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## Will Kymlicka On Communitarianism: Balancing Diversity, Justice, And Community

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**Abstract:** This paper examines communitarianism as a political philosophy having an integral bond between individual identity and the community. It focuses on the necessary corrections to atomistic individualism which emphasizes on liberty and equality. Drawing primarily on Will Kymlicka's analysis, it argues that personal and social identity can not be fully understood apart from shared history, culture, language and practices. He believes that community must be constitutive rather than derivative. He distinguishes "backward-looking" communitarianism (nostalgic for pre modern social modern and often exclusionary) from "forward – looking" communitarianism that embrace individual choice and cultural diversity while still insisting on the moral priority of communal contexts

Communitarianism deals with the concept of common good, opposing the liberal idea of neutral state. Will Kymlicka highlights that how this theory challenges the liberal conception of the "unencumbered self", and proposes "encumbered self" that individual is embedded within the communal practices and shared traditions that emphasize on their choices and self-understanding. However, this paper will raise the concerns regarding cultural relativism, minority rights, and potential suppression of individual autonomy. The debate between backward looking and forward looking communitarianism also reflects tensions between preserving traditional communal bonds and accommodating modern diversity and individual choices.

Ultimately, the paper presents communitarianism's central challenges of balancing diversity and unity, seeking to foster civics solidarity and a common national identity without suppressing the cultural and ethnic pluralism that defines modern democratic society .

**Keywords:** Communitarianism, Common Good, Embedded Self, Politics of Neutrality, Social Justice.

## Methodology:

This is a qualitative, interpretative, and normative philosophical study. The authors employ textual analysis, critical engagement, and conceptual argumentation.

## Objectives

- To describe that personal and social identity cannot be fully understood apart from shared history, language and culture from the lens of Will Kymlicka.
- To distinguish “backward-looking” communitarianism from “forward-looking” communitarianism.
- To analysis the communitarian emphasis on the ‘politics of common good’ versus ‘politics of neutrality’.
- To explore the main challenges of balancing diversity and unity in modern democratic societies.

## Introduction

Communitarianism is a philosophy that talks about the individual and community how they are integrally related. It ignores that philosophy is based on the belief that a person’s social and individual identity are related with community. Community are constituted nothing but the collective individualism of different degrees. While Will Kymlicka define the communitarianism “An entire school of thought, known as ‘communitarianism’, has arisen in political philosophy whose central claim is precisely the necessity of attending to community alongside, if not prior to, liberty and equality”. Kymlicka tries to explain that individual liberty and equality are the fundamental principles of liberalism but it can not possible without the community. Liberalism emphasis on atomism of society which leads towards the disconnection between individual and community. No community can be superior to the other community it ought to promote justice between the individual and the community along with equality and freedom of the culture, one need to be relative in the cultural values.

French Revolution began with motto of liberty, equality and fraternity and they are being considered as the starting point of democratic society. Along with this many ideologies are brought in the eighteenth and the nineteenth century such as socialism, conservatism, liberalism, nationalism and republicanism, all of them talk about these three principles equality, liberty and fraternity or community. The ideals of community have different forms from the class solidarity to the common ethnic groups or cultural groups. Post world War period showed a picture of the community that it is abandoned. In this context, According to Kymlicka, Rawls not only rejects the value of community, he emphasis on the community in little intent in his theory of the justice. “If community was discussed at all, it was often seen as derivative of liberty and equality – i.e., a society lives up to the ideal of community if its members are treated as free and equal persons”. Kymlicka doesn’t think that liberal perspective of politics can include the “independent concepts of community such as history, shared nationality, language, culture, religion or the way of life, conduct of life which are integrally related with each other.”

Basically in 1980s ‘communitarianism’ has arisen as in the political philosophy which claims that we need to attend to community along with the concept of liberty and equality. For Will Kymlicka, communitarians assert that the value of community is not sufficient for recognizing the liberal theories of justice or the public culture of liberal theories but the new communitarianism claims that political philosophy focuses on the common social practices, cultural traditions and the shared behaviour of other in social context. Kymlicka

distinguished between 'backward-looking' and 'forward looking' kinds of communitarianism. Backward-looking claims there were good communal bond in the past and later abolition of community due to over emphasis on individual approach which leads to divers ways of life and for the individual common prosperity. Communitarianism is unable to distinct itself from the traditional conservative since it excludes the women, gays or racial and religious minorities. On the other hand Forward looking communitarians accept individual choice and cultural diversity and this is consideration nowadays in the political philosophy. In the context of 'Individualism' and 'Communitarianism' he raised some questions because he thinks that we face the debates between connection of moral solidarity and political community in the period of individual rights and cultural diversity. "How to build a common national Identity without suppressing ethnic and religious diversity? How to nurture feelings of trust and solidarity in mass societies where people share little in common? How to foster a vibrant public sphere that encourages civic participation and democratic dialogue? How to support family life without imposing traditional gender roles? How to educate children to be public-spirited citizens without inculcating a narrow chauvinism?" According to Kymlicka communitarianism is able to construct a structure that can balance among the diversity of culture, trust issues and pluralism which is based on equality and fairness.

### **Liberal Theories of Justice and Their Limitations**

Kymlicka tries to say that many communitarians agree with John Rawls for his theory of justice, they claim that liberals misinterpreted the justice as ahistorical and as an external ground to live a life in every society. He believes that utilitarians, liberal egalitarians, and libertarians is not going to the path of the subject matter of justice but they think that their theory of justice can give a good society to live amicably. "Indeed, this potential for conflict with local beliefs is sometimes seen by liberals as the point of discussing justice. Theories of justice provide a standpoint for questioning our beliefs, and for ensuring that they are not merely local prejudices." He brought the concept of Ronald Dworkin who says that at the end political theory will be unable to make its contribution for the govern in ourselves, the impulses which are the reason of our pull back in our own culture. Our own cultures are tends towards the generality which reflect the genuine knowledge of our culture as well as the traditional distinction of the culture.

For Dworkin justice should be our critic, not our mirror. If we see again in Michael Walzer's universal theory of justice which is being misguided, there is no anything as approaches external to the community and no way to step outside the history and culture. For Walzer if we want to identify the criteria of justice then need to understand the values of social goods. In regards to the form of cultural relativism Kymlicka says that there are two common objections to communitarians in order to define justice which community's shared understanding. Firstly, cultural relativism violates one of our profound collective cooperation of the behaviour of others. Cultural relativism claims that slavery is wrong if our society can not prove it. Its wrongness is not due to the product of our collective understanding to others in a social context. Secondly, it is unable to define the justice for the weak and marginalized people if we can not raise the voice for eloquent people and powerful people.

## Debating Neutrality and the Politics of the Common Good

“*Communitarians object to the neutral state.*” They believe that neutral state should be conducted for the ‘politics of the common good’. So the contrast between ‘politics of neutrality’ and communitarians ‘politics of common good’ might mislead. We can see the presence of common good in the liberal politics since it is the aim of liberal politics to deal with the promoting of interest of the members of community. “In liberal society the common good is the outcome of a process of combining preferences, all of which will be counted equally and in this society common good is adjusted to fit the pattern of preferences and conceptions of good held by individuals.” In a communitarian society the common good is considered as the substantive conception of good life which denotes the ‘community’s way of life’. Here common good not only adjust the pattern of people’s consideration but also evaluate this good. “The community’s way of life forms the basis for a public ranking of conceptions of the good, and the weight given to an individual’s preferences depends on how much she conforms or contributes to this common good. A communitarian state can and should encourage people to adopt conceptions of the good that conform to the community’s way of life, while discouraging conceptions of the good that conflict with it.” According to Kymlicka “a communitarian state is a perfectionist state” because it involves a public ranking of the different value of different ways of life. Now a question arise, why should we prefer this ‘politics of common good’ over liberal neutrality? For Kymlicka, people’s self respect is important issues in the state neutrality but communitarians rejects both view of self determination and state neutrality, for communitarians the human existing practices are the matter of good ranks.

### Will Kymlicka on the Limits of the Liberal Self

Communitarians talk about the unencumbered self. According to liberals the individual is free to ask questions regarding their participation in the social practices and have choice to opt out of them. But as a result, individual are not defined by their membership in any particular economic, religious, sexual or recreational relationship as they are free to question and reject any particular relationship. Rawls says ‘the self is prior to the ends which are affirmed by it’, it means that we have choice to set back from any particular situation and whether we want to continue this or not. Kantian view on self is important since he says that self is prior to it’s social role and relationship and is free to hold the social situation at a distance and justify them according to the rule of reason. But communitarians object it by saying that this is the false notion on the self. For them, self can not be embedded or situated in existing social practices that we can not always set back and opt out of them. We need to be mindful that our social roles and relationship must be taken as givens for the purpose of personal deliberation. Kymlicka considers “three arguments against the liberal account of the self and it’s end; the liberal view of self are (1) Is empty; (2) violates our self-perceptions; (3) ignores our embeddedness in communal practice.” For Taylor, freedom of choice is inherent in liberalism and self is empty but Taylor rejects this emptiness of self, he says that there should be projects that is worth pursuing and worth fulfilling. “The best defence of individual freedoms is not necessarily the most direct one, but the one which best accords with the way that people on reflection understand the value of their lives. And if we look at the value of freedom in this way, then it seems that freedom of choice, while central to a valuable life, is not the value which is centrally pursued in such a life.” Kymlicka tries to assert that freedom of choice is necessary along with value of life which makes a way of life for the community, culture and good society, individual freedom for him is direct one which is based on the understanding the values of life. Taylor has pointed out that we can acquire freedom of choice in the community only by dealing with communal values as ‘authoritative horizons’ which ‘set goals for us’. “We can and should acquire our tasks through freely made personal judgements about the cultural structure, the matrix of understandings and

alternatives passed down to us by previous generations, which offers us possibilities we can either affirm or reject.” Since we have some constitutive possibilities as ends, for him our lives betterment is not because of having the needed to be selected but by having the conditions needed to an awareness of these constitutive possibilities as ends. Here Sandel asserts that a politics of common good by manifesting these shared constitutive ends being worth us to ‘know a good in common that we can not know alone’. Kymlicka tries to clear the standpoint on self between Sandel and Rawls. Sandel points out that self is constituted by its ends and the boundaries of the self are fluid, on the other hand Rawls asserts that self is prior to its ends and its boundaries are fixed previously. So contrast with liberal view of the communitarians on embeddedness of self, communitarians says that liberal view is a deception in the sense that communitarians view is the self is embedded in communal roles incorporates but liberal view is independent of them, communitarians view is practical reasoning as a method of ‘self-discovery’ incorporates on the other hand liberal view is that self is a method of judgement and choice. For Kymlicka the difference is merely semantic. Kymlicka tries to say that if we accept that the people have the choice to criticize and reject the traditions norms or the values of the society then somehow people will stop to asking the question of communal values which will focus only a single ‘common good’. “We can and should acquire our tasks through freely made personal judgements about the cultural structure, the matrix of understandings and alternatives passed down to us by previous generations, which offers us possibilities we can either affirm or reject.”

Kymlicka thought that in terms of define the communitarian that there might be different objections will raise that we are unable to describe communal ends as the authoritative, it is needed since liberals have false view on self. . “Our self is at least partly constituted by ends we haven’t chosen, but which we discover by virtue of our being embedded in some shared social context.” Kymlicka called the claim two different arguments of Sandel for the encumbered self as ‘self perception’ and the embedded self argument. Self perception is the deepest self understanding of a community which he says that it is incompatible with Rawlsian understanding of the self. But the issue is that Nozick and Sandel, for them we don’t perceive our selves as being essentially unencumbered. Michelle Sandel says in his article *The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self* ‘to identify any characteristics as my aims, ambitions, desire and so on, is always to imply some subject me standing behind them at a certain distance.’ Kymlicka take the position of Rorty who says self as a kind of ‘substrate’ lying behind our ends which is propertyless thing, a disembodied. “no end or goal is exempt from possible re-examination. For re-examination to be meaningfully conducted we must be able to see our self encumbered with different motivations than we now have, in order that we have some reason to choose one over another as more valuable for us”. What has given to the self that can change over the course of lifetime. In the communitarian society Government should encourage the certain values which is concerned with community and discourage the non-conforming as if government should ensure that our judgements are made out by society. Kymlicka thinks that this the powerful motive for the communitarians and it will be the reason of worry for the liberals. To explain this Kymlicka criticized both Taylor and Sandel as Taylor says that individual choice is logically empty and for Sandel individual choice presupposes a mistaken self-understanding. “No one’s life goes well if led according to values they’ve chosen but don’t really believe in, and the confirmation of others is needed for firm belief. No one disputes the importance of securing the social preconditions of self-respect – i.e. the conditions which give a person ‘the secure conviction that his conception of the good, his plan of life, is worth carrying out.’” Kymlicka holds that self respect is also important for the firm belief which is the essence of a community, this should be secured by government I a state. The secure conviction is also necessary to give a good life for the citizens what communitarians claim and that would be the worthy dealing.

If we see communitarian perspective of justice they try to bridge the broken relationship between the individuals and the community. Communitarianism introduced the concept of situated self against the liberal isolated self. Communitarianism emphasis on politics of right rather than common good. As it is said that Rawls describes justice as the first virtue of social institutions. According to communitarianism rights implies virtue, when we accept good it takes care of the community. MacIntyre, a British Philosopher in his work *After Virtue*(1981) points out the limitations of Rawls theory of justice. He says that individual as the autonomous moral agent, disconnected from the society, community and culture but he can flourish himself within the context of socially established cooperative human activity which is basically an opportunity for the individual to show his excellence. MacIntyre tries to say that liberals are moral relativist who detached the individual from the practice of the particular tolerance. Michael Walzer, an ardent exponent of social communitarian who rejects the universal and transcendental principles of justice. He tries to establish the distributive justice on shared social meanings of good. Walzer in his book *Spheres of Justice* points out the communitarians issue against the Rawls distributive justice. For him no system of justice can claim that it is inherently just or unjust. According to Bhargava and Acharya the distribution of things can not be decided without an understanding of the specific meanings of those things which are socially constructed and embedded in the community, its practices and institutions rather than individual deeds and thought. Walzer introduced the idea of 'shared social meanings of goods' and 'complex equality' in the sense of distributive justice. Former claims that the just distribution is determined of any goods by specific social meanings and which is shared by the members of a society. Later claims that no citizen's standing in one sphere or with regard to one social good and even the social life should be undermined by another as well. So the distribution of the social goods which are based on their specific meanings and contexts rather than aiming for a unchanging equality across the entire spheres. For Walzer, people are culture producing creatures. They are the agents of the continuation of culture and they come together to live amicably so that they created religion, culture, tradition and the languages. They design their lifestyle, the values and the different ideas and find the social meanings.

### **Communitarian Anxiety over Social Fragmentation and Institutional Decline**

Kymlicka asserts that communitarianism involves basically two types of line of argument which are giving different type of political purport. The first line of argument claims that there is the relationship between the self and it's ends. For Kymlicka communitarian idea of 'constitutive ends' and 'embedded self' play a role as an alternative to the liberal view of rational revisability, this doctrine mainly such a conservative theory because it limits the ability of individuals to questions and or reject the tradition and practices of the oppressive groups which are considered as unsatisfactory. The leaders of this groups who are fundamentalist ethnic or religious groups can find these idea as attractive but it is difficult or doubtful for the many communitarians who endorses the liberal view. For Kymlicka as a result it leads to the straw man arguments for the debate on self and It's ends. The second line of argument, it describes that what are the things at needed for the social context for individual freedom. For Kymlicka it also take sometimes the form of straw man arguments because liberals believe in the atomism and denying the social thesis. In the politics of communitarianism there are several political issues, the are concerned with the relationship between unity and diversity. "To oversimplify, we could say that liberals accept and indeed welcome the fact that citizens in modern societies have adopted an increasingly wide range Of different and often competing conceptions of the good life, and view this diversity of ends as a source of cultural richness and individual autonomy. Communitarians, by contrast, are more anxious about the proliferating diversity of ends in modern societies, and its impact on social unity and the ability of groups to come together to accomplish shared goals." Kymlicka tries to show that liberal has nicely pointed out that citizens of the modern societies have different approach and have the tendency of the competition for the good life. On the other hand communitarians

emphasis on the diversity of the end in modern societies which teaches social unity and the togetherness of the groups for the shared goals. According to Kymlicka communitarians believe that social unity can be sustained by such a weak bond as the shared principles of justice and they fear regarding the balance between diversity and unity can not be lost. Sense of anxiety is also a crucial point or characteristic of contemporary communitarianism because it fears of the decline or failure of various social institutions whether it be the family, neighbourhood association, media, schools or churches. Basically the term 'communitarian' used to denote anyone who is anxious about the prior conditions of the social institutions. On the other hand liberals focused on protecting individual's civil liberties and access to economic resources, communitarians assert the destiny of our social institutions and their abilities to generate a sense of ethical community. "If communitarians share this anxiety that the relationship between diversity and unity is out of kilter, they disagree about how to re-establish the balance." Communitarianism has the tension of the modern societies since it is fragmented into different cultures, groups, ethnic community which disrupts the unity.

## Conclusion

Will Kymlicka's analysis of communitarianism provides a nuanced which is corrective to the atomistic individualism of liberal theory. By distinguishing "backward-looking" from the "forward-looking", Kymlicka argues that community can remain significance for the personal identity without sacrificing individual choice or cultural pluralism. The Communitarians critique to "unencumbered self" by advocating that our deepest self-understanding are shaped by shared histories, languages and practices; yet Kymlicka rightly insists that these constitutive contexts should be open for rational revision and democratic contestation .

Kymlicka doesn't try to insist on liberty and community rather he focuses to reconcile them. A politics of common good do not need a coercive perfection, instead of, it can nurture the social pre-conditions like self-respect, trust, civic solidarity, and mutual recognition – while protecting the minority rights and dissenting voices. Kymlicka mentions that communitarianism should be forward-looking that can enrich liberalism rather than replace it. So, balancing diversity and unity remains a ongoing democratic process that one can demand both liberal commitment to justice and the communitarians approach that justice itself flourishes only within vibrant, reflective communities .

Eventually, Kymlicka's understanding underscores that the tension between unity and diversity is not problem to solved once and for all but an ongoing challenge in a multination state, specially in democratic societies. A just society must continuously negotiate the balance between social meanings and respecting cultural pluralism. By reconciling the insights of communitarianism within liberal framework, Kymlicka provides a solution of a society where individuals are free and socially connected , and where justice is grounded not merely in abstract notions but also in the lived experiences of communities.

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