



Review: Toward an I & We Paradigm

Reviewed Work(s):

After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory. by Alasdair MacIntyre

Liberalism and the Limits of Justice. by Michael J. Sandel

Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality. by Michael Walzer

Interpretation and Social Criticism. by Michael Walzer

Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age. by Benjamin Barber

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Featured Essay

Toward an I & We Paradigm

After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, by ALASDAIR MACINTYRE. 2nd ed. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1984. 286 pp. \$9.95 paper.

Liberalism and the Limits of Justice, by MICHAEL J. SANDEL. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982. 190 pp. \$10.95 paper.

Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality, by MICHAEL WALZER. New York: Basic Books, 1983. 345 pp. \$13.95 paper.

Interpretation and Social Criticism, by MICHAEL WALZER. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987. 96 pp. \$12.50 cloth.

Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age, by BENJAMIN BARBER. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. 320 pp. \$10.95 paper.

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A recent movement within social philosophy known as communitarianism has significance for sociology for several reasons: it provides an opportunity for sociologists to contribute to another discipline; it concerns issues that we as sociologists have not settled among ourselves; and finally, the movement affects both public policy and contemporary ideology. Among the most influential communitarian philosophers—typically, far from full agreement with one another—are Michael Sandel, Michael Walzer, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Benjamin Barber. Communitarians also flourish in other disciplines—for example, George Lodge in business administration, Roberto Unger in law, and our own Philip Selznick.

Progress Toward the I & We

The recent communitarian movement has risen largely in response to contemporary liberal philosophers (CLP), particularly John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, and Robert Nozick. While communitarians challenge liberalism on many points, one issue dominates the agenda and provides the school with its name: concern about the neglect of community and common good (moral values, shared understandings, public interest). Communitarians decry the “presence of moral chaos and the absence of common purposes” (Thigpen and Downing 1987, p. 638) in contemporary society. Sandel calls for philosophy to give

“fuller expression to the claims of citizenship and community than [philosophical] liberalism allows” (1984, p. 5). MacIntyre charges that the “notion of the political community as a common project is alien to the modern liberal individualist world” (1984, p. 156).

CLP’s neglect of the commons can be traced to their basic purpose: to provide moral anchoring for personal autonomy, for the individual’s right to choose his or her own way of life. Claims upon a person in the name of community are thus considered a violation of the individual. Nozick, for instance, argues that a citizen should not be compelled to defend his or her country; in fact, he sees community itself as a “burden.” Rawls is less emphatic, allowing for positive, procommunity sentiments—by individuals.

In *A Theory of Justice* (1971), Rawls seeks to develop moral criteria that establish a just (or “fair”) society. Rawls constructs his notion of justice by considering what persons in a modern reformulation of the state of nature—the “original position”—would choose as just principles. Individuals in the “original position” are rational agents stripped of all particular attributes as social beings; they debate behind a “veil of ignorance” that prevents them from knowing their position in society. Because they are unsure of where they will “end up,” they cannot but rationally choose a just order.* In

* Critics have portrayed Rawls’ book as more liberal, or, alternatively, more communitarian, than here interpreted. We suggest that *in essence* his position is

later writings, Rawls has somewhat modified his position, giving greater recognition to the role of community. Rawls' 1985 essay, "Justice as Fairness," concedes that the basic values of the representative moral agent—now called the "citizen"—derive not from intuitions formed apart from social reality but from "an 'overlapping consensus' that undergirds the modern state" (Wallach 1987, p. 584). Further, Rawls contextualizes his theory, acknowledging social and historical particulars (specifically, the democratic society reflected in contemporary, advanced, Western, industrialized nations (Rawls 1985, p. 224). In kind, Dworkin now considers his fundamental liberal concept of "equal concern and respect" to be historically and politically embedded (Dworkin 1977, p. 201; 1978, p. 116 n.1).

Communitarians challenge the liberal project on both sociological and moral grounds. Sociologically, they move that individuals cannot exist outside of the social realm, without community. In Sandel's view, Rawls' hypothetical individuals are "wholly without character, without moral depth" (1982, p. 172). Persons as we know them, Sandel maintains, are always "situated" or "embedded" in a social context; they are "encumbered" by ties of community: "we cannot conceive of our personhood without reference to our roles as citizens, and as participants in a common life" (1984, p. 5).

The moral counterclaim for community is made most forcefully, perhaps too forcefully, by MacIntyre, who argues that the Aristotelian tradition of civic virtue can restore moral coherence to the community. In this "classical moral tradition," persons are understood to have an end or highest aim—a *telos*—which they achieve through exercising virtues (particular "acquired human qualities") to achieve the intrinsic goods of "practices": complex and coherent, "socially established," human activities (1984, pp. 187, 191). The range of practices is wide: "arts, sciences, games, politics in the Aristotelian sense, the making and sustaining of family life, all fall under the concept" (p. 188). Individuals in such a community do not (as liberals would have it) choose their own good; they find a common good as members of a distinct moral order. MacIntyre writes that "[a]n Aristotelian theory of the virtues does

therefore presuppose a crucial distinction between what any particular individual at any particular time takes to be good for him and what is really good for him as a man" (p. 150).

MacIntyre has been criticized for advancing too "strong" or emphatic a communitarian vision, for he provides no moral anchor for individual autonomy and rights. He writes that "[n]atural or human rights . . . are fictions" (p. 70). There are, he insists, "no such [universal] rights . . . every attempt to give good reasons for believing that there *are* such rights has failed" (p. 69). In his project, social roles completely absorb the person, leaving no adequate basis for a critical stance against society. True, MacIntyre insists that

[t]he fact that the self has to find its moral identity in and through its membership in communities . . . does not entail that the self has to accept the moral *limitations*. (p. 221)

But as Thigpen and Downing (1987, p. 643) observe, "MacIntyre does not identify aspects of the self that transcend social roles": a claim that moral limitations need not be accepted cannot be advanced without making clear how this transcendence can occur.

Walzer offers a partial corrective to MacIntyre's collectivistic tendencies. Like MacIntyre, he challenges the CLP notion of abstract persons and he declares community "conceivably the most important good" (1983, p. 29). However, unlike MacIntyre, who calls apparently for a unified community (he refers to "the pluralism which threatens to submerge us all" [1984, p. 226]), Walzer advocates multiple spheres of justice—and by implication, multiple subcommunities—each sphere relevant to the meanings of particular "social" goods (e.g., money, political power, prestige, education). The result is a pluralism of moral foundations. However, Walzer does not indicate whether the individual is free to choose among these foundations, nor does he provide in *Spheres of Justice* a plausible critical basis for individuals to stand apart from consensual social meanings and, hence, existing values, whatever they may be. (Fishkin [1987] correctly calls him a moral relativist: Walzer believes the community determines a person's moral stance.)

Recently, the trend toward a synthetic position has continued. For example, Walzer has addressed more directly the need to accommodate the critical individual. In *Inter-*

individualistic, and that he *has* become somewhat more concerned with community in recent works (see below).

pretation and Social Criticism (1987), Walzer maintains that the critic shares the moral values of the community; yet Walzer makes room for individual moral positions by claiming that such argument is largely the "interpretation," rather than the "discovery" or "invention," of shared values. He defends this posture "against the charge that it binds us irrevocably to the status quo—since we can only interpret what already exists—and so undercuts the possibility of social criticism" (1987, p. 3). Walzer asserts that for the critic who is adequately distanced from the loci of power, "there are [critical] standards available . . . that are internal to the practices and understandings of his own society" (p. 40). He explains that moral standards can be interpreted "in both apologetic and critical ways," and that it is *not* the case that "the apologetic interpretations are the 'natural' ones" (p. 48).

Considering the dialogue as a whole, one can argue that the CLP, criticized for neglecting the community both as a sociological reality and as a moral claim, have attempted somewhat to provide for both. In turn, the communitarians, attacked for neglecting individual actors, rights, and a critical stance against the community, can be seen as seeking a *principled* basis for these claims.

For Parsonian, Chicago, and many other sociologists, the answer that social philosophers find so elusive lies in what might be called "the human arch." An arch is composed of bricks and cannot exist without them, but the bricks without the arch are merely a pile of rubble. The human arch is thus comprised partly of community and partly of individuals situated within the arch. In this view, it is not possible to conceive of community without individuals, or individuals outside the social realm. (An individual may escape a particular community, but not all communities.)

The debate among social philosophers points to a *moral* position not entailed in the sociological fact of the human arch but quite readily supported by it: both individuals and the community have a basic moral claim, and any position that omits one of these two intertwined foundations leads to positions that even their respective advocates find hard to defend. Hence the CLP's scramble to determine a place for communal obligation, and

the efforts to establish a *principled* basis for individual rights and a critical stance within the communitarian camp. We refer to the resulting sociological-moral paradigm, an extension of Buber's I-Thou, as the I & We paradigm. (For additional discussion, see Etzioni 1988.)

Having explicated this basic synthesis of the liberal and communitarian views, I wish to raise an important remaining issue, evident both in the philosophic debate itself and in the sociology literature, particularly in Wrong's (1961) profound article on the oversocialized person and in the dialogue about conformism. This question concerns the scope and nature of the individual elements not captured by roles. Thigpen and Downing, objecting to the strong communitarian view in which socially prescribed roles may fully absorb the individual, write that persons "cannot be *totally* constituted by their social (and natural) environment" (1987, p. 645). However, this objection is far from sufficient, for it treats individuality merely as a residue: whatever is "left over" after socialization. Some sociologists have fallen into a similar trap: if they do not neglect individual differences, they see them as a result of conflicting cultures or incomplete socialization. What must be formulated—and perhaps it can be found in the psychological literature—is a fuller model of individual development (as distinct from deviance) that allows a person to transcend his or her background and social foundations. The studies of innovation and entrepreneurship, critical intellectuals and leadership, have not crystallized into a fully coherent and powerful corrective to the sociologic, emphatic communitarian position.

Sociologists seem to have settled for themselves certain issues still confronting social philosophers, by recognizing both that the relationship between individuals and community values are often strained *and* that this strain can be creative rather than necessarily dysfunctional. Conservative social philosophers still tend to assume harmony, or the need for it. As Nancy Rosenblum (1984, p. 586) writes of the communitarian view,

[i]n a community, the notion of "belonging" has meaning and place, for there is no conflict between obligation and personal inclination. . . . In community it

is crucial for the regime to appear "lovely" to its members.

Oppressed minorities and classes often agitate against claims of "the community" because these claims are used to quell dissent in the name of loyalty to country and national unity. And Robert Reich (1988) points out that in the 1980s, a certain kind of community has begun to flourish for all the wrong reasons: concern for money and social status.

There is one thing Americans *do* have in common with our neighbors. . . . It is our income. . . . [A] passionate interest in maintaining or upgrading property values . . . is responsible for much of what has brought neighbors together in recent years. (1988, p. 22)

He contends that "Reagan's communitarianism" has legitimized these "exclusive economic enclaves." Barbara Ehrenreich seconds Reich's assessment, remarking that "[n]o community can span Donald Trump and New York's homeless" (1988, p. 21). The conclusion: the community may have a justifiable voice, but the claims of any specific community need to be evaluated rather than simply deemed legitimate. One important criterion for assessing them can be derived from the concept of community: the more equally responsive the community is to all of its members, the more genuine or authentic a community it is. The more hierarchical, domineering, and exclusive it is, the less of a community—the more of an empire—it is, and the less legitimate its claim (Etzioni, 1968).

Which Community?

Social philosophers are surprisingly ambiguous when (if at all) they discuss in concrete terms the concept about which they argue so fiercely. Both the community's scale—local, societal, or international?—and its substance—e.g., enforced codes or invisible moral college?—remain undeveloped in the dialogue. Sandel (1984, p. 6) implies a concern for local community in several of his writings: for example, espousing "laws regulating plant closings, to protect . . . communities from the disruptive effects of

capital mobility and sudden industrial change," and suggesting that communitarians would be "more likely than liberals to allow a town to ban pornographic bookstores, on the grounds that pornography offends its way of life and the values that sustain it" (p. 6). Yet Sandel does not outline explicitly the criteria by which a local residential area or a municipal government constitutes a community, beyond suggesting that a community shares "a common vocabulary of discourse . . . and implicit practices" (1982, p. 172). Walzer writes that in the real world, "independent states"—entire nations—approximate most closely his notion of community: "The political community is probably the closest we can come to a world of common meanings" (1983, p. 28). Somewhat like Sandel, Walzer distinguishes a community by its "shared understandings and intuitions," but insists that "we have only dim perceptions" of the community (p. 35). Sociologists who have studied the ways in which communities are formed from social bonds, shared values, and institutions could make a significant contribution to the debate, clarifying the boundaries of community.

In addition to the issues of boundary and scale, there is confusion about how the "voice" of the community reaches its individual members. The more liberal a philosopher is, the more the philosopher tends to confuse the community with the state. The "strong" liberal will label the community's voice "coercive" whether it actually imposes laws (say, against abortion) or exerts psychological pressure (which is viewed as psychical and hence akin to coercion). Jean Bethke Elshtain (1984, p. 19) writes that libertarians, who represent the "strongest" form of liberalism,

cannot get beyond a picture of isolated individuals, bound up in their rights and their "freedom from," going through the world *en garde* against possible constraints from concerned and potentially "repressive" communities.

On the other hand, the more communitarian a philosopher is, the more inclined the philosopher is to see community values as readily internalized and conformity as spontaneous and willing. Witness MacIntyre's conclusion that "what is good for me *has to be* the good

for one who inhabits these roles" (1984, p. 220).

The evolving I & We paradigm would benefit from continuing to recognize that the term "community" has a wide range of meanings, but it can constructively adopt the concept of a responsive community, one that draws either on appeals to values that members already possess ("Give a hoot, don't pollute!") or encourages them to internalize values they currently do not hold (before an appeal not to litter is made, individuals are urged to become sensitized to the environment). These types of voluntary moral affirmation provide a foundation for the noncoercive community. When people act to express a value they have truly acquired (internalized rather than accepted as a social pressure to which they had "better" conform) within a pluralistic community (in which there is latitude for more than one moral position), people are not, nor do they feel, coerced, even in a psychological sense. Rather, they feel affirmed when they uphold their values. There is nothing morally objectionable about such an act; on the contrary, without the expression of internalized values, there would be no moral coherence or community—or, for that matter, individuals, as functioning persons.

Aggregation

Some of the bonds between individuals and the community are interpersonal and intrapsychic: bonds of friendship that tie individuals, or a personality that is composed of multiple selves, yet has a theme, structure, or profile. Some such bonds are institutional: political sociology and much of the political science literature examine the relationship between individuals (and subgroups) and the community they share (sometimes referred to as "aggregation," but this assumes an upward process, *from the Is to the We*; in fact, the process works both ways). Further, much political theory seeks to legitimize or defend one particular institutional format.

Communitarians have addressed this issue, charging that the CLP position focuses merely on process. Individuals, CLP maintain, are to make the choices; hence, institutions and the community are not legitimate sources of shared positions or policies, but must be worked out from what individuals choose.

Barber (1984) critiques this CLP stand from the communitarian perspective, charging that liberal or "thin" democracy serves "exclusively individualistic and private ends" (p. 4). From the "precarious foundation" of this democracy, concerned to "promote individual liberty" and "advance interests . . . no firm theory of citizenship, participation, public goods or civic virtue can be expected to arise" (p. 4). Such individuals, Barber contends, are "not really free at all" (p. 146), because persons are by nature socially dependent. They can only be free within a collectivity: "The road to autonomy leads through not around commonality" (p. 217). Barber's antidote is a "strong" democracy—universal, direct political participation. Participation is for Barber a panacea: he believes, for example, that through participation and "public talk" (p. 162), the political community "transform[s] . . . partial and private interests into public goods" (p. 151). To participate *is* to create a community that governs itself, and to create a self-governing community *is* to participate (p. 135; Barber's italics). Sociologists have much to say about the structural conditions and dangers of direct, as opposed to representative, democracy, in complex societies. Little of this extensive knowledge has been absorbed by contemporary social philosophers.

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