COMMUNITARIANISM: THE SEARCH FOR A COMMON GOOD IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

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ABSTRACT

One version of a normative justification of liberal democracy is to believe that the laws and the procedural aspects of law making are only legitimate if basic human rights are to be given a priority. The liberal commitment to the human rights in an individual context is faced with serious challenge from communitarianism. These criticisms are mainly based on two grounds: methodological and normative. In methodological terms, communitarianism challenges the liberal concept of the individual as a rational, moral person with all the ability to choose freely. While in the normative sphere, communitarians criticise the liberal image of the individual lacking moral qualities to form a genuine community, as the state remains neutral between the concepts of good life. Communitarians firmly expressed the central role of political participation in protecting individual rights and liberties. It has been pointed out that, the enjoyment of our rights and liberties, to a greater extent, depends on a democratic institutional structure, which distributes power among the citizen body.

Having these in mind the article below critically asseses the vision of democratic politics that new communitarianism offers contrary to individually centered liberal democratic politics which is thought to be transformed.

Keywords: Liberalism, Communitarianism,Public Sphere, Political Participation

CEMAATÇİLİK: KAMUSAL ALANDA ORTAK İYİYİ ARAMAK

ÖZET

Liberal demokrasinin normatif meşruluğunun bir biçimi, yasaların ve yasa yapma süreçlerinin ancak temel insan haklarına öncelik verilmesi halinde gerçekleşebileceğini ileri sürer. Liberallerin insan haklarına bireysel bağlamdaki bu vurgusu cemaatçiler tarafından ciddi biçimde eleştiriye tabi tutulmaktadır. Bu eleştiriler esas olarak iki noktada yoğunlaşır: yöntemsel ve normatif. Yöntemsel açıdan, cemaatçiler özgür seçim yapabilme yeteneğine sahip ahlaklı ve akılcı liberal birey anlayışını eleştirirken öte yandan normatif alanda devletin iyi yaşam anlayışları karşısında yansız duruşu ile birlikte sahih cemaati kurabilecek moral yetilerden yoksun birey imgesini sorgularlar. Cemaatçiler siyasal katılımın bireysel hak ve özgürlükleri korumada merkezi bir rol oynadığını savunurlar. Bu noktada temel argumanları hak ve özgürlüklerimizin kullanımı vatandaşlar bütünü içerisinde gücü dağıtan demokratik kurumsal yapılara bağlı olduğudur.

Bu noktadan hareketle aşagıdaki makale birey merkezli liberal demokratik siyasetin dönüşmesi gereğine vurgu yapan yeni cemaatçilerin demokratik siyaset projeleri ve bu proje ile ilgili yaklaşımlarının eleştirel bir analizi yapılmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Liberalizm, Cemaatçilik, Kamusal Alan, Siyasal Katılım

INTRODUCTION

Communitarianism is the belief includes methodological and normative arguments, as well as moral and political claims.(Avineri and De-Shalit 1992:9) Allen Buchanaen distinguishes between radical and moderate communitarians. While the radical communitarian 'rejects the individual civil and political rights out of hand' the moderate one 'acknowledges individual, civil and political rights but denies that they have the sort of priority the liberals attribute to them.'(Buchanaen 1989: 855).

Central to the communitarian criticism of liberalism is the constitution of the self. For liberals, the opposition determines the nature of the relationship between the individual and society. In the framework of 'abstract individualism',(Kymlicka 1989:14) liberals understand human nature as 'a pre-social self, solitary and sometimes heroic individual in a position to confront the society whose formation was completed prior to such confrontation.'(Walzer 1990:20) Obviously this vision of individual, as an 'unencumbered self' in the words of Sandel, would be suspicious towards any 'constitutive' community which 'would engage the identity as well as the interests of the participants.'(Sandel 1982: 15)

Liberalism praises this abstract individualism in the name of liberation. However, modern communitarins such as Alasdair MacIntyre, blames the modern individualism as it abandons the idea of telos, the ultimate aim that ought to be fulfilled. Itis the principle cause of the moral chaos

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(i.e. the diversity of arbitrarily chosen, incommensurable values). Without the idea of telos, moral declarations could only be arbitrary preferences because human beings cannot know their good unless they understand their ultimate end. Human beings can neither restore a rational or objective sense of morality nor reach unity and intelligibility without any sense of what I ought to be (a telos). Communitarians perceive the liberal individualism as a search for a liberation from undesirable forms of social organisation which is believed to impose a tutelage under the banners of a theistic and teleological world order and within those hierarchical structures which attempted to legitimate themselves as part of such a world order. Therefore individualism, in the view of MacIntyre, not only undermined the hierarchical social structures, but also destroyed the teleological understanding of men as the bearers and the seekers of virtue. He thus stated:

'For what constitutes the good for man is a complete human life lived at its best, and the exercise of the virtues necessary and central part of such a life, not a mere preparatory exercise to achieve such a life. We thus cannot characterise the good for man adequately without already having made reference to the virtues.'(MacIntyre 1981:140)

MacIntyre believes that, it is impossible to know the telos when the human good is seen as prior to and independent of all social roles that help man to be a functional concept. The meaning of being a wo/men is to fill a set of roles, each of which has its own point and purpose. In this concept what determined the identiy of wo/men is, her/his roles and statutes within a well-defined and highly determinate system of roles and statutes which seems to refer to Aristotelian virtue. In his view, liberalism misrepresents, and in a way, underestimates the importance of collective experience in the formation of individual's identity and integrity. Because once the conception of role-based telos is rejected, man ceases to claim that 'I belong to this clan, that tribe, this nation ... [h]ence what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles.'(MacIntyre 1981:204-5)

FREE-RIDER ATOMISTIC SELF VERSUS MORAL SELF WITH A TELOS

Generally speaking the communitarian argument is based on the notion that liberal individualism is a misrepresentation of real life(1). A vision of the individual who chooses freely according to his or her ends is simply a false understanding. The emphasis here is given to the capacity of being a 'free-rider' that gives priority to the ends. According to Sandel, the liberal self is a person, who is an active willing agent, distinguishable from surroundings and capable of choice, alters the possibility of person's being constitutively identified himself with his ends. This liberal vision of personhood, in Sandel's view, should not be understood as the advocacy of an attractive form of moral life but it is rather a misrepresentation of the nature of moral experience. It is simply because individuals have certain roles and attachments that go beyond the obligations that any voluntary involvement or the sense of duty would demand. The identity of a person is formed through relations with others in community, be it as a member of the family, nation, or religion, as the bearers of that history, or as a citizen of the republic. By putting the self beyond the reach of self, the person that the liberal ethic pursues is invalid and incoherent rather than undesirable.

In a similar line, liberal 'atomism' argues Taylor, is the misconception of 'self' and the society. He defines 'atomism' as a doctrine of social theory which society constituted by individuals for the fulfilment of ends, which were primarily individual. Seeing society from the purely instrumentalist perspective, it defends the priority of individual and his rights over society.(Taylor 1985: 187) Liberal individualism, is one of the malaises of modernity alongside the 'instrumental reason'(Taylor 1989: 500) (2) and 'political alienation', malaises which are 'thicken the darkness around the moral ideal authenticity.' Individualism is both the cause and consequence of the loss of 'moral horizons', which are used to confer 'meaning' and 'purpose' on our lives.(Taylor 1992: 1-21)

Being critical of liberal atomism, Taylor undertakes the enterprise of assessing the communitarian concept of self. For Taylor, identity is a stand, which is defined by the commitments and identifications. It provides a ground, or a framework so to speak, for one to determine what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done or what one endorse or oppose. At this point Taylor takes a Habermasian stand and argues that, human identity can be created through dialogue in the realm of society in response to our relations, including our actual dialogues with others. Our self-identity is constituted through discursive dialogue with others in a 'common space'. What is important here is the nature of the relationship between 'We-stance' and 'I-perspectives.' When 'I' participates in discourse it reflects his/her own individual perspective. By this contribution, each and every 'I' became a 'constitutive participant' of the 'We-perspective.' However, the 'We-perspective' is greater than simply an amalgamation of 'I-perspectives', which the former is of 'prior origin'.(Taylor 1991: 27-8) Diametrically opposed

to the liberal view, for communitarians, society has primacy over individuals. Our particular identity is therefore, relevant to our common identity in both ways. As it were, community constitutes a common culture including common language.

Contrary to the solitary liberal individual, -at its best tied to his or her family, communitarians offer a 'thick' self in which the individual identity is formed 'between and beyond generations, which are not matter of choice but rather a constituent elements' of the socially and historically formed self.(Etzioni 1995: 5) Jean Bethke Elshtain defines the communitarian individual as the product of his or her particular history as well as future, a social being with responsibilities and commitment. She is, by no means lost in the community. She is still:

'Very much an individual ... who does not stand as an isolate but as a being emerging out of a dense social ground. She acknowledges that ground, with its rough edges and ill-defined boundaries, its ties that binds, its hold that paradoxically releases us into a wider world.'(Elshtain 1995: 108)

The second focal point of communitarian criticism is the normative discourse of liberalism. Communitarians suggest that, as we develop our 'self' within the realm of community one must attached some intrinsic value to the community itself and to our relations with other members of community. This sense of obligation derives from a 'particular conception of good. Sharing common values, norms and goals as opposed to individualist self, based on 'priority of right' which can be understood in following terms: First 'individual rights cannot be sacrificed for the sake of the general good.' Second 'the principles of justice that specify these rights cannot be premised on any particular vision of the good life.'(Sandel 1985: 16)

Placing human good prior to, and independent of, social roles is, in the view of McIntyre, detrimental to his or her being a functional concept. That is, because the roles and status decide the identity of an individual within a well defined and highly determinate system of roles and status. The rejection of role-based common good would bring the loss of the sense of belonging to any particular collectivity and shared aims. The absence of communal wholeness seems to be the bull's eye of the communitarian critique of liberal individualism. This 'atomising' (3) effect argues Taylor, is:

'The dark side of individualism is a centering on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society.'(Taylor 1992: 4)

COMMUNITARIAN POLITICS: DEMOCRACY OF CONNECTED MINDS

In summary, the communitarian critique focuses on the absence of the sense of 'community' constituted by virtuous individuals in even the most efficient and affluent liberal state(Wolf 1968: 183). Nevertheless, the communitarians do not deny the fact that liberals have their own conception of community, even if it is 'impoverished' like the liberal self (Fried 1983: 962). For communitarians, the liberal vision of society is one in which community is instrumental since individuals for the fulfillment of essentially individual ends form it. This criticism is not altogether groundless since Gauthier maintains that a just (liberal) society provides a 'framework for community but is not communal.'(Gauther 1986: 339). He further argues that the socialisation that it [the just society] affords its members promotes the realisation of their autonomy. At its best, the liberal conception of community is bound to figure on 'sentimentality' in liberal theory where the priority is given to the radically separate self and the plurality of persons. In the phase of Kantian liberalism and its conception of community, Sandel sees a convergence with communitarianism. However, it is contradictory to the liberal's primary concern, which radically separates the self, as well as conceives it as inviolable. He stated that:

'[T]he moral vocabulary of community in the strong sense cannot in all cases be captured by a conception that "in its theoretical bases is individualistic". Thus a "community" cannot always be translated without loss to an "association" nor an "attachment" to a "relationship", nor "sharing" to "reciprocating, nor "participation" to "co-operation" nor what is "common" to what is "collective."' (4)

In the view of the communitarians, these subcommunities are social realities and form the rich fabric of the body politic. They share the same concept of a good life, which is crucial for the integrity of cultures. Communitarians believe that sustaining the democratic form of life, depends on the presence of citizens who have the sense of responsibility to achive the quality of their common life together. In an egalitarian society, argues Gutmann, liberal isolation of the individual is reflected in the public sphere by the individual's 'lack of identification with institutions.' The liberal blindness towards different religious, sexual, ethnic identities is the consequence of the 'neutrality' of the public sphere (Gut-

mann 1994: 4). In this neutrality, what matters is our common, universalistic identity of being a human agent.

Our particular identities, liberals would argue, is politically irrelevant hence they need no recognition, since citizens share the same interests. At an individual level, this fragmentation encourages an individual's withdrawal from social life. This led the individual preoccupied with himself. The individual's experience of himself becomes more real to him than his experience of the objective social world. The result is the rise of the private sphere on the level of consciousness, which is subjective contrary to demise of the objective world of the public. As Walzer has stated, in liberal individualism:

'There is no consensus, no public meeting -of minds, on the nature of good life, hence triumph of private caprice ... We liberals are free to chose, but we have no criteria to govern our choices except our own wayward understanding of our wayward interests and desires ... liberal society ... is fragmentation in practice and community ... is the home of coherence, connection and narrative capacity.'(Walzer 1990: 8-9)

The scattered nature of individualism always carries the danger of 'dissolution and abandonment'. Referring to the Rawlsian concept of the state (social union of social unions) Walzer further argues, 'the larger union must be weak and vulnerable.' Communitarians argue therefore, that the atomisation of the individual and loose connection in social sphere is counter-productive that has resulted in 'strengthening the central state, beyond the limits that liberalism has established.' In the end, it may contradict the principles of individual rights and civil liberties, as well as state neutrality (5).
Communitarians argue that with the cultivation of the sense of community among the persons the kind of citizen that liberals take for granted flourishes. Contrary to the notion of plurality of atomistic individuals in liberal theory, Communitarians value the plurality of small or intermediate size of communities i.e. families, neighborhoods, religious organisations, labor unions, corporations, professional organisations, co-operatives, universities alike. This does not deny the fact, that in its essence, individuals are bearers of political rights. On the contrary, the communitarian individual is said to be very much an individual who is aware of its responsibilities as well as rights. The individual can, at its best, exercise of his or her rights and undertake responsibilities within their own respective communities.

For communitarians, the public sphere is the realm where the common good is determined. In this respect, the communitarian notion of the public sphere is more comprehensive than the liberal 'political' public sphere in terms of both scope and content. In contrast to the liberal public sphere, which is seen as the source of political legitimacy and the space where competing interests are resolved, the communitarian public sphere is conceived of as a function of civil society. The difference is important, since the communitarian public sphere adds the dimension of socialisation to rational discourse. In the communitarian view, the public sphere is the realm where, 'decisions are partly constituted by the common understanding of the participants.' It is crucial then that in the words of Taylor, the participants to the process of public opinion formation 'actually understand what they are doing.'(Taylor 1995: 274) This requires strong communal ties, to enable individuals to make sense of the issues related to them. Only through socialisation have individuals become the primary bearers of cultural meaning and value.

At this point, communitarians raise an objection to the liberal public/private dichotomy. As we saw, in deontology, -also many liberals share this view, public/private separation is justified by identifying the public with the political, a domain in which is governed by the coercive power of state. The private sphere is free from state coercion. Communitarians believe this is no longer the case. As Wolf has stated, regarding the private sphere, as the realm of freedom, lost much of its weight as a result of the expansion of state and market institutions. The sphere of freedom, Wolf has argued, is 'increasingly squeezed from two directions: from the one side by the bureaucracy of the administrative state and from the other by powerful determinism of markets linked together.'(Wolf 1989: 20)

The expansion of the state and the market at the expense of individual requires strong communal ties. Through membership of the various subcommunities that exist in civil society, the individual will be able to counterbalance their weakness. Unlike the liberal individual, the communitarian individual, therefore, bears a particular notion of common good that derives from his or her particular process of socialisation. The function of the public sphere appears to be the realm in which an understanding of -even if it is not always agreed- the common good emerges out of a critical discourse between these particular concepts of the common good. What participants are required to have in this public discourse of various concepts of the good life is 'intellectual solidarity.' Contrary to liberal tolerance, intellectual tolerance, in the words of Hollenbach, calls for: ['A]n engagement with the other through both listening and speaking, in the hope that unders-

tanding might replace incomprehension and that perhaps even agreement could result.'(Hollenbach 1995: 150)

As a virtue, intellectual solidarity promotes the idea of a single truth and common understanding. This in turn, Hollenbach hopes would bring 'social solidarity' in order to heel the sufferings of the less-advantaged in society. Communitarians believe their notion of public sphere is more dynamic when it comes to solving the existing injustices in society. Only then can we legitimately discuss issues like equal payment to women, abortion, and environmental issues.

Participation in public discourse is another issue that is perceived differently by liberals and communitarians. In the framework of a 'dualist democracy' liberals are in favor of restricting popular sovereignty in order to protect the hard-won individual liberties. Unlimited democracy is potentially, if not actually, totalitarian, and threatens liberal values and institutions. Liberals, according to Gutmann, are skeptical about democracy due to 'its potential for legitimating majority tyranny.'(Gutmann 1995: 154). To avoid this, Gutmann writes elsewhere, liberalism is in favor of constrained democracy, 'to protect individuals from democratic tyranny by granting them rights that can be used as moral trumps against the exercise of that authority.'(Gutmann 1983: 25).

Nevertheless, this is an insufficient justification to satisfy an advocate of participatory communitarianism, argues the liberal conception of the individual undermines the democratic practices upon which both individuals and their interests depend. From such a 'precarious' conception, no firm theory of participation can be expected to arise. Furthermore, since liberals regard political community as an instrumental rather than intrinsic good, they hold the idea of participation in disdain. Pateman seems to agree on that; liberals to a certain extent have been suspicious of the possible 'dangers inherent in wide popular participation in politics.'(Pateman 1970: 1) This fear of wide participation has paved the way for an 'elitist' conception of democracy. It requires citizens to understand that, 'once they have elected an individual, political action is his business and not theirs.'(6)

PARTICIPATION FOR THE SAKE OF CONSCIOUS SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

The criticism of liberal constitutional democracy, that it undermines the idea of wide participation may not be altogether justified. First of all, it built up the critique on the basis of a liberal individual who is solitary, hedonistic and prudential, and social only to the extent required by the quest for preservation and liberty in an adversarial world of scarcity. This is called competitive individualism which liberals appear to disown. On the contrary, as Thigpen and Downing showed, deontological liberals defend 'moral individualism' (the conception of persons as free moral agent) a position that is also adopted by such a critique.(Thigben and Downing 1987: 654) Simply because freedom is integral to politics and for there to be politics there must be a living notion of the free, choosing will.

Secondly, Kantian liberals reject the criticism of incompatibility as regards to participation. Rawls made it clear that, a 'constitutional democratic regime is reasonably just and workable, and worth defending'(Rawls 1993: 225). For him, a well ordered society is one in which some form of democracy exists. He also argues that, the political conception of justice is worked out to apply to what we may call the 'basic structure of a constitutional regime working from intuitive ideas implicit in the public political culture', which is understood, as democratic. A Kantian republic values participation since, in the words of Smith, it means 'one in which, each individual had some share in forming the laws'. It is a form of government, he further argues, 'which requires the maximum degree of participation in the shaping of public decisions.'(Smith 1989: 60) (7). Reflecting this, Rawls also sees political liberalism as perfectly comparable with the idea of participation. Active participation in the public sphere, he writes, will secure the basic individual rights and liberties, otherwise:

'Without widespread participation in democratic politics by a vigorous and informed citizen body, and certainly with a general retreat into private life, even the most well-designed political institutions will fall into the hands of those who seek to dominate and impose their will through the state apparatus ... The safety of democratic liberties requires the active participation of citizens who possess the political virtues needed to maintain a constitutional regime.'(Rawls 1993: 205)

The central role of political participation in protecting individual rights and liberties is also well expressed. He pointed out that, the enjoyment of our rights and liberties, to a greater extent, depends on a democratic institutional structure, which distributes power among the citizen body. Because of this, he further argues:

'Without the possibility of widespread political participation the state apparatus can fall into the hands of narrow cliques who seek to use it to further the particular interests of their class, group, religion, ideology or leader.'(Bellamy 1992: 258)

In summary, liberals are bound to value democracy and wide political participation, as individual rights and liberties are best protected through them. So the dividing line between liberals and communitarians is not whether they value participation, but rather the conditions and ends of the individual who participates the political opinion formation.

For liberals, the individual is a free moral agent and he or she participates to maximise his or her happiness, while for communitarians the individual is much more socially bound, and point of participation is to have a say in collective future. Having a notion of what is good for his community -although this notion is particularistic and derives from an individual's own socialisation process, at the same time participation in political process means, commitment to conscious social reproduction. Contrary to deontology, deliberative democracy must be non-repressive and non-discriminatory towards the disadvantaged groups in society. It requires not only every adult to be respected as a free equal, but also every child should be thought these values through education. This seems the formula to protect the society from falling prey to dangers of a tyranny by majority. The majority, as Walzer made clear:

'Can rightly say: because we argued and organised, persuaded the assembly or carried the election, we shall rule over you. But it would be tyrannical to say: we shall rule over you forever.'(Walzer 1983: 309-10)

For Walzer political rights are permanent guarantees. It means that the rights in communitarian politics are underpin a process that has no endpoint. Its vision on argumentation is one without a definite conclusion. Mainly because in a democratic politics, all destinations are temporary. No citizens can ever claim to have persuaded his fellows once and for all.

CONCLUSION

Kantian liberals rejects the notion of political community. The hope of political community, as Rawls stated firmly, must indeed be abandoned if it is meant to be a political society united in affirming the same comprehensive doctrine. Communitarians on the otherhand insist that we can create a political community based on the principles of non-repression and non-discrimination thus not neutral among all conceptions of good life. If a society can teach -and they believe this can be achieved, its children to be open-minded and respect for reasonable political disagreement, through public schooling, this society would have had a common good as well as protect itself from tyranny.

Deliberative democracy, with the principles of non-repression and non-discrimination, is believed to give communitarians a strong position against liberalism.

(1) However, Communitarian critics on liberalism do not show a unified front. There are two different approaches, which suggest different, sometimes contradictory arguments. Some Communitarians view liberalism in harmony between its theory and practice. Whereas, others claim there is a discrepancy between the liberal theory and its practice

(2) Taylor argues 'the instrumental mode of life, by dissolving traditional communities or driving out earlier, less instrumental ways of living with nature, has destroyed the matrices in which meaning could formerly flourish'.

(3) According to Taylor 'the 'atomistic focus on our individual goals dissolves community and divide us from each other'. Taylor, C. 'Atomism' in Taylor, C. Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 187-210

(4) Sandel have made it clear that, Rawl's idea of the priority of plurality to unity normally applies to the second of each of these pairs, 'it does not necessarily hold for the first.' Sandel,Liberalism and Limits of Justice., p. 151

(5) For Walzer, the fragile nature of individualistic social structure is the consequence of social mobility, which, occurs, in four different types: Geographical, social, marital and political mobility. Walzer, ,'The Communitarian Critique'., p.16

(6) Much of the formulation of 'elitist democracy' comes from Schumpeter who defines democracy as method or 'institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire power to decide by means of competitive struggle for people's vote.' By this definition, democracy 'does not mean and cannot mean that the people actually rule in any obvious sense of the terms 'people' and 'rule' ... [it] means only that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule them.' Schumpeter, J. Capitalism Socialism and Democracy, pp. 269, 284-5. See also, Dye, T.R. and L.H. Ziegler, The Irony of Democracy, North Scituate, Mass.: Duxbury Press, 1975, p. 18; Dhal, R. 'Hierarchy, Democracy, and Bargaining in Politics and Economics' in Eulau, H (eds.), Political Behaviour. Glencoe, III: Free Press, 1956, pp.82-92 -Quotation, p. 295

(7) In his Metaphysical Elements of Justice Kant himself says that, the republic is 'the only enduring political constitution in which the law is autonomous and is not annexed by any particular person. Kant, I. Metaphysical Elements of Justice, Ladd, J.L. trans., Indianapolis: Bobs-Merrill, 1965, p. 112

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