

THE TYRANNY OF LIBERAL INDIVIDUALISM IN J.S. MILL'S POLITICAL THOUGHT: TOWARDS A THEORY OF DIALOGICAL LIBERAL-COMMUNITARIANISM

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Abstract

This paper reconsiders John Stuart Mill's liberal-democratic synthesis, with particular focus on the internal tension between liberal individualism and democratic solidarity. While Mill seeks to harmonize the principles of personal liberty with the demands of democratic governance, his synthesis reveals deep contradictions, such as the issues of common good, negative liberty, moral neutrality and selfhood that negate the sustainability of liberal democratic discourse that acknowledges the rights of both the individuals and the community. By interrogating the latent tyranny embedded within his liberal individualism, the paper argues that Mill's approach, though foundational, remains inadequate for

addressing the challenges of pluralistic democratic societies. Using critical and complementarity methods, the paper proposes a new theoretical approach — Dialogical Liberal-Communitarianism — which integrates Afisi's normative emphasis on relational autonomy with Habermas's procedural vision of discursive legitimacy. This reconstructed framework affirms the social constitution of individual identity while grounding democratic legitimacy in reason-giving and mutual recognition. Dialogical Liberal-Communitarianism thus offers a more coherent and inclusive path for rethinking liberalism and democracy in ways that respond to the normative and institutional demands of pluralistic societies.

Keywords: Liberal Individualism Dialogical Liberal-Communitarianism, Communitarianism, Deliberative Democracy, Pluralism.

Introduction

The modern political landscape is often framed by the values of liberalism and democracy, both of which claim to advance freedom, justice, and equality. Yet, beneath their shared commitment to liberty lies a philosophical tension that continues to provoke debate (Wolin, 2004:220-230). Liberalism, especially in its classical form, prioritizes the sanctity of the individual, emphasizing autonomy, personal rights, and protection from state interference. At its core, liberalism advances the notion that individuals are self-determining agents whose primary moral and political claim lies in their freedom from external coercion (Berlin, 1969). In contrast, democracy centers on collective self-governance, often grounded in the will of

the majority and the public interest. It presumes a shared civic identity and interdependence that sometimes requires the subordination of individual preferences to collective decisions (Held, 2006). This tension between individual liberty and collective authority has long haunted the liberal tradition.

On the one hand, unregulated individualism can lead to social fragmentation, inequality, and the weakening of democratic solidarity (Sandel, 1982). On the other hand, unchecked democracy can become a tyranny of the majority suppressing minority rights in the name of popular will (Tocqueville, 2000), a danger John Stuart Mill explicitly warned against in “On Liberty” (1859), where he argued that the will of the majority, if left unmoderated, could impose conformity and silence minority voices, thereby endangering liberty itself. It is precisely this dialectic that forms the backdrop of John Stuart Mill's liberal-democratic synthesis, a political vision that sought to reconcile the liberty of the individual with the demands of democratic governance.

Mill's philosophy was shaped by the post-Enlightenment concern for freedom, yet it was also a response to the emerging threat of mass democracy in 19th-century England. In his landmark essay “On Liberty” (1859), Mill famously defended individual liberty as the “very condition of human progress,” arguing that society should only interfere with individual conduct to prevent harm to others. However, in his later work *Considerations on Representative*

Government (1861), Mill equally championed democratic participation as essential to the development of moral and intellectual faculties. His effort at merging these two commitments, liberty and participation, leads to what may be described as a “delicate balancing act” between liberal individualism and democratic collectivism. This synthesis, though intellectually ambitious, is not without contradiction. Mill's theory implicitly privileges a certain kind of rational, autonomous individual, often abstracted from the social, economic, and cultural forces that shape real-world agency. Moreover, his trust in rational deliberation underestimates the potential for entrenched structural inequalities to distort democratic processes. As such, Mill's liberal-democratic ideal, though foundational to modern political theory, warrants critical re-examination in light of contemporary challenges: rising populism, economic inequality, identity-based exclusion, and the erosion of democratic institutions.

This paper undertakes a critical reassessment of John Stuart Mill's liberal-democratic synthesis, focusing on how liberal individualism, when left unchecked, can erode the foundations of democratic solidarity. Mill's attempt at reconciling personal liberty with democratic participation, though intellectually significant, reveals an underlying contradiction: his ideal of the rational, autonomous individual is too abstract to account for the social embeddedness and normative interdependence necessary for genuine democratic life. This internal contradiction invites a deeper critique of Mill's

synthesis. By elevating the rational, self-directing individual as the normative ideal, Mill sidelines the relational and communal dimensions of personhood that are essential to democratic cohesion. His framework, therefore, inadequately addresses the structural inequalities and social dependencies that shape political agency in real-world democracies. By virtue of the problems embedded in the political of Mill, this paper synthesizes Afisi's normative insights with Habermas's procedural rationalism to propose a new theoretical approach — Dialogical Liberal-Communitarianism. This theory affirms the social constitution of the self while upholding the procedural mechanisms necessary for inclusive democratic legitimacy. Dialogical Liberal-Communitarianism thus emerges as a philosophically coherent and politically relevant framework for rethinking liberalism and democracy in pluralistic societies. To properly discuss this position, the paper is structured into three major parts. The first part analyzes Mill's liberal-democratic theory, showing the internal contradictions within his synthesis of liberty and democracy. The second part examines the communitarian critique of Mill's liberal-democratic ideas focusing on the arguments of Charles Taylor, Michael Sandel, and Alasdair MacIntyre. The third part draws on Afisi's liberal-communitarianism and Habermas's theory of deliberative democracy to propose a reconstructed model of democracy—Dialogical Liberal-Communitarianism—as the most viable path toward harmonizing individual autonomy and collective democratic will.

Mill's Liberal-Democratic Synthesis

John Stuart Mill stands as one of the most significant liberal scholars in Western socio-political philosophy. His work represents a sophisticated attempt to synthesize liberal individualism with democratic governance. At a time when democracy was still viewed with suspicion in many quarters, Mill advocated not only for the expansion of suffrage and representative institutions but also for the protection of personal liberty and intellectual freedom (Ten, 1998). His political philosophy, articulated most clearly in “On Liberty” (1859) and “Considerations on Representative Government” (1861), presents a liberal-democratic ideal grounded in the primacy of the individual, the necessity of political participation, and the developmental function of both liberty and democracy. Mill begins his political theory with a robust defense of individual liberty. For Mill, liberty is not merely the absence of external restraint, but a necessary condition for personal development, moral agency, and social progress.

His central argument in “On Liberty” rests on what he famously calls the harm principle: “The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others” (Mill, 1859: 14). This principle establishes the moral boundary of legitimate social and political interference. Mill believes that individuals should be free to pursue their own conceptions of the good life, provided they do not harm others. This includes freedom of thought, freedom of

expression, freedom of association, and freedom of lifestyle. For Mill, such freedoms are not just political rights, they are conditions for human flourishing: “Genius can only breathe freely in an atmosphere of freedom... Individuality is the same thing with development” (Mill, 1859: 64). Mill emphasizes individuality as a vital human good. The cultivation of unique talents, convictions, and ways of living is seen as the essence of moral and intellectual growth.

Liberty is valuable not simply for its utility, but because it allows individuals to exercise rational self-direction, which Mill sees as the highest human function. Moreover, an important component of Mill's liberalism is his defense of freedom of opinion and discussion. In his view, society progresses by subjecting ideas to open and critical debate. He argues that even false opinions are valuable, because their challenge sharpens the truth. As he puts it:

The peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race... If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error (Mill, 1859: 20).

Mill sees the liberty of thought and expression not only as a defense of individual rights but also as essential for the collective pursuit of

truth. This view ties together personal freedom and social benefit, underlining his belief that liberty enhances both individual and communal life. Also, while many classical liberals were wary of democracy, Mill defends it as a means of individual and social development. In *Considerations on Representative Government*, he argues that representative democracy is preferable to other forms of government not simply because it is more just, but because it educates and morally improves its citizens:

The ideally best form of government is that in which the sovereignty, or supreme controlling power in the last resort, is vested in the entire aggregate of the community... and the rights and interests of every person are secure from being disregarded (Mill, 1861: 53).

Democracy, in Mill's view, is not merely a method for choosing rulers. It is a school of citizenship. By participating in public affairs, citizens learn responsibility, cultivate public spirit, and come to understand the interests of others. He argues that: "the only thing which trains the mind to comprehend and feel a public interest... is participation in public affairs." (Mill, 1861: 79). Thus, he sees democratic government as a moral instrument: it develops the character of the governed, fostering civic virtues such as reason, empathy, and commitment to justice. Consequently, Mill envisions democracy not as direct or unfiltered rule by the majority, but as a system of representative government guided by reason, education, and institutional balance. He is particularly wary of what he terms the

“tyranny of the majority,” where the preferences of the most numerous or vocal segment of the population may come to dominate public life at the expense of minority interests and individual freedoms. In *On Liberty*, he argues: “The will of the people... practically means, the will of the most numerous or the most active part of the people... and there is no check by which their interests can be balanced against those of others (Mill, 1859: 8). To address this risk, Mill proposes several institutional mechanisms that would ensure democracy remains a rational and morally just system. One such safeguard is plural voting, wherein individuals with greater education or intellectual ability are given more votes. For Mill, this is not undemocratic but rather a way to ensure that political decisions are informed by knowledge and competence. He also supports proportional representation, which would allow diverse viewpoints, especially those of minorities, to be adequately reflected in legislative bodies. This, in his view, prevents the domination of a single majority faction and encourages a more inclusive and deliberative form of governance.

Additionally, Mill emphasizes the need for a professional and impartial civil service and judiciary. These institutions, he argues, must operate above party interests and mass opinion to uphold legal integrity and protect individual rights. These elements collectively reveal Mill's understanding of democracy as a complex and mediated system. It is not enough for the people to govern; they must govern wisely. Democracy, for Mill, must go beyond the mechanical

aggregation of preferences and must embody reason, deliberation, and the protection of all citizens, not just the majority. For Mill, liberty and democracy are not opposed but mutually reinforcing. Liberty allows the development of autonomous, rational individuals; democracy provides the institutional framework in which those individuals can act collectively to shape their society. This synthesis is expressed most clearly when Mill holds: “A government is to be judged by what it does with the power of society... but also by what it causes or encourages society to do for itself.” (Mill, 1859: 91). In this way, liberty fuels personal development, and democracy channels that development toward the public good. Mill believes that only a society composed of self-governing individuals can sustain a healthy and just democratic system. Underlying both Mill's liberalism and his democratic thought is a strong belief in moral and intellectual progress. He is deeply influenced by the Enlightenment tradition, seeing history as a narrative of human improvement through reason and freedom. He avers that: “the worth of a state in the long run is the worth of the individuals composing it.” (Mill, 1859: 119). Here, the political and ethical converge: the better the individual, the better the society. Mill envisions political institutions not merely as mechanisms of order, but as tools for human elevation. Government, when properly structured, should foster the conditions for reasoned discourse, personal responsibility, and social cooperation. Nevertheless, Despite Mill's nuanced defense of liberty and representative institutions, his framework remains rooted in a conception of the individual as rational and self-contained; While

Mill emphasizes individual liberty, his liberalism is not identical to libertarianism. Mill's conception of liberty is grounded in a moral and developmental framework that sees freedom not merely as non-interference, but as a condition for human flourishing and self-improvement. In contrast, Robert Nozick's libertarianism, as articulated in "Anarchy, State, and Utopia" (1974), advocates for a minimal or "nightwatchman" state limited strictly to the protection of individuals from force, fraud, and theft. Nozick rejects any redistributive or paternalistic state action as a violation of individual rights, rooted in a deontological commitment to self-ownership and inviolable property rights. This abstraction opens Mill's theory to critique from communitarian scholars who argue that identity and moral agency are socially constituted. The following section examines how scholars such as MacIntyre, Sandel, and Taylor challenge Mill's assumptions and lay the groundwork for a more relational understanding of political subjectivity.

The Communitarian Critique of J.S. Mill's Liberal Democratic Approach

Communitarian critics argue that Mill's liberal-democratic synthesis is fundamentally flawed because it underestimates the constitutive role of community, tradition, and shared values in shaping moral and political agency (Agunbiade, 2025a:57:60). Whereas Mill frames society largely as a voluntary association of autonomous individuals, communitarians contend that individuals are neither pre-social nor self-sufficient. From this vantage point, Mill's model of democracy

appears ethically shallow, as it lacks recognition of the moral embeddedness that gives rise to civic identity, moral responsibility, and public reason. Among the leading communitarian critics of Mill's liberal framework are Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel, and Charles Taylor. In his influential work *After Virtue* (1981), MacIntyre offers a foundational critique of Enlightenment liberal individualism. He argues that modern moral discourse, epitomized by thinkers like Mill, wrongly assumes that rational agents can make coherent moral judgments in isolation from their historical and communal narratives. As he puts it: "I can answer the question 'What ought I to do?' only if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'" (MacIntyre, 1981: 216).

According to MacIntyre, moral reasoning becomes intelligible only within a tradition-bound narrative framework that defines virtues, goals, and ethical standards. Mill's atomistic conception of the self assumes that moral knowledge is attainable through private reflection, divorced from communal anchorage. This abstraction, MacIntyre argues, renders democratic deliberation unstable because it lacks the shared moral vocabulary necessary for justice and civic trust. Similarly, Michael Sandel, in *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (1982), challenges the notion of the "unencumbered self" that he associates with liberal thinkers like Mill and Rawls. Sandel holds that "the liberal conception of the self, as articulated by Mill and Rawls, is one which is prior to its ends and unencumbered by commitments derived from its engagements" (Sandel, 1982: 17). For

Sandel, Mill's view assumes that individuals can construct their values independently of their social roles, family ties, and communal narratives. This neglects the fact that moral identity is shaped by constitutive attachments, citizenship, tradition, memory, which ground one's sense of justice.

Hence, Sandel contends that liberal democracy must be reoriented around shared conceptions of the good rather than procedural formalism. Charles Taylor echoes these concerns in *Sources of the Self* (1992), where he emphasizes that human agency is possible only within a shared moral and cultural horizon. He argues that “human agency requires that we be capable of taking a stance on our past and our future... but the sources of our identity lie in language, in moral frameworks which condition what we can reasonably aspire to” (Taylor, 1992: 34). Taylor's critique suggests that Mill's vision of democracy risks producing a fragmented society in which citizens are alienated from the moral narratives that give their lives meaning. In such a system, democratic participation becomes an exercise in preference aggregation, rather than a collective moral project. Taken together, these scholars converge on three critical objections to Mill's liberal-democratic synthesis: (1) Mill's model of the individual is ahistorical and abstract, detached from the communal contexts that give moral life its shape; (2) Mill's liberalism lacks a substantive account of the good life, offering instead a procedural framework focused on rights and autonomy; and (3) Mill's view that democracy educates citizens is paradoxical: Mill wants democracy to shape

moral character, yet he bases it on an individualism that denies the community's moral authority.

However, while communitarians rightly emphasize the moral and cultural embeddedness of persons, their position is not without serious philosophical and ethical limitations. First, their strong emphasis on tradition and community runs the risk of moral conservatism. As critics have pointed out, uncritical appeals to “shared values” may serve to legitimize oppressive cultural norms, such as gender inequality, ethnic exclusion, or religious authoritarianism. If the moral self is entirely constituted by tradition, how can we critique unjust traditions? Without invoking some form of individual autonomy, it becomes difficult to justify moral reform.

Second, communitarianism's critique of liberal individualism may come at the cost of universal human rights. In elevating communal attachments, communitarians may undervalue the rights of minorities, dissidents, or those who diverge from dominant cultural norms. What safeguards exist within communitarian theory to protect individuals from coercive cultural conformity? Without a robust rights-based framework, the communitarian vision risks becoming illiberal.

Third, the communitarian view tends to idealize the community as a unified moral whole, when in reality communities are pluralistic, contested, and dynamic. Within any cultural group, there exist

divergent values, internal power struggles, and overlapping identities. Communitarian thought does not always account for intra-community differences or the possibility of multiple, intersecting affiliations that complicate notions of collective identity.

Finally, a more conceptual critique concerns the false dichotomy that communitarians often draw between individual autonomy and communal belonging. By framing liberalism and communitarianism as mutually exclusive, this debate overlooks the possibility of an integrative moral framework, one that affirms both the dignity of the individual and the formative role of the community. This raises an important philosophical question: must we choose between liberal individualism and communitarianism, or can we construct a political theory that harmonizes their understanding? Given these objections, OseniAfisi's liberal-communitarianism and Jürgen Habermas' deliberative democratic theory, emerge as constructive responses, which will be considered in the next section

A Reconstruction of Democracy and Liberalism: Toward a Theory of Dialogical Liberal-Communitarianism

This section turns to OseniTaiwoAfisi's liberal-communitarianism and Jürgen Habermas's deliberative democracy not as arbitrary additions but as critically necessary responses to the enduring tensions explored thus far. While Mill's liberal-democratic synthesis provides a strong moral defense of individual rights, it remains encumbered by an abstract conception of the self and insufficient

mechanisms for collective will-formation. Similarly, communitarian critiques from Taylor, Sandel, and MacIntyre reveal deep concerns about the erosion of shared values and social embeddedness, yet often fail to articulate how communal frameworks can accommodate pluralism and protect individual autonomy. Afisi and Habermas offer more promising paths forward: Afisi's liberal-communitarianism seeks a contextual balance between rights and duties without subordinating one to the other, while Habermas's deliberative democracy provides a communicative approach where legitimacy arises through inclusive, rational discourse. Together, these frameworks offer a dialogical alternative that neither collapses into individualism nor lapses into collectivist authoritarianism.

Oseni Taiwo Afisi's (2016) article, "Popper, Liberal-Communitarianism, Beyond the Politics of Liberalism," challenges the received notion of liberalism as strictly individualistic. Drawing on Karl Popper's political philosophy, especially his emphasis on the "open society", Afisi argues that freedom cannot be fully understood without accounting for its inherently social dimension. He introduces the concept of "social freedom," a reformulation of liberty that merges personal autonomy with intersubjective responsibility (Agunbiade, 2025a:62-68).

For Afisi, the liberal tradition has often misrepresented the individual as a self-contained, rational agent, detached from the

communal, cultural, and moral frameworks that shape identity and agency. However, in Popper's critical rationalism, especially his theory of intersubjective critique and the social nature of language, Afisi finds the seeds of a more relational conception of the self. Individuals are not isolated agents, but beings whose consciousness and moral development are realized through social interaction, dialogue, and recognition (Afisi, 2016: 130–132). To strengthen this perspective, Afisi draws on Philip Pettit's idea of “social holism,” which holds that personhood and moral agency emerge from social relationships rather than individual abstraction. As Pettit (1998:86) holds “individuals are not entirely free-standing, for they depend upon one another for the possession of some property that is central to the human being”. Afisi (2016) thus proposes a liberal-communitarian order that does not dismantle liberal rights but reframes them within a matrix of mutual responsibility and social interdependence. This vision avoids the pitfalls of communitarian essentialism, particularly the risks posed by overly cultural or tribal definitions of community, as found in Will Kymlicka's model, and instead advocates for a universal social embeddedness grounded in human relationality rather than cultural boundedness. He contends that “the term 'culture' is not suitable for addressing the challenge of a liberal-communitarian political philosophy... it risks political instability and internal inequality” (Afisi, 2016: 136). Although this paper critiques the limitations of classical liberal individualism, it recognizes that contemporary liberal theorists such as John Rawls(1993), Ronald Dworkin(1977), and Will Kymlicka(1995)

have developed more sophisticated frameworks. Rawls's theory of political liberalism, for instance, is grounded in reasonable pluralism and a commitment to fairness among free and equal citizens. Dworkin emphasizes rights as moral claims that protect dignity, and Kymlicka introduces cultural protections within a liberal framework. These positions mitigate some of the concerns raised by communitarians by acknowledging the social context of persons. However, they often stop short of fully grounding political legitimacy in dialogical engagement or the relational processes that shape moral identity. Dialogical Liberal-Communitarianism seeks to build on their insights while further embedding autonomy within communicative democratic structures.

While Afisi builds a powerful normative account that balances individual and communal claims, his liberal-communitarianism still lacks a clearly articulated procedural mechanism for mediating value conflicts in pluralistic societies. In his approach, the individual is not ontologically prior to the community but derives meaning and identity through communal relations, what he calls the “co-emergence of the individual and the communal” (Afisi, 2016). However, while this ontological complementarity is normatively compelling, it becomes problematic in practice where multiple communities hold conflicting visions of the good. For instance, when individual rights clash with communal customs, such as in matters of gender equality or religious freedom, Afisi does not provide a deliberative or institutional structure through which such

disputes might be fairly negotiated without reasserting communal dominance. His framework appeals to mutual recognition and societal harmony but does not explain how such harmony is to be constructed or maintained amid moral diversity and power asymmetries. It is precisely this procedural gap that Jürgen Habermas's theory of deliberative democracy addresses. By grounding legitimacy in rational discourse and proposing communicative procedures for inclusive decision-making, Habermas offers a philosophically robust and practically viable structure to complement and operationalize Afisi's normative insights. In "Between Facts and Norms," Habermas (1996) argues that legitimate law and political authority can only arise from discursive processes of communication among free and equal citizens. At the core of this model lies communicative rationality, a type of reason rooted not in strategic calculation, but in mutual understanding, intersubjectivity, and rational discourse. Rather than reducing politics to preference aggregation, Habermas envisions democratic legitimacy as a product of reason-giving dialogue in which all affected participants can freely contribute.

He rejects both liberal proceduralism, which privileges atomistic individualism, and communitarian moralism, which risks imposing collective identities. Instead, Habermas offers a third way, a deliberative model that mediates between personal autonomy and collective will through institutionalized public deliberation. In this process, norms are valid only if they can secure the assent of all

affected parties through free and open discourse. As Habermas (1996:374) notes: “the vehicle of public opinion... puts the state in touch with the needs of society”. This deliberative approach resonates deeply with Afisi's conception of the social self. Both theorists converge on the claim that freedom and identity are realized dialogically, not atomistically. However, Habermas extends the argument by offering a procedural infrastructure for realizing liberal-communitarian ideals in actual political practice. His conception of the public sphere as a discursive space of critical communication provides a mechanism for ensuring that democratic legitimacy is grounded in reason-giving, inclusivity, and mutual accountability. The integration of Afisi's relational autonomy with Habermas's deliberative democracy reveals how “social freedom” can move from a normative vision to a functioning political reality.

For Afisi, freedom is inherently dialogical, it emerges through mutual recognition within a web of interdependent relations. However, realizing this vision requires institutional mechanisms that guarantee equal voice, open access, and collective reasoning. This is precisely what Habermas's model supplies. In participatory settings such as citizens' assemblies or deliberative councils, individuals do not merely assert preferences; they engage others in rational discourse that both affirms and reshapes their social identities. Here, Afisi's “social holism” is no longer just a philosophical claim, it becomes a practiced ethos, embedded in communicative processes where persons are constituted not only by belonging but by reason-

giving. Thus, Dialogical Liberal-Communitarianism fuses Afisi's moral vision with Habermas's institutional infrastructure, producing a democratic model where autonomy and solidarity co-emerge through structured dialogue.

Deliberative democracy, therefore, enhances Afisi's liberal-communitarian model in two vital respects. First, it provides an epistemic framework in which political legitimacy emerges from communicative action that respects both individual autonomy and the moral authority of the community. Second, it offers institutional forms, such as participatory forums, public deliberation, and legislative discourse, that prevent domination, ensure inclusion, and protect minority rights without suppressing the bonds of communal solidarity. As Habermas (1996: 107) affirms: "Norms are only valid when they receive the assent of all affected in a rational discourse".

By integrating Afisi's normative liberal-communitarianism with Habermas's deliberative proceduralism, a more philosophically coherent and practically grounded model of democracy emerges. This reconstructed model preserves liberal commitments to autonomy, rights, and dissent; it affirms communitarian insights about identity, moral formation, and social responsibility; and it operationalizes these ideals through deliberative institutions that translate ethical commitments into legitimate political outcomes. Such a synthesis moves beyond the false binary often posed between liberalism and communitarianism. It recognizes that individuals are

simultaneously rights-bearing persons and socially constituted agents. Freedom is not diminished by community; it is enabled by communicative belonging. Democracy is not undermined by pluralism; it is deepened through inclusive deliberation. This integration of Afisi's normative emphasis and Habermas's procedural rationalism gives rise to what this paper identifies as Dialogical Liberal-Communitarianism, a theory that conceptualizes democracy as both a moral and discursive achievement; Dialogical liberal-communitarianism thus moves beyond the false binary often posed between liberalism and communitarianism. It recognizes that individuals are simultaneously rights-bearing persons and socially constituted agents. To move beyond abstract theorizing and demonstrate the practical relevance of Dialogical Liberal-Communitarianism, it is useful to examine contemporary democratic practices that embody its core principles. These examples illustrate how individual autonomy and collective responsibility can be harmonized through deliberative mechanisms in real-world settings. One compelling case is Ireland's Citizens' Assembly, a body composed of randomly selected citizens tasked with deliberating on contentious national issues such as abortion and climate policy. Participants engaged in guided, reason-based discussions informed by expert testimony, resulting in well-reasoned recommendations later enacted by Parliament. This model aligns with the core tenets of Dialogical Liberal-Communitarianism: it affirms individual voice, fosters mutual understanding, and grounds public policy in deliberative legitimacy (Suiter, 2018). The

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in post-apartheid South Africa exemplified dialogical justice rooted in community healing. Instead of purely legal retribution, the TRC prioritized public testimony, forgiveness, and moral acknowledgment. It operationalized communicative rationality in a post-conflict context, honoring both individual trauma and collective accountability. The TRC thus embodies how deliberative processes can reconstruct civic trust and reconcile pluralistic values (Agunbiade, 2025b:71-72). These examples collectively reinforce the viability of Dialogical Liberal-Communitarianism as both a normative and institutional model. They show that democracy is deepened when rooted in shared responsibility and reason-giving dialogue. Rather than suppressing difference, deliberative inclusion allows individuals and communities to co-create a just and pluralistic society. This confirms that the model is not merely philosophically coherent but also politically actionable.

Conclusion

This paper argues that John Stuart Mill's liberal-democratic synthesis fails to fully reconcile individual liberty with democratic solidarity due to its abstract conception of the self. In response, it proposes Dialogical Liberal-Communitarianism, a theoretical model that integrates Afisi's relational autonomy with Habermas's deliberative democracy. This framework affirms that individuals are not isolated agents but socially embedded beings whose freedom is shaped and sustained through public reason, mutual recognition, and

collective responsibility. By moving from critique to synthesis to practical illustration, the paper has shown how liberal and communitarian values can be harmonized through institutionalized dialogue. In doing so, Dialogical Liberal-Communitarianism offers not only a corrective to classical liberalism but also a constructive vision for navigating the moral and institutional demands of pluralistic societies. At a time when rising individualism, polarization, and democratic fatigue threaten the fabric of civic life, the urgency of reconciling autonomy and solidarity has never been more pressing. The path forward lies not in choosing between freedom and community, but in their mutual reinforcement through reasoned deliberation, a task that Dialogical Liberal-Communitarianism is uniquely positioned to fulfill.

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