Communitarianism: A Corrective or an Alternative?*

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Öz: Varlık, bilgi ve değer düzlemlerinde tartışmaya açtığı meselelere ilişkin yorumları; komüniteryan düşüncenin, cari ahlaki-siyasi gerçekliğimizi tesis eden liberal kabul ve faraziyelerin kayda değer bir alternatifi olabileceğini göstermektedir. Fakat literatürde komüniteryanizmin liberal düşüncenin bir alternatifi olarak incelendiği söylemek pek de mümkün değildir. Ona biçilen rol, daha ziyade, liberal düşüncenin aşırılıklarını törpüleyecek bir düzelticisi olmasıdır. Bu makale, komüniteryanizmi liberalizmin bir düzelticisi değil, ona alternatif bir düşünce sistemi olarak yeniden yorumlamayı amaçlar. Makalenin temel iddiası, tıpkı liberalizm gibi komüniteryanizmin de müstakil bir siyaset felsefesi olarak okunabileceğidir. Bu iddia, makalede, komüniteryan düşünürlerin liberalizme yönelik eleştirilerini de doğurup besleyen özgün bir felsefi zeminin -bir diğer ifadeyle komüniteryan eleştiriyi "komüniteryan" kılan birtakım temel kabul ve varsayımların- mevcudiyetiyle temellendirilmeye çalışılır. Bu bağlamda makale, komüniteryanların liberalizm eleştirilerine odaklanmak yerine; komüniteryan düşüncenin ontolojik, epistemolojik ve aksiyolojik temellerini açığa çıkaran bir inceleme vaat etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Siyaset felsefesi, Komüniteryanizm, Ontoloji, Epistemoloji, Aksiyoloji

Abstract: Communitarian thought could be a noteworthy alternative to the prevailing moral-political realities established by liberal assumptions and presuppositions, as its interpretations on issues it broaches in the realms of being, knowledge, and value indicate. However, it is not entirely accurate to say that communitarianism is examined as an alternative to liberal thought in the literature. The role assigned to it is more so to serve as a corrective that moderates the extremes of liberal thought. This article aims to reinterpret communitarianism not as a corrective of liberalism, but as an alternative thought system to it. The main contention of the article is that, just like liberalism, communitarianism can indeed be read as a standalone political philosophy. This claim is sought to be grounded in the article by the existence of a unique philosophical foundation from which the criticisms of communitarian thinkers toward liberalism also emerge and are nourished - in other words, the fundamental premises and assumptions that make the communitarian critique "communitarian". In this context, rather than focusing on the critiques of communitarians against liberalism, the article offers an examination that reveals the ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations of communitarian thought.

Keywords: Political philosophy, Communitarianism, Ontology, Epistemology, Axiology

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Introduction

Communitarianism constitutes a significant line of thought in the contemporary political philosophy literature. Its interpretations on issues it broaches in the realms of being, knowledge, and value indicate that communitarian thought could be a noteworthy alternative to the prevailing moral-political reality established by liberal assumptions and presuppositions. However, it is not entirely accurate to say that communitarianism is examined in the literature as an alternative to liberal thought. It has been argued that it should be evaluated not as a positive social and political philosophy, but as a "*via negativa*" line of thought in light of its strong criticisms directed towards liberalism (Benhabib, 1992, p.70). In this context, the role assigned to communitarianism is to serve as a corrective that moderates the extremes of liberalism. Indeed, from its earliest studies, a focus on the "communitarian critique of liberalism" rather than on "communitarianism" itself is observed (see Gutmann, 1985; Mouffe, 1988; Buchanan, 1989; Hinchman, 1989; Cochran, 1989; Neal & David, 1990; Bell, 2005). Examining communitarianism as a specific set of critiques against liberalism has become a chronicled approach in the literature, even approaching an almost taken-for-granted presumption. So much so that even the extensive reference works considered as primary reference sources have merely classified and presented the criticisms that communitarians have directed at liberalism. In these works, it can be seen that moral, political, anthropological, and sociological *critiques* of communitarians targeting the liberal understanding of the unencumbered self, antisocial individualism, universalism, opposition to perfectionism, subjectivism, and the claim of moral neutrality are recorded (see Mulhall & Swift, 1992; Berten et al., 2006).

Actually, this approach in communitarianism studies is not entirely unfounded. Indeed, it is a fact that the emergence of communitarian thought corresponds to the productive debate atmosphere initiated by John Rawls's publication of *A Theory of Justice* (1971). A group of philosophers consisting of Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael J. Sandel, Michael Walzer, and Charles Taylor quickly began to be referred to as "communitarians." Interestingly, none of these figures claimed to be communitarians during the debates were ongoing. In fact, they have even expressed their discomfort with this label and have tried to distance themselves from such attributions (see Sandel, 1998, p.ix; Taylor, 1989a, p.159; MacIntyre, 1994, p.302; Walzer, 1994, p.103). Nevertheless, it is possible to say that there is a significant consensus in the literature regarding highlighting these four names when discussing communitarianism (see Shapiro, 1995, p.145; Vincent, 2007, p.155; Heywood, 2004, p.36; Cochran, 1989; Tomasi, 1991, p.521; Buchanan, 1989, p.852; Lutz, 2000, p.11; Frazer, 1999). The

issue is that when asked what makes these four philosophers communitarian, all that emerge are the aforementioned *critiques*. It is true, communitarian thinkers have strongly criticized liberalism. But does this mean they have taken on the role of a corrector to liberalism? If we can talk about the *communitarian* critique of liberalism, shouldn't there be some distinguishing factors that allow us to label these critiques as "communitarian"? Just as we can study liberalism independently from the *ancien regime*, can't we consider communitarianism as a separate research topic?

This article aims to reinterpret communitarianism not as a corrective of liberalism, but as an alternative thought system to it. The main contention of the article is that, just like liberalism, communitarianism can indeed be read as a positive political philosophy. This claim is sought to be grounded in the article by the existence of a unique philosophical foundation from which the criticisms of communitarian thinkers toward liberalism also emerge and are nourished - in other words, the fundamental premises and assumptions that make the communitarian critique "communitarian". In this context, rather than focusing on the critiques of communitarians against liberalism, the article promises an examination that reveals the ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations of communitarian thought.

Communitarian Ontology: The Priority of Society

In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls (1971) reinterprets a method familiar from the contractualist tradition in political philosophy on a more egalitarian ground. He believes that if a contractual environment can be established where everyone is genuinely in an equal position, the principles of justice that will regulate social life will naturally emerge and will be unanimously accepted. To achieve this, Rawls redesigns the "original position" to be fortified with the "veil of ignorance". This is because individuals, who will be parties to the contract, must first be purified from the burdens imposed by history (and in some cases by fortune) to duly determine the principles of justice: They need to be deprived of knowledge of their current place and class in society, as well as their natural assets and abilities such as intelligence, strength, beauty; values they care about, and even their psychological inclinations (Rawls, 1971, p.12). In other words, in the original position, individuals should not have knowledge of any attributes that characterize them. After all, these are contingent. No one has chosen to be born into a low-income family, to be ugly, weak, or psychologically vulnerable.

Rawls' attempt to discuss justice on a fairer ground has exposed some fundamental assumptions and presuppositions of liberal thought that have been debated from

its very beginning. In this context, it is accepted that the depiction of the individual behind the veil of ignorance provides a strong representation of the understanding of being in liberalism. A pure "I" subject free from all given conditions of life, a perception of self that comes before society and his/her goals, prevails here. (Sandel, 1984, pp.86-87). Nothing that I didn't choose, neither my place in society nor the values expected to guide the arrangement of my life, not even my biological features, are binding for *me*. Only in this way is it assumed that I can be a free and independent entity, that is, an individual.[1]

Unlike liberalism which attributes ontological priority to the individual against society, communitarianism possesses an understanding of being that emphasizes society comes before the individual. Communitarian thinkers argue that people cannot have an autonomous existence isolated from the society they belong to. At best, this could be the subject of a bad utopia. It is not possible to come across such people in real life (Walzer, 2005, p.1; Walzer, 1984, p.326). In this context, communitarians emphasized that the autonomous individual, which entered our lives with the dominance of liberalism, is a fiction belonging to liberal thought. Just because we think that we are independent and isolated individuals today does not mean that this has always been the case. On the contrary, considering thousands of years of human history this is a fairly new phenomenon, not even in its infancy yet. As a matter of fact, Alexis de Tocqueville (2011, p.91), one of the first witnesses of the change in our understanding of being, stated that his ancestors did not recognize a word like *individualism*. Because in their time, there is no "individual" who could think of himself/herself alone, outside of a certain belonging. At the core, communitarians try to remind us of this truth that the current liberal political discourse obscures. Taylor (2004, p.64), for instance, argued that our first understanding about ourselves is deeply embedded in society. So, contrary to what liberals assume, we haven't realized our sociality over time starting as lone individuals. Our understanding of ourselves as free individuals has been a matter of a much later stage in history.

MacIntyre (1984) also emphasized that in traditional societies, people are recognized through the social groups to which they belong. In these societies, being someone's son, daughter, brother or cousin, or having a lineage from a family, tribe or clan is considered an essential element of my individual existence. Because these are not attributes that I can accidentally possess or give up at will. Each of them has a decisive role in my identity. MacIntyre demonstrates that

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1   At this point, it should be noted that Rawls revised many of his ideas presented in *A Theory of Justice* in his later published work, *Political Liberalism*. See Rawls, 1993.

this way of thinking, which he calls the "classical view of man", extends back to heroic societies where individuals found their places in the chain of being within a completely determined system of roles. This understanding, inherited from the ancient world and found its counterpart in Muslim, Jewish and Christian societies throughout the Middle Ages, was widely adopted by vast numbers of people and became decisive until the modern period. Accordingly, from the moment people are conceived, they are aware that they are stepping onto a stage that is not organized by them. In other words, people are, in a sense, involved in a narrative that is already ongoing. Even if they appear as the main characters in their own dramas, each individual has various supporting roles in the dramas of others. Thus, all these narratives are actually intertwined (MacIntyre, 1984, pp.213-214). Communitarian thought claims that the meaning of our individual lives is hidden in this commonality. The place allocated to us in the common narrative of which we are a part also determines the direction of our lives.

When explained in this way, communitarians might seem like they are trying to revive an ontology that has long since expired. However, it is not necessary to refer to historical examples for the understanding of being in communitarian thought. Although the investigations and descriptions of ancient societies by communitarian thinkers provide important clues about communitarian ontology, simply looking more closely at the reality we are experiencing *here and now* will suffice. Communitarians point out that not much has changed in our ontological status from the past to the present. What has changed is the way we perceive being, and therefore, ourselves. Yes, the classical view of man that attributes purposefulness to our existence might indeed have lost its validity in the eyes of the masses. But, this does not mean that we begin to shape our lives entirely with our individual choices and determine our own destinations. Walzer (1990, p.15) emphasizes that even in today's liberal societies, people are born as members of specific social groups: Everyone is equipped with given identities such as male or female, worker or employer, Catholic or Jew, black or white, democrat or republican. We haven't chosen any of these identities. Moreover, these identities we acquire from society also affect the choices we make later, even if we are not aware of it. In this sense, many of the things we see as our voluntary choices are, according to him, merely expressions of our underlying hidden identities. We cannot escape this. Individuals who remain outside the established relationship networks in society or who are included in them only by their own choice do not exist, nor can they exist in any imaginable form of sociality (Walzer, 1984, p.324).

Therefore, the ideal of the free individual in liberal thought is nothing but an illusion. We do not participate in social life through our own choice. Society is not an instrumental form of association constructed by the will of individuals unlike what

liberalism assumes. On the contrary, it is society that constructs individuals. Thus, in a sense, we are all products of the societies to which we belong. In this context, emphasizing that we always *find* ourselves within specific cultural, religious, national, and linguistic communities, Walzer (2005, p.x), argues that society cultivates not only our identity but also the values that we pass on to our children without seeking their consent. In a parallel interpretation, Sandel (1998, p.179) also mentions certain affiliations such as being members of "this family or community or nation or people", being the "bearers of this history", being the "sons or daughters of that revolution", or being "citizens of this republic" as constitutive commitments. For this reason, ignoring the society to which I belong does not liberate me; on the contrary, it makes me shallow. As a matter of fact, these are the characteristics that make me who I am. I cannot ignore them. If I attempt this, what remains of me? Communitarians have argued that turning away from the society to which I belong would mean denying myself. To them, this is a kind of an identity crisis. Because our identities, which inform us of who we are, are intrinsically tied to "where we're coming from" (Taylor, 1994, p.33). The person we are, that is, the place we currently occupy in the world, cannot be thought of as detached from the route we took to get there. Society is the obligatory starting point for every individual.

Communitarian Epistemology: The Contextuality of Understanding

Emphasis on society has long been seen in liberal thought as an obstacle to individual enlightenment that needs to be overcome. According to liberals, individuals should be freed from the limiting effects of the thoughts and values that dominate social life in order to have a broader perspective on life. To achieve this, individuals should be encouraged to use their own reason. Because every individual has the potential to reach the universal principles of rationality. If people have not yet met on the grounds of universal rationality, the culprit is none other than the established order that continuously reproduces itself. Liberalism holds a strong belief that this vicious cycle will end if individuals succeed in thinking without being influenced by others. Accordingly, when individuals transcend the relational networks they are part of and become liberated, social life can be grounded in a rational basis under the dominion of universal principles. Rawls' search for the principles of justice that will regulate social life behind the veil of ignorance is a product of such a mindset. If it is desired to achieve universally accepted principles, all contingencies encountered in social life must be ignored. Because these are particular experiences that can vary from place to place. Principles that will be accepted by all humanity are not to be derived from these. The claim of universality necessitates a more solid foundation. The hypothetical original position provides this needed foundation. Rawls sees no reason to doubt

that individuals, abstracted from societal contexts, will agree on certain principles.

Communitarians problematize the possibility of this understanding of knowledge that claims universality. Just like the individual that is prior to society, universal reason in this form is also just a premise, an assumption inherent to liberal thought. After all, it is neither philosophically grounded in the realm of thought nor can it be validated within life itself. Indeed, how can individuals who are always born as members of a particular society be sure that the knowledge they acquire is universal at the end of the day? Do we have a criterion to test this? Who is the judge that will rule on universality? Starting from these questions, communitarian thinkers have developed an understanding of knowledge that emphasizes context against liberalism's claims of universal rationality. Essentially, this is a result of society's ontological priority over the individual. According to them, our understanding of things begins to take shape in society, which is the environment in which we encounter reality, from the very first moment. In this sense, we owe even the act of thinking itself to the society we belong to. However, this does not mean that communitarian thinkers advocate for the epistemic tyranny of society. They remind us that if there is a path to universal thought, it also passes through society. In other words, although it originates from the experience of leaving the cave, we do not have to break our connection with the society we live in and isolate ourselves from it in order to gain a more encompassing perspective. We can also philosophize by interpreting our shared world of meaning together with its other inhabitants and continue our search for a comprehensive understanding. Communitarians believe that this latter approach is a more realistic method and more aligned with our existential experience. Moreover, according to them, distancing ourselves from the social world we belong to on a conceptual level is not very possible anyway (Walzer, 1983, p.xiv).

The fact that we are linguistic beings can be a good starting point to understand this issue, because language makes thought possible. Proceeding from this, communitarian thinkers often refer to debates in the philosophy of language when developing their ideas. For instance, Taylor (1985, pp.234-235) emphasized that a language can never be just *my* language; it necessarily requires the existence of others who speak that language. In this sense, language is always *our* language. We acquire it through mutual conversational practice and likewise pass it on to those after us. Human life in this continuity exhibits a dialogic character. What enables us to engage in dialogue with others is sharing a common world of meaning. Therefore, language, thought, and meaning are not things independent of our social life practice. As a matter of fact, it is the context embodied in social life that gives life to these. "The meaning of certain terms and expressions can only be made clear if we understand them as occurring in the context of these activities," Taylor writes, because "meaning can

only be explicated by situating language in the matrix of our concerns, practices and activities, in short by relating it to our 'form of life'" (Taylor, 1979, p.163). Communitarian thought claims that if the context provided by society is disregarded, meaning will also evaporate. I can only think and rationalize my actions within a specific social context. Outside of this, one cannot speak of a self-evident rationality. At least it is not something accessible for humans. Because our language, even if we don't realize it, has already determined our horizon of meaning.[2]

In this context, MacIntyre (1984, p.216) draws attention to the fact that our relationship with knowledge starts with the stories and tales told to us in our childhood: We come to the world as a member of a certain society. We must learn the meaning of our thoughts and behaviors in order to anticipate how they will be understood and interpreted in our relationships with other people we encounter in social life. For this reason, from our childhood, we listen to stories about wicked stepmothers, inherently good but deceived kings, or younger children who couldn't get their deserved inheritance and had to fend for themselves versus elder children who squandered their inheritance and fell into poverty. We learn about our social roles, the nature of things, and the course of the world from these tales. The stories and tales we were told give us an *understanding*. According to MacIntyre (2006, p.7), our entire epistemological experience consists of the construction and reconstruction of these narratives. In this sense, thinking is essentially a social activity (MacIntyre, 2006, p.179). Therefore, it is inevitable that different societies think differently from each other. So, it is not surprising that children who grow up with different stories perceive and interpret the world in very different ways. What is hard to understand is the claim of objectivity and universality in liberal thought. Communitarians have emphasized that where we stand will be determinative of the conclusions we reach. Every viewpoint is a view from *somewhere*, a specific point. Just because something seems meaningless when taken out of its context doesn't mean it is irrational in itself. A thought that doesn't make sense to us might be widely accepted in another society.

But, do people who belong to the same society always live in harmony? Aren't there disagreements from time to time even among children raised with the same stories? What should I do when I am in conflict with my own society? Communitarian thinkers have argued that the problems encountered in social life should be resolved within its own context. Walzer (1993) calls this "connected" or "immanent" critique. Accordingly, each society should be judged by the concepts and values arising from

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2   In this regard, Taylor's (1989b, pp.35-36) observation is notable: "I may develop an original way of understanding myself and human life, at least one which is in sharp disagreement with my family and background. But the innovation can only take place from the base in our common language."

its own world of meaning; if there are aspects that need to be criticized, they should be criticized by considering its own standards. As a matter of fact, in the absence of objective and universal principles that would align different societies, any intervention from outside would be the imposition of a different form of understanding belonging to another context. This is also the case with the criticism of members who have somehow widened the distance between themselves and their own society. The society does not pay heed to the "enlightened" intellectual figure's efforts to "awaken" his people by assimilating "universal" principles or some external thought. Yes, criticism always requires a critical distance. But this distance should be finely tuned to measure just inches (Walzer, 1993, pp.57-64). Walzer also carries this approach to the debate on justice. According to him, since social goods can have different meanings in different societies, justice should also be subject to context. That is, what determines what is just and what is unjust is the thought and meaning world of the society. If hierarchy is identified with the meaning world of a society, even the caste system can be just (Walzer, 1983, pp. 313-314). For a *just society*, first and foremost, the existence of *a society* is necessary. Just as there are no persons-by-themselves, there is also no justice on its own, independent (contextless) from society.

Communitarian Axiology: The Impersonality of Good

Communitarians have pointed out that the attempt to transcend context has created some moral costs. In this framework, MacIntyre (1984, p.62) argues that Enlightenment thought, which devalues all moral resources existing in social life, has failed to substitute new values in place of the teleological and theological legacy it denies. Unfortunately, there is also no basis left to make the old moral rules binding again. MacIntyre apothegmatically describes the situation modern moral thought finds itself in as akin to a post-apocalyptic state. According to him, "What we possess (...) are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived" (MacIntyre, 1984, p.2). Therefore, it seems that all we have left today are individuals who see themselves as the sole moral authority. The failure of the Enlightenment project resulted in all value-containing judgments being seen as expressions of individual preferences. Today, it is argued that if one goes back far enough, one realizes that all moral teachings in history ultimately rest on an individual will.

This idea has been institutionalized and implemented in the political arena through the agency of liberalism (MacIntyre, 1988, p.343). However, liberalism is not merely an implementer. It is readily apparent that contemporary representatives of liberal thought indirectly or directly support this view with theoretical justifications.

For instance, behind Rawls' veil of ignorance, as one might recall, we are expected to renounce not only our place and identity in society but also the values that determine the direction of our lives and give them meaning. This is precisely a trade-off: We have to give up our own understanding of a good life for the sake of universal principles of justice. Because from this perspective, one can speak of universal rights, but there is no universal good. Goods are always relative since they are the goods of certain individuals. Therefore, it is thought that conflicting understandings of the good shouldn't be allowed to dominate social life. As a result, liberalism has come to the conclusion that it would be more feasible to come together around minimal but unanimously accepted principles rather than engage in endless debates about whose good will prevail. According to this, social consensus should be based on rights (justice) rather than the good (morality). The main idea in social life must be to provide an equal space for different understandings of the good. With this in mind, it is stated that liberalism adopts a kind of proceduralism that is neutral towards all moral views (Sandel, 1984). Morality is now entirely left to the initiative of individuals. Every individual is free to choose their own good.

Communitarians propose an understanding of morality that emphasizes the impersonality of the good, as opposed to liberalism's approach that limits morality to individual preferences. According to them, morality cannot be reduced to individual choices. Just because it is chosen doesn't make something inherently good. On the contrary, we always make our choices in accordance with certain conceptions of good (and therefore bad). In this context, communitarian thought underlines that we inherit our goods, like our identities, from the society in which we were born. In a sense, our moral repertoire has already been largely predetermined by the society to which we belong. Our actions often take place within the framework of these implicit understandings of the good, of which we might not even be aware. Even though they are not articulated, they are taken for granted and have become a faculty. Taylor defines these as "strong evaluations" that reside in the background of our social existence. According to him, our very formation as moral agents is conditioned on the existence of these criteria (Taylor, 1985, pp.34-35). This is to say that we would not be beings who make choices if we had no standard of judgment. Because in such a situation, a choice cannot be spoken of. A choice is only a choice if there is a criterion of evaluation between the options. In the absence of any criterion to base our judgments on, what is at hand would be merely arbitrary and random. Therefore, in an environment where no option is truly more preferable than another, I cannot say I made a (moral) choice. Being able to speak of my individual goods is conditioned on the existence of impersonal goods independent of me.

So, what needs to be done is not to ignore the impersonal goods intrinsic to social life, but to reveal and clarify them. Starting from this point, communitarians draw attention to the fact that the moral relativity that has dominated our lives along with liberalism impoverishes our experience of social life day by day. As a matter of fact, the goods that are about to be abandoned today on the grounds that they cannot be universalized are essentially our moral resources that guide us and make it meaningful for us to live together (Sandel, 1996, p.23).[3] According to them, these not only provide the *common goods* that regulate our coexistence but also make our individual lives meaningful with the moral map they offer. On the other hand, saying that our moral map is shaped within a certain sociality does not mean that we should be content with it. It is true, communitarians have emphasized that society provides us with the impersonal goods we need to be moral agents. However, as they also pointed out, society is only a starting point. What remains in moral matters is the pursuit itself. In this context, MacIntyre (1984, p.219, 221) writes, "the good life for man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man", and he adds, "[w]ithout those moral particularities [we acquire from society] to begin from there would never be anywhere to begin; but it is in moving forward from such particularity that the search for the good, for the universal, consists."

As can be seen from here, while communitarians emphasize the impersonal goods that guide social life against the idea of individual good in liberalism, they do not simply identify morality with society. Their emphasis is that morality is not merely an individual experience. For this reason, communitarian thinkers have valued and encouraged moral discussions in social life, contrary to liberalism's efforts to minimize these discussions. Sandel (2012, pp.13-14) claims, contrary to the liberal perspective that identifies the problem in modern societies as individuals with strong moral beliefs imposing their conception of good on others, that the problem arises not from the abundance but rather from the scarcity of moral discussions. According to him, reducing controversial issues to the level of individual preferences and making them invisible in social life is not a solution. Similarly, Walzer (1993, p.32) writes, "morality (...) is something we have to argue about." Because, regardless of its origin, at the end of the day, we have nothing but different moral traditions and communities arguing about them. The diversity and multiplicity of conceptions of the good do not require us to abandon their guidance altogether. Discussing the good is essential not only for maintaining social life in harmony but also for our

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3   Taylor (1997, p.179, 182-183) also argued that the fact that an action cannot be universally justified does not necessarily mean that it cannot guide us.

very moral perfection. Indeed, moral excellence, as MacIntyre points out (1988, p.346), requires a desire to move beyond the known goods while acting towards them. In this context, communitarian thought not only emphasizes the social basis of morality but also revives the search for universal moral standards by placing it on a more reasonable plane.

Conclusion

The massive literature complaining about the negative effects of liberal individualism dates back to the early nineteenth century. Tocqueville (2012, pp.881-882) had determined, as early as 1835, that individualism abstracted people from society and caused erosion in public virtues. By the end of the century, we see that Emile Durkheim (2005, p.167) claimed that the notion of individuals isolated from society brought the end of social solidarity. Today, some contemporary thinkers state that liberal individualism is now damaging to liberalism itself. For instance, William Connolly (1981, p.102) points out that liberalism is a destructive thought that consumes the civic virtues it needs; in the same context, Zygmunt Bauman (2001, pp.48-49) describes the individual as the worst enemy of the citizen. Perhaps partly for this reason, communitarianism is understood and interpreted as a corrective to liberalism. However, we can say that the communitarian correction to liberalism is more of a wish rather than a real possibility.

Communitarianism and liberalism start from completely opposite assumptions regarding being, knowledge, and value. In other words, the distinction between these two thoughts stems from the most fundamental issues. Communitarianism gives ontological priority to society, whereas the individual takes priority over society in the liberal thought. Naturally, this distinction also differentiates the epistemological and axiological assumptions of communitarian and liberal thought. While communitarians emphasize that knowledge is acquired within a social context; liberals argue that the autonomous agent, through his own rational capacity, can achieve a universal understanding of knowledge that is equally valid for everyone. However, when it comes to morality, this time liberalism argues that only the individual can determine his own goods, and in this sense, there are no impersonal goods independent of individuals. Communitarianism, on the other hand, once again emphasizes the social dimension of our existence and highlights the impersonal common good inherent in social life. All of this proves that communitarianism is more of an alternative to liberalism rather than a corrective.

The insights that communitarianism brings to our understanding of being, knowledge, and value can potentially resolve the issues of massification, moral-

political dissolution, anomie and alienation that arise from liberal assumptions. In a world where belonging, context and impersonality are decisive, these would only be exceptional cases. However, without a doubt, communitarianism would also bring many new challenges that liberalism currently obscures. Just like every human-conceived system of thought, it too has its areas of tension, dilemmas, and perhaps in this sense, limits. In particular, the ambiguity in communitarianism's definition of community, the heteronomy brought about by the emphasis on context, and the resulting issue of inter-social moral relativity deserve further examination. Unfortunately, discussing these is beyond the scope of this article. For now, our primary focus should be on breaking free from the veil of ignorance. Because this veil, even if we are not aware of it, actually stands as a barrier between us and the complicated issues of the human condition. Revealing communitarianism as an alternative to liberal thought is a good starting point to lift this veil.

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