

Gina Gustavsson

PhD Candidate

Department of Government

Uppsala University

The Problem of Individualism

Examining the relations between self-reliance, autonomy and civic virtues

Dissertation plan to be presented at the SWEPSA 2007 workshop

Norrköping, October 17-19

Summary

This paper is an outline of my dissertation project, which will deal with political psychology, civic values and participation. More specifically, I ask how the ideal of individualism affects a citizen's civicism. How does the fact that someone believes in the principle of individual independence in turn influence their tolerance, solidarity, participation and general engagement in politics? And what elements does the ideal of individualism consist of? Does it perhaps consist of different dimensions; and if so, do these different individualisms have varying effects on civic virtues? I here briefly comment on previous research on individualism and democracy and propose what I intend to do differently, followed by a dive into the empirical puzzle of individualism in the United States and in Sweden. I then develop a preliminary typology for what I call external and internal individualism. I also discuss why and how we should expect these different ideals to affect civic virtues. I further suggest that the issue of individualism and civicism relates to the larger question of how to balance the positive or 'republican' right to self-development through participation on the one hand, with the negative or 'liberal' right to privacy on the other. In this, my project actualizes a possible conflict at the heart of liberal democracy; a conflict between what Benjamin Constant calls the liberty of the ancients and that of the moderns.

Introduction

Something has shaken the very foundation of Western democracies. It is with this 'something' that my dissertation deals, the outline of which I shall present in this paper. During the second half of the 20th Century, political scientists concerned with the Western world have witnessed a plunge in voter turn-out and decreasing membership rates in traditional parties, coupled with an emergence of unconventional and sometimes even violent forms of political participation. We have seen the rise of a 'new' political agenda concerned with life-style issues that fail to be divided along classic left-right lines. Suddenly, the fact that more and more Americans go bowling alone is considered to be a politically significant phenomenon.¹

Bowling alone has become a symbol of what is considered to be one of the most fundamental forces shaping our societies today: individualism. One way of describing it is the slow but steady weakening of shared collective identities, norms and culture and the concomitant rise of the ideal of the independent individual, whose identity, life-style and values are constantly *chosen* rather than accepted. This trend has had many names: the advent of post-modernism, libertarianism, the silent revolution

¹ Robert D Putnam, *Bowling Alone the Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2000), 256.; Robert D Putnam, ed., *Democracies in Flux, the Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 14, 16.; Bo Rothstein, "Sweden: Social Capital in the Social Democratic State" in *Democracies in Flux, the Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society*, ed. Robert D Putnam (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 294.

of post-materialism, anti-authoritarianism, autonomy, emancipation, self-expression, liberty aspirations, personal independence, the emergence of the open mind, the rise of the creative class, the culture of narcissism and individualization. Despite the lack of shared terminology, scholars who deal with this cultural change seem to agree on one core assumption, namely that one of the fastest growing movements of our time seems to be a rising cult of the independent individual.²

Some readers may object that the rise of individualism started already two centuries ago, during the French and American revolutions. Some may say that individualism dates back to the Renaissance, and others may argue that it has always existed in our societies in one form or another. For me, however, the greatest interest does not lie in the alleged cultural trend towards more individualism, but rather in the very phenomenon itself.

My concern is whether individualism, given that it exists rather than whether or not it has increased, will contribute to or erode democracy. There is little concurrence on this issue. Will individualism lead to increased acceptance of pluralism and thereby make liberal democracy increasingly attractive?³ Or will less and less collectivism undermine people's sense of solidarity? If so, will this not only lead to an erosion of the foundations of redistributive welfare states, but also undermine the civic virtues that are so often claimed to be vital for any democratic system?⁴ In short, is rising individualism a blessing or a plague for democracy?

What distinguishes my approach from that of others?

How, then, should we approach democracy (or, in methodological language the dependent variable)? I believe one of the weaknesses with previous studies in this area is that democracy has been

² Zygmunt Bauman, "Foreword: Individually, Together," in *Individualization*, ed. Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (London: Sage Publications, 2002); Scott C. Flanagan and Aie-Ree Lee, "The New Politics, Culture Wars, and the Authoritarian-Libertarian Value Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies," *Comparative Political Studies* 36, no. 3 (2003); Richard L. Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy, the Human Development Sequence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism, American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978); Milton Rokeach, *The Open and Closed Mind* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1960).

³ As suggested by Inglehart and Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy, the Human Development Sequence*; Michael Schudson, *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life* (London: Harvard University Press, 1999); Alan Wolfe, *One Nation after All* (New York: Viking Press, 1998).

⁴ As suggested by Putnam, *Bowling Alone the Collapse and Revival of American Community*; Flanagan and Lee, "The New Politics, Culture Wars, and the Authoritarian-Libertarian Value Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies."

conceptualized either as *social capital* or *democratic institutions*.⁵ I argue that instead, we should direct our attention towards how individualism affects *civic virtues*. We must ask how the fact that a person embraces the ideal (or perhaps ideals) of individualism affects their tolerance, willingness to participate, solidarity etc. In other words, we must look at how individualism affects a person's civic virtues, independently of the social capital that is created or eroded in the process.⁶

Another serious weakness with existing studies on how individualism affects democracy is that, ironic as it may seem, most of them have been conducted not at the *individual* but at the *aggregate* level. It is often assumed that the syndrome of individualism is as coherent at the individual level as it seems to be at a country level, and that the links to democratic attitudes and behavior are the same at both levels. However, the fact that individualism consists of, say, ten attitudes at the national level and that these have a positive relationship to democracy at the country level, based on country average scores, does not mean that this is the relationship at the individual level. For the individual citizen, the individualist ideology itself may be less coherent and consist of other variables and its impact on civic virtues might even be reversed, or simply non-existent. Therefore, when it comes to individual level opinions, we suffer both from a lack of knowledge, and from the fact that the knowledge some claim to have is often based on 'ecological fallacies'.⁷

⁵ Putnam for example approaches individualism as a *predisposition* towards being a 'loner'. He shows individualism to affect democratic virtues negatively through its negative effect on arenas where social capital is created, i.e. on networks, neighborliness and associations. Another common perspective is to look at individualism's effects on democratic institutions at the national level. This focus, which is exemplified by Inglehart, has taken for granted that individualism and civic virtues, or a lack thereof, are in fact the same thing. I, however, argue that they should rather be seen as separate links in a chain of explanations and it is therefore an empirical question how they influence civic virtues. Putnam, *Bowling Alone the Collapse and Revival of American Community*, 24-26. Also see Robert Wuthnow, "The United States: Bridging the Privileged and the Marginalized?," in *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society*, ed. Robert D Putnam (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).; Lance W Bennett, "Ithiel De Sola Pool Lecture: The Uncivic Culture: Communication, Identity and the Rise of Lifestyle Politics," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 31, no. 4 (1998). Inglehart and Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy, the Human Development Sequence*, 238,56 . Also see Flanagan and Lee, "The New Politics, Culture Wars, and the Authoritarian-Libertarian Value Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies," 242.

⁶ I realize that this is not an exhaustive or satisfactory definition of civic virtues, values or civicness, which I here use synonymously. How to define these things and whether they can indeed be used synonymously is of course much too large an issue to settle in this paper.

⁷ Robert W Jackman and Ross A Miller, "A Renaissance of Political Culture?," *American Journal of Political Science* 40, no. 3 (1996): 635. This predominance of aggregate level focus is also reported in Eva G T Green, Jean-Claude Deschamps, and Dario Pérez, "Variation of Individualism and Collectivism within and between 20 Countries: A Typological Analysis," *Journal fo Cross-Cultural Psychology* 36, no. 3 (2005): 322. For examples of aggregate level studies, see the following: Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behavior, Institutions and Organizations across Nations* (Thousands Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2001).; Inglehart and Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy, the Human Development Sequence*, Shalom H Schwartz, "Mapping and Interpreting Cultural Differences around the World," in *Comparing Cultures: Dimensions of Culture in a Comparative Perspective*, ed. Henk Vinken, Joseph Soeters, and Peter Ester (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Harry C Triandis, "Dimensions of Culture Beyond Hofstede," in *Comparing Cultures: Dimensions of Culture in a Comparative Perspective*,

The considerable country level focus has also been an obstacle to more refined theorizing on what the ideology of individualism is and what the mechanisms might be that mediate its relationship to democracy. In fact, most research on value dimensions is surprisingly atheoretical. Often, factor analysis is used to make sense of chaotic data from surveys, but with no predefined expectations or hypotheses.⁸ This is rather surprising, since there is a vast debate in political theory concerning these very things: the ideals of independence, individualism and autonomy.⁹

Finally, I believe there is need to introduce a normative aspect of individualism. Social psychologists and sociologists have undertaken several and refined studies of individualism, but their questions have concerned whether people are, or experience that they are, independent; and whether or not they have a predisposition to behave in this or that way. None of those that I have examined analyze how people *value* individualism, or in other words: individualism as an ideal.¹⁰ Yet, there is considerable consensus that values are different from predispositions. People's idea of what is right and desirable differs from what they experience as facts, just as it differs from what they actually do.¹¹

The upshot of what was said here above is that we still lack a theoretically inspired, individual level empirical investigation of individualism as an ideal and of how it influences civic virtues. My dissertation will attempt to fill this gap. In particular, I believe that approaching individualism as an ideal is necessary for explaining one core aspect of civic virtues, namely political participation, in a

ed. Henk Vinken, Joseph Soeters, and Peter Ester (Leiden: Brill, 2004). For an explanation of the well-known 'ecological fallacy', see W S Robinson, "Ecological Correlations and the Behavior of Individuals," *American Sociological Review* 15, no. 3 (1950).

⁸ For an overview see Daphna Oyserman, Heather M Coon, and Markus Kemmelmeier, "Rethinking Individualism and Collectivism: Evaluation of Theoretical Assumptions and Meta-Analyses," *Psychological Bulletin* 128, no. 1 (2002).

⁹ J S Taylor, *Personal Autonomy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1.

¹⁰ See for example Mary Douglas, *Risk and Blame* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1992), 106; Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier, "Rethinking Individualism and Collectivism: Evaluation of Theoretical Assumptions and Meta-Analyses."; Harry C Triandis, "Converging Measurement of Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and Collectivism," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74, no. 1 (1998). Anu Realo et al., "Three Components of Individualism," *European Journal of Personality* 16 (2002). Valery Chirkov et al., "Differentiating Autonomy from Individualism and Independence: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective on Internalization of Cultural Orientations and Well-Being," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 84, no. 1 (2003).

¹¹ Naturally, the boundaries between ideology and predispositions or cultural frames are sometimes blurred, and this is not the place to reach a clear-cut dichotomy between the two. But I believe that the issue of how much a person *values* independence can still be separated both from how much independence he believes to have in his own existence or whether he actually lives up to his own ideals of striving for independence. Gian Vittorio Caprara et al., "Personality and Politics; Values, Traits, and Political Choice," *Political Psychology* 27, no. 1 (2006); Wolfgang Jagodzinski, "Methodological Problems of Value Research," in *Comparing Cultures: Dimensions of Culture in a Comparative Perspective* ed. Henk Vinken, Joseph Soeters, and Peter Ester (2004), 98-101.

time where the very content of political mobilization is changing its nature. Hitherto, most of the potential explanations for different levels of political commitment have been sought in the so-called ‘can’-part, i.e. in whether or not citizens have the different resources that participation requires and whether or not they have had the opportunities to use them. But the ‘want’-part has been neglected. Yet, it seems that politics is no longer mostly about protecting your own economic interests (indeed, it is questionable whether it has ever been). Instead, political mobilization in contemporary Western democracies seems to have become less and less concerned with economic divisions and instead centers on questions of morality and identity.¹² If this is true, surely it must be an empirical question and not an *a priori* assumption whether all citizens have the same incentives to participate. Clearly, growing numbers of citizens both can and have the opportunity to participate, but still do not want to.¹³ But why? What explains their different levels of motivation? It is here, I believe, that basic values, and in particular individualistic ideals, should be of utmost importance.¹⁴

Aim and research questions

The over-all aim of my dissertation project is to find out what the ideology of individualism consists of and how it influences a person’s civic virtues. My main focus will be empirical, and it is the empirical background and contributions that constitute the main focus for this paper. However, since a core aspects of my dissertation is the motivational power of principles and values, I will start my investigation where it only seems natural to look for the relevant ideologies; namely in the sub-field of political theory. Along the way, I therefore hope to be able to make some theoretical contributions too.¹⁵

¹² Flanagan and Lee, "The New Politics, Culture Wars, and the Authoritarian-Libertarian Value Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies," 250-57.

¹³ Michael W Foley and Bob Edwards, "Is It Time to Disinvest in Social Capital?," *Journal of Public Policy* 18, no. 2 (1999): 168. With the exception of the norm that it is a duty to vote, I think it is fair to say that ideals have been somewhat marginalized in the classic models explaining political participation. This is partly because they have been considered too hard to measure. S Verba, K L Schlozman, and H E Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 286.; Sidney Verba, Nie H Nie, and Jae-on Kim, *Participation and Political Equality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 5.

¹⁴ Gian Vittorio Caprara et al., "Personality and Politics: Values, Traits and Political Choice," *Political Psychology* 27, no. 1 (2006): 4.

¹⁵ In this paper, I sometimes speak of the ‘ideology of individualism’. This is in line with Robert N Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart, Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (London: University of California Press, 1996), 302. Also consider the suggestion that, in the Swedish case at least, there is reason to speak of “organized individualism”. Rothstein, "Sweden: Social Capital in the Social Democratic State ", 309. I believe that the ‘ideology of individualism’ captures the paradoxical nature of individualism as a contemporary mass belief system that might very well have political

For example, when I consider how individualism relates to civicness, I shall be approaching the issue by looking at a possible conflict between two very different civic ideals, between what have been called the liberty of the ancients and the liberty of the moderns. John Rawls sees the dilemma that faces the liberal democratic state as follows: because of the fact that there will always be inescapable disagreement on the ethical issue of what a good life is, any state based on such an ethical ideal will find dissidents that it will have to oppress. His solution to the problem is to advocate a neutrally justified state. Citizens should support the rights and institutions of democracy based on ‘shallow foundations’. In other words, they should embrace both religious tolerance and free elections on neutral grounds, as parts of a *political* but not an *ethical* conception of justice. Rawls’s proposal has become widely influential in normative political theory. But a crucial element that has been neglected in this debate is whether his alternative is feasible in real life. Are citizens capable of holding certain ethical ideals without it leading them to prioritize one kind of liberty over the other? This is what I will be looking at when investigating how individualism affects civic virtues in the second part of my project. Indeed, if it turns out that the extent to which some citizens approve of and exercise different liberties *can* be attributed to their deep individualistic convictions, then we might question whether Rawls’s hopes are realistic or if the dilemma of conflicting liberties remains unsolved.¹⁶

My research design thus rests on a cross-disciplinary connection between two sub-fields in political science: the study of political values as ideas (political theory) and the study of political values as psychological orientations that lead to certain other attitudes and behavior (political psychology).

The over-arching question that will guide the dissertation is the one mentioned already at the beginning of this paper: *What makes individualism civic in some cases and uncivic in others?* This question raises, in turn, two sub-questions. The first is descriptive: *What is the ideal/are the ideals of individualism?* The second question focuses on the possible causal relationship to civicness: *How does the ideal/do these ideals of individualism influence civic virtues?*

The study I envisage can be divided into four parts, as illustrated in Figure 1 here below.

consequences similar to other more classic ideologies. However, I realize that this is an unorthodox way to use the concept of ideology and that I may need to revise this later.

¹⁶ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 4-5.

Figure 1

Over-all question: *What makes individualism civic in some cases and uncivic in others?*

Research questions:	1. What is the ideal/are the ideals of individualism?	2. How does the ideal/do the ideals of individualism influence civic virtues?
Theoretical contributions	I Developing a typology for the ideals of individualism	III Discussing the dilemma of conflicting liberties
Empirical contributions	II Comparing data to the typology: to what extent do people embrace the ideal/ideals of individualism?	IV Examining the dilemma of conflicting liberties in reality

In Part I, I shall develop a typology of individualism based on ideas from political philosophers. In Part II, I shall investigate whether my typology holds in reality. In Part III, I shall develop what I have termed the dilemma of conflicting liberties, i.e. a possible conflict between focusing on the liberty of the ancients or that of the moderns. From it, a number of suggestions can be distilled concerning how individualism should affect different civic virtues; and these will be tested empirically in Part IV.

Individualism and civicness

Since there are so many pertinent political issues that individualism might affect, some readers may ask why I have chosen to focus on democratic civicness and not, for example, economic solidarity. Surely individualism must have drastically affected the possibilities for a redistributive welfare state of, for example, the Swedish kind? However, to the extent that it is possible to separate support for

the welfare state (i.e. solidarity in a more egalitarian sense) from support for democratic institutions (i.e. solidarity in a more participatory sense) I shall focus on the latter. This is not to deny that the former also constitutes one of the most urgent problems for political scientists to investigate today. But I do believe that the relations between individualism and civicism are even more complex, and therefore more likely to supply us with exciting and unexpected answers. Civic virtues constitute a puzzle in themselves.

For a long time, it was an uncontested truth that “in all nations, people tend to convert socioeconomic resources into participation”.¹⁷ However, recent findings have revealed that it is exactly the highly educated and well-off citizens in post-industrial democracies who are participating *less and less* in politics today, as compared to their predecessors.¹⁸ It is in the light of these findings that individualism becomes not only a culturally intriguing phenomenon but a politically explosive one. As we shall soon see, many scholars hold individualism responsible for these changes in civicism.

How to define individualism is almost a research task in itself. Instead of delineating the theoretical boundaries of the concept here, I shall be pragmatic and take my point of departure in what current empirical research on individualism has taken it to mean and how it is supposed to affect civicism. First, there is the optimistic approach of Ronald Inglehart, who speaks of the growth of individualism as a rise in ‘self-expression’ or ‘emancipative’ values that emphasize independence, autonomy and achievement. Inglehart acknowledges that self-expression values lead to a decline in traditional forms of political participation but prefers to stress that they simultaneously fuel elite-challenging modes of participation and increase tolerance of out-groups.¹⁹

Secondly, we have Robert Putnam, who underlines the competitive and egocentric aspects of individualism, together with its focus on the uniqueness of each individual. He agrees that individualism leads to increased tolerance of minorities but, contrary to Inglehart, he finds it highly

¹⁷ Sidney Verba, Norman H Nie, and Jae-On Kim, *Participation and Political Equality: A Seven Nation Comparison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 73.

¹⁸ Olof Petersson et al., *Demokratirådets Rapport 1998: Demokrati Och Medborgarskap* (Stockholm: SNS Förlag, 1998), 86, 95.; Putnam, ed., *Democracies in Flux, the Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society*, 2.

¹⁹ Inglehart and Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy, the Human Development Sequence*, 257-262.

alarming that individualism also makes people withdraw from social and political engagement and weakens their community spirit.²⁰

Finally, we find scholars like Scott C. Flanagan and Aie-Rie Lee, who discuss individualism as an ongoing cultural shift from authoritarian to libertarian values in Western democracies. The spreading libertarian values they have found involve elements of self-expression, independence and moral relativism. The political consequences seem to be both increased tolerance and a heightened consciousness of civil rights and, at the same time, a growing political polarization and noncompliance to existing laws and procedures.²¹

The three perspectives above differ of course in their definitions of individualism. But I believe it is still correct to say that they speak of the same phenomenon. All three perspectives agree that we are witnessing a growing support for individualistic values that include moral relativism, self-indulgence, open-mindedness and a spreading unwillingness to conform to others' expectations. Furthermore, not even their views on the consequences of individualism are very diverging. Although Inglehart and Putnam disagree on which forms of civicness should be emphasized; roughly speaking both they and Flanagan and Lee describe the same trend: the newest generations in Western post-industrial democracies place a hitherto unknown value on openness towards change and on personal civil and political liberties; but are also inclined to indulge themselves at others' expense, to disrespect laws and procedures and to act as free-riders in their community. As Flanagan and Lee put it, the strongest "supporters of women's and minority rights" are also those who seek self-actualization at *any* cost, "even at the sacrifice of others".²²

The picture that emerges from these accounts of individualism and its influence on civicness is, if we put it poignantly, one of older cohorts of responsible bigots being replaced by younger, open-minded free-riders. This description may appear as a caricature, but in fact I believe it summarizes well a commonly accepted understanding of the postmodern condition, one that surprisingly enough is supported by both critics and proponents of individualism.²³

²⁰ Putnam, *Bowling Alone the Collapse and Revival of American Community*, 351-52.

²¹ Flanagan and Lee, "The New Politics, Culture Wars, and the Authoritarian-Libertarian Value Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies," 267.

²² *Ibid.*: 256.

²³ See for example Putnam, *Bowling Alone the Collapse and Revival of American Community*, 258. Also see Thorleif Pettersson and Kalle Geyer, *Värderingsförändringar I Sverige, Den Svenska Modellen, Individualismen Och Rättvisan* (Stockholm:

My argument in the following few pages is that we have reason to question this picture of individualism as a mystery force that simultaneously sweeps away bigotry and solidarity. I shall argue that the relationship between individualism and democracy cannot be as simplistic as these theories hold, for the simple reason that both Americans and Swedes seem to share a deep commitment to individualist values, but they still differ greatly in their civicness. Let me here give you a quick glance at findings from both cases that in my view suggest a much more complex web of connections between individualism and democracy than the ‘freeriders-replacing-bigots-approach’ allows us to see.

The American puzzle

Individualism is often thought to constitute the cultural core of the American dream. Indeed, individualism has been called “the dominant ideology of American life”.²⁴ Ever since Alexis de Tocqueville, this mythical individualism has invoked both fear and awe. The fear has been grounded in concerns over the potentially eroding effects that individualism might have on American society; concerns that are now becoming perhaps more articulate than ever. There is now extensive evidence that political engagement in the United States, or at least traditional forms of it, is rapidly declining. This change seems to have taken place sometime between the 1970’s and the late 1990’s. During this time, there seems to have been a considerable decrease in both voter turnout, petition signing, attendance of town meetings and political rallies, serving on committees, making political speeches, writing political articles and participating in groups concerned with governmental reform.²⁵ Meanwhile, however, other radical changes have taken place. The number of protest and civil rights movements has steadily grown higher than ever. And during roughly the same two or three decades, the American population has also become much more tolerant and supportive of diversity. Compared to the 1970’s, the American population of the late 1990’s showed a much greater support for gender equality, civil liberties and racial integration.²⁶

Utbildningsförlaget Brevskolan, 1992), 9. Finally note that, although there is much discussion over this, it is beside the issue here whether this change in values is the effect of a generational or a life-cycle change, as discussed in Inglehart and Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy, the Human Development Sequence*, 94.

²⁴ Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart, Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, 302. Also see Steven Lukes, *Individualism, Key Concepts in the Social Sciences* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), 26.

²⁵ Wuthnow, "The United States: Bridging the Privileged and the Marginalized?," 72.

²⁶ For example, in 1973, 45% of all Americans were in favor of banning library books that advocated homosexuality. By 1998, this number had sunk to 26% Putnam, *Bowling Alone the Collapse and Revival of American Community*, 352.

Many commentators have, as the following, connected both the above-mentioned trends to what they perceive as a rise in individualism: “the cultural revolution...hostile to all rules and authority, produced the hyperindividualism and the narrow generational worship of ‘rights’ and ‘choice’”.²⁷ Indeed, apart from the open criticism of individualism that this commentator voices, he rather efficiently summarizes the ‘freeriders-replacing-bigots-approach’ described above. In the American case, there is a widespread belief that individualism is responsible both for Americans’ recent withdrawal from traditional forms of community life and for their increased tolerance and engagement in civil rights movements.²⁸

If we put this picture in a historical perspective however, it tends to get somewhat blurred. Whereas the uncivic behavior that we witness today is a fairly recent phenomenon, individualism was a paradigmatic ideal in American society already during its conception. Indeed, throughout most of American history, individualism has coexisted with remarkably high numbers of civic participation, volunteering etc.; and side by side with slavery, Ku-Klux Klan and small-town prejudice against single mothers, inter-racial marriage, homosexuals and communists. Individualism, in some form or another, has coexisted with all of these different trends in civiness throughout the history of the American nation. Indeed, up until very recently, it was compatible with the highest numbers of participation in the world and at the same time with what now appears almost as unimaginable forms of sexism, racism and homophobia. Clearly, the description of individualism as a liberating but alienating ‘X-ray’ that suddenly appeared in the 1970’s, and lead the previously so engaged Americans to withdraw from community life, must only be part of the full story.²⁹

The Swedish puzzle

Now let us turn to Sweden, which has a remarkable position in Inglehart’s much debated cultural atlas, according to which Sweden exceeds the rest of the world in the value placed on emancipation, individualism and self-expression.³⁰ I am well aware of course that Sweden is in some sense often

²⁷ John Leo, "When Stability Was All the Rage," *U.S. and World Report* 1995.

²⁸ Putnam, *Bowling Alone the Collapse and Revival of American Community*, 25.; Flanagan and Lee, "The New Politics, Culture Wars, and the Authoritarian-Libertarian Value Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies."

²⁹ Robert D Putnam, "Tuning in, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 28, no. December (1995): 675. For the American history of individualism, see Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart, Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, 27-39.

³⁰ Inglehart and Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy, the Human Development Sequence*, 63; Thorleif Pettersson and Yilmaz Esmer, *Vilka Är Annorlunda? Om Invandrades Möte Med Svensk Kultur* (Norrköping: Integrationsverket, 2006).

considered quite collectivistic. Nevertheless, it is hard to deny that there is a widespread conception, in both popular science and established research, of the typical Swede as someone who romanticizes loneliness and independence. Moreover, one cannot dismiss this as a narrow upper-class phenomenon. On the contrary, individualism seems to be one of the fastest growing mass ideologies in Sweden today.³¹

If Swedes are such individualists and if individualism turns participatory bigots into open-minded free-riders, we should expect to see much of the American development in Sweden as well. Indeed, younger cohorts of well educated and economically well-off Swedes resemble Americans in that they are the least approving of censorship and the least intolerant towards extremists and nationalists, but also engage less and less in traditional political activities, and show more lenient attitudes towards cheating on taxes and state subsidies. But the remarkable finding in the Swedish case however is that there is no general trend towards more general egoism, and the weakening of conventional participation is coupled with a growing trend of more unconventional and elite challenging participation. The Swedish population still tends to be in favor of a relatively egalitarian system: they still disagree with suggestions that the poor and needy have themselves to blame and they still oppose increased gaps in society. Although they engage less and less in traditional political parties, they are becoming increasingly engaged in single-issue movements, and they seem to discuss politics more than ever.

Also, when it comes to Swedish tolerance, there is no clear trend towards more relaxed norms in general. On the contrary, results from the National Swedish Democracy Audit in 1998 tell us that, on the one hand, the vast majority of Swedes do not approve of right-wing and left-wing extremists or members of nationalistic parties as school teachers, and many disapprove of these minorities' right to demonstrate. This is in fact a slightly growing trend, as is the growing approval of censorship of pornographic films and what seems to be a more general *decrease* in the (in)famous Swedish sexual

³¹ Indeed, individualism seems to have been growing fastest during the 1980's among the blue-collar workers, according to Pettersson and Geyer, *Värderingsförändringar I Sverige, Den Svenska Modellen, Individualismen Och Rättvisan*, 14. When it comes to the particularly Swedish individualism, there are numerous examples. Individualism was a recurrent theme in a series of programs on Swedish mentality broadcasted by the national Swedish Television Company in the autumn of 2006 (*Världens modernaste land* directed by Fredrik Lindström). For another popular example, consider the Swedish reluctance to admit how one votes, even to family members, since it is desirable for children to form independent opinions discussed by Per Bruhn, "Ungdomarna, Politiken Och Valet," in *SOU 132:Valdeltagande i förändring* (1999), 243. For a more thorough account of Swedish individualism, see Henrik Berggren and Lars Trägårdh, *Är Svensken Människa? Gemenskap Och Oberoende I Det Moderna Sverige* (Stockholm: Norstedts Förlag, 2006).

permissiveness. On the other hand, the majority is also becoming more and more liberal in the sense that they are increasingly positive towards the rights of homosexuals, Muslims and children.³²

In short, it seems as if Swedes have *not* become generally alienated from politics, nor have they given up on morality. On the contrary, many Swedes seem to have strong opinions on what is wrong and what is right.³³

Paradoxes

These brief visits to the political cultures of both the United States and Sweden show that individualism may be compatible with very different kinds of civicness. The ‘freeriders-replacing-bigots-approach’ does not explain these differences. We need to revise this one-sided picture and try to find out what it is that makes individualism both compatible with extreme community involvement and intolerance in the American cities of the 1950’s; and why it today seems to bring high cynicism, withdrawal from community and growing tolerance. In the Swedish case, we still need to interpret what makes Swedish individualism compatible with solidarity, trust and participation but *incompatible* with free-riding and with tolerance towards political extremism or sexual permissiveness.³⁴ Nor can we accept the individual level mechanisms suggested by earlier work on individualism and democracy. It does not seem, as Inglehart argues, that growing individualism and liberty concerns make people feel less *threatened* by diversity or, as others have argued, less *concerned* by what others do in general. If these theories were true, more individualism would not make the Swedes become less but *more* tolerant towards extremists and pornography.³⁵

Perhaps, then, we should simply conclude that individualism has nothing to do with either of these trends? How tolerant or engaged a citizen is may perhaps have nothing to do with how much he or she values individualism. I believe this would be an erroneous conclusion, however tempting it may appear. Several studies based on in-depth interviews with both Americans and Swedes suggest that

³² Pettersson et al., *Demokratirådets Rapport 1998: Demokrati Och Medborgarskap*, 137-39; Pettersson and Geyer, *Värderingsförändringar I Sverige, Den Svenska Modellen, Individualismen Och Rättvisan*, 13, 27.

³³ Pettersson et al., *Demokratirådets Rapport 1998: Demokrati Och Medborgarskap*, 137; Bo Rothstein et al., *Demokrati Som Dialog, Demokratirådets Rapport* (Stockholm: SNS Förlag, 1995), 83-85.

³⁴ Pettersson and Geyer, *Värderingsförändringar I Sverige, Den Svenska Modellen, Individualismen Och Rättvisan*, 17, 29; Stefan Svallfors, *Vem Älskar Välfärdsstaten?* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1989), 88.

³⁵ Flanagan and Lee, "The New Politics, Culture Wars, and the Authoritarian-Libertarian Value Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies," 251; Inglehart and Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy, the Human Development Sequence*, 33.

individualistic values are of a profound importance for how a person thinks of society and the role he should take in it.³⁶ I suggest that instead of abandoning research on individualism when it fails to explain civicness, or lack thereof, we must disentangle it. There is not too little, but too *much* relevant information hidden in this fairly under-theorized ideal. In fact, I suggest that the key to understanding the links between individualism and democracy lies in acknowledging two possibilities:

- Individualism is probably not a one-dimensional ideal once we look at it at the individual level. It may well be that what earlier studies have simply called individualism is in fact two or even more different ideals, concerning different things. It is thus possible that, for example, Americans or Swedes or low-income and high-income groups respectively are all individualists, but in different senses.³⁷
- The civic values and attitudes that we may want to encourage democratic citizens to hold are different from one another and may not necessarily all be compatible. An individual who is civic in the sense that he is tolerant, even of those with whom he disagrees the most, may perhaps be *uncivic* in the sense that he approves of free-riding; and vice-versa. We still know too little about the relationship between these different dimensions of civic virtues.³⁸

³⁶ Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart, Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, Bruhn, "Ungdomarna, Politiken Och Valet," 241. The suggestion that individualism matters for different kinds of civicness is supported by the fact that several otherwise different citizen types (such as 'the activist' or 'the free-rider') have openly individualistic elements in their reasoning although this is apparently compatible with very different forms of behavior, found in Erik Amnå, "Medborgarskapets Dynamik: Reflektioner Kring 2006 Års Förstagångsväljare," in *Rösträtten 80 År*, ed. Christer Jönsson (Stockholm: Justitiedepartementet, 2002).

³⁷ Indeed, Rothstein suggests that the term 'solidaristic individualism' might be meaningful for describing Sweden, and also proposes that altruism/egoism and individualism/collectivism might sometimes be two separate dimensions. But he never discusses what this might mean more in-depth, nor does he try to explain it. Rothstein, "Sweden: Social Capital in the Social Democratic State ", 308. Similar suggestions are made in D G Barker, *The European Values Study 1981-1990* (Tilburg: Gordon Cook Foundation of European Values Group, 1992), 5.; Shalom H Schwartz, "Individualism-Collectivism: Critique and Proposed Refinements," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 21, no. 2 (1990).

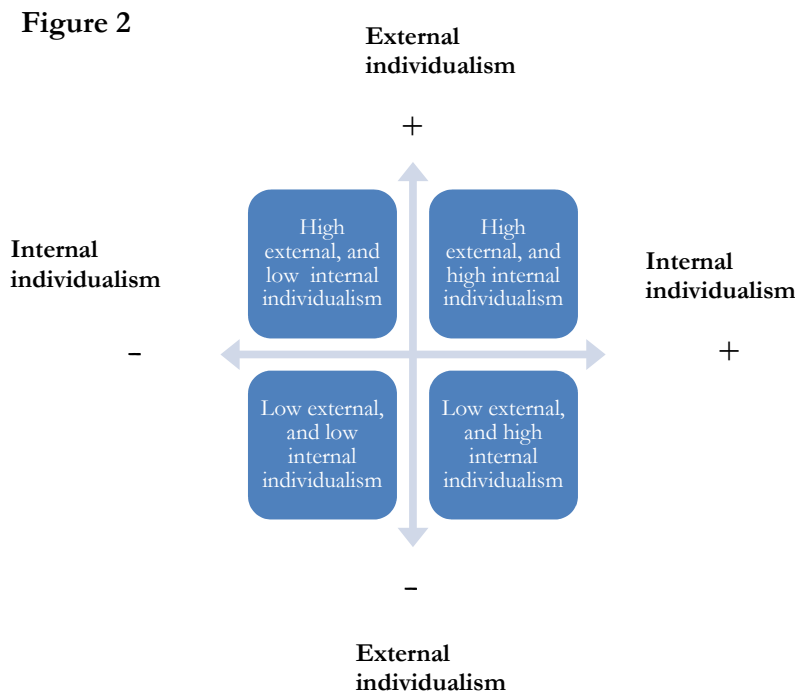
³⁸ This is suggested for example in Steven E Finkel, Lee Sigelman, and Stan Humphries, "Democratic Values and Political Tolerance," in *Measures of Political Attitudes*, ed. John P Robinson, Phillip R Shaver, and Lawrence S Wrightsman (London: Academic Press, 1999), 225. Also, I base my hypothesis on some preliminary results from a pilot study I conducted on attitudes on justifiability from the World Values Survey in Sweden. I found that a person's tolerance of homosexuality and suicide seems to depend on something else than his or her tolerance for taking soft drugs, drunk driving, buying stolen goods or cheating on taxes. This suggests that there is more to tolerance than a general movement towards more permissiveness and more moral relativism. The concept of tolerance is probably multidimensional; it seems to be possible for someone to be very tolerant of some ways of life (homosexuality) while being intolerant towards free-rider behavior (cheating on taxes).

Part I: A preliminary typology of individualism

Naturally, there are many possible sub-dimensions of individualism to explore. Let me here give a brief over-view of the two particular ideals of individualism that I have in mind. Since part of my dissertation aim is to delineate the relevant ideals properly, my answer here can of course not be exhaustive.

Let us depart from a rather conventional definition of the ideal of individualism, according to which it means valuing individual independence. My point is that there are very different forms of independence one might cherish. One person might strive for intellectual independence, whereas another may yearn for independence in their actions. Since the former acknowledges internal forces as obstacles to independence, while the latter is only concerned with external impediments, I shall refer to this as a distinction between the ideals of *internal* and *external* individualism.

The following figure should illustrate these two, theoretically at least, separate dimensions of individualism. As you can see, this simple typology gives us four ideal-type positions, all of which I believe are possible to imagine.³⁹



³⁹ For now, I have conceptualized these dimensions as uni-polar as opposed to bi-polar: i.e. we can only talk of a person being *more* or *less* individualistic.

My distinction draws both on philosophical discussions and more empirical work. It is close to Mary Douglas's grid/group theory that is popular among sociologists and anthropologists; and it is also reminiscent of a psychological approach that differentiates between self-determination and independence. But whereas they have explored to which extent people *experience* individualism; I want to discover to which extent people *value* individualism. In this sense, it is Isaiah Berlin's distinction between the two ideals of negative and positive liberty that is perhaps closest to mine.⁴⁰

The horizontal dimension of internal individualism tries to capture the value a person places on independence in thought, rather than independence in actions. Impediments to internal individualism do not primarily consist in other people, laws or rules that explicitly force you to do things against your will. It is not the threat of imprisonment or physical dependence on others that is the primary enemy of internal individualism. Indeed, I may practice internal independence both while in prison or while completely dependent on, for example, the medical care that my family or the society provides me with. As long as I retain the ability to critically reflect upon my own choices and to follow my own judgment in my *opinions*, I can still be internally independent. The main enemies of my internal independence are instead internal in the sense that they involve other parts of my self, which are considered somehow less true or right than my autonomous, reasoning self. These 'lower' selves consist of irrational desires such as passionate love and hatred or the need I might feel to conform to others' expectations, or to distinguish myself from others and show originality at any cost. These needs, inclinations and whims might of course be awoken by, or otherwise involve, other people. Nevertheless, what makes them problematic as feelings is not that they infringe on my independence in actions *vis-à-vis* others. Instead, the danger lies in the fact that these other parts of my self might overwhelm my judgment and interfere with my possibility to form my own opinion, which should be based on un-biased, critical reflection and reasoning. They might, in one word, interfere with my self-determination.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, ed. Robert E Goodin and Philip Pettit (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1997). Also, a similar distinction to mine is discussed in Ludvig Beckman, "Personal Independence and Social Justice: Contradictions of Liberal Virtues," in *Virtues of Independence and Dependence on Virtues*, ed. Ludvig Beckman and Emil Uddhammar (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2003), 71-73. Following Douglas's typology, we may speak of individualism in two senses: the extent to which the group in a given culture does not constrain the identity of the individual (group) and the extent to which it does not constrain the individual behavior (grid) Douglas, *Risk and Blame*. The psychological approach of Self-determination theory is also often called reactive versus reflective autonomy in Beverly A Hmel and Aaron L Pincus, "The Meaning of Autonomy: On and Beyond the Interpersonal Circumplex," *Journal of Personality* 70, no. 3 (2002): 282.

⁴¹ Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 404-06.

This ideal is, in short, the classic Kantian ideal of autonomy. It involves, I argue, a belief in the moral superiority of an autonomously chosen life-style. Thus, it is very far from the relativism or even moral skepticism often attributed to the so-called libertarians in Western democracies.⁴² Indeed, because of its affinities with stoicism, internal individualism might even be considered to be in conflict with the hedonism so often attributed to individualists.⁴³ It may also be important to notice that Emile Durkheim spoke of this kind of individualism as a religious phenomenon, since it provides the believers with cohesion and a sense of a common purpose – in this case the shared faith in the beauty of human reason and the distinctly human ability to rise above other animals by governing their feelings, instincts and impulses.⁴⁴

On the vertical axis we find external individualism, or the ideal to act independently of others. What matters here is not the source of my actions, not *why* I may want to do what I want. The emphasis is instead on the importance of being allowed by others to do what *I*, instead of what *they*, may want. This is why I have named it the ideal of *external* independence; it is not about the relationships the individual has to himself but to *others*. Thus, someone who values external independence acknowledges the importance of self-reliance, is reluctant to compromise his own wishes when others so demand, and values the virtue of getting by alone.⁴⁵

One may of course value external individualism for many reasons. For example, in many situations the Kantian stoic from above may agree that external independence is important in order to cultivate internal independence. However, someone else might believe in the importance of external independence because they value not reasoned thought but, on the contrary, intuition and passion. Indeed, I believe that external individualism might often be connected to the essentially romantic tradition that emphasizes the uniqueness of each individual, the importance of eccentricity,

⁴² Flanagan and Lee, "The New Politics, Culture Wars, and the Authoritarian-Libertarian Value Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies," 256.

⁴³ Isaiah Berlin, "The Apotheosis of the Romantic Will," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: John Murray, 1990), 216-17.

⁴⁴ Robert Bellah, *Emile Durkheim: On Morality and Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), 43. For an example of the fact that one can combine a pursuit for internal *independence* with an acknowledgment of the need for external *dependence*, see Alisdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals, Why Human Beings Need Virtues* (London: Duckworth, 1999).

⁴⁵ Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 393. A similar distinction has been proposed between freedom to do what is morally right and freedom to do whatever one wants. If we put it poignantly, we can see the American Civil war partly as a clash between these two freedoms: the Unionists fighting for the freedom to end slavery and the Confederates for the freedom not to be interfered with by the government. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart, Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, xxxiv.

personality and authenticity. If internal individualism is intertwined with an emphasis on reason in line with the Enlightenment, then external individualism may often be much closer to the romantics' eulogies of feeling and will, that do not so much imply the distinctiveness of 'the Human Being' in general as they invoke the uniqueness of *each* individual compared to the rest. According to this expressive tradition, the value of each human lies not in the fact that we all share the capacity to reason, but in that we all represent distinct personalities and must be allowed to express them.⁴⁶

Part II: Why should we expect to find these dimensions?

Some readers may ask whether the typology I outline here is only theoretically relevant. I shall therefore now go over a few findings that support my distinction and give us reason to believe that, on the contrary, my distinction should in fact be able to capture relevant empirical phenomena.⁴⁷

Why, for example, should we assume that there are people who value internal but *not* external individualism, or the other way around? Recent psychological work concerning how people experience individualism has revealed at least two different dimensions that in much resemble the ones I propose (with the exception that they mostly consist of self-descriptions, causality orientations and personality types and neglect the normative aspect of individualism, which interests me).⁴⁸ The "Self-governance factor" found in the above-mentioned study is very close to what I call internal individualism. It consists of self-descriptions showing achievement orientation, critical rationalism, the importance of setting your own standards and goals rather than accepting those of others and the statement that when you achieve a goal you get more satisfaction from reaching it than from the resulting praise. This factor is negatively related to solitude and interpersonal insensitivity scales, but positively related to measures of dominance, communion, relatedness, extraversion, open-mindedness and perseverance.

The other factor that was found, bearing much resemblance to what I call external individualism, is called the "Agentic Separation factor". Here, the issues with highest loadings (i.e. the questions that give us the best picture of what the underlying factor might be) are the desire to be independent

⁴⁶ Thorleif Petterson and Kalle Geyer, *Värderingsförändringar I Sverige, Den Svenska Modellen, Individualismen Och Rättvisan* (Stockholm: Utbildningsförlaget Brevskolan, 1992), 32. Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 395-96.

⁴⁷ Naturally, I cannot be sure of this before having started my analysis in Part II. However, one of the first things on my agenda for now is to make some preliminary tests of whether these two dimensions actually exist or not, since rather much in my argumentation hinges on this.

⁴⁸ The following is based on Hmel and Pincus, "The Meaning of Autonomy: On and Beyond the Interpersonal Circumplex."

from others, feeling bothered that other people make demands on you, tending to keep other people at a distance and expressing a concern with being “only average and ordinary”. This factor turned out to be negatively associated with extraversion, agreeableness and communion measures; but positively related to activity and assertiveness scales.

If it is true as these results suggest that the *need* for self-governance and that of separateness on the one hand, and uniqueness and self-reliance on the other, are held by different people and are not part of the same ‘package’, it is not entirely unlikely that the *ideals* of internal and external individualism are also separate issues. Likewise, since these different factors show varying and sometimes even opposed correlations to people’s behavior and other character traits, then we can imagine that the ideals of individualism should also have some relevance for predicting civic virtues, for example.

In another study, of Swedish youth and their views on politics, one of the dominant attitudes shared by most interviewees turned out to be the value of thinking, rather than acting, independently. The values stressed in these interviews were oriented towards self-expression and self-realization. But these processes were described in internally rather than externally individualistic terms. The ideals that were most prevalent might be described as an individualism in *opinions*, i.e. forming your identity independently of groups you might belong to (music, political ideas etc.) and continuously acting in accordance with your own values. These young Swedes stressed that it was important for them to be able to get along with close friends with very different opinions from their own; the important thing seemed to be that no-one tried to force their different views upon anyone. Many of the interviewees were in fact actively engaged in social movements of some kind. But trying to distinguish your authentic and unique self from others by your musical taste or clothes was considered much less important than reasoning independently and identifying with the values and convictions you had chosen.⁴⁹

It is of course rather likely that some of the interviewees may have wanted to embellish their behavior by attributing it to their high principles; but that does not diminish the fact that the ideal of internal individualism seems to be highly valued, whether it is followed or not. Indeed, in 1990, the

⁴⁹ Per Bruhn, "Ungdomarna, Politiken Och Valet," in *Sou 132: Valdeltagande I Förändring* (1999), 246.

number one virtue according to Swedish citizens was “the ability to form one’s own opinions, independently of others”.⁵⁰

A very different form of individualism presents itself on the basis of the interviews discussed in Robert Bellah’s *Habits of the Heart – Individualism and Commitment in American life*. The authors argue that Americans today “insist, perhaps more than ever before, on finding our true selves independent of any cultural or social influence, being responsible to that self alone, and making its fulfillment the meaning of our lives.” But the self-realization that many of their interviewees describe is not so much attained by autonomous reflection as by distancing yourself from other people in a more tangible sense.⁵¹ For many, it still seems to be an ideal to find their own Walden Pond. Thoreau’s idea that human bonds corrupt and that true self-realization can only be sought at a distance from others seems far from forgotten. In fact, many of the interviewees underline the value of self-reliance as something more than of mere economic significance; rather, it represents a personal virtue in all aspects of life. Ralph W. Emerson said that “Society is everywhere in conspiracy against the manhood of everyone of its members”. This conflict is constantly invoked by the interviewees in *Habits...* It is a conflict that places the demands from society and other human beings on one side and the authentic, unrestrained self on the other.⁵²

I think it is important not to mistake the ideal of self-reliant authenticity for selfishness or relativism. It should not be described as *a lack of* ideals, as is often the case. On the contrary, it represents an explicit ideal that sometimes even takes on heroic proportions. Consider for example the American cowboy or detective; both virtuous but lonely heroes. As the authors of *Habits...* argue, these mythic figures summarize a widespread perception of a struggle between the individual’s purity and morality on the one side and the depraving demands of society on the other.⁵³

⁵⁰ Olof Petersson, Anders Westholm, and Göran Blomberg, *Medborgarnas Makt, Maktutredningens Publikationer* (Stockholm: Carlsson, 1989), 262.

⁵¹ Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart, Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, 150. This is also in line with quantitative country level findings. Shalom Schwartz argues that ‘intellectual autonomy’, consisting of broadmindedness, curiosity and creativity is much less valued in the United States as compared to Europe; whereas on average, the Americans emphasize ‘affective autonomy’ all the more, which consists of valuing pleasure, exciting and varied life. Shalom H Schwartz, "A Theory of Cultural Value Orientations: Explications and Applications," *Comparative Sociology* 5, no. 2-3 (2006): 138, 59.

⁵² Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart, Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, 56; Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library of America, 1983), 261.

⁵³ Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart, Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, 144-45.

It is of course easy to exaggerate the shared elements in many of the interviews and lose track of the wide disparities that after all exist. However, I do not think it is an over-interpretation to say that the value of what I call external individualism does not necessarily seem to be intertwined with a quest for reason and critical rationalism. The above-mentioned findings all suggest that there is reason to examine the dichotomy between Enlightenment, autonomy, reason, humanity and society on one side; and Romanticism, uniqueness and separateness on the other. If we look carefully, we might find that this distinction is more than a mere philosophical abstraction.⁵⁴

Part III: Liberties in conflict?

Until now I have focused mostly on individualism. It is time to turn to the issue of civicness, what it is that we want civic citizens to do or be. These questions will be discussed more thoroughly of course in Part III of my project. Note that my purpose there will not primarily be to investigate what kinds of citizens are desirable in a normative sense; I shall in fact assume that we already know that we want certain forms of civicness: for example tolerance and political participation of varying kinds. My main task will instead be to discuss, categorize and bring out the potential differences between the various forms of civic virtues around which the issue of democratic civicness usually evolves.⁵⁵

I find that in the empirical literature on civic virtues, most commentators agree that we want citizens to support and exercise both what Jürgen Habermas calls *liberal* and *republican* civicness. Liberal civicness is essentially concerned with negative rights: rights to not be interfered with.⁵⁶ Republican civicness is essentially concerned with positive rights, rights to exercise one's autonomy. If we prefer Constant's striking terminology, we may also speak of 'the liberty of the moderns' and 'the liberty of the ancients'. For example, tolerating religious groups despite the fact that one dislikes their values is an example of liberal civicness; or, in other words, of valuing the liberty of the moderns. An example of republican civicness or valuing the liberty of the ancients is to consider that it is important, or

⁵⁴ For this philosophical distinction, see Berlin, "The Apotheosis of the Romantic Will," 216.

⁵⁵ Naturally, to some extent a discussion of *why* we want these forms of civicness can not be evaded. Also, it needs to be said that at this early stage, I am still far from certain of the particular forms of civic virtues that may be of relevance here.

⁵⁶ Although I believe it is an oversimplification, I do believe that Berlin is in many ways right in noting that liberalism can be seen as closely connected to the ideas of pluralism and authenticity rather than to autonomy. Indeed, for Berlin, the liberal tradition started as a revolt *against* Enlightenment. Berlin, "The Apotheosis of the Romantic Will," 209.

perhaps even a duty, to somehow engage in one's community.⁵⁷ The difference that is apparent here has deep-going implications not only for what the citizens but also of what the state and its institutions should essentially do or be. Hence, I believe it is justified to speak of different traditions of civiness.

Some have suggested that their divergence is so great that it must be impossible to combine both liberties to an equal extent; there will always be cases in which the state will have to choose between promoting one at the cost of the other. Ludvig Beckman for example has called this 'the rights versus virtues debate'. However, he concludes that this debate conjures a false opposition between two approaches that are in fact compatible, since in a *politics* of virtue (as opposed to an *ethics* of virtue), "we need not assume that there is only one value of relevance" and thus the state may very well protect both.⁵⁸

However, this conclusion does not apply to what I believe many of the commentators in this debate actually suggest, namely an *individual* level conflict between the value of the liberty of the ancients and that of the moderns; or in other words between positive and negative rights. I suggest this possibility must be considered and turned into an articulate argument. Let me briefly describe what the arguments from both sides might amount to if we translate them into my terminology and relate them to the issue of individual independence.

Communitarians and republicans have voiced numerous concerns that a focus on negative rights will erode love and solidarity between individuals and thereby weaken the community or, as many conservatives argue, the family.⁵⁹ In my view, what they are saying is essentially that there lies a danger in basing liberal democratic rights and institutions on a commitment to *external* individualism only. More precisely, their argument might go along the following lines: a person who places great

⁵⁷ Bear with me here; I realize that these definitions are not perfect and that they may not be as easily equated, but this is not the place for a longer discussion of this. Negative rights might also be called civil rights and positive rights referred to as political rights in T.H. Marshall's well-known terminology (Benjamin Constant, "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared to That of the Moderns," in *Political Writings*, ed. Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Jürgen Habermas, *Diskurs, Rätt Och Demokrati* (Göteborg: Daidalos, 1995), 75-81; Thomas Humphrey Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950). Also see Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman, "Return of the Citizen: A Survey of Recent Work on Citizenship Theory," in *Theorizing Citizenship*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

⁵⁸ Ludvig Beckman, *The Liberal State and the Politics of Virtue* (Stockholm: City University Press, 2000), 137, 47.

⁵⁹ Ronald Beiner, *What's the Matter with Liberalism?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 94; Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 32-33; Charles Taylor, "Human Rights: The Legal Culture," in *Philosophical Foundations of Human Rights* (Paris: UNESCO, 1986), 57.

value on external individualism, but does not care much for internal individualism, will probably treasure the negative rights of being allowed to freely do as he pleases in his private life (whether it concerns his religion, free time or love life). However, he will presumably value the *positive* rights, for example the rights to participate and deliberate in public life, only to the extent that they are needed to safeguard his external independence. Thus, if positive rights did in some situation not seem to bring more but in fact *less* external independence, then there would be a considerable risk that our external individualist would be willing to neglect them on behalf of his ideal of external individualism.

The mirror image of this claim is of course that citizens who commit deeply to what I call internal individualism will sometimes accept violations of people's negative rights in the name of autonomy. This fear is shared both by some libertarians, liberals and, which might come as a surprise, some post-modern thinkers.⁶⁰ Their reasoning might go somewhere along the following lines: people who value *internal* but not external individualism have greater reason to value positive than negative rights, since positive rights are often thought to present people with opportunities for exercising internal autonomy, whereas negative rights have little to do directly with internal independence (except for when they are needed as a means to safe-guard the arenas for exercising internal autonomy). Thus, if ever positive and negative rights come into conflict, an internal individualist would be likely to prioritize positive over negative rights.

Some readers might object that whereas the inherent link between external individualism and negative rights appears rather obvious, the connection between internal individualism and positive rights seems less clear. However, I think that at least logically, the value of internal individualism, i.e. the belief in the distinctly human capacity to reason in an unbiased and impartial manner, is not far from the classic idea that engaging in public life is one of the most noble and meaningful human activities, since it allows us to rise above our selves, enlarge our minds and take into account "interests which lie beyond the immediacy of personal circumstance and environment".⁶¹ Indeed, defenders of the duty to participate have long argued that political participation is the activity "in

⁶⁰ Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty."; Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 37.; James Marshall, "Michel Foucault: Governmentality and Liberal Education," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 14, no. 1 (1995); Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell 1974), 152; Jaaqov Leib Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986).

⁶¹ Kymlicka and Norman, "Return of the Citizen: A Survey of Recent Work on Citizenship Theory," 292.

which our highest capacities as rational and moral agents find expression".⁶² At the very least, there seems to be reason to examine whether there exists an empirical link between believing in internal individualism and taking seriously the typical republican virtues of participation and deliberation.

But the clou has yet to come. For the above claims are not only that there are *positive* relationships between each ideal of individualism and different civic virtues. Both sides in the debate also claim, if we translate their arguments into my terminology, that there may arise situations in which each ideal of individualism has *negative* effects on a certain civic virtue. If this is to be true, then we must be able to find situations in which negative and positive rights are in conflict, so that citizens must choose the one over the other. What might a real-life clash between the liberty of the ancients and that of the moderns look like? Let me give you such a possible example. Although it is clearly exaggerated, it shows that there are indeed real political issues in which individualism in one sense or the other might be decisive for what alternative we favor.

The house-wife example

Suppose I am an external individualist and the national elections are coming up. My commitment to external individualism means that above all, I treasure individual independence in actions. This leads me to value the negative rights that protect the possibilities of all individuals to choose whatever life they may want for themselves. But lately, I have felt that this right is being curtailed. The majority in my society has decided to make it increasingly difficult to choose the life of a self-sacrificing house-wife. Dedication to your family instead of your own career is considered obsolete, and both educational and financial measures have been taken to prevent people from choosing it. Although I am, say, a successful business woman and could not be less inclined to be a house-wife myself, I am nevertheless a keen believer in others' right to express their own personality by choosing this life. I therefore consider the possibility of engaging in a party that is against the limitations imposed on house-wives. In other words, I value my positive right to engage in politics since I need it to protect my ultimate ideal, that of external individualism.⁶³

But whereas I desire to engage in a political party that emphasizes freedom of choice in private matters, I also feel that political participation compromises my independence *vis-à-vis* others. By joining together, collaborating and compromising with others, I will inevitably lose some of my

⁶² Michael Walzer, *Toward a Global Civil Society* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1995), 155.

⁶³ This is suggested by Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 411.

independence. I might then conclude that, since my positive right to participate in politics in several ways jeopardizes the very reason for which I want to participate (external independence), it is more important for me to uphold my negative right *not* to engage than my positive right to do so.⁶⁴

Now suppose that a friend of mine is an *internal* individualist who is deeply committed to the belief that critical reflection is the ultimate goal for all human beings. He highly values political engagement in general and political discussions in particular, since he believes that these ancient liberties widen our perspective and challenge the intellect. For him, political participation is valuable as a road towards developing people's internal independence, their intellectual autonomy. Of course, he also values the negative right to a certain amount of privacy, but mostly to the extent that this gives rise to the kind of diversity that is needed in order for people to be able to autonomously choose between different life-styles and to be challenged by different points of view.

When discussing the housewife issue with me, my friend argues that the housewives who claim to have chosen their life-styles freely are in fact not free in the *right* sense. Their choice, he might say, is not based on internal independence but on their perhaps unconscious fear of failure in other careers, or their need to conform to the expectations of their families, or simply a whim they have to stand out from the rest and rebel against what is considered politically correct. When I counter that these housewives claim to be expressing their true personalities by staying at home, my friend might retort that their true selves are being oppressed by their irrational fears and that the personalities they *are* expressing are in that case not of much value. He might further stress that their withdrawal from a public life makes future internal independence even more difficult for them, since they withdraw from the arena of challenging arguments and diversity. Because of this, he would say, it is a duty for the rest of us to do exactly what I oppose, namely to somehow *make* women independent in the proper, internal sense. The result would be that he, because he believed in negative rights as a way to foster internal independence, might find it logical and indeed necessary to curtail a person's negative rights on behalf of their internal independence.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ This is in fact suggested in the interviews in Amnå, "Medborgarskapets Dynamik: Reflektioner Kring 2006 Års Förstagångsväljare," 5.

⁶⁵ Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 411; John Gray, *Berlin* (London: Fontana Press, 1995), 32.

Part IV: Why test if there is a conflict between the two kinds of liberties?

The up-shot of what was said above is that there are a number of claims in political theory that concern the empirical relationship between holding certain ideals of individualism and giving priority to negative over positive rights or vice-versa. My intention is to develop them in Part III of my dissertation, and systematize them in a coherent argument. When this has been done, I shall hopefully be able to distill a number of relevant hypotheses that I can proceed to test in Part IV.

Under the section *Aims and research questions*, I already discussed the possible theoretical contributions that might be drawn from my fourth and final part. I mentioned that testing the empirical links between holding an ideal of individualism and upholding certain civic virtues should be important for the feasibility of Rawls's political liberalism, based on neutral justifications. Let me now be a bit imaginative and sketch what other possible contributions I might make. More specifically, what knowledge might I add to the existing empirical explanations of civiness?

To begin with, consider what Putnam would expect to be the typical effect of the norms of what I call external individualism. Someone who had these norms would certainly have reason to be less prone to neighborliness. Their lack of neighborliness would, in turn, erode both their own and others' social capital in terms of trust. This in turn would probably lead to less tolerance and more free-riding in their community. Thus, the effect from external individualism on both tolerance and participation would be indirect and negative.⁶⁶

My suggestion is that, although the 'Putnam-model' above may be correct, it does not capture all that might be going on. The alternative hypothesis that I propose is based on the rather complicated discussion of a possible conflict between the negative and positive rights described earlier. Perhaps it is helpful to see it as a difference in what rights one person considers as intrinsically and another as only instrumentally valuable. Berlin for example suggests that 'true' liberals value negative rights intrinsically and positive rights only instrumentally, whereas true 'democrats' value positive rights intrinsically and negative rights instrumentally.⁶⁷ I shall rely on this rather simplified dichotomy here below, with the exception that I shall speak of 'republicans' rather than 'democrats'.

⁶⁶ Putnam, *Bowling Alone the Collapse and Revival of American Community*, 63-64.

⁶⁷ Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 412.

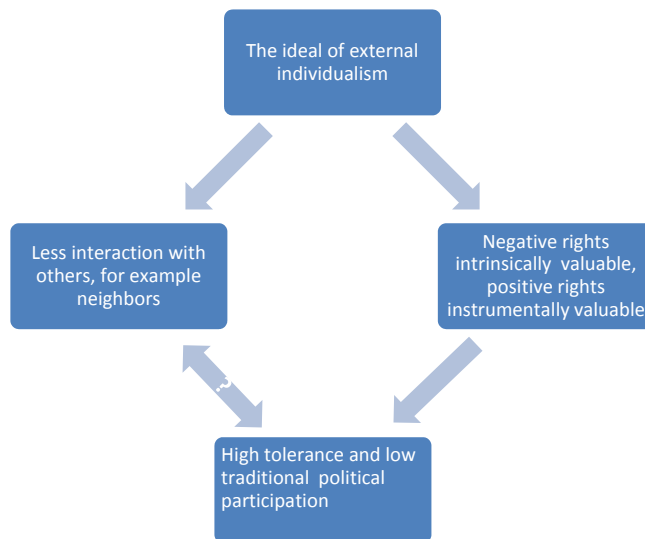
If we turn the dilemma from above into a hypothesis, we should expect that embracing the ideal of external individualism leads a person to value tolerance intrinsically, but participation only instrumentally. The effect from holding the ideal of external individualism on being tolerant should thus be *direct* and *positive*. But in the case where political participation demanded a sacrifice in external independence, the external individualist would probably refrain from participation. In other words, holding the ideal of external independence might have a *direct* and *negative* effect on a person's amount of participation. This should at least hold true for traditional forms of political engagement that demand compromise and where the 'whole package of opinions' may be regarded as impersonal and not in line with each participant's unique personality.⁶⁸

The following figure illustrates what the relationship would look like between external individualism and civicness if this hypothesis were to find empirical support. The issue of neighborliness, which was a necessary intermediate variable in the 'Putnam-model' described above, would no longer be crucial in this case and it would not even be sure in which direction the causal arrows flow concerning this variable.⁶⁹ We might discover that the purported relationship between low levels of neighborliness and low levels of participation is partly spurious and that at least part of this behavior can be explained independently of each other, by the fact that a person who both shuns neighborly barbecues *and* local rallies does both because of an underlying commitment to external individualism.

⁶⁸ This line of reasoning seems to underlie some of the decisions of young Swedes not to vote or engage in political parties according to Li Bennich-Björkman, "Känslomakaren. Populärkulturens Makt Och Medborgarrollens Förändring," in *Civilsambället. Demokratitredningens Forskarvolym Viii. Sou 1999:84*, ed. Erik Amnå (1999).; Amnå, "Medborgarskapets Dynamik: Reflektioner Kring 2006 Års Förstagångsväljare," 4. Of course, the relationship between valuing external individualism and participating in movements that were mostly concerned with advocating negative rights, such as certain civil rights movements, might still be positive.

⁶⁹ However, some would argue that it is more likely that the basic principles of individualism affected neighborliness than vice-versa. Caprara et al., "Personality and Politics: Values, Traits and Political Choice," 2.

Figure 3. A 'liberal' model of civiness:



Let me also suggest another hypothesis, involving the ideal of *internal* individualism. The main political concern of those who Habermas calls 'republicans' should be the exercise of autonomy through positive, republican rights. Negative rights should be regarded as instrumentally valuable, to the extent that they contribute to the exercise of autonomous thinking.⁷⁰ For example, a 'republican' should believe that the foremost value of tolerance lies in making autonomous choice possible through ensuring a diversity of options to choose between. However, if situations arose in which tolerance came into conflict with autonomy, the 'republican' might be willing to infringe upon negative rights in order to help people be autonomous. The lifestyle of the non-autonomous housewives mentioned earlier, or perhaps a religious minority that chooses the life of reverence and obedience rather than critical reasoning, are possible cases in which an internal individualist might be willing to sacrifice someone's negative rights on behalf of their more 'real', autonomous self. These possible relationships can be illustrated by the following figure:

⁷⁰ Habermas, *Diskurs, Rätt Och Demokrati*, 77-78.

Figure 4. A ‘republican’ model of civicness:



Concluding remarks

In the original version of this paper, a part on feasibility and methodology followed at this point. However, I have excluded it in this version, since I expect the seminar to focus on the theoretical validity of my typology and the conflict between liberties, rather than the empirical aspects of my study. Briefly, let me say that my intention is to investigate whether my typology of individualism holds empirically by factor analyzing survey data from the General Social Surveys in the United States and compare with survey data from Sweden. This will be done in Part II. In Part IV, I shall continue using survey data to look at how well different ideals of individualism predict a person’s level of tolerance of least liked groups, their participation in political groups, their compliance to rules and support for civil disobedience etc. I further intend to deepen the approach in Part IV by conducting a limited number of interviews in order to trace how individualists reason and whether or not it is indeed their individualistic values that lead them to embrace or renounce civic virtues.

Finally, I wish to stress that the suggestions I have outlined here above are of course highly preliminary. What I hope to have conveyed in these last couple of pages, when I have discussed Part III and IV, is that the phenomenon of individualism is not only theoretically interesting in itself, nor only empirically intriguing. It also taps the core of a most urgent debate of whether there might be an inevitable empirical conflict between the different kinds of liberties that we want liberal democracy to be based upon. Is there a struggle at the core of liberal democracy between the two ideal type citizens that I have sketched here, i.e. between the ‘liberal’ and the ‘republican’?⁷¹

⁷¹ It must be stressed that I do not mean that either of them exists in real life; these models represent ideal types to which individual citizens can be compared.

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