

The Politics of Communitarianism and the Emptiness of Liberalism
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Rev. 12-08

Communitarian accounts of the ontology of the self were rejected by early liberal critics as internally contradictory, but they are now widely accepted as essential to most forms of liberalism. Retrospectively, this communitarian-liberal “merger” makes sense, because close textual analysis shows that every argument made by the major communitarian philosophers was, in fact, political—not metaphysical. To wit, all of the communitarians’ arguments led to the conclusion that communitarianism would provide a firmer political grounding for the liberal ideal of equal individual freedom than was offered by individualist ontologies.

The Politics of Communitarianism and the Emptiness of Liberalism traces this political mode of philosophizing to the British New Left that shaped Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor; and to the threat to Rawlsian liberalism represented by Robert Nozick, against whom both Michael Sandel (Taylor’s student) and Michael Walzer were arguing.

In the course of its careful textual exegesis, Part I of the book also identifies a deeper, non-political communitarian similarity with liberalism: the two schools’ shared view of the nature of choice. This liberal-communitarian metaethical convergence stopped the communitarians from offering a less formalistic or relativistic account of “the good” than liberals had done. Part II draws a parallel between the liberal-communitarian view of choice and theological voluntarism, which had made God the source of arbitrary choices among good ends. Finally, Leibniz’s critique of theological voluntarism is pitted against both communitarian and liberal metaethics.

The book will be of interest not only to normative philosophers and political theorists, but to historians of political theory, theologians, and philosophically reflective rational-choice theorists.