teorema
Vol. XX/1-2, pp. 55-71

Postfoundationalism and Social Democracy

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RESUMEN

El postfuncionalismo se asocia a menudo con el dandismo estético de los postmodernistas. Con todo, la ausencia de cualesquiera verdades dadas de modo efectivo implica que el individuo depende de la comunidad. Este ensayo muestra cómo el postfundacionalismo podría prestar apoyo a una forma abierta de socialdemocracia. Esta ausencia de cualesquiera verdades dadas implica que un individuo sólo puede llegar a mantener creencias y realizar acciones en el trasfondo de la comunidad, y este punto de vista sustantivo sobre el yo puede apoyar una ética de camaradería centrada en una preocupación por el bienestar y el auge de los demás. Una vez que reconocemos las posibilidades socialdemocráticas del postfundacionalismo, podríamos volver a escribir el énfasis postmoderno sobre la diferencia como un recordatorio de que la comunidad no está basada en una identidad fija. El dandismo estético del postmodernismo puede reorientarse para proporcionar, no un repudio de las reclamaciones de la comunidad, sino más bien como una llamada a favor de una comunidad abierta.

ABSTRACT

Postfoundationalism is often associated with the aesthetic dandyism of the postmodernists. Yet the absence of any given truths actually implies the individual is dependent on the community. This essay shows how postfoundationalism might lend support to an open form of social democracy. The absence of any given truths implies that an individual can come to hold beliefs and perform actions only against the background of the community, and this thick view of the self can support an ethic of fellowship centred on a concern with the welfare and empowerment of others. Once we recognise the social democratic possibilities of postfoundationalism, we might rewrite the postmodern emphasis on difference as a reminder that the community is not based on a fixed identity. The aesthetic dandyism of postmodernism can be reoriented to provide not a repudiation of the claims of community, but rather a call for an open community.

I. POSTFOUNDATIONALISM AND SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

Is postfoundationalism necessarily tied to the aesthetic dandyism so often espoused by postmodernists? I will argue at the very least that postfoundationalism is compatible with a progressive and open social democratic ethic. Postmodernists deploy postfoundationalism to stress the ineluctability

of difference and so the failings of any notion of totality or unity. The other generates meaning in language; it prevents any meta-theory from covering the diversity of what we know; and it disrupts the romantic dream of harmony in nature and society. A related concern to defend the otherness of the individual against the normalising effects of an invidious social power dominates postmodern political theories. Postmodernists take an aesthetic pleasure in the ability of the other to disrupt false totalities and unites. They say, in the words of Jean-Francois Lyotard, "the idea that I think we need today in order to make decisions in political matters cannot be the idea of the totality, or of the unity, of a body" — "it can only be the idea of a multiplicity or of a diversity." [Lyotard and Thebaud (1985), p. 94].

Most postfoundational political theory revolves around a concern to protect the other — the different individual — from imprisonment within a false social whole. Jean Baudrillard calls on us to push the ruling social code into its own "hyperlogic" so as to break up the system and liberate otherness [Baudrillad (1983), p. 46]. Michel Foucault defends an aesthetic relation to self, arguing that one should affirm "one's liberty" by devising a personal style in opposition to all ruling norms [Foucault (1988), p. 49]. Of course, postmodernists differ in important respects from one another, and, indeed, shift their positions over time: for example, Foucault's meticulous analysis of the normalising effects of a specifically modern form of power has few echoes in the work of Jacques Derrida; and Baudrillard and Lyotard have taken almost diametrically opposed views of the impact of new technologies on the possibility of the liberation of the individual. Despite such differences, however, the postmodernists are rightly seen as sharing a concern to protect the difference of the particular individual. Their aesthetic dandyism with its hostility to all unities or totalities leads them to denounce community as inimical to individual difference. They reduce the social to the illegitimate imposition of a normalising power. Postmodernists seem, therefore, to reject the ideas of community and fellowship that sustain the social democratic concern with equality, welfare, and empowerment. Hence Zygmunt Bauman has concluded, "there is no conceivable way a realistic Left program could be patched together out of postmodernist theory" [Bauman (1986-87), p. 49].

In contrast to Bauman, I believe that postfoundationalism can be used to defend a social democratic ethic. Postfoundationalism implies that individuals can have experiences and exercise their reason only against the background of a social practice or tradition: it shows that individuals can come into being only against the background of the community. The dependence of the individual on the community suggests that individual flourishing depends on a suitably rich social background and that we exist in relationships of mutual dependence. Postfoundationalism can lead, then, to communitarian doctrines that provide a basis for a progressive concern with welfare. To say this is, however, not to assimilate postfoundationalism to the communitarianism

espoused by several contemporary philosophers. On the contrary, postfoundationalism encourages an emphasis on difference — otherness rather than identity — that reminds us that the community is not based on a fixed identity. Postfoundationalism should lead us to place greater value on the openness of the community than is usual among communitarians. The aesthetic individualism of the postmodernists can be reoriented to provide not a repudiation of the claims of community, but rather a call for an open community.

II. THE PROGRESSIVE COMMUNITY

The philosophical core of postmodernism is surely a rejection of foundationalism defined as the belief in given or fully attainable truths. Lyotard says "I define *post-modern* as incredulity towards metanarratives," where metanarratives are the supposedly universal, even transcendent, truths that underlie our knowledge and civilisation [Lyotard (1984), p. xxix]. Likewise, Derrida argues that all meanings are inherently unstable in a way that makes any real representation impossible: he denies the possibility of our reproducing physical or mental objects in the way we would have to if they were to be present to us as true [Derrida (1982), pp. 1-27]. Postmodernism draws heavily, therefore, on the defining claim of all postfoundationalism, that human beings have neither pure perceptions of the world nor a pure reason by which to apprehend self-evident logical truths. All human experiences and all human reasoning occur against the background of various contingent, theoretical assumptions. I believe that the postmodernists are right to reject the foundationalist idea of given or fully attainable truths. My concern here, however, is not to defend this position but to draw out consequences that might follow from it. If postfoundationalists want to talk about ethics, their views might sustain a communitarian view of the self and thus a concern with welfare and empowerment.

A rejection of given truths suggests community is vital to individuals[1]. It implies that we can not truly conceive of any individual as coming before the community. Because individuals can neither have pure experiences nor exercise a pure reason, they necessarily construe their experiences and engage in their reasoning in the context of a prior set of theories. Postfoundationalism implies, therefore, that individuals can not reach beliefs through their experiences and reasoning except in the context of a prior set of theories. No doubt individuals reach the beliefs they do through their experiences and reasoning, but they can neither have experiences nor exercise their reason apart from within a theoretical context. Individuals can not come to hold beliefs, and so perform actions, except against the background of a set of prior theories given to them by the community. Of course, once individuals hold an initial set of theories, they then can adopt further beliefs against the back-

ground of that initial set. Nonetheless, individuals must rely on theories given to them by the community to provide them with an initial set. Postfoundationalism leads us, therefore, to what is perhaps the defining insight of communitarianism: our very concept of an individual is a concept of an individual embedded within the community.[2] Postfoundationalists can not truly conceive of individuals holding beliefs or performing actions unless they take them to have done so at least initially in the context of theories made available to them by the community. This communitarian analysis of the self consists of more than an assertion of the importance of the process of socialisation. It implies that our very concept of the individual is one of a socially-embedded self. It thus entails a rejection of a position often — though rather simplistically — equated with liberal individualism: we can not truly conceive of an individual standing in splendid isolation.[3] No matter how far we manage to push our concepts back, whether historically or logically, we still can not reach a state of nature, a realm of pure reason, an existential freedom, or a place behind a veil of ignorance; we can not reach a temporal or conceptual place where individuals exist outside of, or unaffected by, the community. The postfoundationalist rejection of given truths implies acceptance of a communitarian analysis of a thick or social self as opposed to a liberal account of a thin or isolated self.

Although few postmodernists point explicitly to the communitarian drift of their postfoundationalism, we can find intimations of it in their critique of the subject. Many postmodernists reject the idea of the autonomous subject; indeed they often seem to reject the more modest idea of the subject as an agent. Lyotard challenges the image of a language game in which individuals "make use of language like a toolbox" to convey their intentions, preferring to say that "the so-called players were on the contrary situated by phrases in the universes those phrases 'present' before any intention" [van den Abbeele (1984), p. 17]. Many postmodernists clearly reject a thin view of the individual as capable of forming intentions or beliefs, and so performing actions, outside of the community. They defend a thick analysis of the self — an analysis so thick that they sometimes portray the subject as a mere product of social forces. However, while postmodernists in their literary and social theories recognise that postfoundationalism implies a hostility to the subject, when they turn to ethics they often adopt an aesthetic dandyism that does not seem to take seriously the communitarian implications of their critique of the subject. When they write on ethics, they often portray community as an invidious form of power/knowledge from which individuals need to escape, and not at all as a resource from which individuals draw sustenance.

Postfoundationalism can support a social democratic ethic of fellowship because its communitarian view of the self leads to a recognition of human interdependence. The life of each individual is necessarily a common one lived in the context of relations to others. If postfoundationalists talk about

ethics, then, they should accept that freedom, the good life, whatever end one wishes to talk about, can be realised only in relation to others, only in the context of the community. Nobody can become free, pursue the good, or whatever, by themselves. Because each individual necessarily pursues the good together with others, we are bound to others in fellowship. As fellows, human beings provide each other with the background and context in which each has an individual being.

Once we begin talking about ethics, the community of fellows represents the ethical corollary of human interdependence. As such, it contrasts with specific organisations based on combination. Organisations arise when people combine to pursue particular purposes. Although people sometimes find themselves members of organisations by virtue of their birth, combination is often voluntary activity in which individuals form or join an organisation because they share the purpose for which it is constituted. The structure of an organisation derives at least in part, therefore, from the common purpose of its members. Likewise, the place of each member in an organisation derives, at least in part, from the role he or she plays in the pursuit of that purpose. Individuals combine in organisations not by virtue of their being, but by virtue of playing a specific role in the pursuit of a specific end. Fellowship, in contrast, appears in the community understood as an ethical expression of human interdependence. We constitute the community because our individuality arises out of our relations to others.

The community of fellows is not established for a specific purpose by an act of will. Rather, it provides the inextricable background against which individuals can establish organisations for specific purposes. Fellowship can go together with combination: the community can establish an organisation, perhaps even one with the clear purpose of expressing its communal identity. Nonetheless, the two need not go together, and should they do so, the organisation would be expressive of the community, not constitutive of it. Individuals exist in fellowship by virtue of their being, and it is this fellowship that holds them together in the community. The characteristic error of liberal individualism, therefore, is to see social life solely in terms of combination to the exclusion of fellowship. Liberal individualists regard individuals as autonomous beings standing outside all social contexts and choosing whether or not to associate with others. Really, however, individuals exist only in relations of fellowship with others, and the community they thus form provides the background against which they choose whether or not to join with others in organisations for specific purposes. Community is thus conceptually prior to all organisation.

People necessarily exist in relations to others in a way that, once we begin talking ethics, makes them fellows within the community. Against the background of such fellowship, however, people can form all sorts of organisations, exhibiting a wide variety of contingent historical characteristics. The

character of any given organisation will reflect, in large part, the purposes and values on the basis of which it is created and maintained. Sometimes these purposes and values will show little self-conscious recognition of the ethical connotations of fellowship — this surely is the case with slave societies, radical patriarchies, and racial apartheids. On other occasions, however, the relevant purposes and values might exhibit a much greater awareness of the ethical connotations of fellowship. The question to be answered now, then, is: what values should we adopt once we accept our fellowship within the community?

Postfoundationalism points to a thick concept of the self, the ethical corollary of which is fellowship in community. Fellowship thus gives us a duty of care for others; it should make us concerned with their welfare and empowerment. For a start, our relation of fellowship to others should make us concerned with their welfare. One reason for being concerned with their welfare is simply that as our fellows they are people about whom we should care. Our lives are entwined with theirs in such a way that their well-being should be a thing of importance to us. We are social beings in that our self is constituted in part by our relations to others. Thus, properly to care for the self is to care for these relations, where because these relations are in part dependent on the welfare of the others, properly to care for the self is also to care for their welfare. Individuals exist in social relations, and these relations make the well-being of others a part of their lives. It is possible, however, to couch the reason why we care about our fellows in terms that appear to appeal to self-interest. We could say that our freedom or good depends on others having a certain standard of welfare. Because the good life — whatever it may be — can be pursued, let alone realised, only in the context of the community, the good of the individual depends on that of others. We can pursue our good only if the other members of the community provide us with a suitable context in which so to do. Our good depends on our fellows having a level of material comfort, education, and the like, sufficient to enable them to provide a suitable background and context for our activities.

A relation of fellowship to others also should make us concerned with their empowerment. Whereas organisations ascribe people different positions so as to enable them to fulfil different functions in pursuit of a shared purpose, the community is composed of moral equals. We all occupy an equivalent place in the community, a place defined by the way our being presupposes relations to others. As fellows, we should recognise and treat each other as moral equals, rather than as individuals occupying a place within a more or less hierarchical organisation. Of course, the fact of fellowship does not imply that people have equal capacities or that they are equally capable of fulfilling a particular function within an organisation; it implies only that we all occupy equivalent positions within the community. Because fellowship entails moral equality, the members of the community should recognise and treat each

other as they do themselves, that is, as having ends they wish to pursue. Besides, because the community denotes the social context within which individuals pursue specific purposes either as individuals or within organisations, to recognise fellows as belonging to the community should be to ascribe to them a capacity to pursue specific purposes. As fellows, therefore, we should seek to enhance the choices and opportunities available to one another. To some extent, we can do so by promoting others' welfare: we can ensure that they have a certain level of education, health, and income. In addition, however, we can do so by giving them a platform from which to speak and by involving them in decision-making processes. Fellows should seek to promote the choices open to one another, to expand the realm of each other's liberties, to empower one another.

Postfoundationalism also enables us to dismiss the main arguments raised against progressive attempts to promote social equality. Crucially, just as a rejection of given truths leads to a rejection of the liberal view of the self in favour of a communitarian one, so the communitarian view of the self leads to a rejection of a natural concept of rights in favour of a social one. Because we can not make sense of the idea of an individual coming before the community, we also can not make sense of the idea of natural or pre-social rights. Because individuals exist only within social contexts, they can bear rights only against a social background. All rights are thus social in that the community grants rights to individuals because it holds certain liberties and powers to be essential to human flourishing. The community postulates rights to protect what it sees as the vital interests of its members, say, their freedom from certain restraints, their equal access to important opportunities, or their need for a minimum level of welfare. Once postfoundationalists adopt this social analysis of rights, they can rebut the main arguments against a social democratic concern with welfare and empowerment. For a start, postfoundationalists need not to defend a right to private property, let alone a full-blown one. Individuals can not have a natural right to the products of their labour; rather, any right they have to property must be a right given to them by the community. Thus, although postfoundationalists might defend a limited right to private property as conducive to human flourishing, they need not conceive of such a right as sacrosanct. In addition, postfoundationalists can place rights associated with social justice on an equal footing with those to political powers and liberties. Because all rights are designed to promote human flourishing, our view of which rights are most important will depend on our view of flourishing, which might or might not lead to an emphasis on political powers and liberties. Thus, postfoundationalists can reject an exclusive emphasis on limited government for one on the need for the state to act to secure social rights and to promote equality.

Postfoundationalism encourages us to jettison various arguments against a progressive concern with social equality, notably a rigid adherence

to the right to private property and a focus on limited government as a way of protecting individual liberties. More importantly, postfoundationalism encourages us to adopt an ethic conducive to social equality, that is, an ethic based on fellowship and centred on a concern with the welfare and empowerment of others. Postfoundationalists can say, together with the ethical socialist, R. H. Tawney, "it is [repulsive] that some classes should be excluded from the heritage of civilisation which others enjoy, and that the fact of human fellowship […] should be obscured by economic contrasts" [Tawney (1931), p. 113].

III. THE OPEN COMMUNITY

Many critics have pointed to a contradiction between the postmodern view of the subject as a product of social forces and an ethical commitment to an aesthetic dandyism [*e. g.*, Habermas (1987)]. The contradiction disappears, however, if we replace the postmodern hostility to the subject with the postfoundationalist position I have adopted. Postfoundationalists need reject only the thin concept of the self as an autonomous being standing outside of all social contexts. They can allow that the self is an agent capable of reasoning and acting in innovative ways within any social context[4]. To argue that individuals always exist in a social context is not, as some postmodernists imply, to conclude that individuals must be mere functions of their social contexts. That we start out in a given social context need not imply that we can not go on to modify that context. On the contrary, although individuals always reach their beliefs and perform their actions against a social background, they still can have reasons of their own — reasons they draw from their existing beliefs — for adopting further beliefs and actions that go beyond, and even transform, this background. Postfoundationalism can incorporate the idea of individuals being agents capable of modifying the heritage of the community. Moreover, once we accept the idea of agency, we can deny there is any contradiction between our postfoundationalist rejection of the liberal view of the self and a concern to protect the individual from society. Because the self is not autonomous, postfoundationalists can stress the role of social forces in the construction of any given self; but because the self is an agent, postfoundationalists can defend the self from the illegitimate imposition of social force.

An ethic of fellowship need not preclude a concern to help the individual escape the normalising effects of social power. The aesthetic dandyism of many postmodernists provides a pertinent corrective to the usual communitarian emphasis on a fixed identity or consensus. It highlights the need to prevent difference being forced towards sameness. Difference need not mean that the community necessarily stands as an alien imposition upon the par-

ticular individual. It might mean rather, first, that the community does not have a clear boundary, and, second, that the individual is not bound to the identities currently found within the community. Postmodernism could be re-oriented to sustain not a repudiation of community, but rather a call for an open community based on a fluid and indeterminate identity.

Communitarians typically depict communities as based on at least partly fixed identities. Sometimes they derive the fixed part of communal identities from a too thick a view of the self, that is, a view of the self as constituted by a community, a view of the self that denies agency as well as autonomy. Michael Sandel, for example, argues that people's "identity" is "defined to some extent by the community of which they are a part," and this prompts him to reduce agency from a "capacity for choice" to "a capacity for reflection" on a nature given to people by their community [Sandel (1982), p. 150]. He says, "agency consists less in summoning the will than in seeking self-understanding," for "the capacity for reflection enables the self to turn its lights inward upon itself, to inquire into its constitutive nature, to survey its various attachments and acknowledge their respective claims" [Sandel (1982), p. 151]. According to Sandel, a community fixes core features of the nature of its individual members. Yet communitarians go astray when they thus adopt a too thick a view of the self, denying agency as well as autonomy. If individuals were constituted by a communal identity from which they could not deviate, we would be able to deduce the core of their beliefs from knowledge of the nature of the community to which they belong. But, of course, we can not do so. People can come to hold all sorts of beliefs against the background of any particular community — they can reject any belief no matter how sacrosanct it seemed to their predecessors — and we can explain their ability to do so only by invoking their creative agency.[5] As agents individuals can not only reflect on, but also reject, any of the values and attachments they inherit from a community. Moreover, because every aspect of community is thus open to rejection, the idea of the community can not possibly include within it that of a fixed identity.

At other times communitarians derive the fixed aspect of communal identities from a reified concept of tradition. They define a tradition by reference to a checklist of core ideas or debates. Alasdair MacIntyre argues, for example, that in a "tradition of enquiry the question of precisely how its history up to this point ought to be written is characteristically one of those questions to which different and conflicting answers may be given within the tradition"; and doing so prompts him to define traditions as composed of debates about their content in which the participants appeal to a fixed set of historical authorities or epistemic criteria [MacIntyre (1988), p. 11]. According to MacIntyre, a tradition is a reified entity made up in part of certain core debates such that we include people in it only if their thoughts and actions belong within those debates. Yet communitarians go astray when they reify a

tradition by postulating a fixed heritage common to all its members. The fact of human agency implies that a tradition must be the contingent product of the ways in which individuals have adopted and modified their social inheritance, rather than a fixed entity in which we locate individuals because they exhibit its core features. Because a tradition is not a reified entity, we can decide whether individuals belong in it only by tracing the temporal connections that bind them back to their specific predecessors; we can not decide whether they belong in it by comparing their beliefs and actions with either an abstract moment in an argument or a privileged set of debates, beliefs, or practices. Moreover, because the appropriate temporal connections need not give rise to a fixed set of beliefs, themes, or debates, the idea of the community can not possibly include within it that of a fixed identity.

Ironically when communitarians define communities as constituted in part by a fixed identity, they make a mistake resembling that we found to be characteristic of liberal individualism. They see social life exclusively in terms of combination as opposed to fellowship; they ascribe to the community features of organisation. The communitarians argue that a community is characterised by a particular way of life or set of values thereby implying that only people who live that life or hold those values belong to it. Yet when people combine in respect of a fixed identity or purpose, they establish an organisation, not the community. Communitarians, in other words, confuse the community as the ethical expression of the fact that individuals only exist in interdependent relationships, with the mistaken idea that the community must take the form of an organisation. By reifying the community, they give it the form of an organisation; they see it as constituted by a particular identity. But the community does not arise when we combine with others with whom we share a particular identity. It arises out of a fellowship we have with others whose lives are entwined with our own, where lives are entwined not by virtue of a common identity, but a vast range of diverse interactions. Moreover, because the group of people with whom we might interact remains open, we can not specify criteria by which to demarcate our fellows — the question "who are our fellows" is an open one, to which we should answer "potentially everyone".

It is because liberals and communitarians alike see organisation as the basic form of our relations with others that they conceive of the community in terms of a fixed identity or consensus. All organisation requires a shared purpose, so if the community took the form of an organisation, it would indeed require a fixed identity or consensus. Here liberal individualists characteristically postulate a neutral, universal consensus. They appeal to fixed principles that all persons, or all reasonable persons, should accept: sometimes they say that as autonomous beings we possess a neutral reason that teaches us to agree on certain principles; sometimes they derive the basis of agreement from norms allegedly embedded in all communication; and some-

times they argue that we should agree on certain minimal principles of coexistence derivable from the fact that we disagree over so much of substance[6]. Communitarians deny the neutrality of liberal theories only then to postulate a fixed identity or consensus within particular communities: sometimes they derive a fixed identity from too thick a view of the self; and sometimes they define traditions as reified entities based on a fixed consensus over values or authorities.

Postfoundationalism offers a pertinent corrective to a concern with a fixed identity. It suggests, first, with communitarianism, that there is no neutral reason of the sort liberals use to construct a consensus, and, second, against communitarianism, that community does not embody a given identity. For a start, postfoundationalism challenges the idea of a pure, universal, or neutral reason. A rejection of given truths implies that all reason necessarily occurs in a particular context. Because nothing is given as true, all reasoning is infused by prior commitments, so no reasoning can be pure — free from all prior commitments — universal — standing outside all particular contexts — or neutral — independent of all prior commitments. As Lyotard explains, all knowledge or reason occurs in the context of narratives that "define what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question"; and the particularity of narratives means that they have only a limited historical and cultural validity, so there can not be a unifying metanarrative [Lyotard (1984), p. 23] In addition, postfoundationalism challenges the idea of the community as constituted by a fixed identity. I have argued that postfoundationalism is compatible with the concept of agency. Although a hostility to the subject prevents postmodernists adopting such a concept, their analysis of language leads to a similar conclusion. Postmodernists emphasise the slipperiness of language in a way that makes them hostile to the idea of meanings being fixed within a tradition. Lyotard, for example, explains that the nature of language entails the perpetual possibility of "the differend" defined as "a case of conflict between (at least) two parties that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgement applicable to both arguments [Lyotard (1988), p. xi].

Postfoundationalism suggests that the way people see the world is not given to them by either pure reason or the community. It is, rather, a product of their creative agency exercised against a social background. Once we thus accept the particular and local nature of all reasoning, we will highlight the inherent diversity of things such as people's experiences and cognitive values, so we will reject all appeals to a fixed identity. "Consensus," Lyotard concludes, "has become an outmoded and suspect value" [Lyotard (1984), p. 66]. Whether the prescribed identity is a universal one, as favoured by liberal individualists, or one specific to a community, as favoured by communitarians, postfoundationalists will see it as the imposition of a false unity upon a pluralistic world.

Perhaps a critic will object that the fellowship I have evoked looks suspiciously like a partly fixed identity that helps to define the community. Surely, however, we should distinguish between, on the one hand, communities based on fixed identities prescribing things of substance in ways that implicitly deny unlimited agency, and, on the other, the community based on a recognition of unlimited agency such that the only fixed point is that things of substance should not be fixed? The community does not prescribe criteria of membership: for example, people who reject postfoundationalism are still fellows since they form part of the background against which we come to be as individuals. There are no pre-requisites of membership in the community — no beliefs one must hold, no intellectual authorities one must recognise, no actions one must perform, no race one must belong to. Rather, as we have seen, the question "who are our fellows" is one to which we should answer "potentially everyone". The community tends towards universality in that it unites people by virtue of their dependence on inter-linked backgrounds.

To invoke universality here is to move towards a cosmopolitan, arguably liberal, ideal [cfr. Bevir (2001)]. Nonetheless, the postfoundational community remains distinct from many liberal ones. Liberals typically look to a society based on principles that all reasonable people should accept. Postfoundationalists, in contrast, must allow reasonable people might not share the beliefs underlying the community. Perhaps, however, a critic will ask how we can justify the community if we can not appeal to a neutral reason or a fixed identity common to its potential members? Although my main aim remains to outline a vision of community that postfoundationalists might defend, not to resolve the difficult problem of how this vision might be justified, I think postfoundationalists can answer this question provided they adopt a weak notion of justification. They can defend the community to other postfoundationalists by arguing, as I am trying to do, that it fits appropriately with the premises of their position. In addition, when faced with others who do not share these premises, they can seek points where their views overlap with that of these others and then try to reach an agreed position through a debate centred on these points. Such debates would differ from those to which liberals might appeal in that we could not specify in advance what the points of overlap might be nor, therefore, any particular features of the outcome[7].

So, postfoundationalism highlights the need to oppose allegedly fixed identities as reductions of difference to sameness. Although individuals exist only in the context of the community, they are agents who can reject the attachments and moral claims given to them by the community, and if we are to respect their capacity for difference, then we must promote an open community that allows for, and even encourages, diversity. One feature of the open community is that it helps to provide people with the resources needed to develop and express their singularity — a feature I considered when arguing postfoundationalism can sustain an ethic of fellowship centred on a concern with the

welfare and empowerment of others. Now I want to emphasise the importance of people using these resources to defend difference. We can draw on post-foundationalism to define the open community as one in which people are treated as agents, ethical conduct is at least as important as moral rules, existing identities are questioned, and others are approached with friendliness.

The open community would treat its members as agents capable of rejecting any prescribed identity. Because people always exist against a social background that influences them, there is a sense, as Foucault suggests, in which power is ubiquitous[8]. But because power is ubiquitous, to point to its presence can not be to pass a critical judgement. What matters is the nature of the power that is present. Is it violence or influence? By violence, I mean forms of power where one individual or group denies the agency of the other. By influence, I mean forms of power where the agency of others is accepted; thus, although violence need not entail physical assault, physical assault always constitutes violence. Violence represents an attempt to control others without their collusion. It goes to work on the body. Others do what the powerful wish not because they so choose, but because physical force or the threat of it so compels them. Thus, violence takes the form of a domination composed of order and discipline: laws and rules are issued, and any failure to comply with them is met with beatings and incarcerations. Influence, in contrast, represents an attempt to convince others that they want, or ought, to do as one wishes. It goes to work on the mind. Others do what one wishes because as agents they reflect on relevant arguments and choose so to do. Thus, influence takes the form of continuous persuasion: a position is put forward, and if the other does not accept it, one develops one's arguments further in the light of the other's objections. Whereas violence treats others as objects to be forced to do something, influence treats them as agents to be convinced of the rightness of so doing. The open community would rely on influence more than violence. Although the community inevitably includes aspects of domination, we should seek to minimise it.

A reliance on influence rather than violence brings with it a focus on ethical conduct at the expense of moral rules, where, as Foucault suggests, ethical conduct represents the way people behave within the framework of a moral code [see, in particular, Foucault (1988a)]. To some extent a focus on ethical conduct is a corollary of trying to minimise domination: after all, violence generally takes the form of order and discipline — moral rules are imposed on others along with the threat of punishment — so to minimise violence we also have to minimise moral rules; we have to shift our focus from a fixed code to a more open-ended and flexible idea of ethical conduct. However, the focus on ethical conduct also arises because influence itself can undermine agency. Indeed, postmodernists sometimes argue that in modern society power-as-influence is so strong that most individuals do not exercise their agency but merely regulate themselves in accord with conventional mo-

rality. We have to make sure, therefore, that power-as-influence takes the form of a loose set of norms interpreted in ethical conduct rather than a fixed set of moral rules. Whereas moral rules impose requirements and restrictions on people, an ethic constitutes a practice through which people negotiate their relationship to requirements and restrictions. An ethic is a personal mode of being through which people interpret and develop laws, rights, and duties. Thus, postfoundationalism, like communitarianism, encourages a focus on ethical conduct or the good conceived as a practice, rather than morality or the right conceived as the domain of law. Unlike communitarianism, however, it promotes forms of ethical conduct centred on difference and agency, rather than shared values. Morality or the right has a valid role to play in human affairs, but in the open community the system of laws would remain flexible enough to leave plenty of room for individuals to devise new forms of ethical conduct.

Because the purpose of ethical conduct is to exercise the capacity for agency so as to devise a personal mode of being, its key feature should be a questioning of received identities. We should use our capacity for agency to interrogate social norms and to produce ourselves through our own ethical conduct. The value of transgressing received identities dominates the ethic of many postmodernists. Lyotard, for example, describes "the political task of today" as one of promoting "the resistance that writing offers to established thought, to what has already been done, to what everyone thinks, to what is well known, to what is widely recognised, to what is 'readable" [Reijen and Veerman (1988), p. 302]. Postfoundationalism encourages us to recognise the role played by the community in constructing our identities, and so to see our identities as contingent. We escape the normalising effects of power-as-influence by exploring the limits to the forms of subjectivity made available to us by the community. Nonetheless, we have little reason here to follow those postmodernists who equate such explorations with stylised, aesthetic transgressions[9].The value of people interrogating received identities is that they thereby attain freedom defined in terms of agency. Although we are not autonomous beings able to discover ourselves, we are agents capable of reflecting on, and even rejecting, the identities we inherit. The freedom we attain through ethical conduct is, therefore, not the impossible liberation of a true self from all social influences, but rather the exercise of our capacity to modify ourselves in the context of the social influences at work upon us.

When we question received identities, we should approach others with friendliness, not fear. When people believe the community is based on a fixed identity, they often meet those who do not share that identity with hostility. They treat others as enemies to be met with fear and aggression. In contrast, the open community rejects the illusion of a fixed identity in favour of radical contingency, so those who fall outside of its existing identities can be met with a friendly recognition of the positive role of transgression. Others can be

welcomed as new members of a fellowship that has the potential to include everyone. Although we can not specify in advance what the others we will encounter will look like, by refusing to base the community on any set of fixed identities, by basing it on a fluid and indeterminate identity, we can try to ensure we remain open and friendly towards the others whoever they might be. Derrida describes this friendly stance of the open community - "the hospitality without reserve" of "the democratic promise" — in messianic terms:

> Awaiting without horizon of the wait, awaiting what one does not expect yet or any longer, hospitality without reserve, welcoming salutation accorded in advance to the absolute surprise of the *arrivant* from whom or from which one will not ask anything in return and who or which will not be asked to commit to the domestic contracts of any welcoming power (family, State, nation, territory, native soil or blood, language, culture in general, even humanity), *just* opening which renounces any right to property, any right in general, messianic opening to what is coming, that is, to the event that cannot be awaited *as such*, or recognised in advance therefore, to the event as the foreigner itself, to her or to him for whom one must leave an empty place, always, in memory of the hope [Derrida (1994), p. 65].

The postfoundational community is in principle open to everyone. It is open to everyone in that, first, its internal construction eschews all fixed identities in favour of a recognition of difference, and, second, it regards people who stand outside it as friends and potential members rather than enemies to be excluded.

IV. CONCLUSION

Postmodernists such as Baudrillard, Foucault, and Lyotard defend an aesthetic dandyism that seems to leave no space for social democratic notions of fellowship. They portray society as the locus of an invidious power that oppresses and normalises us, and they call on us to resist such power by creating ourselves in acts that transgress all social norms. In contrast, I have argued that postfoundationalism can promote an open social democratic ethic. For a start, a rejection of all given truths leads to an emphasis on the importance of community, an emphasis that I have constructed as both a theoretical argument and an argument of which we can find intimations in the critique of the subject offered by the postmodernists themselves. Postfoundationalism implies that no beliefs are given to people by pure experience or pure reason, so individuals can hold beliefs and act only in the context of the community. In addition, this thick analysis of the self points toward an ethic of fellowship characterised by a concern with welfare and empowerment. Finally, once we link postfoundationalism to social democracy in this way, we can then re-

write the aesthetic dandyism of the postmodernists not as a rejection of community but as a call for an open community. To evoke a postfoundational community is, of course, to do little either to establish its viability or to fill-out its concrete form. Important questions remain, such as: is it realistic to expect attachment to a community based on difference, not identity? and what policies and institutions should we favour as productive of such a community? I hope, however, I have shown why postfoundationalists might interest themselves in these questions.

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NOTES

[1] For a detailed version of the following argument, see Bevir (1996), pp. 102-14.

[2] For an introduction to communitarianism, see Mulhall and Swift (1992).

[3] As is often pointed out, liberalism is a far more complex phenomena than such a caricature allows. Moreover, liberals have responded creatively to the challenges of communitarianism and postmodernism. See respectively Mulhall and Swift (1992) and both Kateb (1992), Flathmann (1992). For the sake of simplicity, however, I will continue to identify liberalism with individualism.

[4] For a detailed version of the following argument, see again Bevir (1996).

[5] A belief in the potential revocability of all beliefs is, of course, a corollary of the rejection of given truths.

[6] See respectively Rawls (1972), Habermas (1984-87), and Larmore (1989).

[7] On such debates and how they overcome the problem of relativism, see Bevir, (1994), Hoy (1995) and, especially for how they differ from Habermas's version of the liberal position, Hesse (1995).

[8] See the essays collected in Foucault (1980).

[9] See, for example, Foucault's idealisation of Bataille and Baudelaire in respectively Foucault (1977); and Foucault (1984). On the influence of Bataille and his concept of aesthetic transgression on other postmodernists, see Pefanis (1991).

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