



From the Urban to the Civic: The Moral Possibilities of the City

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ABSTRACT *Relating bioethics to the philosophy of the city creates the possibility for developing the field along paths not yet explored. In the Western tradition, the city has been understood as the venue for two quite different forms of activity and two different types of moral possibility. In one guise, the city is an urbs, a center of commerce, market exchange, and social individualism. In another guise, the city is a civitas or polis, the space of active democratic citizenship, equality under law, and civic virtue. As civitas, classical philosophers regarded the city as the place of moral growth and full human self-realization. These two possibilities of human moral and political experience in the city have given rise to distinct traditions of political theory—liberalism and civic republican and democratic theory. This article traces these conceptual configurations into the domain of contemporary bioethics, arguing that most work in the field has drawn on the liberal tradition and hence has been insufficiently critical of the moral paradigm of market individualism and unduly inattentive to the values of civitas and the civic tradition. It argues for the creation of a form of civic bioethics and explores some of the theoretical foundations that type of bioethics would require.*

The city is a Janus-faced enigma, at least in the Western political tradition. According to the book of Genesis, the first city was founded by Cain, and all cities partake of the problematical character of this original founder (Genesis 4:17). Archeologists agree that the appearance of cities marked a fundamental transition in the history of human culture: A sedentary agricultural society came to dominate over the more nomadic existence of hunting, gathering, and pastoral husbandry.¹ In historic times, the city had two fundamental, coexisting identities. It was a space of market transactions and the birthplace of individualistic self-identity. It was also the birthplace of politics in the West, particularly the fifth century BCE Greek city-state, and was a space of political community, democratic citizenship, and civic virtue. Again, the ancient legacy endures: The city remains democracy's only and best hope for renewal and its worst enemy, its moral antithesis. The philosopher Hadley Arkes² captures these two faces of the city in a striking way:

All about us today urban life is celebrated, but largely for the wrong reasons. When the city is valued, it is valued as the theater of diversity, the center of a cosmopolitan culture, the breeding ground of freedom and tolerance. . . . But these virtues are the virtues of the marketplace or of the city as "hotel." What they leave out, conspicuously, is any sense of the city as a source of obligation—not an arena for pursuing wants, a place for indulging tastes of literally any

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description, with no governing sense of character, but a place where people learn the lessons of propriety and self-control. . . . What is lost, then, in this vision of the city as a shopping center is the sense of a people joined together in a perception of common ends; who found their common life on procedures they regard, by and large, as just, and who cultivate an understanding of justice as morals in one another through the things they hold up to the community with the force of law. What is lost, in a word, is the sense of the city as a polity.^{2(p3)}

I begin with these rather sweeping observations because I want to push toward boldness in thinking about a new enterprise of “urban bioethics.” I wish, for reasons discussed at length below, that we could agree to use the term *civic bioethics* instead, but that train has left the station. The most straightforward definition of urban bioethics is to take the type of practical ethics discourse that has now become an important part of clinical, acute care medicine (bioethics) and apply it to the medical care of city dwellers, who have demographic, epidemiological, and cultural characteristics that make their health care needs special. I have nothing against urban bioethics thus understood; I am sure it will produce interesting and important work. But, it is not theoretically innovative or radical. It misses an opportunity to rethink some of the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of our field, or at least much of it. To take bioethics as it has developed in the United States—rooted philosophically and theoretically in Enlightenment rationalism and liberalism and committed to an applied ethics model of moral reasoning and judgment—and then apply it to urban health care is to leave too many assumptions, too much conventional wisdom (both about bioethics and about cities) in place.

Accordingly, this article is largely an exercise in bioethics metatheory and critique. Even at the expense of writing at a fairly high level of abstraction, I believe it is important to explore the theoretical foundations and underpinnings of this promising new departure in our field. If we take the phenomenon of the city seriously, what it has meant in human history and what it means in our society today and in the emerging global society of tomorrow, we have an opportunity to broach much larger and more fundamental questions than those likely to arise in conventional bioethics applied to urban health care. It will lead us to think of cities, medicine, public health, politics, and finally ethics itself in new ways. Taking the phenomenon of the city seriously means focusing on the city not so much as a physical place, a population, a cluster of buildings and streets, or a statistical construct (a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area), but as a way of seeing, thinking, and acting and as a particular form of the human moral and political imagination. A city (and its associated mirror image, country) is a form of life and a state of mind. Or, to be more precise, the concept of the city in the West offers two imaginative possibilities, two states of mind and ways of being in the world, that are distinct heuristically and conceptually, but in reality often are intertwined. These are the *urban*, a market society of competitors and exchangers, and the *civic*, a moral and political community of equality under law and active pursuit of shared purpose. Properly and broadly understood, urban bioethics will be *civic bioethics*, drawing its theoretical imagination from one of the two moral possibilities the city has to offer. Civic bioethics will reveal the political face of the city and return us to the founding roots of the city, which are moral and communal.

A perfect example of the unsettling power of urban bioethics is the exciting and growing body of work in epidemiology that indicates that the uneven distribution of health and morbidity in a population—the public health “gradient”—is not

simply a matter of statistical correlation with the familiar black box standing between the independent and the dependent variables.³⁻⁶ On the contrary, we are coming to understand that even physical health—to say nothing of mental health, quality of life, and good old-fashioned human happiness—is linked directly to matters that are social and institutional and not merely numerical. These matters include social identity; self-esteem; social involvement and connectedness; social support and membership; the experience of social discrimination and injustice; the stress of social hierarchy, competition, and uncertainty; the behavior-shaping power of peer-group influences; and one's sense of power and efficacy.⁴

The list goes on. The point is that contemporary epidemiology is taking us from statistical correlation to the design and redesign of personal relationships, institutional capacities, moral connections, and in the broadest sense of the term, political space itself.³ The new epidemiology has less to do with the causal nexus than it does with a kind of moral ecology, and it is this new moral ecology that the contemporary city desperately needs if it is to counter other powerful trends toward fragmentation, polarization, and virtual ungovernability in a transnational and postindustrial world.⁷⁻¹⁰ That is, it is needed if the urban face of the city is not to eclipse its civic face. Moreover, the study of public health is becoming *public* in a way that does not reduce to an interest in the health of populations. If we take it seriously, the goal of enhancing the health of large numbers of people from disease that is preventable, premature, or related to risky behavior is a goal that will require our fundamental reconsideration of what it means to have a public space, to be public selves, and to share a common or public good.¹¹

To rethink the philosophical foundations of mainstream bioethics and to build some foundations for a new, civic bioethics are the aims of this article; the two-fold meaning and moral possibilities of the city—the marketplace of transaction and individualism and the civic space of moral transformation and citizenship—are its themes.

THE URBAN AND THE CIVIC

The phrase *urban bioethics* needs careful explication before we can assess its potential, its implications, and its directions for future research. First, what exactly should we mean by urban? What should we mean in saying that the city provides an appropriate space within which to locate the concerns of bioethics? And then again, what should we mean by bioethics? What are its core values and appropriate aims? Employed in the context of the contemporary city, is the discourse of bioethics to be primarily technical/rational, primarily interpretive, or primarily emancipatory?^{12,13} Does it aim to control, to understand, or to liberate?

In both Greek and Latin, the idea of the city is given two distinct meanings that are marked by different words. In classical Greek, the terms are *asty* and *polis*; in Latin, the parallel terms are *urbs* and *civitas*.^{14,15} An *urbs* (or *asty*) is an area of mass assembly, originally a site of religious gathering and ritual and later a center for commercial transactions and exchange. As it lost its association with the religious or ritual center of the society, the *urbs* became the center of commerce and economic exchange; the *urbs* is where everything and everybody has its price, is for sale, is a commodity. An *urbs* is a market, and the forms of life there consist primarily in market relationships (what Thomas Hobbes called “market friendships”) since it is a place for the pursuit of material self-interest and the gratification of desire. In the early modern period, the *urbs* also became a new and virtually unprec-

edented space of individuation, privacy, and anonymity; the city as *urbs* is the dwelling place of strangers—cooperative strangers, to be sure, but strangers nonetheless. It is also the theater for the invention and reinvention of the self so that personality is negotiated through instrumental relationships or transactions with others who are engaged in equally calculating strategies of selfhood. This is the Paris of Rousseau, Baudelaire, and Walter Benjamin, the London of Blake and Dickens, the New York of Whitman and Tom Wolfe.¹⁶

In contrast, the notion of *civitas* (or *polis* and *politeia* in Greek) grows out of the political theory of the ancient Greek city-state and the classical Roman republic. It connotes a political and moral community created for the purpose of pursuing the good life and realizing the highest form of human goodness or excellence. The notion is developed most clearly by Aristotle in his *Politics*, in which he points out that if two aggregations of families were to be surrounded by a single wall, that would not transform them into a *polis* or city. This is because a city is created only from the sharing of a common moral space, the sharing of a common commitment to one another and a common political identity, and not merely from the sharing of a common physical space. In particular, Aristotle contrasts the form of cooperation based on instrumental relationships of economic transaction with the form of civic or political cooperation based on constitutive relationships of moral growth and transformation. The former is an urban space, but cannot be a civic space, a city in the sense of *civitas*.¹⁷

The *civitas* or *polis* is a structure of citizenship ordered by reciprocity, equity, and just and proportionate laws. It aims not at the fulfillment of “interests,” but at the cultivation of human flourishing and virtue. It is not content to extend negative liberty and negative rights (privacy, anonymity, and the right to be left alone) to its citizens, but aspires to positive liberty and rights (reciprocity, mutual assistance, and self-improvement) as well.^{14,17} A citizen of a *civitas* is not the protean individual resident of an *urbs*. Self-identity is not an artifact to be fashioned as a personality, but is rather a form of character uniquely appropriated by the person from a repertoire of pre-existing traits and possibilities inherent in the culture and traditions of the community.¹⁶ This is not to say, of course, that cities understood as civic communities are not composed of individuals (as well as smaller groups); they are. But, it is to say that such cities are not composed of walking manifestations of the modern ideology of possessive individualism.

BIOETHICS AND THE TWO FACES OF THE CITY

When we speak of urban bioethics, we must understand the city to be a *civitas* rather than an *urbs*. And when we pursue the research program of urban bioethics, we should reach toward a kind of civic bioethics rooted in democratic and communitarian values rather than bioethics rooted in individualistic values. An individualistic bioethics will be at home in a city understood as a densely populated marketplace. A civic bioethics will be at home in a city understood as a civic community of shared authority and common purpose.

No less than the concept of the city, the discourse of bioethics can be taken in different directions and given more than one moral and political valence, as the above remarks suggest. No version of bioethics can do without a social ontology and a politics, that is, a conception of the nature of the human good and society and a conception of how freedom, justice, community, equality, and other public values should fit together. While there are exceptions, for the most part the ontol-

ogy and politics that inform mainstream bioethics comes from the tradition of Western philosophical liberalism and moral individualism in its contractarian, neo-Kantian, utilitarian, and libertarian guises. This is important, both for bioethics and for liberalism, because many of the quandaries and controversies posed by biomedical science, technology, and health care are social and moral anomalies that challenge the liberal paradigm. For instance, the liberal tradition has long struggled to adjudicate the tension between the values of individual liberty and social equality, but current advances in human genetics and neuroscience may transform the meaning of these categories in ways that will call into question the liberal modes of employing and analyzing them.

How can we get a purchase on such questions? In what follows, I approach the problem via a method of comparison and contrast between two conceptual frameworks in bioethics. These are heuristic or ideal types that I call *liberal bioethics* and *civic bioethics*, a contrast that is parallel in many ways to that between the city as *urbs* and the city as *civitas*.

In this analysis, I hope to identify at least some of the core philosophical and theoretical questions that the next generation of work in bioethics must address. Perhaps doing so can help to move our discourse in bioethics toward a more robust civic voice and sensibility, if not to supplant, then at least to supplement, the dominant discourse of liberal bioethics. Doing this, in turn, may play some small role in rediscovering the civic imagination of the city itself and thereby affect the sensibilities and forms of communal life in actual cities. As the urban and economic life—the *urbs*—of the global city slouches toward polarized extremes of excessive wealth and poverty, its civic and political life—its *civitas*—may find renewal and sufficient power to counteract the transformation of the urban marketplace. This will not be the work of a day or the work of bioethics alone. But, since public health, medicine, and biomedical science lie at the core of the political economy of the postmodern global city, value-based discourse about them (namely, bioethics) will not be wholly irrelevant to these questions either.

In what follows, I use the concept of *liberalism* in a very broad and general way. It is informed by a reading of the history of European and American political thinking since the 17th century that I consider defensible and sound, but is nonetheless controversial in scholarly circles. I skirt over differences, which for other purposes would be crucial, such as the difference between deontological and consequentialist theories or the difference between utilitarianism and contractarianism. What I call liberalism is spread fairly broadly across the ideological spectrum from left to right and includes advocates of the free market and those of the welfare state. For the purposes of this discussion, I focus instead on characteristics of the liberal tradition, including its abstract conception of the individual, its universalism and ahistoricism, and its exogenous moral stance, which seem to me more fundamental to the future way we do our work in bioethics.

It will be said that my account of liberalism, however accurate it may be in relation to the classical liberalism of earlier periods, is unfair and outmoded because it ignores the important work of contemporary neo-Kantians and neoliberals such as Rawls, who have already recognized many of the flaws in classical liberalism and have taken steps to correct them. I agree that liberalism is a living tradition of discourse that continues to change and adapt in the hands of creative theorists and in response to changing social problems and demands. But, I also believe that the real world of liberalism in our political culture and in the discourse of public policy, the professions, and the law remains closer to the paradigmatic concepts of classical

liberalism than it does to the avant-garde work of contemporary academic liberal theorists. It is this grounded liberalism, so to speak, that has permeated the work of bioethics.

Now, one might characterize the discussion that follows as an attempt to bring the most nuanced and sophisticated versions of contemporary liberalism (or neoliberalism) to bear on applied work in bioethics. Fair enough. But then, the issue becomes one of labels and terminology. How many fundamental changes can you make in the intellectual orientation of a tradition and still be working within it? I prefer to define liberalism in a specific way, acknowledge its strengths, criticize its weaknesses, and contrast it with an alternative construction, which is also a heuristic based on intellectual history. Still, the value (if any) of the conclusions reached do not depend entirely on the wisdom of that particular rhetorical and terminological strategy.

LIBERAL AND CIVIC BIOETHICS

The task of liberal bioethics is the application of general moral principles to specific dilemmas and decisions arising in professional practice. Central to this conception of bioethics are three ideas that merit careful scrutiny.

First, the primary unit of analysis for bioethics is the activity of the individual professional practitioner rather than the collective practices of many practitioners or the traditions, norms, and institutions of the profession as a whole. Bioethics is concerned with individual moral agency, not communal moral practice.

Second, the focus of bioethics is not on moral activity or praxis in a broad sense—*activity* as the shape of a life, a pattern of conduct that reveals character, a vocation, a praxis of virtue and excellence. Instead, the focus is on activity understood as decision making and choice. The moral agent envisioned by liberal bioethics is a weigher of options, a balancer of conflicting values and interests.

Finally, in applying principles to choice situations, the gaze of bioethics passes judgment on decision making (individual choices, professional decisions, or public policies) from outside the community within which the decisions are made and from outside the practices of decision making themselves. This stance and gaze might well be called “cosmopolitan” without forcing the terminology too much. The principles applied by liberal bioethicists are both universal moral principles and principles of universal morality; as such, their justification can come only from some exogenous or Archimedean standpoint of enlightened reason. Thus, the liberal bioethicist provides the moral view from nowhere or at least the moral view from afar. If this is ethical cosmopolitanism, the bioethics that has taken over from its liberal and Enlightenment ancestry, what would an ethical “politanism” look like?¹⁸ It will be one task of civic bioethics to explore how sources of moral evaluation, judgment, and critique can be generated from within the life of the city itself, without having to be imported from the outside.

Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of liberalism in bioethics is the central role played by the notion of autonomy. Autonomy, of course, is a very complex notion, and the understanding of autonomy (or self-determination) influential in bioethics is only one among many.¹⁹ However that may be, liberal bioethics has come to employ the notion of autonomy to mean uncoerced choice in accordance with the individual’s subjective perception of his or her particularistic interests. Those interests are valuable, at least in part, because they are personal; their realization validates the person’s self-identity.

In addition, autonomy involves a conception of self that stresses the uniqueness of each person and values precisely the individuality of each person—that which symbolizes difference and separation rather than sameness and commonality. Relational ties with others are permissible morally to an autonomy ethic when they are instrumental to the achievement of individual ends and when they are entered into voluntarily. But even when social bonds are thus justified, there remains a wariness in the autonomy perspective about claims asserting the intrinsic value of belonging, communal membership, or public life because connection with others is seen primarily as a source of threats, limits, or the effacement for the self rather than as an enabling or empowering medium of self-realization.²⁰

Autonomy is the touchstone of liberal bioethics in that the primary question asked about all exercises of professional power and all contemplated developments or uses of biomedical technology involve the impact on the private possibilities of the self in a mode of difference or separation (which does not mean isolation) from others. The impact of such power and technology on the public possibilities of the self, the self in a mode of connection with others, is much less often a question at the forefront of our attention.^{13,16}

Yet, even as the city as *urbs* has been a symbol of anonymity and submergence of the self in a world of fleeting contacts with strangers, the city as *civitas* also is a symbol of the interdependency of individuals and groups. The city is a social landscape of thickly interwoven groups with various kinds of kinship, ethnic, occupational, class, and ideological ties. Moreover, the demands of life in the city are such that reciprocity and cooperation are essential to survival, let alone to a healthy and satisfying quality of life. For the face of the city that is *civitas*, the metaphor of a moral ecology is neither inappropriate nor wholly a metaphor. Thus, although liberal bioethics has tended to downplay the problems with individualism, the urban experience itself will bring those problems to the fore.

THE CITY AND DEMOCRACY

Perhaps we are now in a position to sharpen the contrast between liberal and civic bioethics to which I have been alluding. Liberal bioethics sees personhood primarily in terms of those interests and capacities that set one off and make one unique. It seeks self-affirmation through, but not in, social relations, which are at best instrumentally useful for the satisfaction of subjectively defined interests and at worst confining. In contrast, democratically informed civic bioethics sees personhood in terms of those dimensions of human selfhood and experience, such as physical frailty or need and membership in a community of shared life and purpose, that highlight connection and commonality rather than difference. It would seek self-realization in, as well as through, relations of shared purpose with others.

Why should civic bioethics be informed democratically? Or, put differently, what might be contained in the study of urban bioethics that would make democratic values and conceptions so necessary and so useful?

The answer to these questions is partly historical and partly normative and utopian. Historically, the ancient city was the birthplace of democracy, and when the city gave way to empire, anything remotely resembling democracy as a form of government or as a set of values disappeared for more than a millennium. When modern forms of democracy and republicanism were reborn in the 16th century and after—in Florence, in Geneva, in the Puritan New Model Army of the 1640s, in the New England town meeting, in the Paris commune, in the home rule move-

ment of the Progressive era in the United States, in workplace democracy in Yugoslavia in the 1960s, and in many other fleeting venues—they were primarily urban-based movements. In the United States at any rate, some of the best opportunities for rebuilding participatory democracy, both in some governmental units and in the voluntary institutions of civil society, are to be found among urban populations and in urban areas working to sustain or to regain their local problem-solving capabilities and their infrastructure of social networks and supports.¹¹

The normative or utopian answer lies in the hope that a vibrant culture and effective institutionalization of democracy within the major cities of the world offer an antidote to the alarming trends of sprawl, the privatization of police and other civic functions, and the absolute polarization between fabulously wealthy global elites and the marginalized immigrant workforce that serves the infrastructure of service on which they rely.^{7,9} Such trends are already far advanced in cities of the global south, such as São Paulo, Brazil; Mexico City; Lagos, Nigeria; and Johannesburg, South Africa.¹¹

What do I mean by “democracy” in this context? For one thing, I do not mean to limit the term to governmental structure or process. Nor do I use the term to mean only the periodic selection among competing elites for elective office. In general, I have in mind a form of political identity and activity that not only may involve the organs of official government, but also extends into the nongovernmental sphere of voluntary, charitable, religious, and grassroots organizations that are still more vibrant and numerous in the United States than they are in many other countries.^{6,21,22} There is a cluster of substantive and procedural values that have been associated traditionally with the values and practice of democracy thus broadly conceived—positive liberty, community, participation, civic virtue, majoritarianism, popular sovereignty, and decentralized authority, to name a few. But, there are two values above all that I would single out as most essential to any robust and morally defensible democratic perspective and as most theoretically fecund for future work in bioethics. These are equality of civic respect and a dynamic, transformational conception of human moral agency and self-realization. A few words about these values here may help pull together some strands of my argument so far.

Equality of civic respect and transformational moral agency are notions that protect democracy from spinning off into two opposite and ultimately despotic and anti-democratic directions—anarchism on one side and collectivism on the other. And, they are symbiotic notions in the sense that each taken in isolation is prone to problems that both taken together can handle. The notion of civic equality gives limits and a sense of public purpose to the otherwise unbridled energy contained in the transformational agency of the democratic self who does not seek security and containment behind fences, but who projects itself outward onto the world, seeking to mold that world and finding itself molded by it in turn. At the same time, the idea (and ideal) of transformational agency keeps the acting subject—the moral imagination and will of the individual—at the center of bioethics. This counteracts the tendency of the notion of equality to submerge the person into the project, a tendency that historically has led away from democratic pluralism toward collectivism or radical majoritarianism, which is democratic procedural form without democratic moral substance.²³

Equality of civic respect is not simply a distributive notion, although it clearly has important implications for a theory of distributive justice. This is not what sets it apart most from liberalism. What does so is the idea that it is the civic, connec-

tion-making side of ourselves and our existence (and not the private, difference-affirming side) that is worthy of respect. The idea is that we, as a matter of right, should have access to a space in which we are placed on an equal footing with our fellow sufferers, our fellow creatures of need and aspiration, our fellow inhabitants of the body human and the body politic.

Transformational agency is pertinent to bioethics in several different ways. Consider the doctor-patient relationship. Here, liberal bioethics characteristically has focused on the tension between autonomy and paternalism and has sought through the categories of autonomy, patients' rights, disclosure, and informed consent to protect the freedom of the vulnerable individual from the exercise of superior professional power and expertise. The democratic notion of transformational agency, I think, would cast the doctor-patient relationship in an altogether different light. In this dyad, civic bioethics would see the moral ideal not of protecting one pole of rights and interests, but of creating a mutual enterprise in which both parties are shaping it reciprocally and being shaped by it in turn. In other words, bioethics would see the professional-patient relationship as a political or civic relationship in precisely this sense.

This gestalt switch would lead to a much more radical critique of professional power than the liberal client's rights perspective offers. It would help bioethics recover (or actually to appropriate for the first time) the fundamental idea of the use of power and authority as a vocation, a commitment that takes deep roots in one's sense of self-identity and a practice that engages the self to the point at which it is at least partially constituted and transformed. Transformational agency in a shared space of common endeavor is the praxis of democratic citizenship, and whenever or wherever this praxis takes place, the civic possibility of the city—the city as *civitas*—comes into existence. The transactional or market face of the city—the city as *urbs*—hobbles the practice of transformative moral agency and, left unattended, stifles it.

Return for a moment to the challenges facing the new public health in an urban setting, such as dealing with chronic illness and behavior modification or with changing unresponsive behaviors that put the individual at increased risk for a variety of health and social problems. In these settings, like it or not, the health care professional will need to have a moral vocabulary rich enough to deal with two pairs of profound questions. The first pair is, What is the human good for you? and, What shape should your life take? The second pair is, What is the common good for us? and, What shape should our lives take together? Medical or epidemiological knowledge alone will not suffice to answer these questions or to counsel such patients. Also, appeal to rational self-interest alone will provide insufficient motivation for lasting behavioral change. Deeper roots of self-esteem and self-identity will have to be tapped by the urban-based public health and medicine of the future.³ Thus far, the field of public health has thought that the key to achieving its goals lies primarily in offering a plausible answer to the first pair of questions because, whatever else the human good may consist of, health is surely one of its primary building blocks. It may turn out, however, that finding a compelling answer to the second pair of questions is equally important for the kinds of social and behavioral change that sustaining public health in an aging society requires.

A second implication that the democratic value of transformational agency has for bioethics comes through the importance democratic theory gives to the structured institutional setting within which transformational agency by individuals

takes place. The argument goes something like this. Transformational agency is a component of a life of human flourishing and a medium for the pursuit and realization of the good for individuals. But, this kind of agency cannot be exercised without a just or well-ordered public space of institutional norms and cultural traditions, that is, without a city in the sense of *civitas*.

Therefore, there is a strong connection between the individual good and the common good—the stability and continuity of public institutions and cultural traditions. Civic bioethics need not adopt an orientation that is adopted sometimes by communitarians, namely, that of setting individual interests and social goods in conflict and opposition to one another. No doubt, some trade-offs will have to be made, but there is no good philosophical reason to set the individual apart from and at odds with “society” in this way. Only by taking an atomistic individualistic perspective for granted as our conceptual starting point does such opposition appear even plausible, let alone inevitable.²¹

The problem is that bioethics can draw from liberalism only an aggregative notion of the public, so that the public interest means little more than the summation of individual interests. With only this notion of the public interest at hand, when faced with the advent of a new development in biotechnology, liberal bioethical analysis can ask only whether the benefits to individuals outweigh the costs and whether the benefits and burdens will be spread fairly and equitably across the population.

A serious problem with this analysis is that there are some kinds of moral costs (and benefits) that are invisible conceptually to it. They have to do with notions of public life and communal relationships that are not defined by the aggregation of particularistic interests, but rather by the nurturing and transformation of democratic or communal interests—interests that flow directly from institutions, customs, and practices that foster inclusiveness, solidarity, and mutual respect, as well as opportunities for the exercise of transformational agency. The introduction of new technologies or the exercise of certain kinds of elite, professional authority might disrupt or undermine the norms that sustain these democratic values and practices. New forms of social discrimination based on stigmatizing information revealed by new technologies of genetic screening are an example. The eroding of traditions and institutions that sustain democratic values is a significant social “cost” that must somehow figure in the bioethical analysis of public policy. But, it will take a civic type of bioethics, one attuned to the intertwining of individual lives with the effects and control of institutional power, to offer such an analysis.

To push the contrasting moral visions offered by liberal bioethics and civic bioethics one step further, it is necessary to say something more about their underlying political theories, liberalism and civic theory. The theme of the city as alternative moral spaces gives us three topics around which this discussion can be organized: (1) the nature of citizenship and the purpose of political association, (2) ethical universals or cosmopolitanism versus moral localism or politanism, and (3) rediscovering the rationale or founding purpose of the city.

Citizenship and the Ends of Civic Life

Historically and etymologically, the word and idea of citizen (*cive* or *polites*) are connected to the idea of the city (*civitas* or *polis*). Civic association, not solitude, is the proper domain of the human being; it is mediation between a (higher) realm of the self-sufficient being that needs no order and association and a realm that lacks the resources for intentional, self-conscious association. Citizenship is mem-

bership in this civic or political realm that has particular properties and demands. The city is not simply a large aggregation of people together in one place (*urbs*), just as the polis, according to Aristotle, is something more than a group of households surrounded by a single wall.^{14,17} The city is a moral and intentional realm that has been understood in different ways by various traditions of political theory. Different conceptions of citizenship follow from these different conceptions of the city.

For liberalism, the city is a place of mutual cooperation and mutual protection. In this tradition, citizenship is understood as a structure of individual rights and duties, a legal and moral status the individual assumes for purposes of self-interest. Citizenship, theoretically conceived as the social contract, involves an exchange: The individual agrees to give up unlimited moral freedom and to assume duties toward others in return for the reciprocal self-limitation and pledge of assistance by others. An inefficient and relatively weak way of pursuing self-interest (self-reliance) is given up in favor of a much more powerful collective and mutual pursuit of the self-interests of each citizen.^{13,24}

In contrast, in the republican and civic humanist traditions that form one source of civic theory, citizenship is more akin to a vocation or a destiny.²⁵ It represents less a means to the protection of human and moral status than a constitutive element of that status. To move into the political realm and to assume the role of citizen is to cross an ontological threshold; it is to make the step to full humanness. On this view, to be excluded from this realm—as the ancient world excluded women, slaves, and resident aliens—was arguably a more serious affront than exclusion from rights and privileges are in the modern world. To be a citizen, then, is to be a participant in the defining praxis of our humanness, namely, collective deliberation and collective action to solve problems faced in common by the community as a whole. The city is the space of this deliberation and action, and the focal points of the city's concern are matters of common well-being (*civitas*), not the aggregation of individual interests (*urbs*).

Closely related to the different perspectives on citizenship characteristic of liberalism and civic theory is a contrasting understanding of the purpose or end of political association itself. The civic tradition tends to view political existence from a teleological perspective, as when Aristotle maintained that to be political beings was the natural end of our humanness.¹⁷ The social contract theories of the 17th and 18th centuries, from which much of liberalism springs, rejected teleological thinking and stressed a much more mundane and materialistic foundation for political association: enhanced survival; predictable and rule-governed life; a rising material standard of living; and the fruits of science, technology, and learning.

The difference is a subtle one because not all thinkers in the liberal tradition have been crudely hedonistic or reductionistic in their account of human interests. Still, however subtle, the shift is crucially significant. Gradually, liberalism moved away from the notion of human moral self-realization as the defining purpose of the city and moved toward a more materialistic vision of protection and promotion of interests that were defined in private or prepolitical terms. At the same time, the individualistic orientation of liberalism came to the fore, making collective life and political institutions take on an instrumental value only. Liberalism could see when the individual good was separate from the common good and was prepared to accommodate and protect the individual good should conflict arise. Civic bioethics (indeed, all forms of civic republican or participatory democratic theory) makes a fateful gamble if it defines the individual good in terms of the common good or asserts that the individual good cannot be understood apart from the common good. The promise is that the common good will be rescued from neglect or from

an unduly narrow definition, and that the individual citizen and the city will be reconciled. The danger is that the city will dominate the citizen.

One of the sturdiest protections against domination in the city is the status and rights of citizenship. In the ancient empires, there were no citizens; all but the ruler were slaves. In the ancient Greek polis and Roman republic, there were several types of status, of which citizen was but one. In the democracies of the present day, citizenship is open to all. In this, all democratic traditions and variants of democratic theory agree, but here, the similarity between liberal and civic understandings ends.

For liberalism, citizenship is mainly a status of legal protection; only to a limited extent is it an active role. Active citizenship is limited to periodic voting, and inclusion in political life for most citizens takes the form of selecting among competing elites for governmental roles. Private citizens then form interest groups to compete for the attention of elites in the governmental process between elections. Liberal politics becomes a market system with votes as the currency, and liberal governance becomes a kind of political consumption in which the preferences of various customers are satisfied through the legislative and policy process.²⁶ Matters of moral principle in civic life are directed mainly to a court system comprised of politically insulated elites who retain their democratic legitimacy by following strict traditions of professional legal analysis and judicial propriety.

For civic democracy, this form of electoral, competitive elitism is insufficient. There are two basic ways to attack it. First, it may be attacked on liberal grounds by arguing that the system of interest group liberalism is not capable of effective governance given the nature of problems faced by the United States today. It is too cumbersome. It is blind to certain types of problems that do not lend themselves to measurement in economic terms. And, its relationship to the institutions of corporate capitalism is such that it cannot undertake redistributive policies necessary for social justice or abandon environmentally hazardous policies in pursuit of economic growth.^{10,13}

Second, and more fundamentally, liberalism can be attacked from the perspective of civic theory on the grounds that its limited form of democratic citizenship is unstable and unsustainable. Democratic citizenship must be more extensive and more active than liberalism allows; otherwise, the legitimacy of the ruling political institutions and elites will begin to erode, and the legitimacy has shown marked signs of such erosion in the last 20 years.^{9,13} One solution for this is more active governmental involvement at the local and grassroots level, but another solution is to extend the meaning of democratic citizenship beyond the official boundaries of government as such into the voluntary associations and community activities of civil society, a realm included in the classic meaning of the city or the political association, but midway between the state or government and the domain of individual domestic privacy. In this way, “democracy” for civic theory is both broader and more localized than it is for liberalism. It is broader because it includes the institutional range of civil society and is not reduced simply to an electoral voting procedure and a principle of majority rule. It is also broader because democracy connotes not only a form of governance, but also a cultural temperament and a moral sensibility. Democracy is a frame of mind as well as a form of rule.

Universalism and Localism

The liberal and the civic traditions tend to place political life in different landscapes or natural surroundings. Liberalism, concerned as it is with distributive justice and material self-interest, places political life in a setting of abstract “natural resources,”

raw materials lying about waiting to be put to human use, and equally abstract “social resources,” willing people and institutional arrangements that are valuable instrumentally for the individual to achieve his or her goals. A classic expression of this view is John Locke’s labor theory of value, according to which objects of human value, property, are created by the mixing of human labor with raw materials to fashion something that will serve human needs.²⁷ The quality, both physical and social, of the raw materials that one person or group is fortunate enough to have at its disposal is important for liberalism, but nature as such and community as such are demystified. They have no spiritual significance or intrinsic value.

In the civic tradition, moral self-development, rather than the pursuit of wealth or the meeting of material needs, is the paramount purpose of the city, and hence the importance of natural surroundings have more to do with affective ties between the citizen and the community than with economic production and distribution.^{21,28} Republican theorists have understood the link between love of country (patriotism) and attachment to physical landscape and sense of place. Traditional republican theory—from Cato and Cicero through Machiavelli to Harrington and Rousseau—has often tried to grasp the meaning of political life through an emphasis on martial and military metaphors; with that rhetoric has come a strong sense of place and territoriality.²⁵ (Compare Rupert Brooke’s poem “The Soldier”: “If I should die, think only this of me:/ That there’s some corner of a foreign field/ that is for ever England.” *The Soldier*.)

Theorizing in this vein has produced some profoundly racist and ethnocentric orientations, and perhaps there is something inherent in localism that orients it toward exclusion. To produce a strong sense of cohesiveness within the city, is it necessary to so localize and particularize the civic experience that dangerous insider/outsider, us/them discriminations are inevitable? Does the political psychology of the civic tradition extract too high a moral price? Can only a more abstract form of universalism avoid that danger? Can civic bioethics posit the connection between the quality of civic life and the localism of a sense of place (politanism) without losing touch with the ethical cosmopolitanism that has been one strength of the liberal tradition?^{29,30}

Refounding the City

What is the basic human problem for which the invention of political space, the city, holds the solution? For liberalism, it is overcoming obstacles to cooperation; for civic theory, it is overcoming obstacles to community. For liberalism, it is how to live effectively with human conflict and difference; for civic theory, it is how to achieve unity and commonality. For liberalism, it is how to build upon separation and individuation; for civic theory, it is how to build upon that which is the same and can be shared. For liberalism, it is how we make the most of the human condition of alienation; for civic theory, it is how we find in political existence an escape from that alienation and a return to some source of unified being.

Ironically, when it comes to the foundational motive that creates the city, liberalism and civic theory reverse their orientations toward particularity and universality. For liberalism, what is humanly universal is actually difference that leads to conflict and the imperative of finding some *modus vivendi* that will produce the peace and cooperation. For civic theory, surface differences are actually less important than underlying commonalities, at root a universal underlying humanity. Liberals give justice or the right moral priority over the good, and in so doing, they carve a private space at the heart of the city—within the conditions of justice (i.e., equal respect, freedom, and opportunity for all)—where the diverse variety of private

goods can be pursued independently and peacefully. When civic theorists speak of some substantive conception of the human good as the end of politics, they mean that justice is necessary, but not sufficient, for an adequate political morality, and that there is a harmony, a kind of right relationship, among persons that should be attained. If it is attained privately, by individuals in the urbs who achieve an identity of self-interests, that is fine, but it is not to be expected in the normal course of events, and although welcome, it is not enough. A political harmony of interest, a common good, must be attained purposefully and intentionally embedded in the very life and fabric of the city.

THE LIBERAL CRITIQUE AND THE CITY'S URBAN FACE

The civic perspectives and democratic values discussed above are not uncontroversial, to be sure. In closing, I want to acknowledge some lines of criticism as strongly and seriously as I can. These critiques grow out of the urban face of the modern city; they grow out of cosmopolitan morality; they grow out of a liberal tradition that has every good reason, especially in the 20th century, to be suspicious of communal visions of moral transformation and the use of governmental power to promote positive rights and the good.

This liberal tradition certainly was the predominant mode of political thought in the West in the late 20th century. It represents, at the philosophical level, the institutional form of liberal democratic capitalism that has prevailed since the defeat of fascism in the 1940s and the collapse of communism in the 1980s, but has roots that extend into the 17th century. From a liberal perspective, achieving greater social justice and individual liberty at the same time requires economic growth and expansion for policies of economic redistribution of wealth are prone inherently to conflict and are counterproductive.^{9,13,31}

Moreover, according to the liberal view, the individual alone is the only one who can or should define what is in his or her own good, and such views should not be imposed on others, particularly not with the aid of the coercive power of the government. In a pluralistic society, liberals expect that no widespread agreement on questions of the moral good will be possible, and peaceful cooperation and coexistence can be based only on agreement about basic questions of justice, consensus as to fair procedures, and a focus on material interests that promote a generally beneficial kind of economic prosperity and growth. A rising tide lifts all boats.

Contemporary liberalism holds, finally, that rational balancing of the value conflicts and the governance of complex policy questions (including health and social welfare questions) is better left to civilly minded elites and technically proficient experts than to ordinary citizens at the grassroots level. The last thing the managers of the delicate postindustrial global economy need is more participatory democracy at the local level. This is in keeping with the peculiar conception of democracy that liberalism has embraced historically, a conception of democracy as the popularly sanctioned rule of competing, periodically accountable, elites. This is representative democracy or democracy by delegation, as opposed to participatory democracy through deliberation.

CONCLUSION

Civic bioethics, and the attempt to think through urban health and social problems in terms of the city as a space of civitas, enters the American intellectual scene at a

most problematic and, one is tempted to say, inauspicious moment. Urban bioethics as I urge us to construe it, is about the justice of economic redistribution; it is about political deliberation concerning the ends of life and the nature of human flourishing, including health and well-being; it is about active, participatory citizenship that is a practice of civic responsibility as much as it is a stronghold of protective rights. In short, it is about precisely those questions that American liberalism in the post-cold war era of free market triumphalism does not want to see on the public agenda. Civic bioethics is on a collision course with liberalism in this sense, but then, in a way so is medicine and so are public health and environmentalism.

Nonetheless, the attempt to revitalize older traditions of thought, coupled with the impulse for innovative and creative theorizing, is precisely the intellectual response that one would expect, and hope for, at the present time. Urban or civic bioethics responds, in part, to the conceptual disarray of the progressive left and to the moral vacuum that disarray creates. It also responds to the manifest failure of our cities and our society as a whole to sustain genuine equality, social justice, or democratic life.

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