CRITICAL REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY, 2017
https://doi.org/10.1080/13698230.2017.1398859

Why should we care about competition?

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ABSTRACT

Most people believe that competitive institutions are morally acceptable, but that there are limits: a friendly competition is one thing; a life or death struggle is another. How should we think about the moral limits on competition? I argue that the limits stem from the value of human sociability, and in particular from the noninstrumental value of a form of social connectedness that I call 'mutual affirmation.' I contrast this idea with Rawls's account of social union and stability. Finally, I show how these ideas provide the basis for a powerful argument in favour of social provisions for public goods: for example, a strong public health care system moderates the stakes in labour market competition, preventing the competition from descending into a life or death struggle.

KEYWORDS Competition; sociability; public goods; associative obligations

Many important social institutions tend to be competitive. Some examples include markets, democratic elections, adversarial systems of justice, and college admissions processes. A key feature of these institutions is that they 'pit people against each other': they put people in circumstances where the only way for one person to secure an important good is by formulating and successfully carrying out a plan that will effectively interfere with some other person's formulating and successfully carrying out a plan to secure an important good. For example, the typical mayoral election creates a situation in which for any one candidate to secure the office, she has to formulate and successfully carry out a plan that will effectively block all of the other candidates from securing the office.

Competitive institutions put people in situations where they must undermine one another as a necessary side effect of their pursuit of their own aspirations. There is something antisocial about these arrangements, and philosophical disagreements about the proper place of competitive institutions in a liberal democracy stem in part from different views about the nature and value of human sociability or social connectedness.

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One view is broadly *instrumental*. It says that human beings form bonds of sympathy and attachment with one another, and that these bonds are important mainly because they help to ensure that people will treat one another as justice requires. The problem with competitive institutions, on this view, is that they impede the formation of social attachments and thereby undermine the motivational structures necessary for people to reliably treat one another in a just fashion.

The other view is broadly *noninstrumental*. It says that the members of a political community stand in a particular social relationship with one another. The political relationship, much like friendship or family relations, makes certain demands on how people should think and act (see Dworkin, 1986). Among these 'associative obligations' is a requirement that citizens should think and act in ways that constitute a kind of caring concern for one another. The political relationship requires a certain type of social connectedness among citizens and it prohibits excessively competitive institutions because these institutions are antithetical to the relevant form of connectedness.

In this paper, I want to develop the social democratic idea that competitive institutions are sometimes objectionable because they do not respect the noninstrumental value of social connectedness. My argument will focus on two questions: (1) how should we conceptualise the form of social connectedness that is distinctively important from the standpoint of political morality? and (2) how should we think about the value of social connectedness, so understood? The argument that I develop draws on the work of Ronald Dworkin (1986), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1979, 1997a, 1997b) and Karl Marx (1964), and I will loosely contrast this argument with John Rawls's (1999) account of social union and his account of stability.

Let me note at the outset that my motivation for formulating the social democratic view is not to argue for some form of socialism. My goal is rather to contribute to a broader account of the proper place of competitive institutions in a liberal democracy. Most people agree that competitive institutions are acceptable up to a point. And most people agree that competition can go too far: a friendly competition is one thing; a life or death struggle is another. The noninstrumental value of social connectedness gives us a way of thinking about why liberal democracies may adopt competitive institutions, but why they must also moderate and contain the sphere of competition in social life. I will use the case of health insurance to illustrate the moral limits of competition.

Two conceptions of social connectedness

Let me distinguish first between two conceptions of social connectedness. The first conception is articulated in Rawls's idea of *social union*. In section 79 of *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls says that individuals achieve 'social union' when they are engaged in a certain kind of activity. Activities of this kind have two important features. First, there is a mutually recognised plan that defines various roles

and assigns individuals to these roles. Second, each person does her part in the overall activity because the activity serves some objective that she values as a final end.

The example that Rawls uses to illustrate is an orchestra (Rawls, 1999, p. 459f4). In an orchestra, there is a mutually recognised musical score, which defines various roles for musicians, and an assignment of individuals to each role. Furthermore, each musician plays her part in the musical enterprise because the orchestral performance serves some objective that she values as a final end – for example, it realises her aspiration to make beautiful orchestral music.

What stands out about social union, from Rawls's point of view, is that in social union 'we cease to be mere social fragments' (1999, p. 464). We do not see the things that other participants are doing as completely disconnected from us. If I am in an orchestra and other members do their parts, they contribute to something that I care about as a final end. And when I do my part, I contribute to something that they care about as a final end. Rather than being disconnected individuals, we are each absorbed into a larger social project that connects us to one another. This social connectedness then serves as a foundation for us to appreciate one another's talents, abilities and character traits.

Social union is one form of social connectedness. Another form is one that I will call *mutual affirmation*. Let's say that a person A 'stands with' a person B when A is oriented to form attitudes towards B's succeeding or failing in some subset of B's projects as if, in some attenuated sense, A were succeeding or failing in a subset of A's projects.

Two people are 'mutually affirming' when person A stands with person B and person B stands with person A.[1] When two people stand with each other in this way, they affirm each other's importance and share in each other's fate.

Many normative relationships demand that those who stand in these relationships should be mutually affirming in some way. The most obvious case is friendship. If you and I are friends, then friendship demands that when I think about the possibility of your succeeding in certain projects that are important to you, I should regard this as something to hope for, and if you actually succeed, I should be happy about it.[2] Similarly, when I think about the possibility of your failing in certain projects that are important to you, I should regard this as something to be anxious about, and if you actually fail, that I should be disheartened. The relationship makes similar demands on you with respect to me.

Many normative relationships demand some form of mutual affirmation. The most important example, for my purposes, is the *political relationship*. Many philosophers believe that the members of a political community stand in a social relationship that has some features in common with friendship. The political relationship makes demands not only on how people act, but also on the attitudes that they form. As members of a political community, citizens should be mutually affirming in the sense that each citizen should form attitudes towards some subset of the successes and failures of her fellow citizens as if she were (in

some attenuated sense) succeeding or failing in a corresponding subset of her own projects. We can think of the relevant subset in terms of a conception of the *common good*. This conception may take the form of a list of abstract goods that any citizen has reason to secure as part of a framework for realising her more particular objectives: these goods include things such as income, wealth, health care and a public basis for self-respect. On the 'common good' interpretation, the political relationship demands a kind of solidarity among citizens. For example, the relationship demands that each citizen should hope that her fellow citizens secure a sound public basis for self-respect and that she should be happy if her fellow citizens secure such a basis. And each citizen should be anxious about her fellow citizens failing to secure a sound public basis for self-respect and be disheartened if this failure ever becomes a reality.

Social union and mutual affirmation articulate different conceptions of social connectedness. At the heart of social union is the idea of a *cooperative activity*. In social union, the connection between people is 'external' in the sense that each person's connection to the others runs through a group activity which they each value: the activity is what each person contributes to and what each person cares about. In an orchestra, for instance, what ties the members of the orchestra to one another is the fact that each player finds that the actions of the others contribute to something that she cares about as a final end, namely playing beautiful orchestral music.

With mutual affirmation, on the other hand, the central idea is *solidarity*. In mutual affirmation, the connection between people is 'internal' in the sense that it involves each citizen thinking and acting in ways that accord a certain status to the good of other citizens. In the political relationship, for example, what ties members of the political community together is that each citizen is prepared to treat some of the ups and downs in her fellow citizens' lives as she were going through something similar. Social connectedness in this case is closely connected with caring and empathy (Figures 1 and 2).

Political philosophers often fail to distinguish clearly between cooperation and solidarity. This is in part because the distinction between self-interested behaviour and 'pro-social' behaviour is so important in modern economics that the differences between various forms of 'pro-social' behaviour tend to fall out of the picture. I will not pursue these issues further here since it would take us too far afield. I am interested in developing a particular kind of argument against competitive social institutions based on the idea of mutual affirmation. I offer the contrast with social union mainly as a way of clarifying the relevant form of connectedness.

Mutual affirmation and competitive institutions

Mutual affirmation represents one way of thinking about social connectedness. From now on my discussion will focus on this idea. For the purposes of my

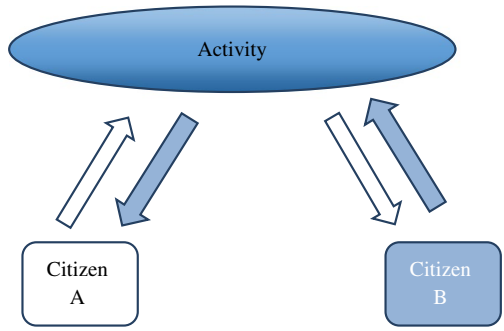

Figure 1. Social union.
Notes: In Rawls's conception of social union, people are connected through a group activity. Citizen A does her part in the shared plan, and B recognises A's activities as contributing to something that B cares about as a final end. Citizen B does her part in the shared plan, and A recognises B's activities as contributing to something that B cares about as a final end.

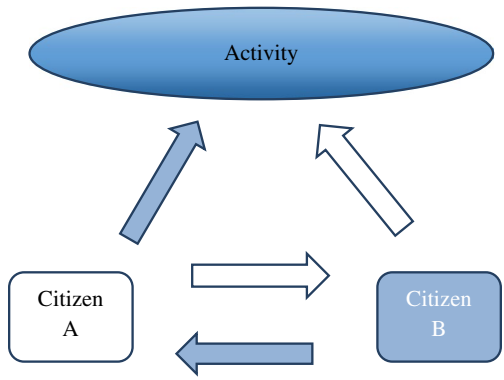

Figure 2. Mutual affirmation.
Notes: In mutual affirmation, each citizen is directly connected to her fellow citizens. A 'stands with' B, so she forms attitudes as if some subset of B's projects were A's projects as well. B 'stands with' A, so she forms attitudes as if some subset of A's projects were B's projects as well.

argument, it is important to see that some social institutions are more consistent with certain forms of mutual affirmation and others are less so.

Let me explain what I mean when I say that some social institutions are 'more consistent' with a certain form of mutual affirmation and others 'less so.' As I understand it, mutual affirmation is not primarily a physical state or a physical process. Mutual affirmation is best understood as a set of normative demands: it is a pattern of activity to which people may conform or fail to conform. For example, friendship demands a certain form of mutual affirmation: each of the individuals who stands in the relationship should think and act in certain ways, actively forming certain attitudes in response to the possibility of the other person's succeeding or failing in certain projects.

An institution is 'more consistent' with a certain form of mutual affirmation when it creates fewer and less serious obstacles to people thinking and acting in the ways that the relationship requires. An institution is 'less consistent' with a certain form of mutual affirmation when it creates more and more serious obstacles to people thinking and acting in the relevant ways. Consistency here is a measure of the extent to which the institution's design is consistent with a commitment to living up to the requirements of a certain form of mutual affirmation.

Consider now the case of a competitive arrangement. Baseball, for instance, is a competitive enterprise. The rules of the game define a certain status, i.e. 'winning' and they define a certain process for achieving this status. Each team has good reason to pursue the valuable status, but the activity is structured in such a way that the only way for members of one team to achieve the status is by preventing members of the other team from doing so. If team A gets a run, thereby taking one step closer to winning, this necessarily amounts to a setback for team B – that's one more run that team B needs in order to win. The same holds true when team B gets a run: this constitutes a setback for team A. The institution puts each team in a situation where members must effectively damage the project of the other team as a necessary side effect of the pursuit of their own aims.

Recall that people are mutually affirming when person A forms attitudes towards some subset of B's projects as if these were also, in some attenuated sense, A's projects (and vice versa). Suppose that the two teams in a baseball game are playing for an important prize: members of the winning team will get scholarships to a good university. None of the players could afford to go to college without these scholarships. But now suppose that all of the players – players on both teams – also stand in a certain social relationship with one another. For instance, suppose that the players are also all members of the same extended family or members of the same high-school community. Suppose further that the social relationship that binds them all demands a certain form of mutual affirmation. For example, membership in a family requires family members to share in one another's college aspirations or membership in a high school community requires classmates to share in one another's college aspirations.

The competitive structure of the game clearly creates significant obstacles to the players being mutually affirming in the way that the wider relationship requires. Given the competitive structure of the baseball game, a step forward for the members of one team constitutes a step backward for the members of the other. If team A scores a run, this will necessarily push the members of team B further from getting the college scholarships – that's one more run they need to make up. But the only way for the members of team A to get the scholarships is to score runs and win the game. So, in effect, the only way for the members of team A to reach their objective is by demolishing the aspirations of the team B. With every run team A scores, they are destroying the college aspirations of

the members of team B. Team A could not do this effectively if members were also, at the same time, sharing in the failures of team B. As such, the structure of the competitive enterprise gives the members of team A powerful reasons to 'distance' themselves from the members of team B, that is, not to form attitudes towards the failures of team B in the way that is required by the wider social relationship. The same thing plays out from team B's perspective with regard to team A.

The point of the example is to draw attention to the tension between the structure of a competitive institution and the solidarity that is required by more encompassing relationships. The competitive structure of the baseball game creates significant reasons for the members of each team to 'distance' themselves from the members of the other team. As some might put it, the game sets the stage for 'man's alienation from his fellow man.'

I want to stress that the moral status of a competitive institution does not depend simply on its competitive structure, but also on the stakes involved. Ordinary moral thinking recognises the idea of a 'friendly competition.' An institution falls into this category when it has a competitive structure that generates reasons for distancing, but the reasons are not antithetical to the relevant form of mutual affirmation. There are two significant possibilities: (1) the reasons for distancing may not bear on the attitudes that matter in the relationship or (2) the reasons for distancing may be relatively minor. Consider again the case of a baseball game among the members of a family or a school community. Suppose that, instead of college scholarships, the winners simply get a beer at the losers' expense. Here, the competitive structure of the game gives players on each team reasons to distance themselves from the players on the other team. But (1) these are not reasons for distancing with respect to one another's college aspirations and (2) these reasons are not very serious. Since the reasons for distancing lack relevance and urgency, the institution is not antithetical to the relevant form of mutual affirmation – it is a friendly competition.[3]

A final point of clarification. Some readers might assume that any institution that distributes scarce goods must be competitive. But, as I understand it, the competitive character of an institution is never simply a function of background facts about scarcity. Suppose that there are 100 people in a community who need a kidney transplant and there are only 10 available kidneys. There is nothing the community can do to reduce the need for kidneys or to increase the supply. In the face of an absolute shortage, one thing the community could do is distribute kidneys by means of a lottery: under a lottery scheme, the kidney transplants would go to 10 patients drawn from the 100 at random. Of course, there are various reasons that might tell against a lottery scheme in this case. But the important point for my purposes is that under the lottery scheme, there is no way for any of the patients to formulate and carry out a plan that would undermine the prospects of any other patient. The institution does not put patients in a position where they can damage one another's prospects for getting a kidney,

so it does not pit them against each other in my sense. The example illustrates how the competitive character of an institution is never simply a function of background scarcity but always depends on the structure of its rules.

Public goods and the sphere of competition

At this point, I want to make the discussion more concrete by relating the moral status of competitive institutions to certain questions about public policy. Imagine for the moment that a liberal democratic society is considering a set of measures to weaken its public health care system. As it stands, citizens receive medical coverage, independently of their ability to pay, and the community collectively bears the costs of providing health care to each individual. The proposal is to change the system so that individual citizens will have to enter the labour market to secure a market wage and then buy medical coverage for themselves and their dependents through a network of private insurers.

Let's assume that something short of full employment is the normal state of the economy. This means that there are at least some people who want a job and are actively looking for a job, but who cannot find a job. Short of full employment, the labour market is, at some level, a game of 'King of the Mountain': any one job hunter's formulating and successfully carrying out a plan to get a job will effectively block someone else in society from formulating and successfully carrying out a plan to get a job. A certain number of people can be in the workforce at any given time, and people get into the workforce and stay there by pushing other people out and keeping them out.

One thing that provisions for public goods do is they manage the stakes in labour market competition. When a society has a strong public health care system, one person's formulating and successfully carrying out a plan to get a job will have a limited impact on other people. A's success in getting a job will keep some other person B from getting a job, but this will typically deprive B only of the added income that comes with employment. But when society weakens its public health care system, this raises the stakes in labour market competition. A's success in getting a job will keep some other person B from getting a job, and the consequences for B are more severe: not only does this deprive B of the added income that comes from employment, but it also deprives B and B's dependents of health care.

Raising the stakes in labour market competition puts citizens on a different footing with one another. When a society weakens its public health care system, citizens find that they pose a more fundamental threat to one another. Any one citizens' obtaining health care for herself and her family requires that she take steps that will effectively prevent some other citizen from securing health care for herself and her family. Moreover, citizens are under constant pressure, as even those who have a job must constantly stay ahead of those who are looking for one in order to maintain their medical coverage. So when the stakes

are higher, everyone has a more powerful reason to distance herself from the others. People must distance themselves from one another in order to effectively pursue something that matters more to each of them, i.e. medical coverage for themselves and their loved ones.

Of course, it may be acceptable for social institutions to pit citizens against each other to some degree: for example, it may be acceptable for institutions to pit people against each other with respect to moderate gains in income. But there is a limit: there is something morally objectionable about social institutions pitting people against each other with respect to extremely important goods, such as basic health care. As I noted at the outset, there is a difference between a friendly competition and a life or death struggle.[4] One of the strongest and most intuitive arguments for a public health care system is precisely that an arrangement of this kind is essential to avoid the situation where labour market competition descends into a struggle with life or death consequences.

The value of social connectedness (I): the instrumental view

How should we characterise the moral defect in competitive institutions that pit people against each other excessively? What exactly is wrong with a competitive labour market with potentially life or death consequences?

One account of the moral defect in excessively competitive institutions appeals to the instrumental value of social connectedness. Justice is a fundamental value and it requires people to act in certain ways towards one another. In order to act as justice requires, however, people must be adequately motivated to do so. According to the instrumental account, social connectedness plays an important role in generating an adequate motivation among citizens in a liberal democracy to treat one another as justice requires. On the instrumental account, the moral defect in excessively competitive institutions is that they are less likely to generate an adequate sense of justice in citizens.

Here is one way to flesh out the argument.

(A) Among other things, the principles of justice require citizens to offer just terms of social cooperation to their fellow citizens and to accept just terms of social cooperation when these are offered to them (see Rawls, 1999). More specifically, citizens in a liberal democracy must propose just laws in the public forum, whether as candidates, party officials or participants in public debates, and they must accept just laws when these are proposed by others.

(B) Reciprocity is a fundamental feature of human nature (Rawls, 1999, pp. 429–434; Rousseau, 1979). There is a basic psychological tendency in human beings such that when person A sees that person B acts with evident concern for A's good, then A will naturally form an attachment to B. The fact of reciprocity implies that an institution in which each

participant's activity contributes to the good of others will naturally generate a richer network of social attachments than an institution in which each participant's activity detracts from the good of others.

(C) When A forms an attachment to B, A will be more powerfully moved by the justice or injustice of laws that affect B (Rawls, 1999, p. 426–427). So, other things being equal, when citizens are tied together in a dense network of social attachments, they are more likely to offer just terms of cooperation to one another and more likely to accept just terms when these are offered to them.

(D) In a competitive institution, participants have powerful reasons to act in ways that undermine one another's good. So, other things being equal, a competitive institution will generate a weaker and less dense network of social attachments. It follows that a society whose basic institutions are intensely competitive will generate a weaker and less dense network of social attachments and therefore a less powerful motivation in citizens to treat one another as justice requires.

To illustrate, consider again the case of a liberal democratic society that adopts a set of policies that weaken its public health care system. These policies raise the stakes in labour market competition. Under a more intensely competitive arrangement, each citizen finds that her fellow citizens are formulating and carrying out plans in the labour market that would effectively deprive her and her dependents of health care. Moreover, each citizen finds that she must formulate and carry out plans that would effectively deprive other citizens and their dependents of health care if she wants to secure health care for herself and her dependents. An institution of this kind leaves less room for citizens to act with evident concern for one another's good. As a result, the social order on the whole will generate a lower degree of mutual attachment among citizens and they will have a less powerful drive to offer just terms of social cooperation to others and to accept just terms when these are offered to them.

The instrumental account of the moral defect in competitive institutions has a great deal of plausibility. It appeals to widely observed facts about human nature and connects these facts with a fundamental value, i.e. social justice. One might supplement the basic argument I sketched above with a more complex view of the importance of social connectedness in moral development (e.g. Rawls, 1999, pp. 405–434) and the importance of social connectedness in each person's good (e.g. Rawls, 1999, pp. 456–464, 496–505). These elaborations would present a richer account of how competitive institutions might undermine the just character of a liberal democracy.

The problem with the instrumental account, as I understand it, is not that the account is false: I believe that the instrumental account is true and that excessively competitive institutions are morally defective in part because they impede the formation of a rich network of social attachments, which is necessary

for maintaining just arrangements over time. The problem with the instrumental account is rather that, even if it is true, it cannot fully explain the moral defect in excessively competitive institutions. There are two main problems.

The first problem is that our judgements about the morally defective character of excessively competitive institutions are much more definitive than the empirical evidence would warrant. The instrumental account makes the moral status of competitive institutions depend on a series of empirical claims about (1) how people form attachments, (2) how these attachments develop under different institutional arrangements and (3) the role of these attachments in sustaining just institutions. The evidence for these claims is substantial, and a significant body of work in psychology, sociology and evolutionary biology supports them. But these claims represent one major paradigm of social explanation: there is another paradigm that explains the emergence and persistence of various social arrangements in terms of human dispositions that are oriented towards the rational pursuit of self-interest. To a significant degree, the same body of observations about society and social arrangements can be explained in terms of the 'rational choice' paradigm, and there is no particular reason to think that the evidence will ever come down definitively in favour of the reciprocity based view.

By contrast with the empirical evidence, however, our judgements about the moral defectiveness of institutions that pit people against each other excessively are quite definitive. We rightly recoil at the prospect of a labour market that is a life or death struggle. Since our judgements about these institutions are much more secure than the empirical case for a causal connection between competition and injustice would warrant, the instrumental account cannot be the whole story about the moral status of these institutions.

The second problem with the instrumental account has to do with the grounds of our judgements. When we judge a certain competitive institution to be defective because it pits people against each other excessively, we do so largely without regard for a causal connection between competition and injustice. To appreciate the point, it is important not to think about competitive institutions from the detached perspective of an economist or bureaucratic planner, but from the perspective of a participant. When I think about what life would be like in a labour market with life or death consequences, I have a strong sense of the immorality of the institution. As a competitor in the arrangement, I would resent being put in a position where I have to beat our other parents for jobs, effectively pushing their potentially sick children out of doctor's offices, in order to make sure that my children have access to medical care. My resentment would not focus primarily on the fact that, under this arrangement, I might not develop an adequate motivation to reject laws that treat other citizens unfairly and that other citizens might not develop an adequate motivation to reject laws that treat me unfairly. My resentment would focus primarily on the way that the arrangement shapes my interactions with my fellow citizens. The arrangement

puts tremendous pressure on me to act in ways that express a kind of disregard for them (and their families) and it puts tremendous pressure on them to act in ways that express a kind of disregard for me (and my family). The arrangement throws us in a cage match, where the prize is so basic that we all have very little option but to do what it takes to win.

The immorality of institutions that pit people against each other excessively stems most directly from the way that these institutions require people to act with an extreme form of mutual disregard, a form that is inconsistent with ordinary notions of civility. It is this feature that grounds our moral judgements rather than the fact that these institutions may affect our motivation to act as justice requires in the political arena.

The value of social connectedness (II): the non-instrumental view

The instrumental account says that the moral defect in social institutions that pit people against each other excessively is that these arrangements will not generate the kind of social connectedness that is essential for citizens to develop an adequate sense of justice. I have shown how the instrumental account does not fit with the definitiveness of our judgements about excessively competitive institutions or with the grounds for our judgements. Is there another account of the moral defect in these arrangements that can supplement the instrumental account? I believe that there is.

The other account appeals to the *noninstrumental value* of social connectedness. Members of a political community stand in a political relationship with one another. Like friendship, this relationship requires a certain form of mutual affirmation among members. The disposition to be mutually affirming may be important for instrumental reasons, i.e. because it supports or 'complements' a sense of justice (see Cohen, 1997, 2010). But mutual affirmation is intrinsically important because it is a requirement of the political relationship. Insofar as the political relationship requires a form of mutual affirmation among members, it also requires members to adopt institutions that are properly consistent with this activity. And the moral defect in excessively competitive institutions is that they are antithetical to the relevant form of mutual affirmation.

Here is one way to flesh out the argument.

(A) People born into a political community stand in a political relationship with one another (Dworkin, 1986; Marx, 1964; Rousseau, 1979). They are involved in a set of ongoing activities that transform the natural environment, socialise future generations, and articulate and enforce social institutions, thereby reproducing the community over time. Taking part in these activities gives rise to what Dworkin calls 'associative obligations': in much the way that involvement in shared activities and a shared history gives rise to obligations among the members of a family, involvement in

shared activities and a shared history gives rise to obligation among the members of a political community (compare Kolodny, 2010).

(B) Mutual affirmation focused on a conception of the common good is a requirement of the political relationship (Rousseau, 1979, 1997a, 1997b). The relationship requires citizens to be oriented to share in the successes and failures of their fellow citizens with respect to securing income, wealth, health care and a public basis for self-respect.

(C) If a relationship requires that people should be mutually affirming with respect to certain projects, then the relationship also requires that people should adopt institutions and practices that are consistent with these forms of mutual affirmation. For example, if the marriage relationship requires partners to share in one another's successes and failures with respect to their careers, then the relationship also requires partners to adopt marriage practices that are properly consistent with this form of solidarity – i.e. the relationship does not allow partners to adopt practices that give them powerful reasons to undermine one another's careers.

(D) The political relationship requires citizens to be mutually affirming with respect to securing elements of the common good. It follows that the relationship prohibits citizens from adopting institutions that give them powerful reasons to distance themselves from one another with respect to these projects. Excessively competitive institutions create significant reasons for distancing of this kind so the political relationship prohibits members from adopting these types of arrangements.

To illustrate, consider again a set of policies that would weaken a public health care system. In a market society, these policies would lead to labour market competition with potentially life or death consequences. From the standpoint of the instrumental account, the moral defect in a labour market of this kind is that the social order would not generate an appropriate motivation in citizens to treat one another as justice requires. But from the standpoint of the noninstrumental account, the moral defect does not stem from a causal connection between competition and injustice.

From the standpoint of the noninstrumental account, the moral defect in a labour market with life or death consequences stems from the requirements of the wider political relationship. The relationship that binds members of a political community together requires that they should be mutually affirming with respect to the projects that constitute the common good. The community is properly understood as a group whose members must stand in solidarity with one another, not unlike a group of friends or neighbours, as they work together to secure certain achievements for each member. Let's say that securing health care for oneself and one's dependents is among the projects that make up the common good. Given that health care is among these projects, the political relationship requires that members should adopt institutions that not only secure

health care for members, but also do not put members in circumstances where they have powerful reasons to undermine one another with respect to their health care coverage.

Notice that the noninstrumental account fits better with the two features of our judgements about excessively competitive institutions that I mentioned earlier. First, our moral judgements about excessively competitive institutions are quite definitive, but the empirical evidence about the relationship between competition and injustice is not. According to the noninstrumental account, the moral defect in excessively competitive institution does not depend on any causal connection between competition and injustice, so the fact that the empirical evidence for this connection is ambiguous does not bear on our judgements about the moral defectiveness of these arrangements.

Second, our judgements about excessively competitive institutions are not grounded primarily in the impact that these institutions may have on legislative motivations. According to the noninstrumental account, the moral defect in excessively competitive institutions does not have to do with the fact that these institutions may not generate an adequate motivation in citizens to treat one another appropriately in political rule-making. Instead, the moral defect in these arrangements has to do with the reasons that these institutions create for citizens to act with a kind of disregard for one another in the civil sphere. This fits better with the intuitive grounds for our judgements.

Some might object to the noninstrumental account because it appeals to a demanding view of the political relationship. According to the noninstrumental account, the political relationship has a feature in common with friendship, as it requires citizens not only to act in certain ways, but also to form certain attitudes and to reason in certain ways. This may seem excessively demanding. In response, I would stress that the political relationship is not necessarily a standard for assessing the conduct of individual citizens. For the purposes of my argument, the political relationship is rather an ideal of social interaction, an ideal that serves as part of a standard for assessing *social institutions*. The theoretical objective is to formulate a conception of proper interaction among citizens that can then account for our judgements about the moral defect in certain social institutions, such as a labour market with life or death consequences. The concept of a political relationship can serve as part of a conception of properly ordered institutions, even if it does not also provide a standard for assessing individual conduct.

Conclusion

A certain degree of competition in social life is clearly acceptable, but – just as clearly – there are limits: social institutions can be morally defective when they pit people against each other excessively. Over the course of this paper, I have developed a particular way of thinking about the moral defect in these

institutions. Excessively competitive institutions are antisocial and antithetical to certain forms of social connectedness. The value of social connectedness is not primarily instrumental: the problem with a life or death labour market is not simply that it interferes with the kind of connectedness that helps to maintain just arrangements over time. The value of social connectedness is also noninstrumental: excessively competitive institutions are morally defective because they are inconsistent with the kind of mutual affirmation that is required by the political relationship. So the full story about the moral defect in excessively competitive institutions has two parts: (a) arrangements of this kind are less likely to generate the kind of social connectedness that is necessary for an adequate sense of justice and (b) arrangements of this kind directly violate the solidaristic requirements of the political relationship.

Notes

1. A 'stands with' B when A is *oriented* to form certain attitudes towards the possibility of B's succeeding or failing. This means that A will form the relevant attitudes when the relevant facts come to A's attention. In most cases, people in a relationship are not constantly in each other's presence, so what the relationship requires is an orientation to form certain attitudes. The relationship may also require people to gather certain forms of information and monitor others' progress, and it may require them to give each other space.
2. There are, of course, limits. If you are a paedophile, for example, then I have no reason to share in your happiness about your success in this project.
3. Even Rousseau (1960, pp. 126, 127, 1979, p. 352, 1997b, p. 191) gives games and competitions a place in the ideal republic.
4. There are important questions to consider here about when exactly the stakes in a competitive institution become excessive. But for my purposes in this paper, I will set these questions aside and use the case of a labour market with life and death consequences as a relatively clear example of an arrangement that crosses the line.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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