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Some Problems with Communities of Choice

PHILIP R. SHIELDS
Department of Philosophy and Religion, Beloit College, 700 College Street, Beloit, Wisconsin 53511-5595, USA; e-mail: shieldsp@beloit.edu

One aspect of globalization is the use of the Internet to increase our choices in life. This is usually taken to be a good thing, or at least to be harmless. We can now more easily transcend the limitations of physical location and spatial distance not only to access goods and services, but also to make connections and form relationships with a variety of people of our own choosing. Increase in choices is not entirely new. In important respects the rise of Internet communities has merely intensified a process that urbanization began long ago. Cities not only brought a variety of goods and services to their inhabitants, but they also brought together people of diverse religions, classes, and ethnicities, and allowed a greater variety of possible associations and self-selected relationships.

In the *Discourse on Method*, Descartes raves about moving to Amsterdam in the seventeenth century, "where in the midst of a great crowd actively engaged in business, and more careful of their own affairs than curious about those of others, I have been enabled to live without being deprived of any of the conveniences to be had in the most populous cities, and yet as solitary and as retired as in the midst of the most remote deserts."[1] What is remarkable and revealing about the account Descartes offers is the ironic way that the increase in choices is directly linked to a detached aloofness, a disengaged anonymity. Being submersed in social possibilities coincides with an asocial isolation and solitude. But Descartes is not disturbed, or even concerned, by this result. In fact, earlier, Descartes described such asocial detachment as an ideal opportunity for objective reflection, "where, as I found no society to interest me, and was besides fortunately undisturbed by any cares or passions, I remained the whole day in seclusion, with full opportunity to occupy my attention with my own thoughts."[2] The absence of family and friends, of meaningful employment, and of emotional ties seems to open up possibilities, allowing the individual greater freedom of thought, and ultimately, of association and action. This is a deep and seductive idea in modern Western societies, going all the way back to the Hebrew prophets, who literally fled to the desert to escape the constraints of family and community and to redefine their personal identity and sense of purpose. Amsterdam allowed Descartes

to achieve this result without having to give up any of the conveniences of civilization.

The Internet raises this process to a higher level and may avoid some of the logistical problems of urbanization like pollution, parking and pigeons, but the allure of freedom and opportunity remains essentially the same. We can control the terms of contact and form relationships with pinpoint accuracy, avoiding, or due to our remoteness, not seeing, the collateral damage. Many of us are now critical of the anonymous detached individualism described by Descartes and we recognize the crucial ways in which human beings are social animals. Indeed, while the Internet was originally envisioned as a means for individuals to procure goods, services, and information, it is increasingly being used as a means to socialize. Chat rooms have proliferated. Internet relationships and Internet communities of all kinds have sprung up over night. Ironically, what initially appeared as a process of distancing and depersonalization now appears as a vehicle for reconstituting relationships and communities that are chosen. Instead of being arbitrarily identified by our given communities, we can self-identify by choosing which communities to affiliate with. This irony has always been a part of urbanization. The sense of detached isolation and anonymity described and valued by Descartes went hand-in-hand with the growth of urban subcultures, ethnic neighborhoods, and civic organizations. Perhaps the rise of Internet communities is not simply a quixotic effort to buy freedom without responsibility. Perhaps it should be seen as an attempt to take ownership of our commitments and to consciously choose our affiliations. In this view, social relationships are important, but they are better when they are fully chosen and not merely thrust upon us by accidents of birth and location.

At this point we can see Internet relationships and communities as examples of what Marilyn Friedman calls "communities of choice."[3] The notion of communities of choice was proposed by Friedman to combine some of the virtues and avoid some of the problems of communitarian and liberal theories, but the idea of communities of choice is incoherent, and the driving liberal assumption behind it, that it would be good for our choices to be as unconstrained by our geographical, historical, and social particularity as possible, is itself highly questionable. Insofar as this assumption is shared by proponents of Internet communities, our analysis raises questions about the value of these virtual communities as well.

The incoherence of the idea of communities of choice stems from the underlying cross-purposes contained in the terms "community" and "choice." The emphasis on community reflects a commitment to the communitarian notion of a social self and the need to ground identity, meaning, and value in something prior to the agency and rational choices of individuals, while the emphasis on choice reflects the liberal wish to transcend such communities and to ground identity, meaning, and value in the agency and rational choices of individuals. Friedman's subsequent attempt to contrast what she

calls communities of place with communities of choice tends to distort both by implying that communities of place are perpetuated passively without the complicity and choices of their members, while communities of choice involve choices that are somehow unconstrained by preexisting prejudices. Instead, we should recognize that any community depends on the active complicity and choices of its members and all choices presuppose values or prejudices that are communally determined.

After rejecting the impossible dualism between communities of place and communities of choice, there is still the question of whether there are differences of degree where some types of community are relatively constrained and others, like friendships and urban communities, allow for more choices and hence are more liberating and thus preferable. This seems to be the real motivation behind Friedman's attempt to distinguish communities of choice from communities of place, and it clearly reflects the deeply held liberal assumption that it would be good for our choices to be as unconstrained by our physical and social particularity as possible. We will question this assumption and briefly consider an extreme case of this ideal, Internet communities, where some of the issues surrounding the conceptual dilemma above reemerge. Increasing the variety and sheer quantity of our choices increases the means at our disposal, but it may do nothing to further the quality of our ends. We conclude that Friedman's notion of a community of choice is indicative of a broader liberal tendency to elevate choice from something having instrumental value to something that is taken as an end in itself, thereby placing more weight on the notion of choice than it can bear.

Marilyn Friedman has noted that many feminists find common cause with communitarian critiques of the abstract individualism that underlies traditional liberal political theory. In her account of these liberal metaphysical assumptions, Friedman writes

> Abstract individualism considers individual human beings as social atoms, abstracted from their social contexts, and disregards the role of social relationships and human community in constituting the very identity and nature of individual human beings. Sometimes the individuals of abstract individualism are posited as rationally self-interested utility maximizers. Sometimes, also, they are theorized to form communities based fundamentally on competition and conflict among persons vying for scarce resources, communities which represent no deeper social bond than that of instrumental relations based on calculated self-interest.[4]

In contrast to this liberal concept of a self, a self that is essentially autonomous and constituted prior to all the social relationships into which it enters, Friedman offers the communitarian view advocated by Alasdair MacIntyre. Quoting MacIntyre she writes

> We all approach our own circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity. I am someone's son or daughter, someone else's cousin or uncle; I am a citizen of this or that city, a member of this or that guild or profession; I belong to this clan, that tribe, this nation. Hence what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles. As such, I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. These constitute the given of my life, my moral starting point. This is in part what gives my own life its own moral particularity.[5]

Socialization through particular relationships and communities is a precondition for becoming a moral reasoner. In a more recent book, *Dependent Rational Animals*, MacIntyre offers a picture of the human situation as fundamentally dependent and derives from this a corresponding picture of the relationship between rationality and various virtues. In the last chapter he concludes that "we are able to become and to continue as practical reasoners only in and through our relationships to others," and hence, "rational enquiry is essentially social." It is "not something that *I* undertake by attempting to separate myself from the whole set of my beliefs, relationships, and commitments and to view them from some external standpoint. It is something that we undertake from within *our* shared mode of practice."[6] In arguments similar to this, many feminists have called for a conception of a social self in order to acknowledge, in Friedman's words, "the role of social relationships and human community in constituting both the self-identity and the nature and meaning of the particulars of individual lives."[7] For example, it is a fundamental thesis of Virginia Held's recent book, *Feminist Morality*, that our ability to be moral reasoners depends on the fact that we are fundamentally social selves. She argues that we identify ourselves with various circles of persons beyond our individual skins and care for their welfare without calculating the utility to ourselves as individuals.[8]

However, while many feminist theorists sympathize with communitarian critiques of the abstract individualism underlying traditional liberal political theory, they have also been anxious to distance themselves from typical formulations of communitarian theory which fail to address the special dangers that traditional parochial communities can present for women and other frequently marginalized groups. Friedman writes, "communitarian philosophy as a whole is a perilous ally for feminist theory. Communitarians invoke a model of community which is focused particularly on families, neighborhoods, and nations. These sorts of communities have harbored social roles and structures which have been highly oppressive for women," it is to the credit of liberals, she notes, that they have "always condemned, in principle if not in practice, the norms of social hierarchy and political subordination based on inherited or ascribed status."[9] They have denied that we have "a priori loyalty to any

feature of situation or role" and they have reserved the right for individuals "to question the moral legitimacy of any contingent moral claim."[10] She concludes, "We can agree with the communitarians that it would be impossible for the self to question all her contingencies at once, yet at the same time, unlike the communitarians, still emphasize the critical importance of morally questioning various communal norms and circumstances."[11]

For this reason, Friedman wants to make a distinction between communities of place, characterized by a family–neighborhood–nation complex which communitarians favor, and communities of choice, characterized by friendships and urban relationships that can be largely self-selected. She allows that communities of place may typify the experience of a child for whom, as Michael Sandel has said, "community is found, not entered, discovered, not created," but it need not typify the experience of a mature adult for whom significant self-identification is possible through voluntary participation in groups such as labor unions, political coalitions, and other communities of choice.[12] She explains

> Sandel is right to indicate the role of found communities in constituting the unreflective, "given" identity which the self discovers when *first* beginning to reflect on itself. But for mature self-identity, we should also recognize a legitimate role for communities of choice, supplementing, if not displacing, the communities and attachments which are merely found.[13]

With communities of choice, our identity need not be limited by the contingent setting into which we were thrown, but it may grow and extend through voluntary associations to a point where the communities and relationships with which we identify can qualify or even oppose many of our original norms and practices.

Modern friendship is an important example that Friedman examines of a relationship that is characterized by voluntary choice. Private friendship is not governed by specific laws, institutions, or customs and is a realm in which individuals are allowed to make a selection based on personal and private criteria, such as our "own needs, values, and attractions."[14] Therefore, it is "more likely than many other close personal relationships to provide social support for people who are idiosyncratic, whose unconventional values and deviant life-styles make them victims of intolerance from family members and others who are unwillingly related to them."[15] Thus, Friedman concludes, "friendship has socially disruptive possibilities, for out of the unconventional living which it helps to sustain there often arise influential forces for social change."[16] In this way, communities of choice are thought to provide a mechanism for critiquing and transcending communities of place, while allowing that we remain inherently social and are largely constituted by our social relations and communal attachments.

In moving from her original account of the communitarians and their critique of liberalism, to her own critique of the communitarians, there is a crucial slide where Friedman reduces the communitarian position to a simple determinism. The quotations Friedman originally uses from Sandel and MacIntyre qualify their claims by indicating that our inherited community only gives us "our moral starting point" and "partly" determines our identity, whereas in Friedman's paraphrases she tends to drop the "partly" to make it seem that communities of place completely determine our identity, thereby leaving us passive subjects of these inherited norms.[17] Thus, she condemns a straw man of her own creation when she states, "Any political theory which appears to support the hegemony of such communities and which appears to restore them to a position of unquestioned moral authority must be viewed with grave suspicion."[18] In her later account of communitarianism, there is no room for individual moral agency, since the individuals there are simply the products of their social environment. At this point, she has reduced communitarianism to a psychological or metaphysical theory of the self that has no moral or normative relevance. In her words, "The communitarian 'social self,' as a metaphysical account of the self, is largely irrelevant to the array of normative tasks which many feminists thinkers have set for a conception of the self."[19] The reduction of communitarianism is then used to characterize communities of place and this opens the way for a contrasting type of community, communities of choice, where individuals are not mere products of their social environment, and moral judgment and choice have free reign.

Before examining this new ideal, the community of choice, we should note its familiarity to the classical liberal ideal, where the oppressive and unthinking forces of premodern cultural, political, and religious practices and institutions are to be transcended by the rational choices of free-thinking individuals. The distinction between communities of place, where individuals are wholly dependent and passively determined by their historical and social circumstances, and communities of choice, where individuals somehow rise above these circumstances and actively determine their own future, is clearly reminiscent of the dualistic account Descartes gives of his own education. In *The Discourse on Method*, he speaks of his childhood and education as if he were merely a passively conditioned thing completely under the sway of his body and elders, "governed by . . . desires and preceptors," until he finished his university training and then suddenly became an autonomous mind capable of transcending his past through freely exercising the "natural light of reason."[20]

We can see traces of Cartesian dualism when Friedman associates communities of place with the "unreflective" and "given" identities of childhood, and communities of choice with the "self-identity" of adulthood.[21] However, the Cartesian mechanism for transcendence, the natural light of reason, is rejected, as indicative of the liberal metaphysical self, by Friedman and

communitarians. Without this metaphysical mechanism, the dichotomy between passively determined children and autonomous adults is problematic, and it makes the process by which children become adults utterly inexplicable. How can a passively conditioned animal that is determined by its environment become an autonomous and free-thinking human being? To make such transitions intelligible, we must reject the above dualisms and recognize that children are never merely passively conditioned animals and that adults are never fully autonomous, free-thinking minds capable of setting aside all their prejudices, of engaging in self-identification, and of creating their own ends, like gods, out of nothing.

There are two basic types of choice. Either choices require the application of preexisting criteria, which is basically the Aristotelian position, or they do not. There are various ways in which modern philosophers have tried to avoid the Aristotelian possibility, in order to ground choice in something that is not dependent on the received prejudices found in the social, cultural, and religious traditions of a particular community. Perhaps the clearest case has to do with Kant. He allows that most of our choices involve preexisting criteria, or what he calls empirical ends. Empirical ends produce two types of hypothetical imperatives, rules of skill, when an imperative is used to command the means to an arbitrary end, and counsels of prudence when an imperative is used to command the means to happiness, the universal end of human well-being. But Kant insists that no such empirical ends can produce genuine moral obligation. He suggests that there is only one way to avoid such empirical ends, and that is to use pure reason to determine a choice of universal and necessary moral value through the formality of the categorical imperative. Such a choice employs a criterion, but because it is *a priori* and formal, the value of this type of choice is intrinsic to the choice itself and not dependent on any empirical result or external end.[22] A Kantian would be justified in believing that in this important type of case, the use of pure reason to determine the moral law, it is possible to choose our ends. However, inasmuch as communitarians and Friedman agree in rejecting the claims of Kantian reason, both in its original form and in the sophisticated reformulations given by neo-Kantians, we do not need to dwell further on the Kantian possibility here.

A subjectivist offers us a different possibility for choosing our ends. Kierkegaard argues in *Philosophical Fragments* that since even the use of pure reason presupposes ends, rationalists cannot choose their ultimate ends. Insofar as rationalists use reason to guide their choices, Kierkegaard suggests, there is no genuine choice, since reason is the basis for choice. He then argues that this leaves only one possible way for us to choose our own ends. Choice must be a criterionless judgment, a nonrational leap of faith, and not an outcome of any process of rational deliberation.[23] Friedman, or as Kierkegaard would admit, no rational person, would opt for this route. Perhaps choosing our own ends is a misguided and arrogant idea.

Let us consider the more humble Aristotelian possibility that choice presupposes that we are always *in medius res*, that various desires, ends, and norms are already there for us, and that choice has to do with selecting means to the given ends, though we will also see that our choices may in time indirectly alter or extend the ends we started with. While we may not have chosen our ends, the fact that we choose means to the ends involves moral complicity on our part. It will illuminate Friedman's notion of communities of choice, and ultimately so-called Internet communities, to examine Aristotle's analysis of choice in some detail.

Aristotle begins the *Nicomachean Ethics* by claiming that every art and every action aims at some end or good. The ends, or goods, are that for the sake of which the arts or actions are done. There must be some things that have value in and of themselves, he argues, and are desired for their own sake and not merely as means to something else, because if everything were merely a means to something further "the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain."[24] If everything were a means then nothing could be a means. We do not need to accept Aristotle's belief that the whole of nature operates teleologically to appreciate his further claim regarding the realm of human action that choice always has to do with means and never with ends.[25] We cannot choose to win the lottery. We may desire or wish to win it, but we can only choose to buy a lottery ticket. Language usage reveals the logical relations between these concepts. If ends are that for the sake of which we do an action, they are also that for the sake of which we choose to act, so having an end is the precondition for making a choice but not itself the object of choice. As Aristotle says

> But neither is it [choice] wish, though it seems near to it; for choice cannot relate to impossibles, and if any one said he chose them he would be thought silly; but there may be a wish even for impossibles, e.g. for immortality. And wish may relate to things that could in no way be brought about by one's own efforts, e.g. that a particular actor or athlete should win in a competition; but no one chooses such things, but only the things that he thinks could be brought about by his own efforts. Again, wish relates rather to the end, choice to the means; for instance, we wish to be healthy, and we wish to be happy and say we do, but we cannot well say we choose to be so; for, in general, choice seems to relate to the things that are in our own power.[26]

We can desire or wish for ends, since we can desire or wish for things not immediately in our power, but we can never choose ends because we can only choose something that is within our power, and only the means to the ends are ready to hand and within our power.

Since in ordinary life we often speak of choosing our goals, we may ask why we should believe we cannot choose our ends. Aristotle's point seems to be that if we try to choose an end, we must be presupposing some further end, which is our true end and that for the sake of which we choose. Our ostensible end is really just a means. For example, most doctors deliberate how to promote the ultimate well-being of a particular patient and then choose the means to this end. But if someone deliberated and chose to promote the well-being of a patient, the person must really have had some other end in mind, such as making money, wielding power, or impressing others, for which promoting the well-being of the patient is merely a means, otherwise, there would not have been deliberation or choice about whether to heal. Promoting the well-being of patients is the presupposed end that defines the practice of medicine. If individuals deliberate or choose this, they might be hospital administrators, or military interrogators, but they would not be engaged in the proper practice of medicine.[27]

Once we grant to Aristotle that in every individual case we do not choose our ultimate ends or values, we merely choose the means to the values, we should also recognize that, since choice is the outcome of deliberation, we must not be able to deliberate about the values either. This is a special case of Aristotle's general point that any reasoning must presuppose some first principles. If Aristotle is right that any moral deliberation must also presuppose some ends or values, we may ask how are the original ends acquired. His answer, anticipating communitarians, is that they are initially acquired, not by reasoning or choice, but through our moral upbringing. As children we acquire our initial values, and as adults we continue to acquire them, through social processes of imitation and habituation.[28] This is why Aristotle notes that it would be foolish and futile to try to become good through taking a course in philosophy, as if reasoning alone could create, or even improve, our ends or values.[29]

Aristotle acknowledges that this seems to suggest that our characters are determined by our upbringing, but he emphasizes that although it is naturally difficult, it is not impossible to change our character. Children and adults revise their given values through the experiential process of employing them. Aristotle's analysis of character can shed light on communities. A community is a repository of ends, norms, and values just as a person's character is. Since, through socialization, individuals internalize many of the ends and values, choosing a community, according to Aristotle, would be akin to choosing our character and just as problematic. These kinds of things are not matters of choice, since they are not directly in our power, but they are related to choice since they are obviously affected by our choices. It is not in our power to choose to have a different character, to choose to be courageous or temperate, for example, though we may wish for a different character and we can choose specific acts that eventually serve as means to alter our character toward what

we wish. Similarly, we may wish or desire to become a French speaker, but we can only choose to get up in the morning and go to class. Only in such an indirect way would it make sense to speak of choosing a community or choosing an identity. In either case the difficulty remains, inasmuch as the content of the original desires and wishes comes from somewhere within the horizon of our existing communities and characters.

We can appreciate why communitarians, and feminists like Friedman, emphasize the importance of community. Our very capacity to be moral reasoners depends on our social nature in deep and multiple ways. But we also can appreciate why the idea of a community of choice is incoherent. If we cannot trust our communities to provide criteria of goodness, and we have rejected the *a priori* rational capacities of the notion of a metaphysical self of classical liberal theory, then it is not clear how we can presume to transcend our communities of place and choose better communities, communities of choice. The choices must either be without criteria, in which case we have to follow Kierkegaard and give up any assurance that our new community is somehow better, or we must produce criteria of choice that do not depend on our communities of place. Friedman tries to produce such criteria when she suggests, "In this context, 'voluntary choice' refers to motivations arising out of one's own needs, desires, interests, values, and attractions, in contrast to motivations arising from what is socially assigned, ascribed, expected, or demanded."[30] By suggesting this, Friedman acknowledges that choices are about means and that they presuppose existing ends. But, given her commitment to the notion of a social self, she cannot contrast the relevant needs, desires, and interests, to the motivations at issue. The contrast requires that we have a way of constituting our own ends that is somehow independent of societal constraints and that the social ends are forced upon us without any complicity or responsibility on our part. Even if this were all true, we would not be justified in thinking that our own ends are better. We need to recognize that any community depends on the active complicity and choices of its members, and all choices presuppose values or prejudices that are communally determined.

The incoherence of the idea of communities of choice arises from Friedman's attempt to combine two intellectual traditions, communitarianism and liberalism, that have contradictory commitments. On the one hand, the emphasis on community involves a commitment to the communitarian notion of a social self and recognizes the need to ground identity, meaning, and value in something prior to the agency and rational choices of individuals, while on the other hand the emphasis on choice involves the liberal wish to transcend such communities and to ground identity, meaning and value in this very thing, the agency and rational choices of individuals. But Friedman cannot endorse the communitarian critique of the possibility of autonomous preconstituted individuals while also embracing a strong modern concept of choice that presupposes such metaphysical individuals.

Though much of Friedman's criticism of the communitarians is subject to the conceptual dilemma posed above, it is reasonable to suggest that Friedman's primary concern is not the theoretical concern of distinguishing two fundamentally separate kinds of community but the pragmatic concern of suggesting an avenue of progressive social action. In this view, her primary concern is not to establish a conceptual dichotomy between communities of place and communities of choice, but merely to argue that feminists should promote circumstances and relations, like urban environments and modern friendships, where individuals have more choices and are relatively less constrained by arbitrary geographical and social realities. This initially appears to be independent of the issues we have considered and consistent with letting go of the untenable contrast between communities of place and communities of choice. But when we examine an extreme case, Internet communities and relationships, where choice variety has been maximized and largely disconnected from geographical and social constraints, we can see the issues surrounding the above conceptual dilemma reemerge. Choices by themselves do not liberate us. Increasing the variety and sheer quantity of our choices increases the means at our disposal but does nothing to further the quality of our ends. In fact, it may tend to actually undermine our ability to reconsider the ends. Not only is there a cost to increasing our choices, in terms of diminished involvement and weakened commitment, but it also more effectively restricts our contacts to our choices and may thereby tend to confirm our original prejudices.

Internet communities are natural extensions of the so-called communities of choice found in urban areas, and they have been praised for similar reasons, allowing people to transcend the arbitrary constraints of location and geography to form relationships and make connections based on meaningful and self-selected criteria. Technology trade journals, and even the mainstream press, regularly laud the choices. Walter Anderson is the author of the recent bestseller *All Connected Now: Life in the First Global Civilization*.[31] He writes: "Cyberspace has become a new kind of social terrain, crowded with 'virtual communities' .... Both mobility and the growth of communications networks reduce the predominance of geography as a force in shaping community. Many communities are much more fluid, and some are placeless .... Choice is one of the most powerful forces in the lives of people being exposed to the forces of globalization."[32] We are overcoming geography and place, and our choices seem limitless. This is frequently viewed as unquestionably a good thing, but our choices are only as good as the norms and ends guiding them, and there is nothing to guarantee that this process can improve our norms and ends. In fact, there are at least two reasons to fear that this process of limitless choices may actually diminish our ability to improve our norms and ends.

Kant showed that negative freedom, the absence of external constraints, is only valuable to the extent that we have developed positive freedom, the

internal capacities to determine good ends. Choice by itself does not produce autonomy. We must choose rationally to achieve autonomy. In Kant's account, freedom is directly linked to morality, since pure reason is the sole source of our autonomy and our good will. Once we dispense with Kant's idea of pure reason, our internal capacities of freedom and morality must be acquired through socialization and education, and external constraints must play a legitimate and constructive role in creating these capacities. Unfortunately, this means that when our negative freedom outstrips our positive freedom, when our freedom to choose outstrips our capacity to determine good ends, we undercut the possibility of further developing our internal capacities to determine good ends and, in many cases, our basic freedom to choose. This is why we only gradually give children choices to the extent that we believe that they have acquired the ability to handle the choices responsibly. Premature or excessive choices can be harmful and undermine the capacity to make good choices.

In addition, feminist critics of communitarianism, like Friedman, criticize traditional communities of place as dangerously inbred and sometimes prone to reproduce narrow and oppressive norms and practices, but ironically, communities of choice, epitomized by Internet, have a parallel danger of becoming narcissistic pools, where other people are just reflections ourselves insofar as each individual only forms relations with people based on self-selected criteria. Search technology makes our original biases more effective. We can always find what we want to find. A narrow-minded bigot, for example, can find an endless supply of likeminded and supportive individuals. This may be flattering to an individual who conducts a search, but it does not promote self-criticism or the reevaluation of our ends.

Friedman believes that choices have value inasmuch as they allow us to disrupt oppressive practices. But choices are not valuable in themselves. They are valuable only as means. Change can be for better or for worse. Without an account of how the new chosen community is better, such choices may just lead to practices that are even worse. Furthermore, given the example of Internet communities, there is some reason to be concerned that increasing our choices only increases the quantity of means at our disposal but does nothing to improve the quality of our ends, and in fact, if we are not careful, it may even worsen the quality of the ends.

It may well be that genuine resistance to our will and self-criticism are more profoundly promoted in communities of place between concrete embodied human beings than in Internet communities, where contacts are more highly controlled and filtered by self-selected criteria. Ironically, it may be communities of place, where individuals recognize that they are embedded *in medius res* and do not presume to choose new beginnings like gods creating *ex nihilio*, that offer the best hope of producing individuals capable of self-transcendence and self-criticism. Such embodiment may flesh out the

meaning of our choices and help us to encounter and take responsibility for their unintended consequences. This need for embodiment is plain with the moral development of children, but it may remain true of us as adults. It may be no accident that Socrates, the most parochial of his Athenian contemporaries, who refused to travel beyond the walls of Athens except under military conscription and declared himself more interested in the youth of Athens than in the youth of Cyrene, was also the most profoundly self-critical and capable of investigating questions about universal justice.[33]

Notes

1. Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*, trans. John Veitch (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1989), p. 29.
2. Ibid., p. 17.
3. See Marilyn Friedman, "Feminism and Modern Friendship: Dislocating the Community," *Ethics* 99 (January 1989).
4. Ibid., p. 275.
5. Ibid., p. 278.
6. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), pp. 156–157.
7. Friedman, op. cit., p. 276.
8. See Virginia Held, *Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture, Society, and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 57–63.
9. Friedman, op. cit., p. 277.
10. Ibid., p. 282.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p. 284.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., p. 286.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., pp. 286–287.
17. Ibid., p. 278
18. Ibid., p. 281.
19. Ibid., p. 280.
20. Descartes, op. cit., p. 18.
21. Friedman, op. cit., p. 284.
22. See Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959), pp. 30–36.
23. See Soren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), pp. 37–45.
24. Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross, rev. J.L. Ackrill and J.O. Urmson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 1094 a20, p. 2.
25. Ibid., 1111 b27, p. 54.
26. Ibid., 1111 b20-29, pp. 53–54.
27. Ibid., 1112 b13-1113 a12, pp. 56–58.
28. Ibid., 1103 a17-b25, pp. 28–29.
29. Ibid., 1105b 13-16, p. 35.

30. Friedman, op. cit., p. 286.
31. See Walter Truett Anderson, *All Connected Now: Life in the First Global Civilization* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 2004).
32. Walter Truett Anderson, "Communities in a World of Open Systems," *Futures* 31 (June 1999), p. 457.
33. Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. Robin Waterfield (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 143 dl-3, p. 17.