

The State and the Shaping of Identity

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I. INDIVIDUALITY AND IDENTITY

In contemporary philosophical discussion in the English-speaking world, there is a broad consensus on the outlines and the history of a liberal political tradition. It is conventional, for example (as, of course, you all know) to suppose that this liberal tradition owes much to John Locke's conception of religious toleration *and* his theory of property; that the language of human equality and human rights, which was developed in the French and American revolutions, is central to the heritage; that liberals care about individuality, in ways well articulated by John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty*; that it is natural for a liberal to speak of human dignity and to suppose that it is (*ceteris*, no doubt, as usual, *paribus*) equally a possession of each human being. We may have learned to think of these core elements of the liberal tradition as contested: so that, to put it crudely, liberals are not people who *agree* about the meaning of dignity, liberty, equality, individuality, toleration, and the rest; rather they are people who *argue* about their significance for political life. We may have learned, that is, that the liberal tradition—like all traditions—is not so much a body of doctrine as a set of debates. Still, it is widely agreed that there *is* a tradition that has debates about these topics at its core.

It is an important question whether we can, in fact, identify traditions of thought that include these elements; and this is, of course, a question that would require serious historical inquiry. My own suspicion is that if you began such an inquiry, the intellectual antecedents of the politics of Mill or L. T. Hobhouse or Isaiah Berlin or John Rawls would turn out to be more multifarious than singular, and that what we now call the liberal tradition would look less like a body of ideas that

One attractive feature of the issues I shall be discussing in these lectures is that almost everyone one meets is interested in them, and almost everything one reads provides material for thinking about them. So I am sure I cannot recall all my intellectual debts here—and, since I do not think of intellectual life as a matter of the creation of property, I am happy that other people's ideas have become integrated with my own. The most substantial debts of which I am aware are to the thought of Charles Taylor and Ronnie Dworkin and to the students in the many classes I have taught on race and identity at Harvard over the last decade. I am also very grateful to those at Cambridge University who invited me to give these Tanner Lectures, even if they have faced me with the terrifying prospect of lecturing at my alma mater for the first time since I ceased to be a student here.

developed through time and more like a collection of sources and interpretations of sources that we now find useful, looking backward, in articulating one influential philosophical view of politics. Yet another instance, so to speak, of the Owl of Minerva's taking wing as the light fades. One reason—a shallow one, perhaps, but it has impressed me—one reason for thinking that liberalism is a creation of hindsight is that the word “liberalism,” as the name for a political faith, occurs, so I am told, nowhere in the writings of Locke or the American Founders, in whose absence our current story of liberalism's history would be sorely depleted.

But I am not—as may become, I fear, increasingly evident—a historian. And my interest in these lectures is not a historical one. Rather, I shall be preoccupied with a set of problems that arise for those of us who find ourselves broadly convinced that certain values, now associated by anglophobe philosophers with the word “liberal,” are important to ethical life in general, and to political life more particularly. But in order to explain how these problems arise, it will help, first, to offer an account of liberalism's core. And now you will understand why I began with a preemptive expression of skepticism about the idea of *a* liberal tradition. I grant, of course, the interest of the question how well the position I am going to characterize recognizably reflects a broad consensus of *soi-disant* liberal thinking; but I think the problems I want to discuss are of interest and importance, whether or not “liberalism” is the right name for the project within which they arise. Indeed I hope to be able to persuade you that, though the problems I am talking about arose for me in thinking about certain questions for the liberal political tradition, they are important even if, *mirabile dictu*, you do not find yourself disposed to think of yourself as a liberal at all.

Here, then, is a sketch of the position within which the problems I want to talk about arise.

Each of us has one life to live. While there are many moral constraints on how we live our lives—constraints that derive from our obligations to other persons prominent among them—these constraints do not determine which particular life we must live. We must not live lives of cruelty and dishonesty, for example, but there are many lives we can live without these vices. There are also constraints on how we may live that derive from our historical circumstances and our physical and mental endowments: I was born into the wrong family to be a Yoruba

chief and with the wrong body for motherhood; I am too short to be a successful professional basketball player, too unmusical to be a concert pianist, and I do not have the mathematical aptitude required to make serious contributions to string theory. Nevertheless, adding these social and biological constraints to the moral ones still leaves me with many degrees of freedom in making a life. And so, once the constraints are acknowledged, each human life starts out with many possibilities. Some people have a wider and more interesting range of options than others. I once had a conversation with the late Nobel laureate Jacques Monod—one of the founding fathers of molecular biology—who told me he had had to choose, at a certain point in his life, between being (as I recall) a concert cellist, a philosopher, and a scientist.¹ So there were various lives the young Monsieur Monod could have led, each of them a life of interest and value, and he made his choices among them. But everybody has—or, at least, should have—a variety of decisions to make in shaping a life.

I assume that, so far, no one here, liberal or illiberal, will disagree. But that is in part because of a number of important changes in the climate of moral philosophy since the days when I studied it here, nearly thirty years ago.

First, we have developed a more capacious sense of the range of ethical concerns. It is a reflection of this more capacious understanding that we have a use now for a distinction between ethics and morals, of the sort that Ronald Dworkin identifies when he says: “Ethics, as I use the term, includes convictions about which kinds of lives are good or bad for a person to lead, and morality includes principles about how a person should treat other people.”² I shall myself draw on this distinction regularly, though I shall not consistently use Dworkin’s verbal convention to mark it.³ But the diffusion of the understanding that there is a philosophical debate to be had about what lives we should lead, a discussion that must go beyond the question how we should treat others and that defines a well-lived life as something more than a life in which our preferences are

¹ See “Conversation in the Fog at London Airport, with Jacques Monod, Anthony Appiah & Mark Fitzgeorge-Parker,” *Theoria to Theory* 9, no. 2 (1975).

² Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 485n1.

³ Bernard Williams, in particular, has argued that there are ethical norms, central to the ways in which we construct our lives, that do not belong to the universalizing institution of morality; see Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

well satisfied, has significantly extended the scope of philosophical reflection.

Second, we have come to recognize a wider range of the distinctively moral virtues than impartial benevolence. There are arguments for partiality all over the place now: to family, lovers, friends, fellow citizens and nationals, and, of course, to ourselves: so much for impartiality. But what we owe to others is not easily limited to wishing them well: so much for benevolence.

Third, there has been a fairly forceful flurry of attacks on the utilitarian assumption (an assumption shared, of course, whether explicitly or implicitly, with some other moral theories) that morality works in a single currency, that all values are commensurable. And fourth, many moral philosophers have come to believe—under the influence of Isaiah Berlin, among others—that there is an incompatibility between some virtues that makes it impossible to conduct a life in which all of them are given their full due. Wisdom and courage may be the virtues of generals: it is difficult to see how, in their profession, impartial benevolence can be given full rein. And there is, some now hold, no further, more fundamental currency of value that we may use to adjudicate among wisdom, courage, and benevolence; and so there is no way to determine whether a life that balances them as the general must is better or worse than a life that balances them after the manner of a bishop.⁴

These issues are important. But I put them aside for now, because the point I want to insist on is one that can be accepted for any and all of these reasons. It is this: unless you think that there is a single best life for each of us (given the historical contingencies that shape our options) you will have to hold that there are choices to be made about how each life is to be given its determinate shape. And for a person of a liberal disposition these choices belong, in the end, to the person whose life it is.

This means, I think, at least two things. First, the value of my life, the standard by which it is to be assessed as objectively more or less successful, depends, in good measure, on my life's aims as specified by me. Second, for a person of a liberal disposition, my life's shape is up to me, even if I make a life that is objectively less good than a life I could have

⁴ Every one of these three lines of thought, by the way, is consistent with holding that there are objective and determinate answers to a vast range of moral questions and that when there is no determinate answer it is an objective fact that this is so. These new views do not represent the growth of relativism.

made, provided that I have done my duty toward others. All of us could, no doubt, have made better lives than we have: but that, the liberal says, is no reason for others to attempt to force those better lives upon us. True, morality and affection demand a concern for the ethical achievements of others. So thoughtful friends, benevolent sages, anxious relatives will rightly offer us both assistance and advice as to how to proceed. But it will *be* advice, not coercion, that they justly offer. And because coercion will be wrong in these circumstances, it will be wrong when it is undertaken by governments interested in the perfection of their citizens as well. That is what it means to say that—once I have done my duties—the shaping of my life is up to me.

What my duties to others are is, as a result, one of the central questions for liberalism. Making a life as a social being requires making commitments to others. If these are voluntary, it may be proper to enforce them even against my (later) will. But how much does what I owe go beyond my voluntary undertakings? One of Mill's suggestions was, roughly, that what we owed to others, in addition to what we had committed ourselves to, was that we should not harm them; and that leads to interesting discussions about what counts as harm.⁵ But if we grant that the mere fact that I do something you do not want me to do does not *eo ipso* count as my harming you, then the view that I should be permitted (in particular, by the state) to make whatever life flows from my choices, provided that I give you what I owe you and do you no harm, seems still to leave me a wide range of freedom. Which, given the centrality of liberty to liberalism, is what you would expect.

In recent years, a new set of issues has arisen for liberalism from a recognition of the fact that the tools with which we make our lives include many socially provided resources: among them, most obviously, language, and other private and public institutions. But there are also what we now call *identities*: genders and sexual orientations, ethnicities and nationalities, professions and vocations. Identities are ethically central, in ways I shall be exploring throughout these lectures, because they are among the most important elements we use in making our lives. For we make our lives *as* men and *as* women, *as* gay and *as* straight people, *as* Englishmen and Englishwomen and *as* Americans, *as* black and *as* white. Mill wrote in *On Liberty* of expressing one's individuality through a "plan

⁵ These issues are extensively discussed in Joel Feinberg's *Harm to Others* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

of life,” an idea that is central, too, to Rawls’s more recent formulation of liberalism.⁶ And, as we shall see, a plan of life is centrally shaped by our identities.⁷

Some people have argued that state acknowledgment of such identities is intrinsically illiberal: precisely because the shaping of my life is up to me, the government should treat me simply as a citizen and should seek to constrain my acts independently of my identities, requiring me only to do my duty to others and avoid harm. Otherwise the state will be in the business of advantaging and disadvantaging particular identities in ways that constrain the individual’s freedom to shape his or her own life.

Other, so-called multicultural liberals have argued, to the contrary, that the state *must* recognize these identities because without them individuals will lack some of the essential publicly sustained resources for making a life. A human life is made, in part, by the constitution of an individual identity: and these social identities are among the tools that all of us use in that self-constitution. To the extent that social identities allow people options for making their lives, they are positive resources in that process. And their recognition by the state is part of what makes them available for this purpose. (Because it is sometimes useful to be able to distinguish the individual identity one constructs from these collective identities, I shall sometimes call it one’s *individuality*.)

In this dispute, I initially found myself occupying an intermediate position: I thought—contra some anti-multicultural liberals—that the

⁶ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1986), p. 67; John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

⁷ Talk of “plans” here can be misleading, because it suggests a life sketched out in advance, a life not only without spontaneity but also insensitive to new knowledge or to changing circumstances. But, of course, what Mill meant by a plan of life doesn’t map out your biography in advance. It is not like the plans of those ambitious young women in sex-and-shopping novels, who want to have a husband with a fortune by the time they are thirty. A plan of life is more like a set of organizing aims within which you can fit your daily choices, and elements of it may change as time passes. What makes a life one life ethically is not that it is guided by a single plan. But among the elements that give continuity to a life are our persisting social identities, and the plan of life I have at any particular time will reflect those identities. (I am conscious here that I am responding to comments on a talk on individuality I gave at the New York Humanities Institute in December 1998, particularly from David Rieff. He rightly objected to two possible implications of talk of a life plan: that there was something to be said for a life mapped out fully in advance and that one should avoid changing one’s direction in life. But, like Mill and Rawls, I meant by a plan something that could have a fairly open texture: and having a plan, however determinate, doesn’t commit you to sticking to it no matter what.)

sorts of social identities I have mentioned are, indeed, resources for the making of lives, but also—contra some multicultural liberals—that this is an argument for toleration of identities not for their recognition. That is, I was inclined to a view about these social identities that is analogous to the position on religious toleration adopted by the American Founders: so far as is possible, no establishment of identities, on the one hand; but, on the other, free exercise (subject to the constraints of duty and harm) as well.⁸

I shall try to say more about what the analogues of non-establishment and free exercise here might be in a moment. But actually to apply such an ideal requires, first of all, some notion of what the relevant social identities are. Here it seems to me that the existence in a society (or sub-culture) of the sort of social identity that raises questions for ethics and politics consists in three core elements.

First, the availability of terms in public discourse that are used to pick out the bearers of the identity by way of criteria of ascription, so that some people are recognized as members of the group—women, men; blacks, whites; straights, gays. The availability of these terms in public discourse requires both that it be mutually known among most members of the society that the labels exist and that there be some degree of consensus on how to identify those to whom it should be applied. Let us call a typical label for a group “L.”⁹ This consensus is usually organized around a set of stereotypes of Ls, beliefs about what typical Ls are like, how they behave, how they may be detected.¹⁰ Some elements of a stereotype are typically normatively derived: they are views about how Ls will probably behave, rooted in their conformity to norms about how they should behave. We can say, in a convenient shorthand, that there

⁸ The American Founders in practice must have thought these principles attached not to individuals but to communities, since they knew that some of the states that came together to form the union did, in fact, have established religions. So I am really drawing on the current understanding of religious toleration, as embodied in interpretations of the first amendment, not on the original understandings of it.

⁹ Groups will generally have more than one label, so that part of what one learns in coming to understand an identity is a way of assigning members to the group and a label associated with it. Thus one has, so to speak, an individual concept associated with the group, which is one’s own set of criteria of ascription.

¹⁰ I do not use the term “stereotype” in a way that implies that any of the beliefs that constitute it are incorrect. See my “Stereotypes and the Shaping of Identity,” *California Law Review* 88, no. 1 (January 2000): 41–54.

must first be a *social conception* of Ls. Stereotypes are rough-and-ready things, and there may be different conceptions of Ls associated with different individuals or groups within the society. For a social conception to exist, it is enough that there be a rough overlap in the classes picked out by the term “L,” not that there be a singular determinate extension; nor is it necessary that the stereotypes or criteria of ascription be identical for all users of the term. So it does not matter that the boundary between women and men is not agreed upon (do female to male trans-gendered folk count as men all along, or only after surgery, or never?) or that even given a full specification of his affectional life and sexual habits it might well not be universally agreed whether or not William Shakespeare was what we now call “straight.” It follows from this that one cannot always speak of *the* content of a social conception: sketching a social conception requires an ethnography of ways of conceiving of Ls, one that recognizes especially that different stereotypes of Ls may tend to be held by people with different social positions. (African-Americans, for example, may well have characteristically different social conceptions of a black identity from others in the United States; and homosexuals may tend to conceive gay identity differently from heterosexuals.)¹¹

A second element of a social identity is the internalization of those labels as parts of the individual identities of at least some of those who bear the label. If the label in question is, once more, “L,” we can call this *identification as an L*. Identification as an L means thinking of yourself as an L in ways that make a difference: perhaps thinking of yourself as an L shapes your feelings (so that you respond with pride as an L, when an L triumphs); perhaps it shapes your actions, so that you sometimes do something as an L (offering a helping hand to another L, perhaps, who is otherwise a stranger; or restraining your public behavior by the thought that misbehavior will reflect badly on Ls). Often, then, being an L carries ethical and moral weight: Jews ought to help other Jews and should avoid behaving in ways that discredit the Jewish community. And often, too, there are behavioral norms associated with identities that it seems wrong to dignify with the epithets “ethical” or “moral”: men (of-

¹¹ Many people have the idea that the normative content of an identity should be determined essentially by its bearers. Even if that is true—which I doubt, since recognition by people of other identities is often a proper source of their meaning—this would still mean that some people would have the content of their identities determined in part by others, namely, those of the same identity.

ten we say *real* men) walk this way, hold their hands that way, don't cover their mouths when they laugh.

Identification often has a strong narrative dimension. By way of my identity I fit my life story into certain patterns—Confirmation at puberty for a religious identity, tenure in my mid-thirties for a professional one; and I also fit that story into larger stories—for example, of a people, a religious tradition, or a race. By way of an identification as an African-American, you can think of yourself as the first person of African descent to gain a Cambridge doctorate in English literature; by way of an identification as Jewish, you can be the first Jewish president. As I wrote in *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race*:

This is not just a point about modern Westerners: cross-culturally it matters to people that their lives have a certain narrative unity; they want to be able to tell a story of their lives that makes sense. The story—my story—should cohere in the way appropriate by the standards made available in my culture to a person of my identity. In telling that story, how I fit into the wider story of various collectivities is, for most of us, important. It is not just gender identities that give shape (through, for example, rites of passage into woman- or manhood) to one's life: ethnic and national identities too fit each individual story into a larger narrative. And some of the most "individualist" of individuals value such things. Hobbes spoke of the desire for glory as one of the dominating impulses of human beings, one that was bound to make trouble for social life. But glory can consist in fitting and being seen to fit into a collective history: and so, in the name of glory, one can end up doing the most social things of all.¹²

The final element of a social identity is the existence of patterns of behavior toward Ls, so that Ls are sometimes *treated as Ls*. To treat someone as an L is to do something to them in part, at least, because they are an L (where the "because they are an L" figures in the agent's internal specification of her reasons for the act). In the current landscape of identity, the treatment-as that is often in focus is invidious discrimination: like it or not, gender, sexuality, and racial and ethnic identity have been profoundly shaped by histories of sexism, homophobia, racism, and ethnic hatred. But it is as well to recall that not all treatment-as is negative

¹² K. Anthony Appiah and Amy Gutmann, *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 97.

or morally troublesome: most sexuality (even bisexuality) requires responding to people as women and as men, and this means that there are patterns of action toward men and toward women that are constitutive of the standard range of sexual orientations. The *New York Times* reported on its front page recently that Bernard A. Friedman, a federal judge in Detroit, had written with sweeping—and injudicious—generality that “[a]ll racial distinctions are inherently suspect and presumptively invalid.”¹³ This is not only a questionable reading of American law (and the words “suspect” and “invalid” here are legal terms of art), but it is also doubtful as a moral ideal. If—as I fear is pretty close to the truth—black people living in the United States are more likely to suffer race-based disadvantages while white people continue to receive systematically race-based advantages, then it is *not* making a distinction between black people and white people that is morally suspect. But that identity-based responses can be morally positive should be uncontroversial: many of the world’s acts of supererogatory benevolence involve treating people as fellow Ls—generosity, then, is often a form of treatment-as.

Where a classification of people by the members of a society as Ls is associated with a *social conception* of Ls, some people *identify as* Ls, and people are sometimes *treated as* Ls, we have a paradigm of a social identity that matters for ethical and political life. That it matters for ethical life—in Dworkin’s sense—flows from the fact that it figures in identification, in peoples’ shaping and evaluation of their own lives; that it matters for politics flows from the fact that it figures in treatment by others, and that how others treat one will help determine one’s success and failure in living one’s life.

With social identities thus understood, we can ask the question, once more, what it would mean to allow (the analogue of) free exercise of them while avoiding (the analogue of) establishment. On the establishment side, the idea would be to avoid government policies that amounted to making some identities the official identities of the state, just as disestablishmentarians oppose the maintenance or introduction of an official state religion. So presumably, anything that counted as making, for example, heterosexuality the official sexual orientation, masculinity the

¹³ *New York Times*, Wednesday, March 28, 2001, p. A1.

official gender, white the official race, or Englishness (conceived ethnically) the official national identity would count as an impermissible establishment in the same way that making Anglicanism the official religion impermissibly establishes a particular Christian denomination.

Now, in a country with an established church it may seem far from obvious what wrong is done intrinsically when one establishes either religious or other identities. Many people in England, including many self-identified conservatives (with a small *c* and with a large one), apparently think that it is not only proper but positively desirable to identify the English state not only with a church, but also with a racial identity. I fear I detected the resonant reverberations of a thousand nodding heads when Charles Moore observed famously some years ago: “You can be British without speaking English or being Christian or being white, but nevertheless Britain is basically English-speaking and Christian and white, and if one starts to think that it might become Urdu-speaking and Muslim and brown, one gets frightened and angry.”¹⁴ If I find myself agreeing with Polly Toynbee—who observed: “Let him call us politically correct: I call him a racist”—it is not because I think it is clear what, in general, the prohibition of racial establishment amounts to. Nor is it obvious whether, to offer a different example, the disarmingly named “Defense of Marriage Act” in the United States, which aims (perhaps unconstitutionally) to permit one American state not to recognize a gay marriage contracted in another, amounts to saying, in effect, that the national state identifies with heterosexuals and repudiates homosexuals and thus “establishes” heterosexuality.

After all, the root liberal idea, I have suggested, is that each of us is in command of his or her own life; or, in W. E. Henley’s familiar, and suitably first person, poetic formulation:

¹⁴ Quoted in Polly Toynbee, “The White Backlash,” *Guardian*, Wednesday, March 3, 1999, from an October 1991 *Spectator* article (Charles Moore, “Time for a More Liberal and ‘Racist’ Immigration Policy”): “You can be British without speaking English or being Christian or being white, but nevertheless Britain is basically English-speaking and Christian and white, and if one starts to think that it might become Urdu-speaking and Muslim and brown, one gets frightened and angry. Next door to me live a large family of Muslims from the Indian subcontinent. We are friendly enough to one another and they have done us various small acts of kindness. During the Gulf War, however, I heard their morning prayers coming through the wall, and I felt a little uneasy. If such people had outnumbered whites in our square, I should have felt alarmed. Such feelings are not only natural, surely—they are right. You ought to have a sense of your identity, and part of that sense derives from your nation and your race.”

I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.¹⁵

If this is how things should be, then clearly wresting command of my life from me does me a wrong. Others may sail in the same waters, in command of their own vessels. Rules of the sea may be made, among them rules that prohibit endangering the journeys and the ships of others. But a proscription against taking command of another person's fate cannot rule out every action on the part of others that affects my life, every deed that shapes my choices or influences me in virtue of my various social identities. I shape my life in the light of what I know about the costs of various options, costs that will depend in part on the acts and decisions of other individuals and groups and of the state. Which acts and policies constrain me in ways that amount to taking from me my command of my life? Well, we can say the ones that are coercive, but that doesn't tell us much. For very often what counts as coercion is constraining a person's action to an extent that would ordinarily be illegitimate, and in this case it is precisely what is and is not legitimate that is at stake.

Here, so it seems to me, we will make progress only if we bring in another liberal value as well, namely, equality. Identities as I have been imagining them are important tools in the shaping of one's life. To the extent that we are equals as citizens, the state owes us equal consideration. Insofar as resources—including not only economic but also symbolic and other resources—are made available by the state, they should be made available equally. A state that identified with heterosexuals as such, providing them with material resources (such as tax benefits for couples) or symbolic goods (such as the recognition of their marriages) or practical benefits (such as the laws governing the division of property in the unhappy event of separation), and denied them to homosexuals would be failing to treat people of different sexualities with the required equality.¹⁶ Distinguishing in law between parents and childless couples, in contrast—granted that the having and raising of children is something in which there is a proper public interest—would not be open to the same objection, provided, of course, that there was some reasonable relationship between the distinctions made and the effects sought; and

¹⁵ *The New Oxford Book of English Verse*, ed. Dame Helen Gardner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 792.

¹⁶ My discussion here owes much to Dworkin's *Sovereign Virtue*.

that is true even though “parent” is surely an important social identity, as I have defined that term.¹⁷

When it comes to free exercise, it may seem more obvious what is required. Free exercise of identity would mean being able to make a life as an L without the government’s interfering with our living out our own understanding of what it means to be an L and, in particular, without the government’s trying to coerce us not to live as an L at all. Once more, what this means in practice is not, alas, as straightforward as it seems.

To begin with, once free exercise has financial costs (as it inevitably will if the identities matter) there will always be an element of coercion lurking somewhere, since as Robert Nozick reminded us forcefully in *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, taxation is coercive and taxation is where the government gets most of its money. True, it is a different kind of coercion: one of the advantages of taxation as a means of raising resources—as contrasted with forced labor—is that, while it reduces the resources that a citizen has for life-making, it does so in a way that leaves a wide range of choices open. Taxation pays for the national defense, allowing some to opt for the soldier’s life, others to spend their youth developing their skills in their chosen lives as mathematicians or soccer players. Conscription leaves you no such choice.

Taxation will, of course, constrain expensive identities more than it constrains cheaper ones: the heir to the Duke of Omnium will rightly see estate taxes as constraining his life as a scion of a landed aristocracy. But the government should not aim, in taxing him, to constrain his identity *as such*. The tax need not be an expression of a view about the

¹⁷ Similarly, if being raised by a single-sex couple were always worse than the best available alternative, the refusal of adoption rights to homosexual couples would not be an illegitimate infringement on their identity. Since, however, there is no evidence for the empirical antecedent of this conditional, I do not endorse the consequent (see, for example, Charlotte J. Patterson, “Adoption Of Minor Children by Lesbian and Gay Adults: A Social Science Perspective,” *Duke Journal of Gender Law and Policy* 2: 191). It might be worse because people deliberately treated the children of gay couples badly, as a reflection of their homophobia. Then the real problem would be to try to stop that immoral practice. Whether, in the interim, gay adoption should be permitted would presumably then depend on whether it was possible to protect the children from real harm. Even if the refusal of adoption rights to gay people substantially reduced the success of their lives *and* was made necessary by injustice, we should not use children as a means to the end of fulfilling other people’s lives: the adoption is for their sake, not the adopters’. There are no principles at stake here that do not apply in other cases of adoption where there is substantial prejudice. In the United States courts have held, for example, that the fact that children’s lives may go worse in racially prejudiced communities because their parents are of different races is not a proper ground for refusing adoption to mixed-race couples. Part of their reasoning has been that the state must not give effect to these unjust prejudices. But this is presumably only so where the relevant harms are not sufficiently certain or substantial.

goodness of his life. In constraining his choices through taxation, it is indifferent to the meanings inhering in the identity he is constructing and indiscriminating as to its worth as against other lives with other identities. To repeat the central point: not everything that shapes your choices, even if it stops you from doing what you most want to do, is illegitimately coercive. So it is at least consistent to hold that tax moneys may be spent to permit the free exercise of identity, while holding that state coercion in the sphere of identity is wrong.

I have spoken of identities so far and of their recognition without reflecting on the fact that much recent multiculturalist discussion has been driven by a Hegelian conception of recognition, drawing on the now too familiar discussion of lordship and bondage in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. There the thought is that my identity as master is constituted in part by the acknowledgement of my status by the bondsman (and, of course, vice versa). I cannot be a master, act as and think of myself as a master, unless the bondsman acts toward me as bondsman to master and treats me as a master. It will be uncontroversial among those who have normal human relations that the responses of other people play a crucial role in shaping one's sense of who one is. As Charles Taylor once put it:

On the intimate level, we can see how much an original identity needs and is vulnerable to the recognition given or withheld by significant others. . . . Love relationships are not just important because of the general emphasis in modern culture on the fulfillment of ordinary needs. They are also crucial because they are crucibles of inwardly generated identity.¹⁸

We may even acknowledge that our identities are sensitive to the responses of strangers. If, as has happened often enough in our time, a black person receives contemptuous glares from white strangers, a Jew sees Gentile strangers turn and spit as she passes, a gay man faces a daily passage through a world of putatively straight men glowering and muttering "filthy queer," only someone with no sense of a normal human psychology would suggest that the proper response is only: "Sticks and

¹⁸ Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 36.

stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Taylor is surely also right, then, when he goes on to say that “the projection of an inferior or demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress, to the extent that the image is internalized.”¹⁹

But to grasp all this is not yet to say what role the state should have in the regulation of such acts of Hegelian recognition and misrecognition. On the one side lies the individual oppressor whose expressions of contempt may be part of who he or she is, and whose rights of free expression are presumably grounded, at least in part, in the connection between individuality and self-expression. On the other, the oppressed individual, whose life can go best only if his or her identity is consistent with self-respect. How, if at all, is the state to intervene? Some writers, Taylor among them, seem to hold that the state itself, through government recognition, can sustain identities that face the danger of self-contempt imposed by the social contempt of others. Others hold that, in regulating the public sphere in a society of diverse identities in order to sustain a regime of mutual toleration, the government should seek to educate citizens of all identities into an attitude of “live and let live.” Here the first-order constraint that the state should not take sides for one identity against others may require the regulation of those identities that do not practice public toleration, even if to do so amounts to taking sides against those identities.

My aim here is only to exemplify the sorts of political questions raised by identity. For I believe that progress with such questions requires a deeper understanding of the background of moral and social psychology upon which our identities depend. And a modest contribution to that understanding is one of my aims in these lectures. But I also think that settling such questions in detailed policy terms is not the most useful way in which philosophy can contribute to the political life of our culture. Philosophy, so it seems to me, is most helpful in the political life of democracies when it suggests that certain issues, framed through particular conceptual resources, need to be borne in mind in shaping policy. And if it is to be helpful in this way, it will most often be because it not only identifies the issue—as I have identified the relations of identity and the state—but also provides some mapping of the conceptual territory that

¹⁹ Ibid.

surrounds it. Despite the current vogue for talk of public intellectuals, it seems to me that the life of an intellectual, dominated as it distinctively is by the desire to understand and make sense of our world, is not necessarily the best standpoint from which to make detailed policy prescriptions. For these require a sense for what is possible in the political moment—of what rhetoric will work, what interests can be mobilized and defeated, what actual bureaucracies can currently achieve; and while there are some intellectuals who have the knowledge and the practical wisdom to make such judgments, a philosopher's training does not prepare one for them, and I am happy to admit that these talents are not mine.

I am conscious that the picture I have been sketching of the ethical and its relevance for what states owe their subjects has not obviously been part of the moral repertoire of every age or condition. For many people through much of human history, it has probably seemed that their task was to live the life to which they were born: to work on the lord of the manor's estates or the master's plantation, to be a good wife or daughter or son, to rule as a lawful prince: to occupy a station—however base or exalted—and perform its duties. The ideal of self-creation and self-mastery can easily seem to be the ideal of those who have mastery over others. Many English schoolboys in the heyday of Empire learned the whole of William Ernest Henley's poem, of which I cited earlier only the final couplet. (I have an idea I learned it under the title "Invictus," which implies that it is not a philosophy for the vanquished, though I see that that is not how it appears in *The New Oxford Book of English Verse*.)

Out of the night that covers me,
 Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
 I thank whatever gods may be
 For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
 I have not winced or cried aloud.
 Under the bludgeonings of chance
 My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
 Looms but the Horror of the shade.

And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.²⁰

We may assume that it did not occur to sufficiently many of those boys who became the political masters of imperial subjects that those subjects might have had the same ideal of self-mastery. But the fact that an ideal was promulgated for a few does not mean that it should not be made available to all of us: what is liberal is not the idea of self-mastery—but the idea that it should be offered to everyone. And I have never met anyone who did not want the opportunity to shape a life of his or her own: even monastics who take vows of obedience have, in an obvious sense, made lives of their own.

It is important, as well, that the ideal of self-creation is not solely Western, at least if my reading of some secondary literature on Confucianism is correct. And this point is worth stressing, because Confucianism, with its talk of the filial piety and loyalty to the emperor, is often thought of (and not only in the West) as precisely an ethic of “my station and its duties.”

So consider, for example, Tu Wei-ming’s discussion in *Humanity and Self-Cultivation: Essays in Confucian Thought of hsieu-shen* (which he translates as “cultivating personal life”). Tu argues that this is an element of *li*, the process of becoming fully human that includes as well “(2) regulating familial relations (*ch’i-chia*), (3) ordering the affairs of state (*chih-kuo*), and (4) bringing peace to the world (*p’ing t’ien-hsia*).”²¹ Now *li* has often been translated as “propriety” or “ritual,” but Tu Wei-ming argues that it is better understood as the “externalization of *jen*” (which is often translated simply as “benevolence”) “in a concrete situation.”²²

²⁰ *The New Oxford Book of English Verse*, ed. Gardner, p. 792.

²¹ Tu Wei-ming, *Humanity and Self-Cultivation: Essays in Confucian Thought* (Boston: Cheng & Tsui Company, 1998), p. 27.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 18. What Tu Wei-ming calls *jen* here is now often transcribed as *ren* and translated as “benevolence” or, in what I believe is the currently favored interpretation, “humanity.”

And he also suggests that we should think of *jen* as “a principle of inwardness” (in the sense that it comes from within rather than outside the self) that is “linked with the self-reviving, self-perfecting, and self-fulfilling process of an individual.”²³

Philip J. Ivanhoe remarks, in a similar spirit, in a recent book entitled *Confucian Moral Self-Cultivation* that “[m]oral self-cultivation is one of the most thoroughly and regularly discussed topics among Chinese ethical philosophers” and demonstrates the truth of his claim by following this theme through from Confucius (551–479 B.C.E.) and Mencius (391–308 B.C.E.) to Xunzi (310–219 B.C.E.), Zhu Xi (1130–1200 C.E.), Wang Yangming (1472–1529 C.E.), Yan Yuan (1635–1704 C.E.), and Dai Zhen (1723–77 C.E.).²⁴ (These philosophers flourished from the sixth century before Christ to the eighteenth century of the common era: that is, indeed, a long tradition of reflection.)

To see moral self-cultivation at the heart of ethics is not, of course, *eo ipso*, to celebrate what Mill meant by individuality: Confucius and the Confucians by and large regarded moral self-cultivation as a matter of developing a character that would lead one to live a good life, and they did not suggest (so far as I have been able to discover) that what made a life good was in any sense up to the individual. But they *did* have the idea—Immanuel Kant’s pietist Protestant idea—that what mattered

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 9. This interpretation fits with one of the more surprising moments in the *Analects* where Confucius is highly critical of the honest—or, as Tu Wei-ming suggests we might say, “hyperhonest”—villager (*hsiang-yüan*). It comes in *Analects* 17, where we find: “The Master said: ‘The “honest men” of your prefecture undermine virtue’” (*The Analects of Confucius: A Literal Translation*, with an introduction and notes by Chichung Huang [New York: Oxford University Press, 1997], p. 169; this edition numbers the adage 7.12, but in many editions it is 7.13; and that is how Tu Wei-ming refers to it). Mencius, when asked to explain this passage, said that these “honest men” were (as a different translation has it) “thieves of virtue” according to Confucius because: “If you would blame them, you find nothing to allege. If you would criticize them, you have nothing to criticize. They agree with the current customs. They consent with an impure age. Their principles have a semblance of right-heartedness and truth. Their conduct has a semblance of disinterestedness and purity. All men are pleased with them and they think themselves right, so that it is impossible to proceed with them to the principles of Yáo and Shun. On this account they are called ‘The thieves of virtue’” (*The Works of Mencius*, translated, with critical and exegetical notes, prolegomena, and copious indexes by James Legge [New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1970]). (Yáo and Shun are two of the seven wise kings of antiquity that Confucius most admired; see *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 31.) Tu Wei-ming glosses Mencius in a way that makes the centrality of self-cultivation clear: “The real problem with the hyperhonest villager is his total lack of commitment to the Way. Despite his apparent compatibility with the established social norms, he is absolutely devoid of any ‘ambition’ for self-improvement” (*Humanity and Self-Cultivation*, p. 38).

²⁴ Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self-Cultivation* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), p. ix.

was not just doing the right but doing it for the right reason, a reason that flowed from the self one had either uncovered (this is the Mencian line) or crafted (this is Xunxi).²⁵ And they *did* believe that the work of making one's self was a central ethical task.

Mencius, certainly, would have appreciated the story told about Rabbi Zusha, brother of the celebrated eighteenth-century Jewish scholar Rebbe Elimelech of Liszensk (1717–87), who wandered the woods singing praises to the divinity and was known as the “Fool of God.” Zusha is supposed to have said: “When I die and come before the heavenly court, if they ask me, ‘Zusha, why were you not as great as Abraham?’ I will not be afraid. I will say that I was not born with Abraham’s intellectual capabilities. And if they ask me, ‘Zusha, why were you not like Moses?’ I will say that I did not have his leadership abilities. But when they ask me, ‘Zusha, why were you not Zusha?’ for that I will have no answer.”²⁶

Zusha was an eighteenth-century Hasidic rabbi; Mencius, a member of the Chinese gentry born nearly four decades after Plato: I am certain they would have been puzzled by some of Mill’s defense of individuality, but they, like Plato, would surely have recognized that he was discussing a topic that mattered to them. And so, to judge by some of our proverbs, would my Akan ancestors: “Wobö bra-pa a, wote mu dé” (If you live a good life you find it sweet) they said; and also: “Öbra ne dé wo ara woabö” (Your life is what you alone have formed). And so I make no apology for suggesting that while I have framed these issues within a particular modern Western tradition, the topic I am adumbrating is part of the common conversation of much of humankind.

I hope I have said enough about the idea of an identity and the liberal response to it that you will have some sense of the territory in which my talk of identity is intended to be located. It is because identities are important in these ways that I believe we need to have an account of them.

And my aim in the remaining lectures is to explore two kinds of presupposition of this whole way of framing a question for ethics and politics. The first set of presuppositions is about the natures of the people whose individualities I have been taking so seriously. The picture of the person that is implicit in much of what I have been saying is of an

²⁵ See *ibid.*, chapters 2 and 3.

²⁶ Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, *Jewish Wisdom* (New York: William Morrow, 1994), p. 90. I learned this story from my friend Daniel Rose.

individual with needs, tastes, values, identities, and dispositions and a capacity for rational deliberation and action. It is, as Kant suggested, because people are capable of reason that we must respect their right to self-mastery, what he taught us to call their autonomy. A creature driven by instinct and appetite, incapable of planning, unguided by commitments, insensitive to reason or to the demands of morality: such a creature would not be entitled to the concern for its autonomy that the liberal ethical perspective entails. Such a creature would not—in the relevant sense—be making a life.

I want to examine one of these assumptions—that we have a capacity for rational deliberation—in order to ask whether our pervasive irrationality provides grounds for the state's intervention in the making of our individual identities.

The second presupposition of the liberal framing, which I will explore in the final lecture, is about the origins of these individuals. We all start out—do we not?—as infants. Without language, without ambitions, without projects. And the languages, ambitions, and projects we acquire, and the social identities we develop, are not themselves the product solely of our own choices. If we place so high a premium on permitting people to shape their own lives once they are adults, are there not also constraints on how we can shape them as children? Or, to put the matter more positively: we should presumably prepare them, if we can, to take up the task of developing an identity and shaping a life. But how should we do so?

A person's shaping of her life flows from her beliefs and from a set of values, tastes, and dispositions of sensibility, all of these influenced by various forms of social identity: let us call all these together a person's "moral self." A person's self changes over time—beliefs, tastes, sensibilities, even identities change. But each of us has, at any time, a self from which our choices in the shaping of a life derive. In this language we may ask what it is permissible to do to shape each person's self in childhood.

This question seems to me to arise very naturally, in the sort of way I have suggested, out of current liberal preoccupations and debates; and that is how it arose for me. But surely any plausible view of politics will have a view about what terms the state should set for the determination (by itself or by others) of the selves with which each person in the community will reach adulthood.

In conducting and creating our lives we govern our thoughts, plans, and actions. We need to identify our aims, understand how the world in which we are living is constituted, and connect our actions with our aims in the light of that understanding. In making our lives, we must reflect on ends, accumulate evidence, form beliefs, identify options for action, predict and evaluate their outcomes, and then act. The moral self I have spoken of requires these capacities of reason if it is to make a life. In the next lecture I want to take up some questions about how we should understand these demands of reason. This will be important, after all, if we are concerned to help people shape their lives as responsible moral selves, ready to take up the task of making lives of their own: and that will be the topic I shall turn to toward the end of the next lecture and in the final one.

II. REASON AND THE SELF

If my friend Dorothy is standing outside in her best clothes with an umbrella and it starts to rain, chances are she'll open up the umbrella. If she doesn't, there'll be a reason: she was trying to be inconspicuous; she thought the umbrella wasn't working; she doesn't care about her clothes because her boyfriend has just left her. But if she really *does* realize that opening the umbrella is a way to keep her clothes tidy *and* knows that she can *and* cares about her appearance *and* has nothing else on her mind and she *still* leaves the umbrella tightly furled, we'll just be stumped. And we'll wonder, rightly, if we've got her state of mind right.

Now, our resources for explaining why Dorothy hasn't opened the umbrella are close to unlimited, though, of course, the more we know or think we know about her the more constraints there will be. We might even be willing to accept the occasional deviation from reason. But the more this happens, the less certain we will be of the particular ascriptions of mental states that we have made; and we will eventually come to wonder whether, in fact, Dorothy is responding to the world as a creature with beliefs, desires, hopes, fears, and the rest of the multifarious states we ascribe with careless regularity to ourselves and to others every day and all the time. I shall need a shorthand way for referring to beliefs, desires, intentions, emotions, and the like, so I shall call them, as

philosophers usually do, “intentional states.” So now we can say: reasonableness of some sort is built into our ascriptions of intentional states.¹

There are two major kinds of reasonableness that have interested philosophers from the beginning of the Western tradition: one, the epistemic or theoretical, has to do with keeping beliefs in line with evidence, with each other, and with the world; the other, the ethical or practical, has to do with keeping action in line with our beliefs and our purposes. I began with an example of practical reason, but Dorothy could puzzle us epistemically as well: we would be just as stumped if she looked out across the lawn in the teeming rain and remarked how pleasantly sunny it was. If she raised her umbrella now, we should no longer have the practical puzzle. But her using an umbrella as a parasol when there’s overwhelming evidence that it’s raining now raises a problem of a new, epistemic, kind.

The notion that people have intentional states is not limited to our society, our language, or, more generally yet, our Western tradition. It would be easy to tell the little story I told about Dorothy in Twi, my father’s Ghanaian mother tongue. Everywhere people make sense of what others do on the basis of supposing them to have inner states that represent how the world is and how they would like it to be. Everywhere, too, people will have a hard time making sense of someone who seems, on the basis of one set of considerations, to have such intentional states, and yet does not act as they require. It is not that people believe they can always predict what others will do: unpredictability is one predictable element in human action. But we do make assumptions of predictability all the time, and we will want explanations when those assumptions fail.² So, whatever your first language or cultural origins and whatever

¹ You may take what I have just said as a brief informal gloss on the later teachings of Donald Davidson (see Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1984]). But you should also note that I do not mean to be taking sides in a debate about the reality of the internal states that I have adverted to. Perhaps Daniel Dennett is right and the constraint that we can only sensibly speak of someone’s beliefs and desires if that someone is broadly speaking reasonable is built into the adoption of what he calls an “intentional stance” toward them: the essence of the intentional stance being that we predict and explain what people say and do while making them seem reasonable at the same time. Adopting the intentional stance is approaching something *as if* it had intentional states, as we often do with our computers. Taken either way—as an observation about having beliefs and such or about being treated as having them—the claim seems to me correct.

² I am of the party that thinks that the reason for this human consensus is that we come equipped with a disposition to understand other people this way; a “module,” in the cognitive science jargon, that generates a mental model of others without our having to be taught very much about it. But, once again, for my present purposes you do not need to agree with

your philosophical inclinations, there is a set of questions here to ask: about the relationship between having intentional states, on the one hand, and being in some sense reasonable, on the other.

This question, interesting enough in itself, matters a great deal to the wider project of these lectures, which is to explore some of the presuppositions of the picture of the self that leads us to think that people should be left to make their own lives. The liberal notion that autonomy matters relies, as I said in the last lecture, on the assumption that people are not “driven by instinct and appetite, incapable of planning, unguided by commitments, insensitive to reason.” If the ascription of intentional states requires reasonableness, then a creature with commitments and plans will necessarily be sensitive to reason. It will, therefore, be entitled to self-government. If, *per contra*, our states are not rationally constituted, this argument may not go through.

So, what sorts of things are practical and epistemic reasonableness? That is a question you could come at in many ways. But one relatively simple way (a sort of *via negativa*) is to ask what kinds of relations between intentional states—and between intentional states and other states of the world—are grounds for an accusation of *unreasonableness*. Let me offer some simple examples, the first of them on the practical side:

John prefers this artichoke to this beet and this beet to that carrot. It would seem then that he ought to prefer the artichoke to the carrot. If the schema is generally valid—if you prefer A to B and B to C, then you ought to prefer A to C—then we can say that preferences should be transitive. Suppose, however, that John actually prefers the carrot to the beet.

What could we say about John?

Here is one line of thought. If John had the carrot right now and you had the beet, he would be willing to give you something of value to persuade you to swap. For if he prefers the beet, then he would rather have the beet than the carrot and so the exchange has some value to him. And the same would be true if he had the beet and you had the artichoke. So far, there is no problem. But if he also prefers carrot to artichoke, then he would offer something for the chance to swap the carrot for the

me about that. Perhaps the reason that people everywhere respond to other people by supposing them to have intentional states is just that something like this is true and everyone has noticed that it is true; or, again, maybe this is not true but it is the easiest way to get along with other people, adopting the intentional stance, and all societies have discovered that it is the easiest way.

artichoke, if he had it: for the carrot is worth more to him than the artichoke. But now it seems that, little by little, you can take away from him everything he values.

Suppose you have the carrot, the beet, and the artichoke. First just give him the carrot. (Trust me, it'll be worth the investment.) Now offer him the beet. He will pay you to swap. Now you offer him the artichoke. He will pay you to swap again. Since you retrieved the carrot in the first swap, you can now offer it to him again, and he will once more pay you to swap carrot for artichoke. Obviously, you can keep going round this little circle for as long as you like and, if his preferences don't change, as I say, you can take away, perhaps in tiny pieces, everything he values.³

Now, if an actual John were actually faced with this actual sequence of options—faced, that is, not with this story, but with actual artichokes, beets, and carrots—there would be two possibilities. Either he would go on until he lost everything and then we would think... Well, it's unclear what we would think. We might think, for example, that he had come to value playing this game more than anything else in the world (which is, roughly, the best we can do for a rational explanation of the gambler who fritters away all his worldly goods). Or we might think that he didn't realize what was going on. But, failing that, I think we are likely just to conclude that we don't exactly know what is happening but that saying, simply, that he prefers artichokes to beets, and beets to carrots, but carrots to artichokes, doesn't really capture it.

The other possibility is that John would grasp at some point what was happening and stop the game. Suppose, for example, he said he would hold on to the artichoke, thank you very much, when offered the carrot for the fourth time. Then all would be well. For we would now have grounds for supposing that he didn't prefer the carrot to the artichoke, and we could heave a sigh of relief and record that he no longer had a preference intransitivity. People can be temporarily irrational and we will forgive them, provide they put things right when the problem makes itself manifest.

³ I should underline the fact that this story relies on assumptions not just about preferences but about beliefs, options, and choices as well. The story assumes that John recognizes beets and artichokes and carrots, knows what options are on offer, chooses to pay for the swaps, and so on. The focus of our attention is on John's preferences because it is they that are apparently irrational. If the other apparatus is working as it should, this is what will happen. But if it *isn't*, then the behavior we have elicited may have some other explanation.

On the epistemic side, there are two major kinds of deviation, corresponding broadly speaking to inductive and deductive rationality. On the inductive side, we have people like Dorothy faced with rainstorms who think it's sunny. It seems clear enough that there can be explanations for this sort of thing. Dorothy might think the sky was gray when it wasn't because she believed there was something temporarily wrong with her color vision. But, once again, if someone *has* vision and looks out on a scene in which it is visibly the case that it's raining, we shall have difficulty ascribing to them the belief that it *isn't* in the absence of an explanation of this kind. So, just as we can conclude that, *ceteris paribus*, preferences will be transitive, so we can conclude something like this: sighted people will ordinarily believe what is visibly evidently true.

Let me offer a similar simple example from the deductive domain. Consider Dorothy again.

Dorothy thinks the umbrella is protecting her from the rain; she also thinks that if the umbrella is protecting her from the rain, she is not getting wet; but she thinks she is getting wet.

From the first two of these beliefs it seems to follow that she should believe that she is not getting wet. Given that she doesn't, it is hard to say why we should accept that these *are* her beliefs. Once more, there are stories we could tell—I leave them to your imagination. But we surely think that, ordinarily, if someone believes something of the form “If A, then C” and believes that A, she doesn't believe that it's not the case that C. Indeed, if they think about the matter at all, they will presumably believe that C. Because the logical principle that C follows from “If A, C” and A has long been called *modus ponens*, we can call this idea *applied modus ponens*; and it is an instance of the sort of rationality built into our normal understanding of intentional states.

What I have just dubbed *applied modus ponens*, transitivity of preference, the capacity, when awake, to detect the obvious features of your environment: this disparate little list is meant to exemplify the sorts of things that an assumption of reasonableness amounts to. Let me call the various requirements that together constitute reasonableness the “rules of reason.”

What I want to say amounts to this: even though we often deviate from the rules of reason, it is essential to understanding our intentional states that we see them as governed by those rules. We understand what beliefs and desires *are* in us rationally imperfect beings by seeing how

they would operate in rationally perfect beings, who thought everything through, never made logical mistakes, saw the world as it was. The rules of reason are the rules a rationally perfect being would live by. We are not such beings; nevertheless, this idealization is central to an understanding of our psychologies.

There will be many of you who will draw on your knowledge of the behavioral economics or psychology literatures, or your dealings with ordinary people away from the study, who will, no doubt, find it incredible that anyone at this late stage should be defending the view that I have just outlined. The names of Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, or Herbert Simon, or Tooby and Cosmides and Gerd Gigerenzer, will spring to your lips. How, you will be thinking, can someone who lives in our time—with all the massive experimental evidence that this is simply not how our mental states work, all the grounds for doubting that we maximize utilities rather than using heuristics—persist in thinking that it is useful to build rationality of this sort into our understanding of intentional states?

The challenge can be simply put. Nobody is even close to being rational in this way: how can it be helpful, then, to understand the beliefs and desires of actual agents in the light of this demanding model of rationality?

One popular reply is that this picture of rationality is indeed false of us, but that this is because it constitutes a normative ideal. What this picture is *for*, on this view, is not predicting or describing behavior—not even the behavior of an idealized agent—but saying how we *should* ideally behave.

If this is meant as an account of the sense in which assumptions about rationality in use by social scientists—among them the classical decision theory that underlies much modern economics and so-called rational choice theorizing—have idealized human behavior, then it is just a *pun* to say that they do so by providing ideals up to which we should live. I am discussing the role of the rules of reason as constitutive of our understanding of human beliefs and desires: and in this context it will do no good to defend the picture from its empirical inadequacies by observing that it would be a better world if people did conform to it. To make this move is just to give up claiming the role I have proposed for the rules of reason in structuring our conception of the mind.

But there is one obvious way in which the normative and descriptive

theories are related. The rules of reason help us to understand the intentional states about which the normative theory makes recommendations. *If* we should conform to classical decision theory, for example, we should assign our degrees of belief in such a way that their measure has the shape of a probability-function. But to do that we need to know what degrees of belief are—and that is exactly what the decision theory, construed as the expression of what I have called the rules of practical reason, does.⁴

Whether we should try to conform to the norms of the pure classical theory is another question. But here, too, our rules of reason will help. For they allow us to explore what might happen if we *did* try; and I shall suggest in a moment that, once we *do* explore this question, we can see that the sorts of rules of reason we find in classical decision theory are not a set of ideals worth trying to conform to.

It is a matter of non-normative fact, of course, what norms individuals and societies respect. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the beliefs that embody these norms—beliefs about what one should do or about what one is rationally committed to believing—are not reducible without residue to accounts of non-normative fact. You don't understand what it is for something to be rationally required simply because you know how a community of people who believed that it was rationally required would behave.

What else is needed might, perhaps, be put as a slogan like this: to know what it is for something to be rationally required is to recognize the demands of reason. Less programmatically: on the practical side, to know what it is for something to be rationally required is to be disposed, once you see that an act, A, is, indeed, rationally required, to act—other things, no doubt, as usual, being equal—as is rationally required; to be disposed, then, to try to do A. On the theoretical side, recognizing the demands of reason means seeing that you should believe what reason requires and being disposed, once you see this, to believe it.

Looked at this way, the particular mode of idealization I have proposed is bound to seem unhelpfully radical. To idealize in this way is to regard us as governed by the thought that we should aim to think and do what someone like us whose reasoning was perfect would find it best to do: and this is risky, because thus to ignore the fact of our rational

⁴ How it does it is explained in some detail in my book *Assertion and Conditionals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

imperfections—our limited capacities for reasoning, our tiny memories—may lead us to be worse off, by the very same standards, than we might be if we opted for less stringent idealizations. There is no guarantee that a rationally imperfect creature that aims at the goals of a rationally perfect creature will end up doing what perfection would entail more often than it would if it used, say, rules of thumb that recognized its imperfections and used its knowledge of its own place in the world. I may well do better, for example, in the long run refusing complex bets from a smart bookmaker at large odds than trying to calculate in every case what pattern of acceptance will maximize my expected gains.

What this thought suggests is that the mode of idealization appropriate to developing strategies for real-life decision should be different from the mode I have adopted so far; and this naturally invites the question once more: “For what purposes is *this* mode of idealization appropriate?”

The answer, I am arguing, is that this mode of idealization is appropriate for the purpose of thinking about what our beliefs and desires would have to be like if they were to do their job as well as possible. What, after all, are beliefs for? Representing the states of the world that are relevant to determining how to bring about what we want. And what are desires for? Representing the way we would like the world to be. Desires shape preferences among states of the world. And a state of the world, A, is preferred to another, B, just in case if we could bring about A or bring about B but not bring about both, we would bring about A. The epistemic rules of reason are meant to show how we should change our beliefs in response to evidence and reflection in such a way as to increase the likelihood that they will represent the world the way that it actually is; the practical rules of reason seek to show how we should choose to act if we are to get as much as possible of what we want most.

But living up to these rules would require us finite, natural creatures to be impossibly perfect. And so we cannot have beliefs and desires that live up to those demands. In a certain sense, indeed, if the rules of reason define belief and desire, we do not have beliefs and desires at all. Or, you might say, we do not have beliefs and desires but we should like to. The idealized agent defined by the rules of reason shows us what that would be like. We can see that such an idealized agent would have a life in which beliefs and desires did best what they are meant to do. But we can also understand, in the light of that theory, why our states are not able to be beliefs and desires; and how to use them, despite their imperfections,

to make the best life we can. It is against that ideal theory that we can make sense of the heuristics that are studied by social and cognitive psychologists: for it is only against the ideal theory that we can explain what the heuristics are doing. They are aiming to help us make our imperfect states do what the perfect states would do. That is why, I think, rational choice explanations have the hold they do on the social scientific imagination. These norms are built into what beliefs and desires are for.⁵

How, then, should we *use* the rules of ideal reason?

Well, often we just think things. Often we just form intentions and act on them. But sometimes we don't know what to think *or* what to do. That is when the norms guide us. If we have the time to reflect,⁶ we can use our understanding of the rules of reason to decide whether what we are disposed to believe and desire (and thus to do), given our actual psychological processes, is, in fact, likely to get us what we most want. In the simplest sort of case, for example, we learn from our experience with visual illusions that we should not form beliefs in the way we are designed to do in certain circumstances: those where our eyes and brains will regularly be tricked. Illusions reflect a regular form of deviation from the rules of reason. For they cannot normally be overridden and so we cannot normally change these habits of belief-formation in the light of our experience in the way that the rules of reason would seem to require.

⁵ There are two natural ways of understanding the claim that representing the world and how we should like it to be is what beliefs and desires, respectively, are meant to do. One is conceptual: this is what they are meant to do in the sense that it is built into our conception of them that this is what they are for. In that sense, you could say, this is what *we* mean them to do. Another is explanatory: this is what they were meant to do in the sense that this is their evolutionary (or providential) design.

I do not think it is plausible that beliefs and desires have as evolutionary purposes the purposes I have described. For evolution's purposes, what is important is that we should detect those features of our environment relevant to our survival fast enough to allow us to use that information to help us survive and that we should have those aims that will keep us fed, find us mates, give us offspring, and help them and their genes survive. The inner states that evolution has equipped us with have, clearly, done a good job at that task so far, for they have made us a successful widespread species. Because we have limited computational resources, the way evolution has done this has involved designing us to get the relevant answer to the questions most important for survival in a reasonable time: and that has meant designing us to use not procedures that conform to the rules of reason, but all sorts of *ad hoc* procedures that work faster than applying the rules of reason in the practical contexts in which they are most often to be used.

⁶ Whether we have the time is always going to be a matter of judgment based on the beliefs we actually have, which may be mistaken.

People must often deviate from what reason requires because they are not rationally perfect. This fact has led some psychologists to explore how our actual cognitive design (produced as it was by a process of selection of adaptive strategies) reflects these imperfections. So they have proposed that we use “quick and dirty” or “fast and frugal” belief-forming mechanisms, which take advantage of the fact that it is possible to design algorithms for belief-formation that will be extremely reliable within a specific range of environments, even though they would be generally unreliable *outside* that range of environments.⁷ One simple example here, due to Gerd Gigerenzer and D. Goldstein, is a mechanism for deciding which of two cities in a certain country is the larger.⁸ They propose a two-stage algorithm, which they call “Take-the-Best,” the first stage of which is that you should judge that a city you have heard of is larger than one you have not. In the actual world, since the chances that someone who lives in that country will have heard of a place do in fact rise with its population, this step provides a good example of a belief-forming procedure that works in a rough and ready way because of features of the agent’s environment and her relation to it. Furthermore, such an algorithm will work just as well for an agent who is unaware of these features as for someone who knows about them in detail.

Nobody proposes that such an algorithm is actually built into human cognitive architecture, the relevant features of our environment (cities and their sizes) being pretty short-range in the evolutionary time-scale; but there may be other features of our cognitive architecture that do reflect longer-term such stabilities. Consider, for example, the fact that people regularly deviate from what the rules of reason seem to require by being risk-averse about losses: of two options with equal expected utility, they will pick one with a lower yield that is close to certain over a potentially higher yielding but riskier option that includes a possibility of loss. Most people, for example, will prefer to keep 1,000 pounds rather than buy a chance of getting 2,010 pounds on the toss of

⁷ See “Fast, Frugal *and* Rational: How Rational Norms Explain Behavior,” Nick Chater, Department of Psychology, University of Warwick; Mike Oaksford, School of Psychology, University of Wales, Cardiff; Ramin Nakisa, Department of Experimental Psychology, University of Oxford; Martin Redington, Department of Experimental Psychology, University of Oxford. Web address: http://www-psych.stanford.edu/~jbt/224/Chater_Oaksford_fast.html. See also Gerd Gigerenzer, Peter M. Todd, and the ABC Research Group, *Simple Heuristics That Make Us Smart* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁸ G. Gigerenzer and D. Goldstein, “Reasoning the Fast and Frugal Way: Models of Bounded Rationality,” *Psychological Review* 103 (1996): 650–69.

a fair coin. One proposal that has been made as to why this is runs as follows.

In the circumstances of human evolution, acquiring great quantities of an asset was generally not useful, since many things humans wanted were wasting resources, subject to decay even with the best storage technologies; only a limited amount could be consumed by a single individual or family, and the excess could not generally be exchanged for other useful things in the relatively simply economies of our remote ancestors. In contrast, falling below a certain basic minimum of resources guaranteed death or its close evolutionary cousin infecundity; and, since most of our early ancestors were close to the level of subsistence most of the time, risking current assets usually did mean that, if the risk did not pay off, one would fall below that required minimum. So a bias against risking what one has is built into us, even though in the present world most such risks do not pose threats to our survival, and even though most of us would be better off, by the standards taught us by the rules of reason, if we did not have such a bias. (Not all of us, of course: irrational behavior sometimes produces rewards, as the government chooses to remind us regularly by supporting a National Lottery.)⁹

Notice that whether something involves a risk of loss is often a matter of how the choice is framed. Consider the following example from Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman. You are told of an outbreak of a disease that will probably kill about 600 people in the population if nothing is done. There are two possible policies. One will save 200 people pretty certainly. On the other policy, there is a $1/3$ chance of saving 600 people and a $2/3$ chance that they will still all die. Suppose they cost the same. Most people will prefer the first policy.¹⁰ But now frame the case the other way round. On one option, 400 people will pretty certainly die. On the other, there is a $1/3$ chance that nobody will die, and

⁹ This sort of risk-aversion, which involves treating losses and gains asymmetrically, is reinforced, of course, by the structure of our sentiments. The person who loses 1,000 pounds in a perfectly rational bet that would have netted him a couple of pounds if it had paid off is additionally burdened by regret at the loss. Whether or not this feeling itself counts as reasonable, taking account of it, if it is a settled fact of our natures, is certainly reasonable. And so you could say that evolution has built into us, by way of the mechanism of regret, an emotion that makes risk-aversion sometimes rational. (You could also say that regret is often itself irrational, when its propositional content is that I should have done something else than what I did.)

¹⁰ Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, "The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice," *Science* 211 (1981): 453–58; reprinted in *Rational Choice*, ed. Jon Elster (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 123–41. This case is discussed on pp. 124–25.

a $2/3$ chance that all 600 will still die. Now most people prefer the second policy.¹¹

What makes the difference, arguably, is that in the first case the first policy is described as one of saving 200 people, while in the second it is described as losing 400 people. In the first case, the baseline is the number of people who will be lost if we do nothing and so the 200 people are “gained”; in the second, the baseline is the number of people we have now, and so the 400 people are “lost.” And people tend to be risk-averse about gains, but risk-taking about losses, as the evolutionary explanation predicts. (Note, by the way, that no one picks the response that the rules of reason suggest, which is indifference between these policies.)

So here the agent’s choices depend on how certain options are described, and this makes a difference even though what is being offered is the same pair of options under different logically equivalent descriptions.¹²

My aim so far has been to defend, first, an account of the rules of reason as constitutive of our understanding of beliefs and desires. That, I think, is why rational choice explanations are so attractive and compelling. But I have also urged, second, that once we grasp the idealization that

¹¹ Most people in these cases meant about three-quarters of a sample of about 150 students at Stanford and the University of British Columbia. Tversky and Kahneman, “The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice.”

¹² This fact is important in real economic choices that people make every day. Consider a taxi-driver whose aim is to make a hundred dollars a day. It’s two o’clock in the afternoon, two hours before he has to hand the car over to another driver, and he’s made his \$100.00. I flag him down and ask him to take me to the airport: a longish trip that will net him \$15.00. He has the time to do the job and \$15.00 would normally be appealing. But he’s made today’s account, so he declines. If he’d only made \$85.00 so far today, he’d take me. (This example was suggested to me by the discussion of Richard Thaler’s work in Roger Lowenstein, “Exuberance Is Rational,” *New York Times Magazine*, February 11, 2001, pp. 68–71. Taxi drivers’ “accounts” are discussed on p. 71, column 1.) What makes the difference? That he views a day where he makes less than \$100.00 from taxi driving as one where he’s made a loss. The taxi driver’s attitude here is irrational from a profit-maximizing point of view, because whether an offer is worthwhile should depend only on whether your expected profit is higher if you accept it than if you reject it. It shouldn’t depend on what you happen to have in your pocket already.

Taking the past into account in this kind of way is at the heart of another favorite irrationality that has been noticed by behavioral economists, that of our tendency to weigh “sunk costs.” One of Richard Thaler’s standard examples is the fact that we are more likely to go to the stadium if we’ve bought the ticket already than if we’d merely planned to go to the football game and buy the ticket there. But when you’re contemplating going to the game, the ticket money has already been spent and (let’s suppose) you can’t get it back: so, since nothing you do will bring the money back, it’s odd to take account of the expense in deciding whether to go. If you won’t enjoy it, then the money’s already wasted. If you will, there’s a reason to go, independently of the sunk cost.

underlies that understanding—once we see that it involves ignoring our imperfections—it is clear that the rules of reason are impossible to live up to. Third, I have proposed that we *can* use them, when we have the time, away from the pressure of actual decisions, to reflect upon whether our habits of belief and decision are likely to have us believing what it is best to believe and achieving what we most want. And, fourth, I have suggested that, since the evolution of theoretical and practical reasoning has occurred with our actual limited minds, our actual beliefs and desires often deviate from what the rules of reason require because our actual minds in our actual environments can often get the right results by using “fast and frugal” rules of thumb. And when I say “the right results” here, I mean the results that the rules of reason would yield if we had the capacity to use them.

These claims matter for a politics based, as I suggested in the first lecture our politics should be, on respect for the idea that each of us has his or her own life to make. If, for example, it is possible to shape our environments, by state action, in ways that mean that our actual cognitive systems will more often settle on the right answer, as understood by applying the rules of reason, then, so it seems, government could be seen to be helping us to make the lives we really want.

From the fact that we often breach what the rules of reason require, it follows that there can be questions about whether our decisions reflect our beliefs and desires. In practice, there may be lines of thought we should have followed that would have identified for us better courses of action and we may have carried through incorrectly the lines of thinking we did carry through. In cases where this is true, shaping the world so that we will be directed to the right outcome is not an interference in our projects but an aid in their completion.

But another consequence of our imperfection is that we do not have a single consistent picture of the world or a single coherent preference structure. Sometimes, so to speak, we use one mental map, sometimes another, inconsistent one. If we realized the inconsistency, we might do the investigation necessary to correct it, if we had the time. But, since the maps are invoked in different contexts, the fact of their inconsistency may well never come to our attention. Similarly, we may have incoherent collections of preferences. When I am shopping with cash I think of my financial resources in one way; when I am using a credit card I conceive them in another. I know, at some level, that these two forms of money are fungible, and so I have the intellectual resources to recognize

the problem. Still, I haven't done anything about it yet (I will, I promise, when I have the time...really), and so it is unclear what my real attitude to money is. As a result, then, both of the inconsistency of our beliefs and of the incoherence of our overall preferences, it may simply not be clear what my projects really are: I have many incompatible projects and I haven't done the work to resolve the inconsistencies.

There is another kind of inconsistency in our desires that is not logical inconsistency. It has to do with the fact that we have second-order preferences, so that, to use the most famous obvious example, I may *both* want to smoke a cigarette *and* want not to have this first-order desire. Some work has been done—notably by Harry Frankfurt—that suggests some principles by which we might adjudicate in such cases, between a mere desire and a person's real will. If I not only want to refrain from smoking but also want to have the first-order desire not to smoke to be effective in my actions, then, Frankfurt says, I have a "second-order volition." Its content is that I should refrain from smoking because I have a first-order desire not to smoke. Frankfurt calls a person who has no second-order volitions a "wanton": a wanton does not care about why he acts. And so he says: "When a *person* acts, the desire by which he is moved is either the will he wants or a will he wants to be without. When a *wanton* acts, it is neither."¹³ Frankfurt has gone on to suggest that a person's second-order volitions reflect the fact that he cares about certain things.

A person who cares about something is, as it were, invested in it. He *identifies* himself with what he cares about in the sense that he makes himself vulnerable to losses and susceptible to benefits depending upon whether what he cares about is diminished or enhanced.¹⁴

And a further reflection of what one cares about is that one has second-order volitions that derive from one's caring: "The formation of a person's will is most fundamentally a matter of his coming to care about certain things, and of his coming to care about some of them more than about others."¹⁵

A conflict between one's second-order volitions and one's first-order desires requires a form of resolution that is different from the resolution

¹³ Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," in *The Importance of What We Care About: Philosophical Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 19.

¹⁴ From "The Importance of What We Care About," in Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 83.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

of inconsistencies among one's first-order preferences. It involves, as Frankfurt says, identification, taking one's volitions to be one's real self and one's first-order desire to be inauthentic; and it requires, too (as he elsewhere adds), the capacity for decision, for making up one's mind.¹⁶ To the extent, once more, that government action limits one's ability to act on one's desires in ways that reflect and endorse the second-order volitions that one has identified with, it is, once more, possible to say that it is helping one to make one's life.

The fundamental arguments here are two. First, if the ground of autonomy is that it is required to shape one's own life, then we should distinguish, in using the power of the state to limit people's actions, between constraints that substantially interfere with their making of their lives and ones that don't. The latter do not threaten life-making and cannot be ruled out, therefore, on the basis of such considerations. Second, given our actual irrationality, which itself interferes with our life-making, it will be fine—sometimes, at least—to constrain people to do what is reasonable, where this is a matter of shaping the execution of their will rather than their will itself.

This very rough and preliminary exploration of some of the connections between our notions of reason and our entitlement to political freedom has brought us back, once more, to questions of identification. For, if Frankfurt is right, we need a notion of identifying with what one cares about if we are to resolve some of the many internal contradictions that threaten our claims to be reasonable people. It is, I hope, obvious enough that one reason for caring about things is that one thinks of oneself as being a person of a certain kind: so that what Frankfurt calls "identifying with what one cares about" can be structured by what I called, in the first lecture, one's identifications.

I want in a moment to begin to draw some conclusions for the political project of shaping the identities (and thus the lives) of citizens, the project I shall call "soul-making." But before turning, finally, to that project I should like to point out a different connection between our cognitive limitations and our identities, one that shows up clearly in political life.¹⁷ We cannot gather and process the information it takes to develop reasonably based views on all of the complex questions of policy

¹⁶ See "Identification and Wholeheartedness," in Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, pp. 159–76.

¹⁷ See *Elements of Reason: Cognition, Choice, and the Bounds of Rationality*, ed. Arthur Lupia, Mathew D. McCubbins, and Samuel L. Popkin (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

that face a modern society, even if that project is the one to which we dedicate our entire life. Yet, surprisingly, most of us in fact have opinions on many public questions: we are “for” or “against” globalization; pro– or anti–labor unions; supporters or enemies of the Kyoto treaty. Part of what makes this possible, of course, is the existence of political parties that provide us with total packages of views on all the major questions; and we side with one of them by way of an affiliation that depends, quite often, on their positions on topics that we *have* investigated, or because they are defended by people whose general moral judgment we trust. It is almost true, in a society where there are two parties, that, as W. S. Gilbert had it:

Every boy and every gal
Who’s born into the world alive
Is either a little Liberal
Or else a little Conservative.

(Or is so, at any rate, by the time he or she grows up.)

In other words, what parties do in politics is reduce a plentitude of possible *prises de position* to a few more manageable monoliths: and that is something that identities do for us more generally. They produce packages of life-building elements that have this to be said for them: that they have worked to some degree for a variety of human beings in one tradition or another. If we had the time, cognitive capacity, and imaginations to work out every human possibility for ourselves, we might be tempted by the thought of complete novelty: by the idea that we should be totally original. But, of course, without any recognizable elements our individualities would then impose impossible cognitive burdens on others: there would be nothing they could infer from our dress about our gender and sexuality, for example. And, as a result, our lives would not be responsive to other lives in the Hegelian manner.

Let me now say a little more exactly what I mean by “soul-making,” beginning by way of a return to the question of the ethical evaluation of one’s single human life.¹⁸ Living a life means filling the time between

¹⁸ There are, of course, traditions that suppose that we may have, in some sense, more than one life. It would be an interesting question to explore for such traditions what difference it makes that one is supposed to have a sequence of lives. Since in some such traditions—those of Hinduism, for example—the shape of later lives reflects facts about earlier ones, there is a clear sense in which one has responsibility for happenings in later lives; so that sequences of lives have the sort of ethical connectedness that single lives do in the view I am exploring.

birth (or at any rate adulthood) and death with a pattern of attempts and achievements that may be assessed ethically, in retrospect, as successful or unsuccessful, in whole or in part. And the ethical dimensions of the life include *both* the extent to which a person has created and experienced things—such as relationships, works of art, and institutions—that are objectively significant *and* the degree to which she has lived up to the projects she has set for herself (projects defined in part by way of her identifications). A life has gone well if a person has mostly done for others what she owed them (and is thus morally successful) and has succeeded in creating things of significance and in fulfilling her ambitions (and is thus ethically successful).¹⁹ An individual identity, one's individuality, defines one's ambitions, determines what achievements have significance in one's own particular life. One's individuality makes certain things a significant part of the measure of one's life's success and failure, even though they would not be elements of the measure of success in every life. In my novelist's life—a life that is a novelist's life because I have chosen to make it one—the fact that I have *not* written that witty and intelligent satire of contemporary urban life that I have been struggling toward is a significant failure. My life is diminished by it. In your philosopher's life, the witty and intelligent satire you *have* written is an accidental thing, adding little to your life's value; and its cost was that you failed to complete the thinking-through of metaphysical realism that would have made your life wholly more satisfactory.

To create a life, in other words, is to interpret the materials that history has given you. Your character, your circumstances, your psychological constitution, including the beliefs and preferences generated by the interaction of your innate endowments and your experience: all these need to be taken into account in shaping a life. They are not constraints on that shaping; they are its materials. Faced, as we come to maturity, with a developing identity and a growing understanding of our circumstances, each of us has to interpret those circumstances and construct our identities, so as to make our lives as successful as possible. The identities we make, our individualities, are interpretative responses to our talents and disabilities, and the changing social, semantic, and material contexts we enter at birth; and we develop our identities dialectically with our capacities and circumstances, because the latter are in part the product of what our identities lead us to do.

¹⁹ Dworkin defines ambitions in the sense I mean: "Someone's ambitions include all his tastes, preferences, and convictions as well as his overall plan of life: his ambitions furnish his reasons or motives for making one choice rather than another" (*Sovereign Virtue*, p. 322).

By “soul-making” I mean *the political project of intervening in the process of interpretation through which each citizen develops an identity with the aim of increasing her chances of living an ethically successful life*. My interpretation of my circumstances will lead me, as I have said, to have certain ambitions, on the basis of my beliefs and my underlying preferences, which will themselves be shaped by my identifications. Providing me with relevant information—and thus shaping my beliefs—is not soul-making unless it is aimed at reshaping my identity. So governments that inform citizens that smoking and unprotected sex are dangerous are not engaging in soul-making. This is the least controversial kind of government provision of information because our capacity for reason, however limited, is the ground of our right to manage our own lives. That capacity is properly exercised when relevant information is used to shape our decisions.²⁰ But not all government provision of information is aimed simply at giving citizens bases of decision. The telling of national histories, even when entirely factual, is often motivated by the desire to shape citizens’ identifications and, thus, their individualities. It is designed to raise the thought: Now *that* is the kind of country I want to belong to. And if it succeeds in doing that, creating or reinforcing a national identification in order to improve the life of the citizen—rather than the prospects of the *polis*—then such story-telling is a form of soul-making; which is why, I suspect, there are many modern liberals who are, at least, skeptical about this form of nationalist project.²¹

Nor is it soul-making, in my sense, when government aims to alter our identities solely in order to make us do our duty to others; as when a public education system is designed to encourage the sort of civic identity that guides us to respect the rights of our fellow citizens. For this is driven by a concern not for ethical success but, at most, for moral success; and even moral success is not usually the point, because most such moral shaping aims to protect not the person shaped but others upon whom her actions impinge. But a government does seek to shape a young citizen’s soul when it insists on sports in state schools in order to develop team spirit, thus shaping her relation to her identities in ways that go beyond what is morally required.

²⁰ The provision of misinformation, on the other hand, interferes with the carrying out of our projects; and where it interferes with the success of those projects that flow from our identities it is especially objectionable on that ground.

²¹ Telling me that smoking is dangerous doesn’t affect my identity, in this sense, though it *is* aimed to make my life go better.

So, to insist on the point, not everything that government does that forms my identity is soul-making. For soul-making has to be *aimed* at making such changes and so aimed in order to improve the citizen's chances of living an *ethically successful* life. Of course, governments must affect how lives go: for government must enforce contracts and provide the physical security—from assault and the destruction of our property—that is the background to the pursuit of any reasonable life at all. And these acts will certainly affect the circumstances within which I make my life and, thus, the actions I perform, and may well impact my identifications as well. Still, these acts are only soul-making if they aim to improve my ethical prospects by altering the interpretation of my circumstances that guides my life.

It seems to me that there is an understanding of modern liberalism—one particularly prevalent, I think, in the United States and among certain defenders of “free markets” elsewhere—according to which soul-making, thus understood, is wrong. I suspect that it is a resistance to soul-making that underlies much opposition, of the sort expressed by Isaiah Berlin, to positive conceptions of liberty. Let us call this skeptical opposition to soul-making *restrictive liberalism*.²²

Let me use again the distinction between ethics and morals from the beginning of my first lecture to specify the content of this restrictive view. There is a reasonable place for government in guaranteeing security of life and property and creating the framework of contract because these are matters that have to do with how we treat one another; because they are, in this sense, moral matters. But restrictive liberalism claims that the government should not interfere in ethics, should not be guided by notions as to what lives are good and bad for a person to lead, once he

²² The form of restrictive liberalism I am interested in is a restricted liberalism of principle. It assumes government can be trustworthy and transparent. This is no doubt, to put it gently, a utopian assumption, and there is a tradition of restrictive liberalism that is based not in the arguments I am considering but in that mistrust. It is the liberalism of James Madison, who sought to construct both a constitution of checks and balances in which no power could accumulate too easily anywhere and a rich civil society that would enmesh us in so many networks of interest that no network would ever dominate a majority of us and thus be able to organize the permanent domination of a minority. Madison helped to design a political system that was meant to sustain a wide diversity of thick social identities without government involvement in soul-making. I have some sympathy with these arguments, but I am not going to concern myself with them here. For there are those who would not allow the government to carry out these functions even if it could be trusted, and it is their arguments I am interested in.

or she has met the enforceable demands of moral duty.²³ And so, more specifically, the government should not seek to make me a better person for my own sake. I said something very like this myself in the first lecture. I identified Mill's liberalism with "the view that I should be permitted (in particular, by the state) to make whatever life flows from my choices, provided that I give you what I owe you and do you no harm."

But I have also pointed, from time to time, to ways in which the fact that each of us has a life to make can at least raise the possibility that the state ought to act to help us in that project. And at least some of these possibilities entail a kind of soul-making. Thus, I pointed out that we couldn't respect the autonomy of infants because, not yet having individualities, they begin with no basis for making the choices that will determine how their lives will go. Since parents cannot be guaranteed to prepare children for an autonomous adulthood, the state must, at least sometimes, intervene. As a result, a society *must* engage to some degree in the soul-making of children. It must shape character, preferences, and beliefs; and it should do so with the aim of allowing children to grow into adults whose lives will be successful. Since this shaping will affect the child's conception of her identity and, in particular, will help determine what the adult into whom she grows will take to be her identity, this is soul-making on the grandest scale. It intervenes in a child's interpretation of her situation by forming the tools of that interpretation.

I also argued that the fact that each of us has a life to lead might provide a reason for the state to sustain the materials for making a life, among them the infrastructure that gives sense to our social identities. The free exercise of our identities may require socially provided resources, I said (admitting that I wasn't sure what this might mean in many cases). These socially provided resources, among them the recognition that generates self-respect, go far beyond the provision of objective information or the neutral provision of material resources that will allow the agent to interpret the world and make a life. For each identity that a society sustains in this way is changed by the very fact of government recognition. "Hispanic" in the United States exists as a social identity that includes Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and immigrants from dozens of Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America and

²³ So a restrictive liberal will, of course, take into account people's ethical projects, not least because our duties may include not undermining other people's ethical projects in various ways.

the Caribbean, in part because of the U.S. government's acknowledgment of those people as a collectivity. Many state acts have taken place since the creation of the identity that are aimed at shaping the identities, and thus the ethical prospects, of Hispanics; among them, for example, the provision of bilingual education programs for adults that allow them to maintain a language-based identity while integrating them into American society. So here is a case of soul-making for adults.²⁴

And finally, after my discussion of our defection from the rules of reason, I suggested that there were circumstances in which governments might want to mold our environments so that our imperfect cognitive systems will more often settle on the right answer, as understood by applying the rules of reason; and that it might guide us to choices that reflect what our own judgments would have been, if we had applied our rational capacities more effectively. It will not do to say this cannot be soul-making because it can only give effect to our interpretation of our circumstances rather than overruling or altering it. For sometimes, at least, in cases that I am going to consider, the government may seek to intervene directly in making our identities.

These are all instances of soul-making; and if pursued by a government that is guided, at least in part, by a concern to help each of us make a success of our own lives, then they are instances of liberal soul-making. I want now to say a little more about each of these three forms of liberal soul-making: in the education of the young, in sustaining social identities, and in saving us from our own rational incapacities. I shall begin with the last of these; and to do so I would like to borrow some ideas from Ronald Dworkin.

In *Sovereign Virtue* Dworkin argues for a political morality that is governed by two central principles. According to the *principle of equal importance*, "it is important, from an objective point of view, that human lives be successful rather than wasted, and this is equally important, from the objective point of view, for each human life." The *principle of special responsibility* declares that each of us has special responsibility for the

²⁴ This does not cease to be soul-making just because the social identity in question was not itself wholly the product of intentional state action. Even where it is the fact that the identity already exists that leads to government support for it, that support provides a resource for individuals who have access to the identity, because they may require it for ethical success. But, as I say, in so doing it helps to give meaning to the identity and thus helps form the identities of those who take it up.

success of our own life. “Though we must all recognize the equal objective importance of the success of a human life, one person has a special and final responsibility for that success—the person whose life it is.”²⁵

But Dworkin has an especially helpful discussion—one that appeared first as a Tanner Lecture, in fact—of how each of us should be permitted to take special and final responsibility for the success or failure of our own life. In an essay on “Equality and the Good Life,” Dworkin answers the question, “By what standard should we test a life’s success or failure?” What is the metric by which our fundamental ethical choices are evaluated?

The question, he rightly insists, is not whether we get more or less of what we want (more or less of what he calls our “volitional well-being”) but whether we get more or less of what is worth having; more or less, in his formulation, of our “critical well-being.” Given his commitment to special responsibility, you will predict that he takes it that what is in our critical interest depends, in part, on what our plan of life is, what projects we have selected for ourselves. His metric is provided by what he calls the “model of challenge.” That model, he writes,

adopts Aristotle’s view that a good life has the inherent value of a skillful performance. . . . The model of challenge holds that life is itself a performance that demands skill, that it is the most comprehensive and important challenge we face, and that our critical interests consist in the achievements, events and experiences that mean that we have met the challenge well.²⁶

Now the notion I want to borrow from Dworkin is a useful distinction between three ways in which our circumstances figure in the evaluation of how well we have met the challenge. Some of our circumstances act as parameters, he says, defining what it is for us to have lived a successful life. They are, so to speak, part of the challenge that we must meet. Others are limits—obstacles that get in the way of our making the ideal life that the parameters help define. And the rest are resources. In thinking about her own life, each person must decide how to allocate her circumstances between these categories, just as an artist must decide which aspects of the tradition she inherits define what her art is and which are barriers to or instruments for her creativity.

²⁵ Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue*, p. 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 253. On the challenge model, as he says later, living well is “responding in the right way to one’s situation” (p. 260).

We have no settled template for that decision, in art or in ethics, and no philosophical model can provide one, for the circumstances in which each of us lives are enormously complex.... Anyone who reflects seriously on the question which of the various lives he might lead is right for him will consciously or unconsciously discriminate among these, treating some as limits and others as parameters.²⁷

Among the circumstances Dworkin regards as his own parameters is his being American. His American-ness is, he says, “a condition of the good life for” him.²⁸ So, for example, even though he has long taught jurisprudence in England and has no doubt influenced the development of English legal thinking, there surely is, for him, a special significance to his contributions to American constitutional jurisprudence, a significance that derives from the fact that America—and not England—is *his* country.²⁹ Clearly Dworkin’s talk of parameters here recalls much of what I have said about identification: to identify as an L is to treat one’s being an L as a parameter.

Here, once more, social identities seem absolutely central to ethical life. Consider, to give another example, homosexuality. For some people, their homosexuality is a parameter: they are gay, and, happy or unhappy, rich or poor, the life they seek to make will be a life in which erotic relationships with members of their own sex will be central. Others think of their sexuality as a limitation: they want desperately to be rid of homosexual desires, and, if they cannot be rid of them, they would at least like to succeed in not acting on them. (When I was a student here there were some people who apparently regarded their *heterosexuality* in this way.)³⁰

I think the distinction between parameters and limits is indeed crucial and that making it is central to ethical life. Furthermore, it seems to me absolutely right to insist that many aspects of the allocation between

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 261.

²⁹ Among the limits Dworkin admits to is that he is not as good a sailor of recreational boats as he would like to be. Ibid., p. 243.

³⁰ It is an important part of Dworkin’s view that you can be wrong about whether something is a parameter of your life: it is not simply up to you. So he might say that it is ordinarily just a *mistake* in our society to think this way: or, at any rate, that it is a mistake to think it under pressure from the irrational homophobia of our culture. But he could also say that for such people their sexuality just is a limitation; which is what he says about those who have, but wish they did not have, a “generous appetite for sex” (ibid., p. 82).

parameter and limit must be up to me. This is part of my special responsibility: not only must I meet my challenge, I must also define it.

Here is another place where our understanding of social identities helps us: for it allows us to see that though this act of definition must be mine, the resources I have to draw on in defining my challenge are provided as much as anything by my society. You will recall that I discussed in the first lecture the ways in which the narrative patterns associated with identities help people shape their lives. Because these stories are socially transmitted and produced, they are different in different places. And so because I draw on narrative resources provided by a particular set of social groups, the way I define my challenge will reflect things that are particular to those groups as well.

Dworkin's mobilization of these ideas generates an activist state, because the equal importance of our lives means that each of us is entitled to an equal share of our society's resources in making a life, and some of his most original proposals have to do with how we should measure and equalize resources.³¹ But nothing in here yet requires that governments take a view about the relative merits of the different challenges entailed by different possible assignments of our characteristics to the status of parameters and limitations: so far, for all we have said, legitimate governments will intervene to provide us with an equal share of the resources we need to make our lives; but beyond the demand that we do our duty to others, they will not take a view about what lives we make. That is, for each of us, our own special responsibility.

I have been suggesting, on the other hand, that our limited rationality raises the possibility that the state may have to evaluate at least *some* challenges and engage in soul-making based on those evaluations. I shall explore that possibility and some other kinds of soul-making in my final lecture.³²

³¹ Among other things he takes seriously the notion that the equality of resources to which we are entitled covers some of our natural endowments as well, so that the disabled are entitled to compensation for their disabilities and the untalented are entitled to a guaranteed base-line income if the market does not provide one. For a brief summary of (my understanding of) Dworkin's position, see my "Equality of What?" in the *New York Review of Books*, May 2001.

³² I want to remind you again that even the restrictive liberal distinguishes ethical from moral interventions in our lives and permits the latter. So, in particular, if some element of your identity is associated with an immoral project, if part of your self-defined challenge is doing injustice, the restrictive liberal will have a perfectly principled reason for rejecting your challenge and intervening in your shaping of your life. There is no paradox in saying that we will not let a couple force their adult daughter into a marriage that does not meet with her approval in the name of autonomy: their autonomy is a right to shape their own

III. SOUL-MAKING

At the end of the last lecture, I promised to defend a form of soul-making motivated by a recognition of our defections from the rules of ideal reason. But I want to do this in the context of a clear understanding that restrictive liberalism is not the requirement that the state ignore our identities; that it be color-blind or gender-blind, as it is common now to express that idea. Soul-making is deliberately shaping identities, and, as Dworkin's challenge model proposes—rightly in my view—each person has the central place in determining the parameters of her life. But providing you with resources, as Dworkin's picture also makes clear, is perfectly consistent with taking no view at all about how you have evaluated your challenge. This is as true of identity-supporting resources, such as civic celebrations of ethnically significant holidays, as it is of handouts of money. Restrictive liberals do not oppose providing you with resources; rather they are against, roughly, both telling you what to do with them (beyond not using them in ways that are unjust) and trying to make you want to use them in any particular one of the many morally permissible ways. So if you need certain resources because of your identity that others do not, there is no reason why a restrictive liberal should ignore this fact in designing social arrangements. The provision of public lavatories marked for gender is a reflection of the fact that people's gender identities often entail a sense of bodily privacy that makes the presence of the other sex an embarrassment in that context. That provision need not be an endorsement of that norm of gender identity, and need not be seen as an attempt to force us to interpret our genders in a way that entails this conception of privacy: it could be supported by a restrictive liberal as a mere reflection of the fact that this is how we feel.

It is important, I think, that restrictive liberalism is actually somewhat less limited in its potential interventions than is sometimes assumed, for another reason: a restrictive liberal, too, can acknowledge the need to do something about our pervasive irrationalities. So before considering modes of soul-making that go beyond restrictive liberalism, I would like first to propose, as a thought experiment, a mechanism that

with her approval in the name of autonomy: their autonomy is a right to shape their own lives, not to shape their daughter's, and respect for the autonomy of others, properly understood, is a moral obligation. (It does not follow, of course, that any intervention to change a person's character that will lead them to do their duty more often is *eo ipso* justified.)

should be congenial to restrictive liberalism by which the state could provide us with a tool for dealing with one form of irrationality: namely, a certain sort of weakness of will.

I am not going to provide an account of what weakness of the will consists in, or even of what is irrational about it. (Though I shall say that some of Frankfurt's ideas are helpful in answering these questions.) Saint Paul confessed to the Romans: "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do."¹ I shall take it for granted only that (a) sometimes, like Saint Paul, we find ourselves not doing what we judge to be all-things-considered best for us to do, even when no one else's interests are at stake, and that (b) this is to breach the rules of reason. All of us have fallen off diets, or bought frivolous things when we had resolved to save, or left tasks to the last minute that we knew we would have done better if we had undertaken them steadily over a longer time.

Recognizing this, and understanding that every life would go better if we had mechanisms for controlling our akratic tendencies, the government might step in to propose one helpful solution. Each of us will be given a government-authorized Self-Management card. With modern technology it would be relatively easy to set it up so that each of us could manage our appetites (whether for calories, for nicotine, for alcohol, or for heroin) in the following way. We could sign in, on the web, to the relevant government website and list those things that we did not wish to be able to buy. One would be free to bind oneself for a certain period in this way, so that a change of mind would be given effect only after due deliberation. By law, all goods would be classified according to categorizations relevant for this purpose, and all stores would require the presentation of the Self-Management card before selling anything. The card would be swiped and read before any sale. A person who sought to buy anything that was listed as among the items proscribed on the website would be told that the store was not able to sell it to her, unless, of course, she went back to the website and altered the list. Here we adopt Ulysses' response to the temptations of the sirens, with the government providing the infrastructure.

Notice that this is something that could not be privately arranged. If there were any shops that did not insist on the card, then the device would not work for me. When I am dieting, I should not consume

¹ King James Bible, Romans, chapter 7, verse 19.

liquor or chocolates or a whole list of other high-calorie foods. I know this. I remove them from my house when I am dieting; I tell my friends not to offer them to me. But if I arrive at the supermarket, tired from work at the end of a long day, I know I will succumb and buy myself a Kit-Kat. So, when I go on the diet, I simply enter chocolates onto my Self-Management account as proscribed for the period of the diet and only a criminal will sell them to me. Since, as it happens, I am fairly law-abiding and my friends are responsible, the fact that it would be a criminal transaction to acquire some actually means that, once the entry on the website is done, I will not get chocolates.²

Perhaps it is the case that all of us could take heroin once without being addicted. In that case, I might be interested in having the experience. So I might sign myself up for one dose of heroin and go out and buy it, knowing that the temptation to do so again would require my reflectively signing on and that I could resist the temptation to do that, even though, faced in the store with a second chance at heroin, I might not resist it. The whimsicality of our akratic desires is thus made manageable; and lives that might have failed utterly if heroin had been freely available are in fact lived successfully.

Here, then, is a state-enforced scheme that gives each of us a tool for the management of our lives; nevertheless, it is entirely up to us to decide how to make use of it. You are free to have your Self-Management card declare all goods available to you. So the state here takes no view about the first-order question of how we wish to define the challenge of our lives—if you opt for the struggle with heroin addiction (or even drift into it irrationally), this system permits it. But it does express a second-order commitment to helping us make lives successful by whatever standards we ourselves have defined.

The Self-Management card makes clear that the state can respond to our irrationalities without soul-making. This is important because some people seem to think that there is a direct argument from restrictive liberal premises to the conclusion that there is no role for the state beyond the equalization of resources or as the guarantor of basic moral obligations. Here, however, is a role for the state in enabling our ethical

² Such a system might obviously be extended to deal with narcotics. The government might say that everyone was presumptively signed off from acquiring heroin, but that one could sign on for its use for a fixed amount and period if one chose. Because of the psychology of addiction, it might seem best with an actual proposal to say that, with heroin and such drugs, one would have to sign up a day in advance to make sure that one had time to reflect on what one was doing; but that might offend the restrictive liberal.

success that is consistent with restrictive liberalism and derives from our shared recognition of our incapacity to live by the rules of reason.

But I want, now, to go further and argue that our irrationalities can provide grounds for state soul-making in defense of our ethical projects: sometimes it will be right for the state to help people by shaping their individualities because their unshaped identities are the result of a limited capacity to follow the rules of reason.

Social identities are, as I have insisted all along, among the elements of our individualities. To the extent that social identities are incoherent (in a sense I shall be exploring soon), their incoherence can be an obstacle to the coherence of individual identities that include them. If our irrationality leads us to fail to see or respond to the incoherence of certain social identities, then someone might seek to reshape those social identities, thus reforming those whose individual identities are partially defined by them, in the name of the success of their individual lives. And sometimes, so it seems to me, that someone might be the state.

By the incoherence of a social identity, I mean this: that it has a set of norms associated with it, such that, in the actual world, attempting to conform to some subset of those norms undermines one's capacity to conform to others. (The more substantially this undermining of norms by each other damages the prospects of success of the lives of those who bear the identities, the more incoherent I shall say they are.) The incoherence of a social identity can lead to incoherence in individual identities: to someone's having an identity that generates projects and ambitions that undermine one another. Clearly this will lead to problems for those who identify with an incoherent social identity; their lives will go worse than they might have if they had access to a (more) coherent social identity. A project of reform of the identity to make its norms more coherent would therefore be in the interest of those people. If we could achieve this reform by informing people of the facts of incoherence, then government might choose to do so; and it would be engaging in soul-making to do this, as I observed when I mentioned certain forms of nationalist identity building projects earlier. But if irrationalities of some sort lead citizens not to respond to the facts in this reasonable way, we might then consider other mechanisms of reform, if any were available.

I think that there are many ethnic and racial identities in the modern world that fit exactly this abstract characterization. They are inco-

herent; their incoherence has been regularly announced to no obvious effect; and there are available mechanisms of reform that could be carried out by governments that would lead people to new, more coherent identities. Furthermore, while these reforms would also sometimes lead people to treat others better (and so have a moral dimension to them that is important as well) they would certainly also increase the chances of the ethical success of the lives of those whose identities they are.

To establish that I am right in any particular case I should need, then, to argue three things: that the identity was incoherent; that being informed of the incoherence had little effect; and that there were mechanisms of reform, other than the provision of that information. I do not have the time to do this in any great detail for even a single case. But let me sketch in the argument for one case: that of one American racial identity.

An identity is incoherent, I said, if some of the norms associated with it are mutually undermining. And by “norm,” here, I did not mean anything especially grand. Identities afford reasons for action to those who identify with them, of the sorts I suggested in the first lecture; and, as a result, they will say to themselves sometimes, “Because I am an L, I should do X.” Any such appeal (if it is, indeed, reasonable) is, in the terms I am proposing, an appeal to a norm associated with that identity.

Most social identities, especially of historically subordinated groups, have norms of solidarity: “Because I am an L,” an L will say, “I should do this thing for that other L.” One way in which an identity can be incoherent, then, is if what I called in the first lecture the *social conception* that in part defines the identity pulls, so to speak, in different directions, because it has criteria for ascribing the identity that are inconsistent with the facts. Racial identities in the United States have exactly this feature. Many Americans believe that a person with one African-American and one European-American parent is an African-American, following the so-called one-drop rule that prevailed in some legal conceptions of black identity in the period before slavery and the legal institutions of “Jim Crow,” America’s system of apartheid, were abolished. While most Americans understand that this means that some African-Americans will “look white,” they mostly suppose that this phenomenon is rare in relation to the African-American population as a whole. So, while they acknowledge that there are African-Americans who can “pass for white,” they believe it to be a general truth that African-Americans in general

are very likely to have been subject to the sort of racial discrimination that manifests itself in the sort of everyday discourtesy from public officials that remains a regrettably common feature of American social life.

The set of beliefs I have just described is not logically incoherent; there are certainly what philosophers call “possible worlds” in which they are all true together. But in the actual world these beliefs are not correct, because they are inconsistent with the fact that very many—perhaps even a majority—of the Americans who are descended from African slaves “look white,” are treated as white, and identify as such.³ To put the matter as paradoxically as possible: most people who are African-American by the one-drop rule are, are regarded as, and regard themselves as white. Most people in the United States have a social conception of the African-American identity that entails that this is not so. So they have a social conception that is inconsistent with the facts. Of course, most people do not know this. And as a result it is also part of the social conception of African-American identity that there are some people of African-American ancestry who were raised as white people, not knowing of their African ancestry; who look like other white people and thus have the skin-privilege associated with whiteness; and are, as a result, not really African-American. People who have thought about the matter a little will know that this means that the one-drop rule is not to be taken too absolutely and that, as a result, their notion of what it means to be an African-American has fuzzy boundaries. But, because they do not realize the inconsistency that I have just identified, they regard this as a minor anomaly that makes little practical difference.

The result is that the norm of solidarity for African-Americans entails that African-Americans very often have, in the one-drop rule, a reason for identity-based generosity to people they believe, on the basis of another part of their social conception, to be white. If they acted on the one-drop rule-based norms, their identity-based generosity would be directed more often than not toward people they regard as whites.

This would be only a mild incoherence that posed no substantial

³ This fact was drawn to my attention by Brent Staples in a Du Bois lecture in early April 2001 and will, no doubt, be discussed in the book that will be based on them. He was kind enough to refer me to Robert P. Stuckert, “African Ancestry of the White American Population,” *Ohio Journal of Science* 58, no. 3 (May 1958): 155. This article describes its statistical model and the sorts of data against which it was tested and concludes: “The data presented in this study indicate that the popular belief in the non African background of white persons is invalid. Over twenty-eight million white persons are descendants of persons of African origin.”

threat to the critical interests of the lives of most African-Americans, if acts of individual identity-based generosity were the only norm associated with American blackness. But, of course, it is not. And among the other norms strongly and centrally associated with that identity is support for policies of affirmative action in employment, government contracting, and education. Very many Americans are inclined to say, "As a black person, I support affirmative action." Now, by affirmative action they mean something like this: that various social goods, among them jobs and places in colleges and universities, should be allocated in a way that gives weight to making the average chance of getting these social goods about the same for blacks and for whites. If blacks are between twelve and thirteen percent of the U.S. population, they think that, *ceteris paribus*, they should be represented as about that percentage of those receiving those goods.

Support for affirmative action, thus understood, derives from many considerations. That black people generally have received less than their fair share of these social goods historically and continue to do so, in part as a consequence of historical racial injustice, in part as a result of persisting racial prejudice, and so are entitled to compensation for that wrong; that the presence of a significant number of black people in positions of social authority and respect—as lawyers, public officials, doctors, teachers at prestigious institutions—will reduce the extent of negative stereotyping of black people in general; that the presence of significant numbers of black people in all major social positions will guarantee that black interests will be taken into account in decision-making and that anti-black prejudice will less often be expressed in contexts of decision and thus be less determinative of the outcome; and so on. These arguments are not usually individually self-regarding; they are driven by the desire that things should go better generally for black people in the United States. Many African-Americans, that is, are what black people in America call "race men" and "race women." It is important to them that black people should do well; and making a contribution to that end is one of the aims by which they define the success of their lives.

Now, all decent people will wish that black people in America should not do worse than others because they are treated by state and society as black. We should all wish that the United States, like all other states, not be a racially discriminatory society. As a result, all decent people want African-Americans to do better, on average, than, on average,

they currently do. But while the race men and women certainly think this, this is not the full content of their thought. They take pleasure in the successes and failures of other black people not just to the extent that this reflects an increase in justice, but as a reflection of their identification as black. Central to their identifications is a form of partiality: the success of black people generally matters to them more than the successes of others.

It is the similarity of this sentiment to the sentiment that underlies much patriotism that leads people to call such dispositions “nationalist.” Like other nationalists, these people have the thought that they would like their people to do well, *because they are their people*. It may well be that if African-Americans ceased to be (or, at any rate, to think of themselves as being) the victims of unrecompensed injustice, they might mostly cease to identify as African-Americans, so that this form of nationalism would cease. But while it exists, the success of many African-American lives is thus tied up with the coherence of the project of racial uplift.

The inconsistency of a race man or woman’s social conception of African-American identity with the facts thus poses more than a minor threat of incoherence. For without a clarification of the issue of who is black, the content of policies that meet their aim cannot be identified and the state cannot even consider whether it can, in justice, undertake policies that help to make the lives of African-Americans go well by helping to achieve one of the identity-related aims of African-American nationalists.

I said I needed to establish three things, of which the first was that racial identity in the United States was, in my sense, incoherent. I hope that I have begun to discharge that obligation.

My second charge is to show that information would not by itself solve the problem. That is evident in this case. There has been a great circulation of exactly the sort of information that I have been providing among educated Americans in the last few decades and, more particularly, among African-Americans. During this same period, however, the sort of black nationalism I have identified has become stronger, *especially among the very middle-class black people who are most likely to have gotten this information*. But the incoherence it entails has not evaporated. There is little discussion and certainly no consensus as to how to reconcile the standard social conception of African-American identity with the facts.

When I first found myself in the United States, some twenty-odd years ago, I assumed that the fact that racial classifications were biologically incoherent—a fact that lies at the heart of the intellectual difficulties in the social conception of race that I have been discussing—was widely known at least among the educated. I can report, after speaking to thousands of educated Americans since, that it continues to be a surprise. Talk of the “social construction of race” has become standard in the last few years, but this is a slogan, not the expression of a coherent understanding. And this could not be so if Americans applied the rules of reason to their thinking about their racial identities, because it is an inconsistency between one set of beliefs—about the prevalence of passing—and another—about how to ascribe African-American identity—that lies, as I said, at its heart.

One reason, I believe, why Americans are less troubled than the rules of reason suggest they should be by these facts is a consequence of a practice that Hilary Putnam, I believe, dubbed *semantic deference*, a practice that is a central feature of languages that are the shared possession of very large numbers of people, with very different experiences and large variations in the extent and the subject matter of their knowledge. Under this practice all of us use words whose precise applications are determined finally by experts. Whether or not we are lawyers, we speak of having contracts, even though most of us would not be in a position to begin to explain what the conditions are in English or American law that must subsist for a contract to exist between two parties. Whether or not we are theoretical physicists we use the word “string” (as I did once in the first lecture), which has a technical meaning that it is beyond my competence (and arguably beyond any current person’s competence!) fully to elucidate. We use these terms believing that there are experts somewhere—and, if no current experts, then procedures that could be learned or applied—that would in fact settle such questions. There is no harm (and, indeed, much benefit) in this practice of what Hilary Putnam was also, I think, the first to call “linguistic division of labor.” As a result of it, I can refer to things that I could not specify procedures for finding, and then pass on knowledge about them to others. But because we are so used to assuming deference to experts elsewhere, we do not standardly inquire into whether the experts actually exist or into whether their procedures are sensible, reliable, or coherent. I do not know whether, after sufficient legal training, I would be inclined to suppose that the concept of a contract was determinate enough to guarantee that the arrangements I have

with my publisher are, in fact, contracts. I do assume that they are and that the relevantly empowered legal officials would decide that this was so if writer's push ever came to publisher's shove.

Now, in the case of race it is widely supposed that there is such a category of experts; that they are biologists or physical anthropologists or medical people of some sort; and that their judgments would mostly confirm widespread commonsense beliefs about races. But, as I have argued often elsewhere, this is not, in fact, the case. Many of these experts do not use the concept; those that do, employ it in ways that do not conform to much racial commonsense; and many of the experts that employ it are not life scientists but social scientists. Not knowing this is, I think, part of the reason that many people have not bothered to do their own conceptual housekeeping. They assume it is being done elsewhere.

Notice that this assumption is itself, in a certain sense, an adjustment to our own knowledge of our own cognitive limitations. We do not have the time or the competence, we suppose, to tidy up all our own concepts and so we accept a practice that divides the task with others. If we all had all the time and intellectual tools, we think, we could do the job for ourselves.

So, while many people use the word "race" in ways that reflect defections from the rules of reason, that they do so is not itself entirely unreasonable. It is a reflection of one of the many adjustments to our cognitive weaknesses that it is sensible for us to make; exactly the sort of practice that we can use reflection on our cognitive limitations, which I recommended in the last lecture, to defend.

Now, given semantic deference, the mere fact that the government makes announcements of these incoherences in a society already somewhat suspicious of government pronouncements on race is unlikely to be very effective. Many people would continue in their current ways (as they already have, despite the widespread diffusion of the notion of the "social construction" of race), supposing that there were experts or forms of expertise somewhere that could settle the difficulties, even after government racial propaganda had sought to draw those difficulties to their attention. In particular, therefore, many African-Americans would continue to have identities whose success was tied up with mutually undermining reasons.

That, I hope, discharges my second burden: I take it that I have shown that the incoherence of American racial identities will not be solved

merely by the further dissemination of the already extremely widely disseminated facts about that incoherence. Part of my evidence is that black nationalism of the sort I identified just now is, as I pointed out a while ago, especially common among those who are best informed about these matters.

My final task, then, is to suggest that there are government actions that would be helpful here; helpful, particularly, in reshaping the social identity *African-American* in ways that, in reducing this incoherence, would increase the possibilities of success, the critical interests, in Dworkin's formulation, of African-Americans. Part of the difficulty here is that much government action in the domain of race is rightly guided not by ethical but by moral concerns. You do not need ethical reasons—in the narrow sense—for government action in this sphere, because there are moral reasons for ending racial injustice.

Nevertheless, my aim is to suggest that there may be ethical reasons for adopting state policies that respond to the incoherence of American racial identity, beyond the mere circulation of the facts through state-funded education of both young people and adults.

What sort of policies could these be? Let me offer, by way of example, just one possibility.

Current American state practice presupposes, by and large, that there is a fact of the matter about everyone as to whether or not she is African-American. One is required to fill in forms for all sorts of purposes that fix one's race, and other people—arresting police officers, for example—may also be required to do so as well. As a result, many people, who think of themselves as clearly and obviously black or white or something other than either of these in the racial system, are encouraged by this practice in the belief that the racial system is in fact relatively straightforward. Were the government to modify these practices it would remove at least one of the major struts that gives support to the idea that social conceptions of race are consistent with reality: the fact that the state appears to be able to construct successful practices that assume that social conception. Such a modification could be motivated in many ways (not the least by the recognition that the relevant social conceptions *are* rationally defective). But it might, surely, also be motivated by the thought that government action here could help to reshape racial identities in ways that would diminish their incoherence.

It will be correctly observed by many, at this point, that the policy I

am speaking of here is necessary only because the state already collects racial “data.” Why not simply say that the state should stay away from all racial classifications? This would, in fact, be fine for my present purposes: for it would be an instance of a state policy in shaping identity motivated in part by a concern for the ethical coherence of the lives of those with racial identities and based on a recognition of the role of defections from the rules of reason in their current incoherence.

But there is a reason not to go this far. For the United States government has reasons to collect some racial “data” in order to enforce its antidiscrimination laws. After all, antidiscrimination law presupposes that it is wrong to deprive people of certain socially available opportunities in virtue of their racial identities. One of the best forms of evidence for such practices consists in statistical discrepancies in employment, housing, lending, and the like. The wrongs underlying these statistics are moral wrongs; but they are wrongs because of the principle of equal importance, because such treatment denies that people of one racial identity are entitled to the same chances of success in their lives as people of others. So it is a moral wrong that we bar for ethical reasons.

Antidiscrimination law does not have to be motivated as soul-making, nor, in particular, as soul-making in response to a recognition of our defections from the rules of reason, which is my current topic.

But it is worth insisting that much antidiscrimination law is, in fact, soul-making, though not of the kind motivated by recognition of our irrationality. For when everyday social practices—such as the provision of racially segregated public accommodations or the proscription of interracial relations—project “an inferior or demeaning image on another” and “that image is internalized” then, as Charles Taylor insisted in a passage I quoted in my first lecture, that “projection of an inferior or demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress.”⁴ The result is that changing these everyday social practices—not just by ceasing to enforce them legally but by beginning to proscribe them by law—can be one way of reforming the social conception of the racial identity *black* with the aim of improving the success of the lives of black people through the reform of their identities. That is soul-making *par excellence*; and I share with Charles Taylor and other multicultural liberals the conviction that for wrongly historically derogated identities such soul-

⁴ Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*.

making is more than helpful; it can be one of the duties of a state that cares equally for the lives of all its citizens.

I have been considering arguments for soul-making that result from an acknowledgment of our pervasive irrationality. But liberal soul-making may aim, as I have argued regularly in the course of these lectures, at the sustaining of social identities in ways that derive directly from the recognition of their ethical importance. This is the core of the argument for multicultural liberalism I have just summarized. Restrictive liberalism is going to be skeptical of this view, of course, just because it entails soul-making in the sorts of ways I have suggested for the case of American racial identities.

Now I said in the last lecture that the ethical evaluation of a life depended, first, on whether one had achieved one's ambitions and, second, on whether one had made or experienced anything of significance. We could call the first dimension the subjective dimension of success—not because it is not an objective question whether one has achieved one's ambitions, but because each subject determines what her ambitions are. In creating a self—shaping one's identity—one determines the parameters of one's life and thus defines one's ambitions. Let us call the second dimension of ethical success—the creation and experience of significant things—the objective dimension. If restrictive liberalism is the view that government should not engage in soul-making, does that entail that government should never take a view about *either* the subjective *or* the objective dimensions of a citizen's ethical life?

Suppose that the state has granted us each the equal share of material resources to which we are entitled. Suppose that it has guaranteed us the liberties—including the protection of life, person, and property—that we deserve. Suppose that there is in place a democratic politics, and that each citizen has a vote and the right to stand for office. Then we can consider our question in two stages.

First, is it plausible that it is wrong for that democratic state to propose identity-shaping legislation that is governed by a concern for the subjective success of the lives of citizens? Here the multicultural liberals might say that, once people have identities and the ambitions they generate, a concern for the success of citizens' lives would lead governments to create or support social institutions that allow those ambitions to succeed. People have sexualities. These lead them to have ambitions

for family life in couples. An institution of marriage, which provides supports for and recognition of those couples and the families they create, is a natural consequence of a concern for the subjective ethical success of those who have a family as one of their ambitions. What it means to be a husband or wife is shaped in part by legal rules and meanings. So laws that interpret the significance of marriage, like the race-regarding laws I mentioned a little while ago, are soul-making enterprises. Equality may require that the resources for supporting marriage not detract from the lives of those who have no ambition to be coupled. But it seems consistent with respect for the equal importance of each citizen's life to provide support for those whose subjective ambitions include coupling. Nor does it seem to detract from a citizen's special responsibility, her central place in taking responsibility for her own life: for the success or failure of the marriage will still largely be the doing of its principals.

It might be objected that successful relationships are an element of objective success in life, as well. Perhaps the judgment that sustains marriage (suitably configured) as a liberal institution derives from this fact. So consider another case: that of government regulations designed to guarantee that meat labeled as *halal* or kosher is in fact prepared in the ways required by Muslim or Jewish traditions. Here it seems plausible that conformity to religious dietary codes is valuable only to those who have a commitment to those codes. (This view would be agreed to by Jewish and Muslim traditions: though they might hold that whether you have such commitments is a matter of birth, not of choice.) It is because some people have being Muslim as a parameter that eating only *halal* meat (which contributes to being a good Muslim) is among the conditions of success of their lives. Others, born and raised Muslim, may regard themselves as Muslim in certain contexts, but not see the dietary code as an important part of Muslim tradition. For them, keeping the code is not important, because they do not take it to be important.

Once again, equality does not seem *eo ipso* to rule out government provision of this service. No non-Muslim or Gentile is obliged to take any notice of the labeling; and provided the government would not refuse similar service for other dietary codes on religious grounds, there seems no sense in which this establishes religion or privileges one religious view among others. And special responsibility is respected, too, because citizens retain prime responsibility for the subjective success of their lives, both in defining whether or not dietary codes are parametric for them and in living (or not living) up to them.

Turn now to the question of objective success; and consider, for example, the question of subsidies for the arts. One possible justification for these is that a flourishing culture provides a context in which people can create and experience significant things. For various reasons some such significant things—opera, say—will not be produced by the market.⁵ There seem to be two regular lines of objection to government provision of subsidies on this basis. One is that the question whether opera is valuable is, at best, controversial, at worst, a mere matter of opinion. Opera matters, on this view, to the extent that people care about it and so there is no objective basis for supporting it. If that were true, then this would be another instance of government sustaining subjective success. But I do not think that it is a sensible view that the arts matter only because and to the extent that people care about them. If that were so, then the disappearance of poetry would have no more significance than the disappearance of pushpin.⁶ Suppose, for the moment, that I am right.

A second line of objection is that, even if experiencing opera is an objectively valuable element of success, sustaining it because it enriches lives involves the state in exactly the sort of evaluation of a person's interpretation and definition of her own life that the restrictive liberal seeks to protect. We can hear echoes here of Mill's ringing defense of individuality in chapter three of *On Liberty*: "If a person possesses any tolerable amount of common sense and experience, his own mode of laying out his existence is best, not because it is the best in itself, but because it is his own mode."⁷

I am considering the view that making opera and the arts more generally available at government expense—even when no adult is forced to attend to them—is justified because the arts can contribute to the critical well-being of citizens, whether or not this fact is one that they recognize, and whether or not they have adopted identities—as aesthetes or connoisseurs, say—that give the experience of the arts a subjective importance for them. But on any plausible view of the value of the arts, this value can be realized in our lives only if we experience and attend to them with a certain degree of commitment. And that sort of investment

⁵ These thoughts about opera grew out of a conversation with Paul Boghossian.

⁶ Though I confess to having said this (if only in passing) in the past. See my "Cosmopolitan Patriots," *Critical Inquiry* 23 (Spring 1997): 617–39. Reprinted in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, pp. 91–114.

⁷ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1986), pp. 77–78.

in the arts amounts to an identification with them; it entails the sort of entanglements with one's ambitions and projects that are the stuff of identity. I am not speaking of anything especially grand here: the person who sets aside time during a holiday for reading novels, or who slips in and out of art museums during her lunch break, or who commits some time each week to listening to music is making a life in which the arts matter. In a society without state subsidy of the arts, it must be other lesser arts that shape her soul. But if the state does become entangled in such subsidy it is bound to make decisions that affect what arts are actually available, what effects it has in people's lives; and so it will be in the business of soul-making.

So far as I can see restrictive liberals will be against it for this reason, even though they can acknowledge that many lives go better with these subsidies than they would without. But if the point of government is, at least in part, to create a social world in which our lives can go well, as well as possible, then I think this is enough reason to support the arts through government as intelligently as we can. And this is a project that can be argued for and supported democratically, because, in our reflective moments, we acknowledge that there may be arts whose value we have not yet learned.

I can think of many reasons for skepticism about this project. Government-supported art can be pompous or vacuous; the apparatus of subsidy is ripe for corruption; the energy of an art world may be sapped by bureaucracy; the resources of the state can be unequally directed to the support of the arts favored by the powerful or to the sustenance of the symbolic capital that sustains their power. All this is true; but I do not think that the mere fact that it entails soul-making is an argument against it.

My final brief remarks about soul-making have to do with the education of the young. And here the case for soul-making is simply overwhelming. If you accept any of the central ideas I have been defending, you will agree that children need to be prepared for a life with an identity; that social identities will be among their tools in self-making, as will many other socially provided resources. Because people are entitled to the resources for self-construction, because their lives matter and identity matters to their lives, the state must secure these resources for them, if nobody else will. And it is just an empirical fact that we cannot rely on parents to do this unaided: especially given the richness of resources

needed to prepare a person for a modern life. Even if there are parents who could do this ably on their own, there are many who cannot, and some, alas, who do not care about their children sufficiently to guarantee them what they need, or whose views about what they need are demonstrably and dangerously mistaken.

This fact by itself does not give us the materials we need to decide how government should play its part. Neither the thought that some identities are obstacles to individuality nor the thought that they are instruments of self-creation seems much help: for it seems preposterous to suppose that children could be aided—and equally unattractive to suppose that they *should* be aided—to reach adulthood with no social identities at all; but, on the other hand, that they will need some identity or other seems to under-constrain what we may do in shaping them in childhood. And this matters because it is empirically clear that how we shape them will help determine what lives they will choose to make. We may not, as liberals, want to impose a life upon someone against her will; but what may we do before she has a will at all?

I have left these questions to the end in part because I find them deeply perplexing. How are we to decide what must be taught to children? Surely what—of all the limitless learning in our libraries—they need to know will depend on many things, including their identities. And, equally surely, what identities they develop will depend on what they know. How should a liberal state decide curricular controversy?⁸

Let me end with a suggestion of one way in which the concept of identity can be mobilized in addressing this issue. Some of the greatest controversies about education in democracies occur when people feel that their own children are being taught things that are inconsistent with claims that are crucial marks of their own collective identities. I shall call a claim—whether moral or not—that is, in this sort of way, implicated with a certain collective identity, an *identity-related claim*.

The currency of controversy about the teaching of identity-related claims is not particularly surprising in this age of what Charles Taylor has dubbed the “politics of recognition.” The development, which I have already insisted on, of the liberal idea of an identity has meant that

⁸ My discussion here draws pretty directly on an essay of my own entitled “Preliminary Thoughts on Liberal Education,” *New Political Science* 39/39 (Winter/Spring 1997): 41–62. Reprinted in *The Promise of Multiculturalism: Education and Autonomy in the Twenty-first Century*, ed. George Katsiaficas and Teodros Kiros (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 34–55.

a great deal of politics—especially nationalist and ethnic politics, but also, for example, a lesbian and gay politics that is somewhat modeled on ethno-national politics—turns on the state’s acknowledging a person’s identity and protecting each person’s ability to flourish while publicly expressing that identity. Much debate about what shall be taught in the schools about identity-related claims is thus centrally concerned with insisting on the state’s recognition of some identities (Christian, say) or its nonrecognition of others (lesbian and gay).

Now it will be immediately clear why the notion of raising children to autonomy—with its corollary that we should equip them with the truths they need—does not help much in deciding what should be taught about these particular questions. It does not help because there is substantial social disagreement as to what the truth *is*; and such disagreements, we can predict, will not be settled by the appointment of commissions of experts to resolve them, in the cases where the claims in dispute are identity-related.

You might think the answer should be to stress the democracy in liberal democracy. Let us have public debate among equals and then vote for what should be taught. This seems to me how we *must* decide these questions, in one sense. But among the options in that public debate will be one that says that on some topics we may require the state to step back and leave the matter to the parents. It is not the case that the only option is to teach what the majority believes to be true. And I should like to argue against majority rule in cases where certain identity-related beliefs are in dispute.

I start with the assumption that the role parents play in the raising of children gives them rights in respect of the shaping of their children’s identities that are a necessary corollary of parental obligations. We do not believe that social reproduction should be carried out as it is in *Brave New World*. We believe that children should be raised primarily in families and that those families should be able to shape their children into the culture, identity, and traditions that the adult members of the family take as their own. One liberal reason for believing this is that families help to guarantee the rich plurality of identities whose availability is, as I have said, one of the resources for self-construction.

But once we have left the raising of children to families, we are bound to acknowledge that parental love includes the desire to shape children into identities one cares about, and to teach them identity-

related values, in particular, along with the other ethical truths that the child will need to live her life well. A state that actively undermined parental choices in this regard in the name of the child's future autonomy would be a state constantly at odds with the parents: and that would be unlikely to be good for the children. A compromise is therefore necessary. Here is what I propose: where identity-related propositions are at stake, parents are permitted to insist that their children not be taught what is contrary to their beliefs; and, in return, the state will be able to insist that the children be told what other citizens believe, in the name of a desire for the sort of mutual knowledge across identities that is a condition for living productively together.

Thus, it seems reasonable to teach children about the range of religious traditions in the communities within which they live (indeed, in the world), without requiring them to assent to any of them, so that, to begin with, at least, they will assent only to the religion they have learned at home. This allows the children the knowledge to make identity choices as they themselves grow to autonomy; but it gives parents a special, primary, place in shaping those choices. Only where a parent's choice seems to compromise the possibility of an autonomous adulthood—as would be the case with a refusal, on religious grounds, to allow one's children to learn to read—must the liberal state step in.

This proposal has as a consequence that if intolerance of other identities is built into an identity, or if learning the views of others except as shameful error is one of its norms, we will be seeking, in public education, to reshape that identity so as to exclude this feature. This is liberal soul-making, again. And that makes it plain that liberalism is, of course, more than a procedural value: it places a substantive weight on creating a social world in which each of us can live a life of our own.

I have avoided, the attentive will have observed, one obvious alternative approach to these questions of religion and curricular controversy. That would be to regard the very existence of religious identities as a reflection of our defections from the rule of reason. Fully reasonable people, many philosophers, at least, think, could not believe what most religious people claim to believe; and, to the extent that those beliefs are central, as I have argued, to their identities, their identities are incoherent in the sort of way racial identities, which presume falsehoods, are. A state that cared for us would set about the project of soul-making entailed by reforming our metaphysical convictions.

This argument is certainly too quick. First, because contemporary (and historical) religious traditions in many places do not share the concern for doctrinal correctness that characterizes much Christianity, for example, or some modern streams of Islam. It is arguable that many forms of modern Judaism, while committed to certain practices, are theologically quite noncommittal; and I do not have to remind this audience that there was once a bishop of Woolwich—and former dean of Trinity College—who confessed that being “honest to God” led to atheism.

But the argument is also too quick because the notion of the incoherence of an identity has to do with threats to the success of a life deriving from the ways in which its norms pull in different directions. It is not clear to me that this condition is met by many religious identities. False beliefs by themselves about one’s identity do not make it incoherent: otherwise, given our defections from reason, all of us would be likely to have substantially incoherent identities.

It may be that the best reasons for religious toleration are not identity-related. Liberal religious tolerance began in Europe after a period of devastating religious wars. Attempts to convert others to what various states took to be the correct view turned out to lead to vast amounts of human suffering. I have only been concerned to deny that the arguments from incoherence that I offered about American racial identities can obviously be carried over to religion.

I have explored in this lecture some issues raised by the practice I dubbed “soul-making,” which I defined as *the political project of intervening in the process of interpretation through which each citizen develops an identity with the aim of increasing her chances of living an ethically successful life*. I have defended the view that the state *can* intervene legitimately in soul-making because of our irrationality and *must* sometimes so intervene because our individual identities are in part the product of shared identities that are socially produced.

Our individualities are not simply the products of what is within us. What social psychology teaches us is that what we are and what we do is shaped as much by the social contexts that frame our decisions as by our own inner dispositions.⁹ Since the state is one of the main forces in cre-

⁹ L. Ross and R. Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation: Perspectives of Social Psychology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991).

ating that context, which is so central to shaping our choices and identifications, it cannot but be involved in shaping our identities. In a sense I have been drawing out the consequences of a thought that is sometimes termed “communitarian”: the idea that who we are is profoundly dependent on the thoughts, aims, and actions of others. I agree that a respect for individuality that ignores this fact is doomed to human irrelevance.

But I have not drawn the conclusion that because the state is bound to shape our identities, it should simply do so purposefully and with the good of each of us in mind, engaging freely in soul-making. Rather I have suggested three particular grounds for shaping souls: that children, not having individualities, must be helped to develop them; that our own defections from reason provide some basis for democratically grounded interventions in the social meanings of the identities from which our individualities are constructed; and that those of our moral obligations to each other that the state must enforce may best be sustained by the shaping of our characters.

I want to end by underlining something I said in the first lecture about the relevance of philosophy for politics. If I may rephrase what I said there, I suggested that philosophy is more helpful in framing questions than in providing policies. My hope has been to argue that a philosophical appreciation of the resources of the concepts of “identity” and “reason” is useful in framing many questions that face modern societies. I do not care too much whether you like my answers. But I do hope that I have helped in the reformulation of some of those pressing questions.