transformation of the savage by society was no more than a convenient fiction to help him to describe the way in which social institutions governed man's nature). Nor did he think freedom could be gained by throwing off all social restraints. His solution to the problem of freedom for modern man was quite different, if no less disconcerting for liberals.

The solution was to describe the social and political institutions under which man could enjoy the freedom that was possible in society — even if not the independence that was his in the state of nature. In a nutshell, Rousseau argued that man would be free for so long as he was governed by laws he gave to himself; and this was possible only under political arrangements that recognised the 'people' as sovereign, and in which legislation was the product of popular will. Rousseau conceived of political society, not as an association of private individuals with separate concerns, but as a collective united by a good shared in common. Members of society are united by a 'General Will' to act to further that good. Of course some individuals may on occasion misunderstand what the General Will demands and may rightfully be forced to comply with the judgments of the collective; but when this happens such an individual is not rendered unfree 'because the General Will is nothing more than his own real will. In penalising the law-breaker society is simply bringing him back to an awareness of his own true will, restoring him to his own true self.

On this understanding, freedom is to be found not in being left alone by the community but in conforming to the will of the collective. Belonging to a political community was a good thing because it meant taking part in one's own government and, so, being free.

I have dwelt for so long on Rousseau partly because he continues to inspire those who defend socialist practices from the standpoint of the ideal of a political community. But he is important also because his account is so insistent that in the political community the individual will come closest to freedom and well-being because he is as one with the collective. Well-being is to be secured by forging, not private relations in a pluralistic order, but public or political relations in a unified one.

Karl Marx

Very similar conclusions were vigorously defended by Karl Marx in his own political writings attacking market society. Although he had a greater appreciation than Rousseau did of the material benefits that

capitalism had brought, Marx insisted that in such a society the individual would remain less than fully human because social and economic institutions would alienate him from the products of his labour, from nature, from his fellows and from his own 'species being'. Marx's most fundamental objection to the capitalist mode of production was not that it distributed material rewards inequitably but that it divided human beings from one another. Under the domination of the demands of capital, they remained in competition with one another and inclined to value their separateness rather than their common humanity: to see themselves as Jews or Christians or Frenchmen or members of this or that family, rather than as human beings. And for this reason they were unfree.

Freedom would only be realised when the capitalist mode of production, and the legal institutions that accompanied it, were superseded. Then, under communism, individual~would relate to one another as human beings rather than as competitors with conflicting interests. The contradiction between the interest of the individual and the interest of the community would then be forever dissolved (see *The German* Ideology in McLellan, 1977).

Rousseau and Marx, from their different perspectives, point us toward what is essential in the socialist ideal. It is a vision of a society in which the forces that make for division and conflict have been tamed, if not entirely eradicated. It is a society that is unified and not a mess of competing interests. It is a society ruled by collective deliberation to determine and implement goals. The bonds that unite people in such an order are not ties of habit or private voluntary association — and the dreaded cash nexus is nowhere to be seen — but political ties.

Some Modern Socialist Thinkers

Today, of course, many socialists are quite critical of Rousseau and Marx, conceding that their hopes for a unified social order were a trifle optimistic and naive (and in the case of Marx, fantastic). David Miller, for example, is clear that the 'socialist who wants to avoid the charge that he is merely nostalgic for pre-industrial forms of life cannot appeal to thick-textured, face-to-face community as the building block of his system'. And to the extent that such societies can be found today, he thinks 'it would be wrong to make them integral to the socialist project, or in particular to suppose that the whole of society could come to take on the character of these local communities (Miller, 1989:67). Yet even while such socialist writers insist that their good society would respect 'the freedoms that liberals characteristically cherish: artistic freedom,

religious freedom, privacy', their vision remains a quite different one because of the emphasis socialism places on collective deliberation and decision-making, and collective determination of the character of society. Again, Miller's views are revealing. In the socialist view of community, he argues, we should be 'related as citizens, as co-determiners of our collective future'; and 'people must engage in politics as citizens, that:is, as members of a collectivity committed to advancing its common good' (1989:70-1). As members of a socialist society 'we are to concern ourselves with our collective identity, and use politics for remodelling that identity'; indeed 'Politics enters the picture to prevent communal ties becoming merely traditional, to honour socialist demands for rationality' (1989:72).

Such views are not peculiar to Oxford socialists; Bernard Crick, for example, in his discussion of fraternity in his book *Socialism* writes:

> The task of good government is to create a sense of common purpose and problems that must be solved together: fundamental economic and social policies which actually need widespread support to work for the overriding purpose of creating greater equality and a genuine active liberty or common citizenship for all in each country and gradually for all mankind. (1988:104)

However much modern socialists may emphasise the importance of the rights and liberties that ought to be guaranteed the individual in any society, they also maintain a strong commitment to the idea of society as a collective enterprise held together and given meaning by political relations.

Collective or communal relations must, indeed, be the product not of accident or tradition but of deliberation. This point is made especially clearly by Raymond Plant who criticises the liberal or 'market theory of community' for failing to see that community has to be understood 'in terms of persons having particular kinds of **intentional** relationships to one another' (Plant et al., 1980:232; emphasis added). In the liberal view, Plant notes, the individual does not have to 'entertain fraternal sentiments even though his work may satisfy the life needs of others': a community will develop simply as the result of the interaction of individuals who engage in self-interested exchanges. But this version of community is deficient.

> It makes the existence of community a matter of the upshot, of the unintended consequences of a sequence of actions undertaken for different reasons. Community is a matter of grasping

> these unintended consequences; it is not a matter of relating to persons in terms of fraternal feeling and attitude. However, it is difficult to see how a concept of community can operate without making some reference to the values in terms of which members of the community perceive themselves in relation to one another. Community is not just a matter of particular outcomes, but of right intentional relationships, relationships that involve benevolence, altruism, fraternity. (1980:232)

In short, unintended interdependence is not enough.

This, then, is the socialist model of society. It is a political community in which individuals are related by common allegiance to values which hold them together in their collective pursuit of shared goals. One of those goals is to shape the society in which they live and, so, to take part in the shaping of their own identity. The model rejected by socialism is the liberal model that sees community as a by-product of relations of mutual interdependence.

III. THE SOCIALIST IDEAL IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL POLICY

I have dwelt so long on the nature of the socialist ideal of community because is bears significantly on the way in which we should understand much of social policy in modern liberal democracies such as Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The salient feature of all these societies (at least for this discussion) is their ethnic and cultural pluralism. All are peopled by a variety of cultural communities, though in every instance there is also a dominant 'host culture'. In all of them, immigrants and refugees from various ethnic groupings continue to come from different parts of the world to settle in their new country. In some of them, like Australia, there are native peoples with vastly different cultural histories who had settled before the arrival of the dominant culture. All of these countries have had to confront the question of the terms under which people from these various traditions should coexist.

In the political arena, of course, the question is never posed in such abstract or philosophical terms. The issues are always concrete and practical: how do we address the grievances of aboriginal peoples? What practices should we adopt in dealing with refugees? Which policy should we pursue to accommodate the beliefs and practices of migrant communities, particularly those that hail from very different ethnic traditions? The importance and sensitivity of these questions are beyond doubt. The persistence in many societies of separatist demands,

racial tension, land rights claims, and calls for the creation of a 'multicultural' polity are evidence of this.

The policies that have actually been adopted differ in ways that reflect the claims made by particular communities, popular opinion, and the interests of governments. Hence in Australia, for example, we have recognition of Aboriginal land rights, affirmative action, and multiculturalism all on the government's agenda. Despite the diversity of motivations and procedures underlying policy-making, however, thinking about these matters has been dominated by assumptions about the nature of a political community that come closest to the socialist idea described above. In the rest of this section I want to explain how this is so, before turning to argue why it is also unfortunate. I shall rely largely on examples drawn from Australia, although they might just as easily be taken from the other polities mentioned.

Thinking about social policy governing the character of the polity is infected by the socialist ideal inasmuch as it is widely assumed to be necessary to develop **political** institutions or mechanisms to deal with ethnic pluralism. Very little consideration is given to the idea that the collective should **not** be so concerned about the cultural character or the 'identity' of the society. When it is argued that it is important that the different ethnic groupings be accepted by society, the emphasis is on bringing them in as players in the **political** community rather than on simply accepting them as members of the economic, moral and legal community (called civil society).

Multiculturalism

Consider, for example, the case of multiculturalism in Australia. The idea of a multicultural society should appeal in many respects to liberal-minded people everywhere. It suggests that, whatever an individual's cultural origins, there is no reason why he or she should not be able to live peacefully in a society in which different cultural traditions are tolerated. In this regard, the definition of multiculturalism supplied by the now-defunct Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs (in its ***An***nual Report *1979-80*, p.5) suggests a view that is (as I interpret it) entirely acceptable from a liberal point of view.

> Multiculturalism recognizes the ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity of Australian society and actively pursues equality of opportunity for all Australians to participate in the life of the nation and the right to maintain ethnic and cultural heritages within the law and the political framework. (Quoted in Rimmer, 1988:2)

Insofar as multiculturalism is a call for toleration and a defence of the equal rights of all citizens **as** individuals, there is little for liberals to object to.

The notion of multiculturalism that is currently most vigorously defended, however, is very different. The difference is neatly captured by the swiftness with which Labor M.P. Andrew Theophanous dismissed Liberal Senator Misha Lajovic's view of migrant concerns. Lajovic suggested that 'What they really want is to be left in peace, to be able to restart their lives in freedom and free from undue bureaucratic interference' (quoted in Theophanous, 1984:42). This view, Theophanous suggested, was 'probably closer to the thinking of the majority of the conservative forces in Australian society' than to 'progressive' views on multiculturalism (1984:42). According to the latter, correct view, multiculturalism is not merely an expression of the ideal of peaceful coexistence. Rather, in Theophanous's words, 'A multicultural plan of action involves a programme for the whole of society, an attack on major inequalities due to cultural differences' (quoted in Rimmer, 1988:3). The aim is to develop a different kind of society by giving greater political power to various ethnic communities.

This understanding of multiculturalism is not based on the idea that the law should uphold the rights and liberties of citizens to associate freely, to worship in their own ways, and generally to shape their lives according to their own customs and beliefs to the extent that this does not threaten or endanger others. Instead it regards multiculturalism as demanding action to modify social attitudes, the distribution of economic resources, and indeed the distribution of political influence.

The prevalence of this view may be seen both in the pronouncements of politicians, academics, lobbyists or political activists, and social commentators generally, and in the development of policy programs and publicly-funded political bodies.

Consider, for example, the arguments advanced by Frank Lewins, who suggests that taking seriously the concerns of ethnic communities in Australia requires recognition of the **political** nature of their relations with Australian society. Since there are certain Australian institutions which 'are key institutions because they control the resources which affect life chances' (these include 'education, the economy, the political and health structures'), and because these institutions are 'controlled by Anglo-Australian decision-makers', it 'means that ethnics' increased access to resources controlled by the latter must involve political activity in a common institutional arena' (Lewins, 1984:35). For Lewins, increased access 'entails sector redistribution of resources, that is, structural change'; and 'Structural change of this sort does not come about by

merely asking for it or through encouragement of friendly interaction' (1984:35). More generally, Lewins argues that, since the interests of ethnic communities require structural change if they are to be properly met, we have to recognise that ethnic relations must be **political** relations. And after all, there is 'ready acceptance of the role of politics and conflict in confrontations involving employer-trade union negotiations, Aboriginal affairs and women's issues. Why overlook ethnic relations?' (1984:37).

This desire to politicise ethnic relations is clearly reflected in recent statements of government thinking. In September 1988 an Australian federal government report entitled 'Towards a National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia' argued that Australian parliamentary democracy disadvantaged migrants. What was required, it suggested, was a radical restructuring of Australian political, legal and bureaucratic institutions. The report was even willing to consider the use of 'forms of coercion' against the media should it fail to acknowledge multiculturalism, and recommended the development of affirmative action for migrants not of English-speaking origin (Rimmer, 1988:52). In part, the government's aim is to reduce ethnic tensions and create a more harmonious society. The important assumption underlying this ambition, however, is that this requires bringing ethnic communities into the political fold, and strengthening their economic and social positions as **collective** entities.

The extent to which ethnic affairs have been politicised can perhaps be gauged by the proliferation of ethnic group organisations reliant upon public funding, and by the lengths to which the major political parties will go to 'buy' the ethnic vote. In New South Wales in 1988, for example, the incoming Liberal government, in keeping with its pre-election promises, considerably increased its funding of ethnic groups. In times of financial stringency, funding to the NSW Ethnic Affairs Commission was increased by more than 10 per cent, and funding for ethnic schools by 25 per cent, while Family and Community Services grants to ethnic groups and grants for ethnic housing were increased by more than $5 million. Similar increases were promised by the Labor government in Victoria, which proposed to make available to the Ethnic Affairs Commission, and ethnic job training schemes, an extra $9 million: increases that looked quite remarkable in the light of the public debt problems faced by the State (Rimmer, 1988:53).

To some extent at least, the funding of ethnic affairs can be explained by the pressures under which governments are placed by interest groups making both financial and political demands. More generally, however, it reveals the prevailing assumption that political organisations or institutions are needed to maintain harmony among the

different ethnic communities. The complaint that the very idea of ethnic classification is itself objectionable is rarely heard.

Indeed the idea that individuals ought simply to be left free to pursue their own ways of life without state subsidy or direction is scarcely considered. Even less consideration is given to the idea that harmonious social relations might be possible not through politics but simply through economic and personal interaction among private individuals and communities: that we might have multiculturalism without **official** multiculturalism.

Aboriginal Affairs

The history of Australian Aboriginal affairs reveals evidence of much the same thinking. The destructive impact of European settlement on Aboriginal economic and cultural life is well documented and needs little elaboration. For some years now strenuous efforts have been made by both governments and private individuals to alleviate the sufferings of Aboriginal societies, and to recognise Aboriginal people as citizens entitled to the same rights enjoyed by other Australians. These efforts have met with mixed success over the last two decades. While some communities have secured 'land rights' and a measure of 'control' over land use, and enjoy the benefits independence can bring, many others remain dependent upon services and welfare supplied by State and Commonwealth bureaucracies. The growth of Aboriginal political strength seems to have had little to offer such communities. The creation and expansion of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, with a substantial Aboriginal staff, gave some Aborigines a say in affairs of concern to them, but also generated frustration and resentment. The National Aboriginal Conference and The National Aboriginal Consultative Committee both declined and disappeared as representative bodies amid complaints and criticism from disaffected Aborigines. And today Aborigines appear to be divided over the government's newly-created Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC).

Yet governments, political parties, and private individuals concerned with Aboriginal affairs continue to press for 'solutions' to 'the Aboriginal problem' that seek to deal with Aborigines collectively through political institutions. At the most general level, there continues to be talk about a treaty or *makaratta* between Aborigines and non-Aboriginal Australians, although no political party has given the idea unqualified support. One view, expressed by Senator Michael Macklin of the Australian Democrats, is that we should support 'the notion of a compact between ourselves and the Aboriginal people so that we can

put down for negotiation all those very large and complex problems that still remain between us as peoples'. Such a compact might be signed on behalf of Aboriginal people by commissioners and regional councillors elected by Aboriginal people throughout Australia (Haines, 1988:10). Similar sentiments were expressed by the Prime Minister, Mr Hawke:

> A treaty between the Aboriginal people, as owners of this land for tens of thousands of years, and the Australian government, could address the fundamental issues and be an umbrella document providing direction and perspective to all areas of policy, including land rights, self-management, customary laws and recognition of Aboriginal culture and religion. Programs to meet the physical needs of the Aboriginal people ... would not lose their priority; nor would the objectives of accountability and efficiency be reduced in importance. (Hawke, 1988:4)

What is most striking about these aspirations is that they all look to the development of political mechanisms through which Aboriginal concerns might be addressed. They look to the creation of more councils, consultative commissions, and bureaucracies to deal with the Aboriginal collective. They look to politics as the realm in which the reconciliation of Australian and Aboriginal peoples can take place. Thus the Prime Minister commended the idea of 'a treaty between Australians and for Australians' because the 'treaty will be negotiated by people who share the one nation and the one future' (1988:5).

In so much of current political thinking, then, the tendency is to think of political society as a large community with some shared goals or ends. Greatest emphasis is placed on the need for society to take collective action to shape its character or determine its 'identity'. To the extent that divisions persist within society, political institutions must be established to accommodate differences and reconcile conflicts.

It would be a mistake, of course, to suggest that anyone arguing in these terms is a socialist, or even to suggest that all those who advance such views on matters of social policy share particular ideological commitments. The argument is, rather, that the assumptions underlying these attitudes are assumptions that lie at the heart of socialist views of community and of the good society. The most important of these is the assumption that members of society should seek collectively to determine or shape the character of society through the development of political means by which individuals would interact.

That this assumption is widely shared is evident not only in the pronouncements of political actors but also in the writings of liberal

theorists. Amy Gutmann, for example, while critical of the so-called 'communitarian critics of liberalism', defends the 'ideal of citizens sharing in deliberatively determining the future shape of their society', and commends the democratic ideal as one of 'conscious social reproduction' (1987:289). Indeed, it is difficult to find people who are willing to accept that the shape of a social order ought not to be the product of collective 'design'. What I wish to suggest now is that there are good reasons to be wary of such aspirations.

IV. 'WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE SOCIALIST IDEAL?

It is tempting to say that socialism is untenable because of our nature: because we are, in the last analysis, private, separate, individuals who instinctively shun the collective. But that is not the case. As Hayek has vigorously argued in his most recent work, many of our instincts seem to incline us the other way. We value community and solidarity with our fellows as much as we prize our separate and private ends.

There is, however, a quite different argument to be made. This is that the ideal at the heart of socialist thinking is untenable insofar as it embodies aspirations for modern, extended societies: aspirations that cannot be fulfilled. The most important aspiration is that the values of community and fraternity be realised in a form of political organisation that enables its members collectively to shape its character and advance its common good. This hope cannot be fulfilled because the understanding of politics upon which it depends is mistaken.

Politics cannot create community or fraternity. It is merely a way of dealing with the (inevitable) conflicts between communities (each of which may or may not be bound by fraternal ties). However fine may be the rhetoric of political actors, the 'solutions' arrived at in politics are almost invariably compromises — among parties of varying strength — to ensure peace. While politics may deliver us from violent conflict, it is unlikely to give us 'social justice' or foster community or bring about the 'common good'. Politics is unavoidable inasmuch as there will always be conflicts that cannot be resolved by private cooperation (because the terms of cooperation are themselves the subject of dispute); but it would be wrong to expect too much from it. Moreover, it ought to be recognised that politics can sometimes serve to divide rather than to reconcile by creating public issues — which in turn generate competing interests and opinions.

Socialists like Bernard Crick, who hope that 'good government [will] ... create a sense of common purpose and problems that must be solved together', are thus unduly optimistic about what political activity

achieves. The experience of contemporary social policy illustrates how often politics envisages, not society working together to attain noble collective goals, but individuals acting in concert to further **particular** interests.

The Politicisation of Ethnicity

Once again, the case of multiculturalism in Australia is instructive. In his study *The* Politics *of* Multiculturalism, Raymond Sestito (1982) has shown that multiculturalism, far from being the result of migrants becoming politically aware and organising to pursue their interests, is the product of political parties pursuing the ethnic vote. For most of Australia's post-war history 'migrant issues' figured very little. While it was generally thought in the late 1960s that migrants should assimilate to become a part of Australian society, there was little suggestion that migrants had special needs, and immigration and the idea of a multicultural society generated little political interest. In Sestito's analysis all this began to change when political parties started to recognise the significance of the ethnicvote, and to see that electoral advantages were to be gained by offering benefits to ethnic communities. At the national level, this can be traced back to the initiatives of the former Labor Minister for Immigration, Al Grassby, who in the early 1970s 'came out strongly in favour of a multicultural Australia or what he referred to as the "family of the nation"' (Sestito, 1982:17). During his tenure as Immigration Minister Grassby pointed out that the tendency towards cosmopolitanism ought to be encouraged in Australia, and he set up government task forces in all States to examine migrant problems. A Committee of Community Relations was established to investigate discrimination against and exploitation of migrants. The Liberal Party responded with its own more extensive policy on immigration and ethnic affairs, asserting (in the words of their immigration spokesman) that they did not accept that their opponents 'had the migrant vote all tied up' (1982:18). The nationwide competition for the migrant vote was on.

By the late 1980s it was possible to talk of an ethnic affairs industry. In 1986 the number of tax-funded ethnic groups and associations numbered in excess of 2600. The Office of Multicultural Affairs alone, flourishing under Prime Ministerial patronage in the P.M.'s department, in 1987-88 had a $3 million budget, Regional Coordinators in each State, and 40 public servants in its employ (Bullivant, 1989:218). And the funding of multiculturalism by this time was so inadequately controlled that, in Stephen Rimmer's judgement, neither the relevant government

agencies nor the public had any clear idea just how much was spent or for what reason (Rimmer, 1988:30-7).

More importantly, however, the proclaimed objectives of multiculturalism did not look like being achieved. According to the Director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs, multiculturalism had a 'valuable role to play in ... pursuing a more just and equitable society' (quoted in Bullivant, 1989:219). Immigration Minister Chris Hurford suggested that the government's concern was with 'access and equity': 'all Australians, regardless of cultural background, should have an equitable opportunity to participate in the life of the nation; have an equitable access to its resources; have the opportunity to influence the design and operation of government policies, programs and services and, within the law, be able to maintain their culture, language and religion' (Bullivant, 1989:220). Finally, the Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs explained that equity, efficiency and respect for cultural diversity were the ultimate objectives of multiculturalism (Bullivant, 1989:223). Yet the Committee to Advise on Australian Immigration Policies chaired by Dr Stephen Fitzgerald suggested equity and access were not popularly associated with multiculturalism. Many people saw it, rather, as social engineering that served to promote rather than reduce injustice, inequality and divisiveness (CAAIP, 1988:30-1, 59). Ethnic community leaders appeared to be little more than powerful pressure groups who were not easily brought to account.

The point, however, is that none of this should be so surprising. Politics is unlikely to establish social harmony. It is naive to expect otherwise — as apparently does the Office of Multicultural Affairs, in writing that 'Multiculturalism is ... an approach which seeks to reinforce social harmony by encouraging all Australians to recognize the reality of cultural diversity in our society, promoting tolerance and equality and particularly by helping ensure effective use of all the nation's human resources' (CAAIP, 1988:31). By fostering the development of interest groups, the politicisation of ethnic relations has not contributed to social harmony but has enhanced public perceptions of community differences and conflict of interest.

The Politicisation of Aboriginality

A similar story might be told about the politics of Aboriginal affairs. While important benefits were gained by Aboriginal peoples through the development of their own community-controlled organisations, Judith Wright argues, 'attempts by Commonwealth and state governments to develop political institutions based upon European-Australian

forms of "representative government" have been markedly less successful' (Wright, 1985:294). Aboriginal 'representatives', whether elected by Aborigines or nominated by governments, even when they did not succumb to the temptations of 'white' patronage, were suspected of doing so. The quality of the representation was often questioned by Aborigines themselves, as disaffection with the National Aboriginal Conference and the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee showed. Indeed, in many cases Aborigines did not understand agreements entered into on their behalf by 'representatives'. And perhaps most seriously, there was little appreciation of the fact that 'Aboriginal society was, prior to occupation and to a significant degree still is, composed of separate and distinctive groups each with its common language, ritual and other cultural affiliations, accustomed to conducting its own affairs normally without reference to other groups' Wright, 1985:295).[2]

In some respects, then, attempts to give a measure of political power to Aboriginal peoples have had the effect of highlighting — or generating — divisions within and between Aboriginal communities. Indeed, some Aborigines voiced strong objections to the creation of ATSIC and to the idea of a treaty between Aborigines and non-Aboriginal Australians precisely on the grounds that such measures would divide Aboriginal communities as well as arousing the resentment of the 'white' community.[3] The injury is compounded by the fact that that measure of political power is in fact quite insignificant: unsurprisingly so given the small size of the Aboriginal population. Political representation is of little benefit when representatives are powerless.

Even those Aborigines, such as Charles Perkins and Pat O'Shane, who have reached senior positions in the Commonwealth and State Public Services have had to endure complaints from other Aborigines about their ineffectiveness after being 'swallowed up' by the bureaucracy (Perkins, quoted in Bennett, 1989:103). The criticism is probably

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2. In this paragraph I have drawn freely from Wright, 1985, pp.292-9, especially pp.294-5.

3. Compare, for example, the differing views of Galarrwuy Yunupingu (then Chairman of the Northern Land Council) with those of Bob Liddle (a Northern Territory businessman). Yunupingu argued that 'A treaty will wipe out injustice and redress the wrongs of today, which can be traced to wrongs of the past' (1988:12). Liddle, however, thinks that 'Such a treaty ... is inherently divisive and would undoubtedly create more problems than it solved' and 'would perpetuate differences and increase resentment' (1988:13).

unjust given that the problem lies not with particular individuals but with the nature of the institutions intended to serve the Aboriginal interest. While the attempt to extend political influence to Aborigines may have been intended to empower them, the effect has been rather to lock them into relations of dependence. **As** Bennett notes, 'The Aboriginal interest is like many others, where the call for special treatment creates a need for a bureaucracy to administer the assistance schemes that are established. The controls exerted by this bureaucracy are accepted with poor grace, because they symbolise the continuing dependency of Aborigines upon government' (1989:107).

These cases illustrate how difficult it is to create harmonious social relations in which power is 'equitably' shared among various (political) communities. Good ethnic relations cannot be legislated into existence. Yet much of contemporary social policy betrays the stubborn conviction that politics will accomplish something it has persistently failed to do. (The recently-enacted laws proscribing 'racial vilification' in New South Wales are further evidence of this, although the claim that multiculturalism has reduced ethnic tension sits uneasily with laws providing for substantial fines and jail sentences for individuals who are found guilty of having incited ethnic tension [Rimmer, 1988:52-3].)

What needs seriously to be questioned is the very idea of political community: the idea that it is political interaction between society's members seeking to deal collectively with 'social problems' that is the key to creating a better, more cohesive and harmonious society.

V. A LIBERAL VIEW

There is another view of the nature of society and political order, however, which is less ambitious. The liberal view alluded to in the beginning of this paper, while it does not regard society as unimportant or deny that society may shape individual thinking and conduct, regards the public realm much more cautiously. It is sceptical about man's capacity to control or direct society and about the idea of collective self-determination. Consequently, it places much more importance on establishing the liberty of the individual and is content to accept the shape of the social order generated by the interaction of free individuals. This is a view I would like to defend. Accepting such a view would also have important implications for some of the social policy issues raised earlier.

From the Closed to the Open Society

The liberal view might best be described and defended here by turning to the writings of two thinkers whose work has had a profound impact on liberal thought in this century: F. A. Hayek and Karl Popper. Nearly 45 years ago Popper drew a distinction between 'open' and 'closed' societies. By a 'closed society' Popper meant a collectivist or tribal society in which the ties joining individuals were ties of custom, kinship and common concern: people shared 'common efforts, common dangers, common joys and common distress'. In such a society individuals 'related to one another not merely by such abstract social relationships as division of labour and exchange of commodities, but by concrete physical relationships' (Popper, 1966:173). An open society, by contrast, was one that had lost its 'organic' character, in which people related to one another not face-to-face but rather in spite of the fact that they might never have direct contact with those with whom they deal. Such a society is an 'abstract' society.

The transformation of the closed society into the open society, for Popper, was one of the 'deepest revolutions through which mankind has passed'. And it has had its costs: many people living in modern society enjoy few intimate personal contacts, live in anonymity and isolation and suffer great unhappiness. 'For although society has become abstract, the biological make-up of man has not changed much; men have social needs they cannot satisfy in an abstract society' (1966:175). It is for this reason that we continue to find considerable hostility to the open society, which has been criticised for the alienation of the individual, whose most important relations are no longer concrete (group) relations of mutuality and affection but abstract relations of exchange and contract. None of this is to suggest, of course, that modern societies are wholly abstract and lacking in any sort of group life. Individuals still form groups of all sorts. But these do not provide for a common life shared by all in society at large. It is the desire to reclaim such a common group life that creates such hostility to the open society.

This is a point Hayek has made much of in his most recent book. Man's deepest instincts, he suggests in *The Fatal Conceit*, incline him to think of society as a large family or group. Socialism's deepest error, Hayek has long maintained, has been to think that '"conscious" control or direction of social processes' was possible (1979:153). But this way of thinking has remained attractive, he suggests, for no other reason than that our instincts are group instincts that make us long for social

solidarity. The demand for collective deliberation and action is a manifestation of this longing.

Yet even if social solidarity is weakened or lost in modem society, two points ought to be recognised. The first is that it is doubtful (to say the least) that the communal relations of the small group can be recreated in the abstract society of an extended order. Politics, as we have already seen, does not always breed harmonious group relations. Rather, it is marked by conflict and competition among individuals and groups. The decisions taken are not so much evidence of collective self-determination as revealing of the extent to which differences of power shape the final compromises reached.

The second point is that the gains made possible by the open society too often go unrecognised. The most obvious gain, of course, is economic. In societies in which there is an extensive division of labour, productivity and innovation are considerably greater. With material progress there are better prospects for the alleviation of poverty and distress. But there are other, more important, gains. The most important of these has to do with the way in which human relations are transformed. Popper recognised this when he noted that 'Personal relationships of a new kind can arise when they can be freely entered into, instead of being determined by the accidents of birth; and with this, a new individualism arises. Similarly, spiritual bonds can play a major role where the biological or physical bonds are weakened' (1966:175). The point is that, in a society in which communal bonds are weaker, individuals can relate to one another as individuals rather than as persons bound by the (often conflicting) demands of group membership and group loyalty. This is a point also made by the German philosopher, G.W.F. Hegel, who argued that only in the extended order of civil society can men know one another as men (as opposed to, say, master and servant); only in civil society can minds 'mediate' one another on the basis of equality.

This is an achievement which is all too little appreciated. Its value lies not only in the fact that formal equality (as expressed through the equality of all citizens before the law) is attractive because it rejects the idea of any individual holding privileged status on account of accident of birth or fortune. It is valuable also because weakened communal ties offer greater prospects for peaceful coexistence among communities. The 'bond of human affection is extended, but it is relaxed', as Tocqueville put it (1945:105).

Fraternity and Other Goods

This is not, however, to suggest that community or communal values are unimportant. The question is not one about whether to uphold individual autonomy on the one hand or fraternity or community on the other; rather, it is one about the place of these values. The liberal view rejects the idea that community or fraternity is the primary good, and rejects the idea that society should be one large community. Society is, rather, composed of individuals who belong to many different communities. Such communities are important because it is here that the individual shares ties of affection and friendship, and because it is here that his **identity** is shaped. But if the extended order of society is to allow many such communities to coexist, it cannot be conceived as one large community. The liberal view of social order thus plays down the importance of communal ties and so conceives of civil association as an association of **individuals** governed by norms defining their legal personhood. (Thus liberal arguments are generally couched in terms of **individual** freedom or **individual** rights.)

This is the view challenged by socialism, which wants to see collective ties strengthened and extended. This challenge, I have tried to suggest, is not only to be found in the arguments of self-proclaimed socialists, but also in the proposals of many others who contribute to the shaping of social policy in contemporary liberal democracies. It is implicit in the policies recommended by those who look to strengthening the **political** power of ethnic minorities so that they might play a more substantial part in the collective determination of the character of the society. Such a view places the emphasis on the nature of society not as an association of individuals related by the abstract ties of exchange and contract governed by **law** but as a community or collection of communities governed by **political** ties.

The argument I wish to put here is that strengthening communal bonds by encouraging the development of political mechanisms or bodies through which social relations are conducted is a bad thing. The likely outcome of such a development will not be greater social solidarity or collective self-determination. The more probable result is the fomenting of inter-community rivalry or group conflict, as individuals are driven to see themselves primarily as members of particular groups whose survival and well-being depend upon the extent of their political power *vis-à-vis* other groups in the larger political society. (We would also see some communities divided into two groups: the leaders and the led.) In such circumstances the smaller and weaker communities will

fare worse, becoming at best dependent upon the dominant elements of society. This is, in my view, the indignity the Australian Aboriginal societies have suffered as a result of well-meaning proposals for their welfare and attempts to bring them into the political community.

Civil Society and Property Rights

What we need are not further attempts to empower separate community groups so that they may take their places on the **political** stage. If the liberal standpoint is correct, then what is needed instead is a way of bringing the members of the various groups of the social order within the **economic and legal** 'community' called civil society. In the pluralist societies of contemporary liberal democracies this requires finding ways of enabling **individuals** to become independent economic and legal agents able to play a part in the life of their community.'

What would this mean for social policy dealing with the accommodation of migrants and aboriginal peoples? In some respects it would mean not having a policy at all. There would be no issue of whether such peoples ought to be 'assimilated', 'integrated' or 'given the right to self-determination', That option would be left to the individual who would be identified and treated by the law not as a member of a particular group but simply as a citizen. Ethnic labels, for example, would have no place, although any individual would be free to live according to his own cultural practices without either interference or subsidy. Where there is thought to be a strong case for redress of past injustice, the emphasis would be on empowering individuals rather than political associations so that the communities that persist are voluntary associations dependent upon the commitment of members rather than upon the vagaries of group politics. In this regard policy would look to the creation not of special political claims but to the development of **property rights**.[5]

Some, of course, will object that this approach suffers from an important weakness: no special protection is given to cultures threatened with 'assimilation' and, perhaps, extinction. And many think it important that liberal society do something to ensure that such cultures are preserved (see, for example, Kymlicka, 1989). Giving people the right to preserve their ways of life without supplying the wherewithal or special concessions to facilitate it may be giving too little. Yet what also has to be weighed in the balance is the price of such measures, as well as the difficulty of establishing how much people are really concerned to preserve the ways of life of their particular communities in the face of the demands, not of the outside world for their conformity, but of their

members for release from communal bonds. The price of special measures protecting or insulating particular communities against change is often the restriction of individuals within those communities. In the end, however, no community can remain unaffected by the practices of the larger society (any more than the extended society can remain unchanged by migrant or aboriginal cultures). In this respect, I suggest that the liberal view must be as willing to accept the unintended consequences of private action as they are willing to respect the choices of individuals within particular communities.

The liberal view I have commended, then, takes a very particular view of the relative priority of several important values — among them the values of individual autonomy, community and fraternity. In criticising socialism for placing too much emphasis on the latter two, however, I do not intend to disparage the idea of either community or fraternity. Indeed, I would praise them. But the fraternity and community that I find congenial are not the political fraternity and the political community applauded in socialist theory. It is, rather, the community that is created through the development of the network of interdependence called civil society. Fraternal relations in such a context are weak, with stronger sentiments more readily shared by groups within society rather than by the society as a whole. Relations across the wider society are characterised less by unity and collective deliberation than by peaceful coexistence. This is undoubtedly a less ambitious vision of the 'brotherhood of man'. But it is certainly no conceit.

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4. It is perhaps worth adding that there is no suggestion that we should try to develop various 'welfare rights' to deal with this problem. The work of Charles Murray suggests, on the contrary, that attempts to help disadvantaged minorities by guaranteeing them a livelihood will often work against their interests by making them dependent upon state benefits (Murray, 1984).
5. In this regard the complaint voiced by Bob Liddle seems entirely justified. He writes; 'Land is granted to appease the non-Aboriginal conscience in the large cities, but Aborigines are not allowed to use it freely because paternalists do not think the black man is sufficiently mature to behave responsibly. For example, Aborigines are prohibited from selling, leasing or trading their land — thus shut out from most of the activities that would make their land an economic asset' (1988:14).

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The Fraternal Conceit

Individualist versus Collectivist Ideas of Community

Chandran Kukathas

Socialists frequently argue that liberals, in emphasising the autonomy of the individual, neglect the values of community, fraternity and social solidarity.

In this Occasional Paper, Dr Chandran Kukathas defends the liberal conception of civil association, in which individuals bound by rules of just conduct can peacefully coexist and pursue their private individual or group ends. He claims that socialists have fallen victim to 'the fraternal conceit': 'the fanciful notion that community and social solidarity can be secured in extended societies by developing the bonds of political association'. Multicultural policies are a prime example of the fraternal conceit in modern Australia, since, against the intentions of their supporters, they have actually led to social divisiveness and resentment.

Liberalism does not reject fraternity and community but puts these values in their place. 'Society is composed of individuals who belong to many different communities . . . But if the extended order of society is to allow many such communities to coexist, it cannot be conceived as one large community.'

Chandran Kukathas is Lecturer in Politics at the Australian Defense Force Academy and Director of the CIS Multiculturalism Research Program. Born in Malaysia, he obtained his degrees from the Australian National University and Oxford University. He is author of *Hayek and Modern Liberalism* (1989) and co-author of *The Theory of Politics: An Australian Perspective* (1990).

ISBN 0 949769 64 9 ISSN 0155-7386

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