Overview and Introduction

Some communitarians (disputed and otherwise)

Alasdair MacIntyre 1929–
Michael Sandel 1931–
Charles Taylor 1935–
Michael J. Walzer 1953–

Taylor’s Anti-Atomism

Principle of belonging
An obligation on individuals to belong to some society (political community) and/or to help support and maintain some society and/or to obey some authority.

The obligation may be conditional so that it holds only for societies/authorities of a particular type.

e.g. People might have an obligation to support a democratic society but not a despotic one or to obey a duly elected government but not the leaders of a military coup.

e.g. Or people might be bound to obey only divinely instituted authorities so that they would be obliged to obey a divinely ordained monarch but not an elected president.
Taylor’s Anti-Atomism

**Principle of belonging**
An obligation on individuals to belong to some society (political community) and/or to help support and maintain some society and/or to obey some authority.

The obligation cannot, then, be conditional in certain other ways.

* e.g. The obligation cannot be conditional on individuals’ having consented to be ruled or on the claim that they would have consented if they were perfectly rational.

Taylor’s Anti-Atomism

**Primacy of rights theories**
A group of political theories which take individual rights as basic and which do not treat as similarly basic any principle of belonging.

According to such views:
* individual rights are independent of any sort of political community;
* individual rights are prior to any obligation to participate cooperatively in society;
* any obligations to belong to a society, to help maintain a community or to obey an authority are derivative and depend ultimately on an appeal to individual rights.

Taylor’s Anti-Atomism

**Atomism**
The view that individuals are *self-sufficient* and may develop and exercise their capacities *qua* human beings independently of (any) society.

Atomism is:
* a particular conception of human nature (cf. Hobbes, Locke);
* supposed to be required for any primacy of rights theory to be plausible;
* intended to be opposed to an Aristotelian conception of human nature.

Taylor’s Anti-Atomism

Argument Structure

* The “social thesis”: human beings cannot develop (or possibly even exercise) the characteristically human capacities unless part of a suitable society.
* An individual can only exercise her individual rights if she has developed these characteristically human capacities.
* Individual rights matter to us because the characteristically human capacities matter to us.
* So, if we think that individual rights are important, we are committed to the claim that the relevant capacities are valuable.
* So, we must be committed not only to respecting individual rights but also to promoting the relevant capacities.
* Hence, we must be committed to sustaining a suitable society.

Atomism

The view that individuals are *self-sufficient* and may develop and exercise their capacities *qua* human beings independently of (any) society.

Rationality; moral agency; responsibility; autonomy:
* What is the force of the claim that these are “characteristically human”?
  * Not just in the sense that they are peculiar to us but that they matter to us. They “command our respect” (192–194).
Taylor’s Anti-Atomism

Two Forms of Resistance

Taylor considers two ways of rejecting his line of argument:
1. Assert only minimal individual rights which don’t require the characteristically human capacities covered by the social thesis.
   ▶ Price is high!
2. Claim that voluntary associations and familial (involuntary) relations are sufficient for the development of the relevant capacities.
   ▶ Such associations do not provide the required social context...
   ▶ The capacity for autonomy and genuine, important choice requires a richer context than the family (204).
   ▶ Anarchy can (probably) not provide the required context.
   ▶ (Probably) only (the right kind of) political society can provide it.

Walzer’s Spheres of Justice

Three Sorts of Political Claim

Dominance
Monopoly
Simple Equality
Complex Equality

Dominance

Dominance describes a way of using social goods that isn’t limited by their intrinsic meanings or that shapes those meanings in its own image. (10–11)

The meanings of social goods

Social goods come with built-in meanings which determine (to at least some extent) how they should be distributed. In this sense even physical stuff is never merely physical stuff once it is utilised by human beings living in a society. It has a meaning in virtue of the role it plays and the value placed on it.
Communitarianism II

Dominance

*Dominance describes a way of using social goods that isn’t limited by their intrinsic meanings or that shapes those meanings in its own image.* (10–11)

**Dominance**

A particular social good or set of goods, D, *dominates* another social good, S, to the extent that D determines how S is shared independently of S’s particular meaning; and/or what S means to us.

A particular social good or set of goods, D, is *dominant* to the extent that it dominates all or many other goods.

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Monopoly

*Monopoly describes a way of owning or controlling social goods in order to exploit their dominance.* (11)

**Monopoly**

A single person or group of persons *monopolises* a dominant good to the extent that she/he/they exercise exclusive control over it and enjoy exclusive access to it.

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Simple Equality

*Imagine a society in which everything is up for sale and every citizen has as much money as every other.* (14)

**Simple equality (Regime of)**

- Some social good is the dominant social good. e.g. Money.
- All persons have equal access to and equal control over that social good. e.g. Everyone has the same amount of money.
- A demand for everyone to have equal access to the dominant social good is a demand for simple equality.
  - This corresponds to the first kind of claim Walzer considered.

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Complex Equality

*... we should focus on the reduction of dominance — not, or not primarily, on the break-up or the constraint of monopoly.* (17)

**Complex equality**

- Social goods are generally monopolised. e.g. City bankers own most of the wealth and the goods it can buy. Intellectuals enjoy most of the advanced education. Top civil servants occupy most of the offices of state. Successful politicians have most of the political power.
  - i.e. There is inequality within each sphere w.r.t. each good.
Complex Equality

... we should focus on the reduction of dominance — not, or not primarily, on the break-up or the constraint of monopoly. (17)

Complex equality

- No social good is ‘generally convertible’ i.e. no social good dominates another illegitimately.
  - e.g. Money doesn’t buy bankers a better education.
  - Educated intellectuals cannot manipulate the political process.
  - Office doesn’t bring civil servants political power.
  - Political power doesn’t make politicians wealthy.
- i.e. Patterns of inequality w.r.t. one good do not create similar patterns of inequality w.r.t. other, independent goods.

Figure: Complex equality: some goods may be monopolised.

Figure: Complex equality: more money means more stuff.

Figure: Complex equality: but not more education.

Figure: Complex equality: and not more political power.
Communitarianism

Complex Equality

Figure: Complex equality: everyone shares essential hard/degraded work.

Complex Equality

No social good \( x \) should be distributed to mean and women who possess some other good \( y \) merely because they possess \( y \) and without regard to the meaning of \( x \). (20)

- Complex equality is a principle of distributive justice.
- Using Nozick’s terminology, is it:
  - historical or end-state?
  - patterned or unpatterned?

Complex Equality

Walzer considers three principles of distribution (21):

1. Free exchange
   - money as non-neutral
   - appropriate for some goods but not others

2. Desert
   - appropriate only to a narrow range of goods
   - e.g. punishment, prizes, medals etc.
   - no place in the market

3. Need
   - appropriate only for certain goods
   - blocks free exchange; distribution irrelevant to need
     - socially recognised needs must be provided equally to all citizens (ch. 3)
     - what is needed is culturally dependent
     - e.g. food is always a need, but which foods may vary (76)
     - e.g. historically, it didn’t matter only the rich had doctors
     - but once medical care is socially recognised as needed, communal provision according to need alone is required (86–91)

Complex Equality

Walzer identifies a number of different ways a needed good might be (justly) distributed:

- charity;
- redistributive taxes;
- provision in kind;
- vouchers;
- etc.

Complex Equality

Walzer considers the principles of distribution which might be appropriate for a range of other goods.

- Examples:
  - require military service;
  - ‘hard’, ‘degrading’ work;
  - housework;
  - childcare;
  - attractive offices;
  - university places;
  - schooling;
  - access to the theatre;
  - enjoyment of cultural festivals;
  - leisure;
  - etc.