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January, 2016

# On Community, Justice, and Libraries

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## ABSTRACT

At the core of terms such as “inclusion,” “civic engagement,” “social participation,” and “social justice”—terms that this special issue is built around—are political concepts that have been plumbed deeply by political theorists. Two concepts that underwrite much of this terminology are community and justice, both robustly debated within political theory. It is the premise of this article that exploring those debates—definitions of justice and community put forward and argued—and proposing specific versions of those core concepts will provide a defensible basis for research deploying these terms and a practical *raison d'état* for the institutions of library and information science. Defensible constructs of community and justice with affinities to the field are particularly important in the current political era.

The call for papers (CFP) for this special issue of *Library Quarterly* asks researchers and professionals in library and information science (LIS) to engage issues of social justice and inclusion as they intersect with information work and institutions: although libraries “promote digital literacy and inclusion . . . , the underlying social justice issues . . . remain insufficiently examined” (Paul T. Jaeger, November 5, 2012, e-mail message to the author). In positioning this special issue, a number of political concepts are deployed that are not sufficiently examined by LIS researchers and professionals: civic engagement, social participation, rights, social justice, and inclusion are the obvious examples. Political concepts like this are frequently invoked in the literature and battled over continually—especially during the course of library controversies and problems: the West Bend, Wisconsin, library censorship controversy (Latham and Jones 2014); issues of the Middle East (“Greenwich Library Faces Mideast Lecture Controversy,” 2008); *Kreimer v. Morristown* (1991); and the American Library Association (ALA) South African book boycott debate (Rosenzweig and Harger 1990) are just a

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few well-known ones.<sup>1</sup> An examination of each of the political concepts invoked in the CFP is not possible, but two core ones underlie this special issue, and they have been the subject of vigorous debate within political theory: community and justice. Although this article will not settle the disagreements surrounding them, a look at the differing concepts of community and justice put forward within political theory can help us arrive at workable intellectual positions for LIS. Both concepts bear some examination if the CFP's goal of "greater scholarly attention to the interconnections between libraries, information, values, ethics, and human rights" is to be critically grounded and serve democratic purposes.<sup>2</sup> The article will briefly review the differing positions taken within political theory on both concepts and conclude each section with, we will argue, the strongest social, intellectual, and political position for LIS research and institutions.

### On Community

Derived from "*communio*," the Latin word indicating "something shared together" (Wallacavage and Gruters 2007, 221), community has been viewed through many theoretical and political lenses and is therefore "more complex or differentiated than one might initially suspect" (Mara 1997, 122). This ambiguity certainly appears in libraries, as a recent article illustrated: "libraries as community institutions means they must adopt the normative standards of the community"; "presenting all sides of an issue as having equal moral weight is engaging in moral relativism" and may not reflect the normative standards of the community; library donors and benefactors tend to bring (or impose) a perspective to the collections and services they underwrite for the receiving community; the class perspective of the librarians informs their decisions on how to serve their communities; and public funding for libraries implicates the local, regional, and national political climate (Jaeger et al. 2013, 370–71)—as does tuition. It is not difficult to see real, political complexity for libraries in the concept of community. Democratic political theorists who are concerned with the concept—communitarians—tend to imply different concepts of community, each with particular insights and drawbacks for LIS. Four political concepts of community—each increasingly plausible for LIS—will be reviewed in order.

### Traditional Community

In terms of historical development, organic community—small, homogeneous villages with deep shared traditions and histories characterized as *gemeinschaft* by Tönnies in 1887—requires that human association occur within a distinct physical space (Wallacavage and

1. See, for example, Kniffel (2010), Jaeger, Bertot, and Gorham (2013), Alfino and Koltutsky (2014), Rubel (2014).

2. The differing conceptions of community and justice presented are not "hermetically sealed rival theories," and the emphasis here will be practical and not on technical philosophical disagreements (Miller 2003, 47, 54). Broadly, this article follows the overlapping consensus between Christensen and Levinson (2003, xxxvi), Kymlicka (2002, 208–21), and Brint (2001) on the types of community implied by political thinkers concerned with community (communitarians) and Sandel (2009), Lebacqz (1986), and Konow (2003) on the basic divisions of political conceptions of justice.

Gruters 2007, 221). Thus “*gemeinschaft*” came later to characterize political and “social identities which were spontaneous and prerational, like nations”—placing traditional community ties at the core of nationalism (Stargardt 1995, 99). Classic sociological perspectives fleshed out the traditional concept to include association, social interaction, one or more shared ties, and, importantly, an expanded idea of shared space (Almgren 2006, 362–63).<sup>3</sup> Robert Nisbet gave a modern, maximal definition suggesting that community is characterized by a “high degree of personal intimacy, emotional depth, moral commitment, social cohesion, and continuity in time. . . . Community is a fusion of feeling and thought, of tradition and commitment, of membership and volition. It may be found in, or given symbolic expression by, locality, religion, nation, race, occupation, or crusade” (quoted in Baltzell 1968, 2). Traditional ties of community have resulted in a continuum of political outcomes. Elite political leadership depended on a palpable sense of shared common culture and fate between peasant/worker and aristocrat/businessman for hundreds of years; it is their separation or dissolution that has been politically alienating (De Grazia 1968; Sennett 1999). It has been manifested where “political and economic power [are] co-extensive,” for instance, when corporate leaders serve on local hospital boards or as trustees of universities, and the tax revenues of their businesses form a significant basis of municipal budgets (Sennett 2000, 27). Last, in Eastern Europe, “democratic and communal social relations” were given a prominent role in the late twentieth-century shift to democracy and (coming full circle) rebuilding national identities (Brint 2001, 1).

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### Common Culture, Virtue, and Community

The individual begins her social journey in the family and broadens her social network to the neighborhood, school, village, city, state, and nation, implying that, as the framework (community) broadens, not everyone will be the same. A common culture can embrace controversy and difference where there is no established religious tradition, nor unity on the provision of basic needs for people, but the question then becomes: What is the “social fabric that would hold individuals together” (Bellah 1998, 622)? For these communitarians, what holds community together is expressed in a continuum of ideas about common culture: the need for a “moral basis for . . . sharing” combined with the idea of and the need for commitment to the common good (Sandel 1984, 89). The common good is that which serves all members of a given community, with community, “basically a major common good in itself,” characterized as “some commitment to a core of shared values, norms, and meanings, as well as a collective history and identity—in short, a particularistic moral culture” providing “informal social controls” (Etzioni 2009, 114–15) while at the same time maintaining the “sacredness” of individ-

3. The question of whether or not community can be achieved virtually is a hotly debated issue. “Simply calling something a community does not mean that it provides its members with the same benefits that earlier, less technological forms of community have provided”—certainly the case within the political framework adopted here (Christensen and Levinson 2003, xl; see also Winner 1997; Ellis, Oldridge, and Vasconcelos 2004; Coll 2011).

ual conscience—a near-religious and political ideal to be prized and nurtured (Bellah 1998). The more overtly political direction taken by these communitarians posits that communities are interdependent and citizenship must be fostered: “Free democratic communities depend on mutual responsibility and . . . rights without obligations are ultimately not sustainable” (Barber and Battistoni 1993, 237). A common element implied by this continuum is the requirement and the nurturing of virtue: mutual responsibility, a moral culture, and a commitment to the common good that requires (depending on the communitarian) a range of virtues from the moral to the civic. The point is that good politics in a democracy inherently relies on good people and the “political and cultural forms [that] contribute to human flourishing” (Mara 2008, 15), because “when politics goes well, we can know a good in common that we cannot know alone” (Sandel 2003, 159). Thus, they give traditional community a civic and more inclusive inflection while retaining clear ties to it.

### Community as Social Capital

This form of community is conducted through religious, civic, and other types of associational groups and refers to “features of social organizations such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam 1995, 67). This view of community is strongly rooted in Alexis de Tocqueville’s observations on democracy in America in the 1830s: “Nothing, in my view, deserves more attention than the intellectual and moral associations in America” (quoted in Putnam 1995, 66). Thus, the erosion of associational membership has resulted in the decline of social capital and community. Explanations include (1) the increase of women in the labor force, which does not permit them to participate as actively in organizations like women’s clubs; (2) mobility, requiring time for those who have moved to “put down roots” and then subsequent uprootings; (3) demographic changes to the American family such as the decline in marriages and children, more frequent divorce, and lower real wages; and (4) technological domination of leisure time, encouraging more individualized experiences rather than more active, personally involved engagement that brings people together in a common physical space. Civic engagement, in contrast, is commonly conducted by those who are stable, married, middle-class parents (Putnam 1995, 73–75). The “unsettled” nature of communal bonds in situations of geographic, marital, and social mobility results in uncertainty in the inherited beliefs and ways of community; political mobility—a more independent, more volatile electorate—results in “institutional instability, particularly at the local level where political organization once served to reinforce communal ties” (Walzer 1990, 12). These communitarians explicitly oppose the economic disruption of local communities (factories moving, big-box stores hollowing out downtowns) and voice concern for the displacement of politics from smaller forms of association to more comprehensive ones (Sandel 1984; Gutmann 1985, 320).

### Long-Standing Problems with Communitarianism and an Institutional Focus for Community

The dangers of traditional community are clear and well-known. Generally, they are manifested in varieties of intolerance: severe restrictions on individual freedoms and expression; routine and strong enforcement of conformity; creating deviance (an outside) to foster cohesiveness (on an inside); and outright prejudice (Brint 2001, 16–17). At its worst, community becomes religiously and ethnically exclusive with murderous results. The communitarians' bland and uncontroversial idea that "man is a social animal" does not necessarily justify the modern and "highly controversial conclusion that warm and solidaristic social order is morally obligatory" (Holmes quoted in Brint 2001, 16)—or politically healthy. There is no question that the theorists reviewed here wish to surmount these problems and for community to become (variously) inclusive: "When members of a society have settled roots and established traditions, they will tolerate the speech, religion, sexual, and associational preferences of minorities" they claim (Gutmann 1985, 319). But to simply assume that "the historical exclusion of certain groups . . . was just arbitrary, so that we can now include them and proceed forward" is highly problematic (Kymlicka 2002, 258). To illustrate, communitarians have focused a great deal of attention on the proliferation of diversity and fragmentation in society and framed these developments as problematic: "Mistrust grows out of suspicions that one's fellow citizens are too fragmented in their value orientations [and don't share an] understanding of the common good" (Mara 2008, 93–94). This implicitly (if not always intentionally) fosters some of the forms of intolerance noted. The more-neutral social capital model toggles between the instrumentality of mutual benefit and entangling itself with traditionalism by raising doubts about the increased role, rights, and mobility of women in combination with an emphasis on shared space. But the problems go further. Mitchell Cohen (1986) focuses on the problem of the "shared" emphasis of the communitarians—variously values, commitments, the common good, and so on. People share these for a variety of reasons: genuine support or belief, fear, lack of interest, self-interest, lack of alternatives—a set of "diverse values and ambitions" lie behind their decisions; thus, we cannot assume a common and coherent set of ideas or values in support of a political or social action (Cohen 1986, 462–63, 465). The communitarians smother this diversity of reasons under concepts such as shared or common ends, thus lacking an account of internal diversity—the pacifist in a society at war or the atheist in a society of believers. Alternatively, as Cohen suggests, when there truly is a consensus of "coherent value[s] . . . it is conservative" (1986, 466). Social and political change seemingly must set their face *against* community, with community only belatedly absorbing those changes.

It is these very problems—inherent exclusion; creating an outside, or "others"; a smothering uniformity—that LIS presumably would wish to avoid in its institutions and practices. But

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when ALA (Kniffel 2010) claims that libraries “break down boundaries,” “value the individual,” “support families,” “return high dividends,” and “sustain democracy” and “build communities,” we can see from even this brief review that some of those claims conflict or imply outcomes not intended. Nothing is purely neutral, but LIS would be on more solid ground if it conceptualized and committed to a more neutral concept of community to be fostered. There is a strain of communitarian thought that guides us in this direction. To begin, Michael Walzer (1990) does not believe that the factors militating against community have moved us “so far apart that we can no longer talk with one another” (13), and that is key. Because democracies work better when there is mutual commitment and familiarity, they can slip into exclusion; to avoid this will require negotiation and creative compromise “between peoples who have to or want to live together under the same political roof” (Taylor 2003aa, 25; see also Taylor 2003b, 20). “Democracy obliges us to show much more solidarity and much more commitment to one another in our joint political project than was demanded [in] societies of yesteryear,” and for this to occur, decisions fostered by deliberation and exchange are required; implied is a cohesion—a willingness to listen to one another, to understand one another—that is core to the community libraries wish to foster (Taylor 2003a, 21–22). John Dewey suggests that this “cooperative coping” is enhanced by the good (democratic) state, and he notes that it “renders the desirable association solidier and more coherent” (quoted in Walzer 1990, 19).

Institutions can be the carriers of a powerful common culture—a point made by a variety of political theorists (Cohen 1986; Bellah 1998; Paulsen 2003). The concept posited here is different: institutions are “sites at which individuals actually encounter the structures of the wider society” (Pawley 2009, 81), meaning on-the-ground entities such as schools, universities, and libraries.<sup>4</sup> These institutions can be places of “social and legal relationships which will best promote a mature and responsible neighborliness appropriate to an urban, bureaucratized, and rational (rather than local and patriarchal) social order” (Baltzell 1968, 11). Amy Gutmann (1985, 321) notes that new institutions such as “citizen review boards in areas such as health care, education, and community development have increased interest in democratic participation,” fostering communal political values in the process. Likewise, libraries—the collections, services, and spaces they provide—are an often-overlooked but key site for the kinds of “cooperative coping,” including investigation, inclusion, local and democratic guidance, common space, and conversation, that democracies rely upon to function and libraries foster often as a matter of course. It is this political vision of community—one that puts conversation, inclusion, and democracy at its core rather than tradition, solidarity, and af-

4. Political theorists tend to use this term to connote the “basic structure[s] of society [such as] major institutions such as the political system” and constitutional arrangements (Arneson 2006, 47). In contrast, if “democratic political culture . . . play[s] a constitutive role for democratic” societies and their functioning, then community is key and institutions—as we mean the term—have a role in fostering it (Mara 2008, 143; see also 132, 141; Gutmann 1987).

fective bonds—that makes the most practical sense for LIS to promote, and it avoids many (though not all) of the pitfalls of other versions of community.

Having reviewed concepts of community and made the case for its institutional locus, we will see some affinities with differing political concepts of justice as the article reviews four varieties, with the preferred version presented last.

## On Justice

If there is any political concept even more varied than community, it is justice: “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24); “Justice is the constant and perpetual will to render to each his due” (Justinian quoted in Miller 2003, 76); down to the modern, witty, and irreverent “Injustice is relatively easy to bear; what stings is justice” (Mencken in *Webster’s* 1992). The observations on what it is (and is not) and why we seek it (or not) are a constant theme of reflection and expression. In the broadest terms, we come together in communities and societies for the purpose of living in justice: for protection, safety in our homes and possessions, a certain amount of predictability in our conduct of life, wide observation of the laws, and enforcement of contracts (Wolin 2004, 216, 241–42, 292). Thankfully, within that very broad context, political conceptions of justice have over the long run tended to fall into roughly four broad groupings, though who belongs in what grouping tends to shift according to perspective. The descriptions that follow are of course necessarily foreshortened.

## Equality

The first, “most primitive, and probably oldest, notion of justice” is equality (Konow 2003, 1194). From simple early communal ideas of share and share alike through Christian charity (both with affinities to traditional community), some versions of Marxism, and theories of progressive taxation and social justice, “the preferred solution is the one with the most equal distribution of the goods which are to be distributed” (Olsen 1997, 627; see also Lebacqz 1986; Konow 2003).<sup>5</sup> A contemporary variant elevates the equality of gender and other forms of identity along with the freedom to pursue a variety of plural individual identities as core to democratic justice now (Connelly 1990; Young 1996). The good to be distributed in this case is self-respect and the freedom from the normalizing pressures of society in support of self-realization. The cases against equality are classic: from the Greeks to Jefferson to Tocqueville, only equal power is true equality (which now equates to equal wealth and media access). The powerful are always privileged, and people are naturally and always unequal; they have in-

5. John Rawls (1996, 697) is helpful here: the “goods” are not necessarily commodities or cash (though they can be) but rather “social primary goods—liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect.”

nately different levels of talent and interests, and, conversely, true equality can be stifling and hegemonic with its affinity to the critique of traditional community (Buschman 2012).

### Utility

Utilitarianism provides a set of simple core tenets to define justice: “policies, rules, or laws are to be judged . . . in terms of . . . the best consequences” (Doyle 2001, 51), best consequences being the “greatest possible balance of good over bad, where good is understood to mean happiness or pleasure” (Konow 2003, 1200; see also Lebacqz 1986). In contrast, Mill (1961) tended to define justice by its opposite, the unjust: deprivation of things to which a person has a legal or a moral right, not getting what a person deserves (good to the good, punishment to the evil), “breaking faith” (lying, disappointing behavior), showing undue favor, or treating people unequally (see also Lebacqz 1986, 19). All things being equal, utilitarians generally argue that “‘justice’ in a narrow sense of the exact honoring of claims might be sacrificed for ‘utility’ in the sense of greater happiness for all” (Lebacqz 1986, 31). Later versions implied the redistribution of social goods or moves to maximize efficiency—which produces more of those goods, though distributed unevenly (Konow 2003, 1205–1206). Utilitarianism has powerfully informed concepts of justice because it “seems to come close to the ordinary sense of right and wrong” and democratic politics: when a bill is debated “discussion centers on the likely consequences. . . . The parties are not disagreeing about a fundamental moral principle; both (ostensibly) agree that the bill must be judged in the light of the goodness or badness of its probable consequences” (Doyle 2001, 51). At the same time, utilitarianism is controversial: “The goal which utilitarians seek to promote does not depend on the existence of God, or a soul” (Kymlicka 2002, 10–11), and the answer to the ancient question “Why have moral rules at all?” is simply and merely “to promote happiness” (Doyle 2001, 52). What constitutes *utility* and *happiness*—and when they may be promoted at the expense of the individual for the greater good—is a thicket, and the individual and her or his rights often tend to take a backseat within utilitarian versions of justice (Lebacqz 1986, 22–30). The problems have clear affinities to the critiques of the common good vision of community.

### Economic Liberty

This conception of justice “gives primacy to liberty” defined as “consensual economic interaction” (Young 1996, 482), and in one of its purest forms there are only two principles: the historical circumstances of acquiring property (how it came to be owned) and how that property may be transferred (Nozick 1996, 700–01). Thus, justice “is exclusively concerned with rights that are determined by the historical acquisition by and transfer of property among individuals” (Konow 2003, 1206). Accordingly, only “a minimal state, limited to the narrow functions of protection against force, theft, fraud, enforcement of contracts, and so on, is jus-

tified,” and thus, “the state may not use its coercive apparatus for the purpose of getting some citizens to aid others” (Nozick 1996, 698). Familiar now as market libertarianism or neoliberalism, “economic liberty and market competition” working within an “individualist culture that is our historical inheritance” leads logically to the dismantling of public initiatives (health, education) and social protections (unions, old-age benefits) in the name of “a stable restoration of market institutions” as the best mechanism to enact justice (Gray 1993, 272–75). “Aggregat[ing] diverse individual preferences into social choices” via markets is the preferred solution to social issues and problems (Moe 2000, 129), and indeed any limitations on markets appear “conceptually of a piece with the constraints of bare nature” because the market “is the institutional form proper to [human] nature” (Levine quoted in Lauder 1997, 388). Critics point out that this is an economic theory of justice and elite democracy, reliant on a passive citizenry and reductive of “politics to competitions for economic goods effectively ma[king] real politics disappear” (Mara 2008, 111). These critiques point to affinities with the more instrumental side of social capital. Socially and politically realized forms of justice are de facto ruled out, and at the same time the common culture, values, and habits (community)—which underwrite the stable economic order sought—constitute a “blind-spot . . . [because the] market economy is the only visible part” (Gray 1993, 273–74; see also Buschman 2012).

### Fairness

Rawls reimagined the social contract, directly challenged the long-standing dominance of utilitarian understandings of justice, and single-handedly revived Anglo-American political theory: “His theory dominates contemporary debates, not because everyone accepts it, but because the alternative views are best understood in terms of their relationship to Rawls” (Kymlicka 2002, 10; see also Arneson 2006).<sup>6</sup> In concert with the view of community we have put forward, Rawls brings an institutional focus to justice: he “holds that just institutions distribute primary social goods fairly” (Arneson 2006, 50) and further that “political institutions . . . can generate a just society” and not the other way around, very much affecting “what we regard as justice, collective identity, belonging, trust, and solidarity” (Rothstein 1996, 138). In other words, Rawls is a powerful advocate of the idea that what libraries and other educative institutions do and how they do it in a given community is meaningful in a democracy. Rawls (2005, xxv, xvii) attempts to give us an answer to the question “What are the fair terms of social cooperation between . . . free and equal citizens profoundly divided by reasonable though incompatible religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines [so that] all affirm the political conception of a constitutional regime?”—a compelling question at this point in history.

6. For instance, the renewal of communitarianism and the neoliberalism of Nozick are direct responses to Rawls (Young 1996).

His system of thought tries to capture moral-ethical content but does so in a way that avoids the drawbacks of communitarianism (such as the sectarian foundations that have caused so much havoc in history), accepting the inevitability of pluralism and the value of democracy as mutually reinforcing (Rawls 2005, xiii–lx, 11–15). In other words, Rawls’s justice represents a kind of middle path to democratic purposes for the library as a public institution. A thorough summary is not necessary here to illustrate the value of his work, and there are already many excellent *précis* available.<sup>7</sup> Rather, the focus will be on some core concepts and thought devices and his conclusions, which LIS can draw upon without doing too much violence to the coherence of his thinking.

For Rawls (1996), “justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought” (669). In other words, justice is social and public—not the product of moral reasoning based in a religious or philosophical doctrine. But before we get to justice and how he reestablished it in a novel way, society must be defined and have a basis: “a self-sufficient association of persons who in their relations to one another recognize rules of conduct as binding . . . since social cooperation makes possible a better life for all than any would have if each were to live solely by his own efforts” in spite of inevitable differences and conflicts of interest (Rawls 1996, 670). Justice for Rawls is famously “fairness”: a society arranged as a “fair system of cooperation” meant to produce, in addition, “each participant’s rational advantage” and “reciprocity” (2005, 15–22). His reimagining of the social contract gives the content (and controversy) to justice as fairness. How are the fair terms of social cooperation to be determined? Are those terms the product of an “outside authority,” or God, or “recognized as required by natural law” (Rawls 2005, 22)? All are bases that have caused considerable historical conflict, as noted. Justice and fairness as the basis of the social contract are the “fair terms . . . agreed to by those engaged in it,” and to achieve this, Rawls seeks “some point of view, removed from and not distorted by . . . bargaining advantages” of the everyday interests and concerns of persons and the “advantages and accidental influences from the past” (2005, 23). Under such circumstances, people would truly be free and equal to set social rules. His solution was an ingenious and controversial thought experiment.

The social contract tradition broadly posited different theses: that society exists to prevent violence and ensure safety (Hobbes 1996), to realize freedom in a complex society within the general will (Rousseau 1996), or out of consent to protect property (Locke 1996). In contrast, Rawls asks: What would be the conditions under which we would form society to which we could all assent? It would be a bargain that is fair, “rational and mutually disinterested . . . conceived as not taking an interest in one another’s interests [and] avoid[ing] introducing into it any controversial ethical elements” as the basis of “principles it would be rational to adopt . . . it should be impossible to tailor principles to the circumstances of one’s own case”

7. See Rawls (1996; 2005, 3–46) and Arneson (2006).

(Rawls 1996, 674–75). This then is the Original Position—the neutral stage for negotiating social rules and the social contract. The device to achieve this is the Veil of Ignorance, constructed in order to bracket those things

that are irrelevant from the standpoint of justice. For example, if a man knew that he was wealthy, he might find it rational to advance the principle that . . . taxes for welfare measures be counted unjust; if he knew he was poor, he would most likely propose the contrary principle. [O]ne imagines a situation in which everyone is deprived of this sort of information. One excludes the knowledge of those contingencies which sets men at odds and allows them to be guided by their prejudices. . . . Together . . . these conditions define the principles of justice as those which rational persons concerned to advance their interests would consent to as equals when none are known to be advantaged or disadvantaged by social and natural contingencies. (Rawls 1996, 676)

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In other words, we would set fair terms and rules if we had no idea where we fell in the social and economic spectrum—a situation Rawls freely acknowledges as nonhistorical (2005, 22–28, 273). From this Rawls (1996) draws two principles of justice: “each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all,” and “social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both to the greatest benefit to the least advantaged” within reasonable limits (inheritance is not unjust), with “offices and positions . . . open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity” (696). It follows that racial, religious, or economic discrimination would be ruled out—they would be unfair and an irrational bargain since we would not know beforehand if we were in the minority or poor when we were negotiating the rules, and “institutions are to foster the virtue of justice and to discourage desires and aspirations incompatible with it” (Rawls 1996, 692). Such institutions are to be distributive—or redistributive—of “primary social goods,” specifically ensuring “a certain fair equality of opportunity, especially in education and training” and the fostering of “public deliberation . . . for a reasonable constitutional regime, and specific institutions and arrangements . . . to be laid down to support and encourage it” (Rawls 2005, lvii). Clearly there are affinities here with the deliberative community sought through institutions outlined earlier.

There are many philosophical disagreements with Rawls (Arneson 2006), but two practical critiques are of note here. Michael Sandel (1984) calls the inhabitants of his thought experiment “unencumbered selves,” mythical “people” standing apart from their values, aims, ambitions, and identities. For him, this is not merely implausible but socially freighted in unacceptable ways. Sheldon S. Wolin (1996) argues that Rawlsian justice and politics generate quiescence strongly supportive of a very unequal economic and political status quo. There are certainly more activist stances within democratic theory that point LIS toward more progressive goals (Buschman 2007), but in response Rawls (2005, 223, 46) states clearly that he

wants to make explicit the “implicit in the public political culture of a democratic society” and “continuing public discussion when shared understandings of lesser generality have broken down.” Rawls situates (and justifies) what LIS stands for within the realm of justice: to be open to all in the community (and beyond), to share resources to meet needs, to meet all needs within reasonable limits, to equalize resources—and therefore opportunity—and to set up an infrastructure to realize these goals. In an age of political polarization, such a neutral conception rooted in justice appears at a different point in the political spectrum of contemporary democracy, shifted as it has so far to the right. The goal is a “society in which an overarching consensus prevails on the principles of justice to which . . . institutions should conform” without obviating the differences of cultural, religious, or other kinds of identities (Rothstein 1996, 138). Politically, Rawlsian justice inserts the institutions of LIS into public, political deliberation in a democracy; its interests are defined by justice—it is an institution of justice in his terms. In combination with the institutional focus of community, Rawls’s justice provides a powerful *raison d’état* for LIS, and for the CFP’s provocation to investigate the terms and conditions of it within the field.

## Conclusion

LIS can clearly muddle along without adopting clear concepts of the political terms it invokes—it has for some time now. But how long will muddling through continue to suffice? The landscape of schools, universities, and libraries has shifted dramatically in the last 30 to 40 years, and not only (or even principally) because of technology. Technology is synergistic with the related economic shift toward global markets and the political shift to the right favoring markets. That political shift has brought with it simultaneous “conflation of private interests, empire building, and evangelical fundamentalism” (Giroux 2005, 4) in an uneasy mix of contemporary culture, the cross-currents of which can easily be discerned in the examples of contentiousness in LIS outlined at the beginning of this article. In other words, the institutions of LIS have always navigated a political landscape, but that landscape has tilted (rightward) in ways often at odds with the core tenets and purposes those institutions were begun to serve in the first place (Buschman 2012). Perhaps the value of this article lies not in the identification of the best versions of community and justice to underwrite LIS but rather in stimulating stronger consideration of what is implied when we invoke these core political concepts and then yoke methods (of service, collections, or research) to them.

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