

Communitarian Critiques of Liberalism and Its Applicability

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Abstract: *The debate between communitarianism and liberalism constitutes the main line of contemporary political philosophy. The challenges of communitarianism are mainly reflected in three aspects. First, communitarianism challenges the liberal "individual" with "community". Second, communitarianism challenges the "justice" of liberalism with the "common good". Third, communitarianism uses "historicism" to challenge liberal "universalism". In essence, individuals and societies coexist and construct each other in reality.*

Keywords: *Communitarianism, Liberalism, Applicability, Right*

1. Introduction

Nowadays more and more complex problems we have to deal with, such as race problem, epidemic and so on. I think it is necessary to renew the discussion about communitarianism. We know that the central claim of communitarianism is precisely the necessity of attending to community alongside, if not prior to, liberty and equality. Communitarians believe that the value of community is not sufficiently recognized in liberal theories of justice, or in the public culture of liberal societies. It was an obvious phenomenon we could found during last year. However, I would not use this phenomenon to reject liberalism, I just need to renew the importance of communitarianism and find its applicability. What's more "communitarianism is of particular importance for several reasons. First, communitarianism challenges the dominance of liberalism. Liberalism has always been dominant in the West, yet communitarianism has been a harsh critique of liberalism. This critique reveals the problems and limitations of liberal theory from a unique perspective, and through this critique we can better understand contemporary political philosophy. Second, communitarianism raises questions of political philosophy that require serious consideration. In order to challenge liberalism, communitarianism proposes a series of targeted perspectives that prompt us to think about fundamental issues of contemporary political philosophy, such as justice and goodness, the individual and community, rights and interests, universalism and historicism, neutrality and supreme goodness, unity and pluralism." [1]

2. Communitarian critiques of liberalism

Maybe we could say that the debate between communitarianism and liberalism constitutes the main line of contemporary political philosophy. Since the 1980s, with Sandel, McIntyre, Walzer, and Taylor as the main representatives, communitarians have made extensive and strong criticisms of Rawls and challenged the dominance of liberalism. In summary, the challenges of communitarianism are mainly reflected in three aspects. First, communitarianism challenges the liberal "individual" with "community". Communitarians advocate that the community takes precedence over the individual. They criticize liberalism as individualism in nature and put the individual first. Secondly, communitarianism challenges the "justice" of liberalism with the "common good". Rawls advocates that justice takes precedence over good and puts justice or rights in the first place; while communitarians do the opposite and advocate good over justice, that is, the good of the community takes precedence over justice or rights. Finally, communitarianism uses "historicism" to challenge liberal "universalism". Communitarians advocate that justice is historical, special, and plural, rather than universal, unitary, and applicable to all times.

Begin from the first aspect, the problem between communitarianism and liberalism is not mainly about justice or universalism, but mainly about community and individual. Once we recognize the dependence of human beings on society, then our obligations to sustain the common good of society are as weighty as our rights to individual liberty. Hence, communitarians argue, the liberal 'politics of rights'

should be abandoned for, or at least supplemented by, a 'politics of the common good'. This is also a challenge to utilitarianism, liberals, libertarians, for they agree on a central feature of how to characterize interests. They all believe that we promote people's interests by letting them choose for themselves what sort of life they want to lead. They disagree about what package of rights or resources best enables people to pursue their own conceptions of the good. But they agree that to deny people this self-determination is to fail to treat them as equals. Although Mill defended that each person contained a unique personality whose was different from that anyone else, Marxist perfectionism believes that each person's good lies in a capacity he or she shares with all other humans. These two ways may be extreme and wrong. Our good is neither universal nor unique, but tied in important ways to the cultural practices we share with others in our community. We surely have rights to decide what life we want to live, but we cannot live without others. Marx also said the nature of human is the relation within human. No matter what we do or what we think, all of these depend on where we live and what sources we could get from our situation. Even we can say that god is a waste of time, because a valuable life has to be led from inside, but I don't think it has any essential contradiction between inside and outside so that we could make choice only by inside.

Then, let's focus on Sandel. Sandel's communitarianism critiques of liberalism is philosophical. First, Sandel tried to dig out the metaphysical foundation of this deontological liberalism. Deontological liberalism insists on the primacy of justice, and its core proposition is that justice takes precedence over good. From Sandel's point of view, in the Rawls-style freedom theory of obligation, the core assertion that "righteousness precedes goodness" relies on "self-ego precedence over the purpose." Through the reconstruction of philosophical anthropology, Sandel believes that Rawls' self-concept cannot serve as the philosophical basis for his theory of justice, and thus concludes: "Justice cannot be the first in the sense of deontology, because we cannot consistently think of ourselves as the kind of person that deontological ethics requires us to be." Secondly, Sandel gave an epistemological critique of deontological liberalism. Sandel believes that on the surface, Rawls seems to be advocating the primacy of justice in a moral sense, that is, justice takes precedence over good, but in essence, he is advocating the primacy of justice in a basic sense, that is, justice is independent of good. Sandel gave an epistemological critique of deontological liberalism. Finally, Sandel believes that the error of deontological liberalism lies not in claims but in logic. The deontological liberalism represented by Rawls advocates the primacy of justice. [2] In this regard, Sandel pointed out that the primacy of justice is problematic, and this deontological liberalism is also problematic. However, Sandel is not saying that Rawls is wrong in advocating the primacy of justice, but that Rawls cannot prove that justice has primacy; Sandel is not saying that Rawls' principles of justice cannot be realized in the real society. Rather, Rawls cannot deduce his principles of justice from his deontological ethics. In other words, Rawls cannot logically prove the primacy of justice and the priority of justice over good.

Alasdair MacIntyre, based on Aristotelianism, he launched a fierce attack on the moral philosophy of liberalism. He believes that the subjectivism of liberal moral philosophy does not define the self based on the community, but on the individual, and regards the self as an independent individual, which leads to the individualization of the moral subject. [3] He also claims that only by dwelling in a historical tradition can the individual achieve completeness; and only with the help of the knowledge of the tradition can the individual properly understand himself and understand the meaning of existence. And MacIntyre believes that liberal moral philosophy has also made mistakes in value theory. It understands goodness as the satisfaction of personal preferences and accepts the divergence of different individuals' concepts of goodness. However, in terms of norms, the error of liberal moral philosophy lies in the marginalization of virtue. MacIntyre believes that virtue is an acquired human quality, and the possession and practice of it enables us to obtain the benefits inherent in practice. Virtue itself is the goal, and the pursuit of virtue is the pursuit of the good life of human beings. In liberal moral philosophy, moral rules occupy a central position and play the most important role, while virtue is marginalized. In a community, people share the concept of goodness and virtue. Virtue is not only closely connected with practice, but also maintains the historical and cultural traditions of a specific community and is full of personal life. In other words, virtue is closely related to human life. The former is the necessary quality of the latter. Since practice refers to the cooperative public activities of others, its field must involve the entire community. Therefore, the pursuit of virtue itself has rich social significance. However, in the process of liberalism-led modernization, the community has been weakened and the concept of sharing has disappeared. This has caused the disconnection between people's rights and obligations. This disconnection makes ordinary people's understanding of virtue tend to be confused. Regarding society as a place where it seeks self-interest, leading to the arbitrariness and depravity of its moral practice.

Charles Taylor believes that liberalism's principle of neutrality will exacerbate the inherent exclusion of democracy. However, modern democracies require people to form a strong cohesive community. This

requires individual citizens to trust the legitimacy of the political community itself. Taylor claims that for a member of a political community, the most important thing is not whether it is recognized as an atomic individual, but whether it can be recognized as a member of a cultural group. [4] Liberalism cannot provide a neutral communication platform for all cultures. Its universalist stance is more likely to exacerbate the self-reflexivity of democratic politics, thereby exacerbating the dilemma of democracy and creating a crisis of political identity. And the political identity crisis caused by liberalism is often manifested in a state of political fragmentation. Liberalism does not maintain neutrality among cultural groups but directly among individuals. It tries to respect only the abstract individual itself, rather than the specific belonging or goal of self. What this stance can do is to ignore the differences between various cultures. It cannot establish the common goal of a political community, which makes it impossible to integrate the diverse identities of small cultural groups. Taylor believes that it is impossible for man to be completely independent from his cultural connotations as liberalism said; on the contrary, he must rely on the good ideas provided by his cultural group. [5]

3. Applicability of Communitarianism

The acquisition of individual rights is based on certain specific social conditions and social activity rules. The existence of rights cannot be separated from a specific historical period and social environment. In the real society, there can be no shared, undifferentiated, absolute Equal rights. Communitarianism opposes the neoliberal theory of moral rights, claims legal rights, believes that rights are the social relations between people stipulated by law, and stipulates that people's social relations are regulated by law. The social relations and institutional design between the two parties and give individuals appropriate rights. Communitarianism believes that surpassing others and the survival and development of group organizations" will not have the overall interests of society; ignoring the common interests of the group will have no real individual rights. In a sense, community's concept of rights and collectivism's value goals have a certain similarity. On the other hand, there is a dialectical causal relationship between safeguarding the legitimate interests of individuals and active participation in public activities, and between the construction of a harmonious society and the protection of rights: On the one hand, only the legitimate rights of members of society are supported by various communities including the state and society. With respect and protection, social harmony is possible; on the other hand, only social harmony can realize personal self-worth.

Communitarianism emphasizes public interest and believes that public interest is higher than individual interest. Only the realization of public interest is the guarantee for the realization of personal interest, and public interest and group interest are the highest value. If a political community regards the promotion of public interest as its own responsibility, the larger the scope of the public interest it provides, the more it meets the requirements of a good life. Conversely, if a political community provides few public benefits, or few enjoyments of public benefits, such a society cannot be regarded as a good society even if it is the most just. In real life, any political community including the state, on the one hand, promotes personal interests through its own inaction, and on the other hand, it is also responsible for providing public interests through its own positive actions, thereby ultimately enhancing everyone's personal interests.

The rise of communitarianism in Western society has profound social causes. First, the market economy is the economic context in which communitarianism arises. Under this condition, although the social interaction between people is very common, market competition has caused indifference between people, and people are like enemies. As monopolies were formed, the contradictions between classes intensified, the social crisis became more serious, the market failed, and liberalism began to feel helpless. Capitalism must be adjusted in order to maintain its own survival, and the rise of the welfare state system in the first half of the 20th century, as well as various intermediate communities in the history of Western democratic politics, such as churches, communities, associations, clubs, professional associations, etc., have played an extremely important role, especially the intermediary community has effectively mediated various social crises between individual citizens and between citizens and governments. However, with the increasing integration of social life and political life in the era of informatization and globalization, the status of intermediate associations has been shaken. In recent years, Western left-wing politicians have put forward the idea of a third way. At the same time, some new communities have emerged in Western countries and are playing an increasingly important role in real life. On the one hand, the important role of these new communities in the process of social history needs to be confirmed at the philosophical level and regulated at the ethical level; On the other hand, the rights of these new communities in political life also urgently need to be institutionally recognized. It is in this context that in the 1980s and 1990s, communitarianism rose in Western society and has had a significant impact on

social life and decision-making. In the late 20th century, under the situation of capitalist globalization, the functions of the state began to weaken again, and some large multinational groups were eager to try to intervene in economic and political life. This is manifested in the reduction of state intervention in economic and cultural life and the serious crisis of the welfare system. However, there are many global problems in the 21st century, such as environmental pollution, international crime, economic crisis, AIDS, global plague, etc. To solve these problems, it is not enough for individuals or some small groups to intervene, and the intervention of national governments is essential. Communitarianism advocates positive rights and encourages individuals to actively participate in political life. The spirit of the movement that followed was basically consistent with the communitarianism advocated by Sandel and McIntyre.

As a school of western social and political philosophy, communitarianism, although there are still many shortcomings that need to be further developed and improved, its positive significance in criticizing extreme liberalism and individualism and defending the welfare state and people's public life is undeniable.

The concept of communitarianism has gradually emerged in China, which is roughly synchronized with the development of the market economy, and is also set against the background of the rise of intermediate community organizations in China. These intermediate community organizations have begun to have an impact on social life and the reform of China's political system, but their power is still very weak compared to western countries. In modern society, more emphasis should be placed on and effectively enhance people's sense of collective identity. With the development of China's market economy, the scope of the role of the collective in the narrow sense under the original planned economy has gradually shrunk, so that people's concept of the collective has become more and more blurred, and the awareness of participation in public affairs has become weaker and weaker, coupled with the "public spirit" that the Chinese people have always lacked, making people ignore the importance of the collective. Communitarianism regards the community as the core of its members' self-identity, and the relationships, obligations, customs, norms and traditions of the community are of decisive significance to the members, and this community emphasizes the accumulation of social history on the sense of personal identity, and is mostly expressed in the form of community, nation and state, and the similarity with the collective existence we emphasize. People follow the principle of collectivism, choose collectivist values, and identify with collective values, not only by the nature of people's society, but also by the needs of people's self-preservation and self-development. Communitarianism is necessary to point out in a timely manner the lack of people's sense of collective identity and emphasize their identification with the collective. A modern society is a highly autonomous society. The society needs the government. If there is no rich community life, when various emergencies occur, it will cause unnecessary political crisis. Communication in society is a natural expression of human nature. The fragility of life and the dependence of survival make the coexistence of human beings prosperous and prosperous only in the state of virtue. No one can get through a period of needing dependence without giving from others.

4. Conclusion

Efforts to find a globally applicable path of interpretation and a universal solution to the real problems of the modern nation-state have been futile and misleading from the outset. The causes of any problem are complex, and there are many differences between the causes and patterns of similar problems in different countries. The mechanism by which any idea spreads and acts is concrete and different. Therefore, only based on its own reality can each country find the most appropriate and effective way to solve its own problems. Of course, this does not mean that the criticism of communitarianism is a reference or warning to other societies. [6] Since 2020, the pandemic has made us aware of the many limitations of liberalism. Communitarianism holds that liberalism makes self and society alienated and leads to the decline of community life and many social diseases, and communitarianism criticizes liberalism's self-view, negative freedom view, atomism and so on, but the criticism of communitarianism does not shake the basic position of liberalism, and the criticism of communitarianism forces liberalism to self-correct at the theoretical and practical levels. To raise the importance and necessity of communitarianism, community of shared future becomes an important idea in China's major country diplomacy. In essence, individuals and societies coexist and construct each other in reality. As two interdependent elements of human existence, each element is implicated in all aspects of human action, and an absolutely exclusive or absolutely priority proposition can only cause harm to the other. There is no pure abstract individual that exists alone from society, and there are individuals who are shaped and regulated by specific historical conditions and social relations. Real society provides a background on why individual actions have a specific value or meaning, on which individuals gain the basis to judge the

good and evil of their actions.

As a mainstream political trend, communitarianism continues another development line in the path of liberalism in the traditional pluralistic thinking of the West, and uniquely develops the concept of community and community in Western thought, and in many of its propositions, it can explore the modern elaboration of the concept of civil society and the concept of community such as the church. At the same time, while paying attention to the strong criticism of liberalism by communitarianism, some scholars also pointed out that communitarianism has played and transformed the liberal tradition in some aspects, and even some scholars believe that communitarianism is essentially a new expression of thought within liberalism, and the criticism of liberalism by communitarians does point out some negative effects of the fundamental values of individualism, pointing out that the cornerstone of political science should not be placed entirely on individualism, but should be based on well-ordered communities. Exchanges, cooperation and harmony between people should be taken into account, and free competition should not be fully resorted to, and the weak should be taken care of and social welfare should be expanded. These criticisms have all helped to broaden the horizons of contemporary political philosophy. [7] For example, political modernization is an irresistible historical trend of world civilization since modern times. The struggle between communitarianism and liberalism and their mutual approach enlighten us that simply emphasizing individual rights or public interests will bring social functions into trouble. In the process of political modernization, we must not choose between communitarianism and liberalism. A good social order and a reasonable social structure are based on the two-way rational interaction between the state, general interests, public interests and society, special interests, and individual rights. Its establishment and maintenance depend on the rules of good order, which must be systematic and reasonable legal rules, and use legal forms to clarify the reasonable boundaries between the state, public interests and individual rights. To prevent individualistic anarchy and the abuse of government power, the law must be able to limit the exercise of power by the government in the public interest. Both public interests and individual rights must operate and be realized within the scope of legal regulation, so as to build a harmonious society that is in line with justice and full of vitality and vitality.

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