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Mutuality, Locality and Communitarianism

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Introduction

Author's note: One of the five original defining dimensions of commons as associations and assemblies has accumulated an extensive evolution as an idea. It has changed more than any of the other four defining characteristics. It was originally borrowed from Moses Finlay's Greek term philia *(1974; 1999), and termed mutuality (Lohmann, 1992), one of the basic defining characteristics of commons. It was later relabeled social capital (Lohmann, 2015) to link it with recent work under that label and re-defined as an emergent characteristic that may or may not be present in commons when founded, but which is likely to emerge as they develop and evolve. This manuscript is one part of that conceptual evolution, and retains the term mutuality, as originally written.*

Despite a vast outpouring of work, social researchers and practitioners interested in nonprofit, voluntary action and philanthropic studies have generally been reluctant to confront or even acknowledge a number of important recent issues and developments in social theory and philosophy. (One important exception is Bruce Sievers' *Civil Society, Philanthropy and the Commons* (2010), which examines closely the work of Spinoza and other 17th century Dutch theorists, while casting only a cursory glance at contemporary work.

A case in point is the almost complete absence in the third sector literature of any consideration of the work of John Rawls, whose *Theory of Justice* (1971) has sparked much discussion and debate elsewhere during the past two decades. Not only Rawls, but the large body of work arising in reaction to his theory – including the communitarianism which is the concern of this paper – have had little impact.

Of all of the issues and trends which might be mentioned one of the most interesting and provocative is the resurgence of interest in community arising theoretically in reaction to Rawls' groundings of his theory of justice in individualism and pragmatically to the demise of public or mixed economy liberalism in the face of a coalition of free-market liberalism and religiously-based conservatism. (Lowi, 1969; 1995) As the original title of this paper suggests, the nature of community is of central importance to the commons

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theory of voluntary action. Communitarianism is evolving into a large and complex movement in contemporary social theory and practice. It has been called 'the central political debate in Anglo-American political theory' (Okin, in Bell, p. 2)   Yet only a very small body of third sector work has seriously confronted the importance of communitarian ideas. (Van Til, 1994; McNutt, 1994). The communitarian label has been applied to many different themes and ideas, some nostalgic and some novel: among others, the list includes various 19th century collectivisms and socialisms; Tönnies' gemeinschaft; progressivism, New Deal liberalism, and more.

In order to properly assess the role of communitarianism, therefore, it will be necessary to sort out some of these competing and conflicting claims. My general purpose is to explore the topic of communitarianism and some of its possible implications for research and practice in the third sector.

The Problem of Mutuality

This paper addresses one centrally important issue: the implications of communitarianism for the problem of mutuality. Of all the dimensions of the commons, the most interesting and provocative in light of the communitarian interest is that which I have called mutuality. (Lohmann, 1992, pp. 58-64) The problem may be stated quite simply: What is the nature of the bonds among participants in nonprofit organizations and voluntary action, and between philanthropic givers and recipients, and how do these affect the behavior of third sector actors and those in other sectors? Closely associated with this is the normative question which undergirds practice: How do such bonds temper the ways in which societies should be organized and governed to promote the growth of human freedom and opportunity? Thus, mutuality, offers a rubric within which to consider a host of interesting theoretical and practical problems. It appears, for example, that mutuality cannot be a willed, legislated or mandated characteristic of even the most voluntary of associations. Mutuality is also closely implicated in Tocqueville's intermediate institutions perspective and the power of association to protect individuals from state coercion.

Mutuality and Political Theory

Mutuality, and the regard which co-participants develop for one another is the source of the protective power of association. Mutuality, in other words, accounts for the peculiar intermediary bulwark which offers a primary protection of the individual from the state. Except through Tocqueville, mutuality has had very little impact on American legal and political philosophy until quite recently. Both approaches have generally been in thrall to a philosophical individualism which views citizens as autonomous social atoms and reduces institutions and organizations to the status of

fictive individuals or to mental images. For a very long time, political philosophy has rebounded between this individualism at one extreme and the collectivisms of Marx and other socialists at the other, with little or no concern for intermediate relations other than those based in pure calculation. Libertarians and other liberal individualists have consistently seen only threats to personal freedom and an open society in forms of cooperation or association implying mutual relations. Some of these threats were real, others purely imaginary. Thus, one of the questions inevitably raised by communitarianism is whether it is merely another form of collectivism? A second, equally important question, however, is whether all forms of mutuality can be satisfactorily dissolved into either individual self-interest or collectivism. Conversely, does communitarianism contain elements of some third perspective? Before we can attempt to deal with that or other issues, however, we need to examine the question of what communitarianism is or consists of?

Three Communitarianisms

There are several distinct major forms of communitarianism in existence today which yield a variety of insights on this matter. We might call these movement communitarianism; reluctant communitarianism; and justice communitarianism.

Movement Communitarianism

Movement communitarianism is the phenomenon that Van Til looked at in his recent ARNOVA paper. (Van Til, 1994) It is probably the most widely known form of communitarianism and has had the most evident impact on American public life and policy. It may also be the most problematic theoretically. It was largely in response to movement communitarianism that President Clinton declared himself a communitarian in the 1992 presidential campaign, and it was presumably in response to the failure of that phrase to ignite much interest among voters that he remained silent on the question as President and since. Perhaps the word is simply too long, esoteric and academic sounding to carry much weight in contemporary politics, where 'dumbing down' issues is a much more popular and effective strategy than appealing to anyone's intellect. Movement communitarianism has thus remained largely an effort by a network of social researchers, policy analysts, lawyers and other academics and intellectuals to foster a centrist political movement in reaction to the collapse of socialism, the rise of religious conservatism and the collapse of New Deal liberalism and welfare state ideologies generally.

Reluctant Communitarianism

In sharp contrast to the movement communitarians who have eagerly sought to embrace the communitarian label another group of academic moral and political philosophers who have actively sought to distance themselves from the communitarian label, but who have nonetheless had it thrust upon them by others (and occasionally one another).

One of the least plausible communitarian of all is Alasdair MacIntyre, a moral philosopher whose principal concern in two major books seem to be the moral .ailure of modern philosophy, and his strong belief in the continuing relevance of Aristotle and Aquinas in the modern world. (MacIntyre, 1981; 1988) MacIntyre's primary argument, in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality*? (1988), for example, is that Aristotle did not locate reason and justice transcendentally, but in a particular social, political and historical site – the polis. While the implications of that are pretty straightforward, MacIntyre never really touches on them. In fact, there is little evidence in his work of any practical concern for contemporary issues or problems of a non-theoretical sort. He is a classicist who evidences a considerable distaste for virtually the entire modern world in his writings.

A second equally implausible communitarian is the Canadian moral and political philosopher Charles Taylor. Taylor's affinities to the kind of communitarianism represented by Etzioni are more evident than MacIntyre's, especially in light of his long involvement and writing against the separatist movement in his native Quebec. However, his reading of religion in public affairs, in particular, is dramatically different from Etzioni's. (Tully, 1994)

Justice Communitarianism

Much of the contemporary interest in communitarianism was touched off in reaction to John Rawls, *Theory of Justice* (1971). Bell (1993) notes that prior to Rawls, there were two principal objections among political theorists to arguments for liberalism: The "libertarian objection" was that grounding liberal theory in utilitarianism opens the possibility of sacrificing some people's rights for the good of others. At the same time, the "leftist objection" was that liberal ideology may only be a defense of rule by the upper classes to protect the interests of property.

Rawls sought to transcend both of these criticisms and reinvigorate liberalism by shifting the justification for freedom away from utility (where it has largely rested since John Stuart Mill) to self-determination, thus opening up a common front with civic republicanism. Humans, he argued, have a 'highest order' interest (and responsibility) in making and revising our own life plans and respecting the life plans of others. This was also the basis of his conclusion that no individual 'deserves' her natural assets and

thus liberal equality requires partial compensation for unequal distribution of talents and abilities. This argument, in the larger context, undergirded Rawl's famous twin principles of justice.

The Etzioni communitarian concern over the balance of rights and responsibilities is, in fact, largely addressed by the basic Rawlsian argument. Rawls has precisely stated pairs of offsetting rights and responsibilities of a very fundamental sort: People have a responsibility to recognize their own highest order interests and to recognize the highest order interests of others. (Which together might be called the "enlightenment interests" of self and other). They also have a responsibility as reasonable beings living under social conditions to recognize the need to compensate others (and to be compensated in turn) for inequalities in the basic social structure. (Which together can be termed the "emancipatory interests.") Thus, a balance of rights and responsibilities is, in fact, fundamental to the Rawlsian liberal perspective. In this way, Etzioni and others affiliated with the communitarian movement and the journal called *The Responsive Community* thus come off as Rawlsian liberals in their approach, however much they might wish to correct or separate themselves from such liberalism.

Much the same may be said of the work of Michael Sandel where we find what is, in many respects, the essence of the communitarian critique as it relates to mutuality: (Bell, 4-8) Liberalism (including, in Sandel's view, both John Stuart Mills and Rawls) rests on an overly individualistic conception of self. (Many of the same themes are of interest to Taylor, as they were earlier for Hegel and the early American Pragmatists Dewey and Mead, both of who were influenced by Hegel). Social contract approaches of interest coalitions substitute for any genuine mutuality in a strong (self-other) sense. (Sandel, pp. 147-183)

The essence of Sandel's critique of Rawls is his statement that Rawls' principles of justice, however meritorious they may be, cannot be sustained by his theory of community. In his discussion of "the idea of social union" (section 79) Rawls distinguishes two equally individualistic senses of the 'good of community' (which might in our terms also be relabeled the value or importance of mutuality). (Sandel, 148-149) In the first sense, Rawls says, individuals regard social arrangements as a necessary burden and cooperate only for the sake of joint pursuit of their individual ends. Sandel calls this the instrumental model of community. In the second sense, which Rawls prefers, individuals may share certain 'final ends' and view a scheme of cooperation as good in itself. Sandel calls this the sentimental model of community. Neither the instrumental or sentimental views is "capable of relaxing the bounds between the self and the other without producing a radically situated self."

Intersubjectivity, in short, is officially rejected by Rawls, in the reading of Sandel. Yet, Sandel argues, the theory of justice "depends ultimately for its coherence on precisely the intersubjective dimension (Rawls) officially rejects." The theory relies on concepts like common assets, shared fate, social union, communities in which individual members 'participate in one another's nature', and whereby the 'self is realized in the activities of many selves'. (Sandel, 150-151)

On the basis of this critique, Sandel sets out to fashion a substitute for both of the Rawlsian individualistic alternatives; a "constitutive" model of community in which the self is empowered to participate in the constitution of its identity. It is in this project that he earns (and acknowledges) his designation as a communitarian. It is also this project where some of the greatest importance of Sandel's brand of communitarianism for nonprofit organizations, voluntary associations and philanthropy is found. It is important to recognize, therefore, the way in which he utilizes what we are calling mutuality to make his point that an interactive self (as that notion is recognized by social psychologists) in a constitutive community is not only characterized by calculation and choice, but also by reflection, self-awareness, self-understanding and creation and management of a personal identity.

Sandel's model of "constitutive community" was further developed by Daniel Bell (1994) who uses the devise of the dialogue to make the at times obtuse arguments of the communitarians more accessible to a wider audience. In dialogue, Bell's characters distinguish three principal forms of constitutive community, all of which are important for stimulating or enabling the mutuality of the commons: communities of place, (e.g., religious places, campuses, clubs, lodges and meeting halls, spatial commons); communities of memory (e.g., disciplines and sciences, libraries, archives, museums, galleries and other collections); and psychological communities – which Bellah, et. al., (1985) call "lifestyle enclaves" – (e.g., cults, alternative communities, utopian communities). We might also see these, following Hirschman (1970) as communities of consent, in which mutuality may invoke either loyalty or voice anchored, not in place or memory, but in willingness to remain engaged.

Not all those labeled communitarians are as content as MacIntyre, Taylor and Sandel with traditional styles of philosophical argument or rational methods. Michael Walzer (1983) sought to dismiss entirely the classical tradition of political argument to which Rawls, Nozick, Dworkin, Sandel and others remained committed. He advocates overturning the traditional universal-cognitive approach of philosophy and embraces a unique form of pragmatic communitarianism: Instead of devising principles of moral and political conduct from a universal perspective, Walzer argues, we are better served if we stay rooted in the traditions of our communities,

interpreting to our fellow citizens the perspectives we share. In light of Sandel's three types of communities, we might embrace and actually go beyond Walzer in noting that such localism can be applied equally not only to communities of place, but also communities of memory and consent.

Interestingly, through the lens refracted by Walzer the Neo-Scholasticism of MacIntyre's embrace of Aristotle and his seemingly ethnocentric embrace of the Scottish moralists give powerful new meanings to his conclusion that justice and reason are always local, rooted and sectarian. In this context, the communitarian criticism that liberal universalism is insufficiently sensitive to the importance of community or social context (particularity) begins to reveal some very interesting third sector implications. I have tried to work out the importance of some of these implications for nonprofit organizations and voluntary action and philanthropy in the *Theory of the Commons*. (see especially pp. 53-54 and pp. 260-262) Eugene Genovese's (1995) reinterpretation of Southern conservatism offers a perspective that is also compatible with MacIntyre and Walzer. In the case of associations, perhaps the most profound implication is the futility of the search for universal 'best practices', and other organizational norms. The implication here is that this is a matter to be settled ultimately only by the members themselves.

The reluctant communitarians, in particular, have provoked a series of sharp responses from a large number of critics and commentators, most seeking to defend liberal individualism against what they see as new forms of collectivism and oppression.

Derek Phillips critiqued communitarianism, as represented by MacIntyre, Taylor, Sandel, and the group-authored *Habits of the Heart*, in terms of what he perceives as a desire to return to some past "golden age" of community. If such a golden age of community never existed, for example in colonial America, medieval Europe and ancient Greece then he suggested, the aspirations of communitarianism must be seen as empty and misguided.

Conclusion

In so far as it has importance for the third sector, communitarianism must be seen through its attempts to take adequate account of the problem of mutuality. Many of the issues, particularly those concerning the definition of self, dealt with by the communitarians are old and familiar ones in pragmatic philosophy and social science. Mutuality is a principal concern of some communitarians, particularly Taylor, Sandel and Bell. Constitutive communities of place, memory, commitment, and perhaps others are deserving of much consideration by third sector researchers, practitioners and theorists.

Whatever else may be said, to interpret communitarianism as merely a new form of collectivism, as Phillips and other liberal individualists do, misses the point by failing to acknowledge intersubjectivity, interaction and socialization in creating and sustaining the individual person. This would become more clear if communitarians were to address more directly the manner in which the intermediate institutions of community engender identity and mutuality even as they buffer individuals from state coercion.

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