

CHAPTER 5

WALZER'S DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITARIANISM

"The prophet need only show the people their own hearts."

-- Michael Walzer (1985, 62)

Despite Sandel's and Taylor's heartfelt antipathy to liberal subjectivism, they provide little in the way of argument for the objectivity of their own alternatives. Their opposition to the relativizing effect of individualism has no communitarian payoff; what fills this gap are arguments about the political desirability of a belief in communitarian ontology. Only by assuming that individualist subjectivism connotes the objectivity of communitarianism can metaphysical validity be added, logically, to the alleged strategic advantages of communitarianism.

Why do Sandel and Taylor fail to recognize that their only positive arguments for communitarianism are strategic? If they did so, they would undermine their liberal normative purpose by depicting their collectivist ontologies as manipulative devices rather than liberating ones. This is, presumably, why they insist on the alethic as well as the strategic value of communitarian ontology, even though they fail to demonstrate the truth-value of communitarianism. In Walzer's case, there is strong textual evidence for the same presumption, and thus for a political explanation not only of Walzer's support for communitarianism and of his efforts to constrain it, as there is with Sandel and Taylor; but also for his portrayal of communitarianism as

both politically efficacious and epistemically valid.

In exploring the question of why Walzer makes the move from strategic to truth claims, we will also be able to answer the question of how he, and the other communitarians, can make such a logically fallacious move. One explanation, already mentioned, is the careless assumption that if individualism is false, communitarianism must be true. But there is, I believe, also a political explanation of the "how" as well as the "why" of communitarianism.

Let me begin with Walzer's strategic rationale for communitarianism. He opens Spheres of Justice by complaining that "the force of [the] singular conclusion[s]" reached by such philosophers as Rawls, Habermas, and Ackerman is "not easy to measure. It is surely doubtful that [contractors in the original position,] if they were transformed into ordinary people, with a firm sense of their own identity, with their own goods in their hands, caught up in everyday troubles, would reiterate their hypothetical choice or even recognize it as their own" (1983, 5). In other words, "ordinary people" might not find the difference principle persuasive. Walzer concludes from this that "a just or an egalitarian society cannot be...worked out as philosophical artifacts....If such a society isn't already here--hidden, as it were, in our concepts and categories--we will never know it concretely or realize it in fact" (ibid., xiv).¹ Hence the need for a different kind of theory of justice, one that draws on the concepts and categories ordinary people already accept.

Strictly speaking, Walzer's argument against the likes of Rawls is a non sequitur; what is just need not be known concretely or

realized in fact. Nor is the difference principle (to restrict ourselves to Rawls) designed to persuade ordinary people. If it were, then stripping the contractors of their everyday aspects would hardly be the central device of A Theory of Justice. Nor, finally, are such books as Rawls's designed to predict the likelihood of the adoption of their principles "in fact," or they would rely on survey data, not thought experiments.

Walzer's goal, then, is simply different than Rawls's (and Ackerman's, and Habermas's). He begins by taking for granted what is, for traditional liberal philosophers, at issue: whether property redistribution in particular, and equal freedom in general, are legitimate. Walzer's prevenient democratic socialism settles these questions in advance. What remains to be decided is how to make a case for redistribution and equal freedom that is more rhetorically "persuasive" than traditional theories of justice (1994b, 43)--which have not, thus far, induced people to adopt democratic socialism.

Walzer's solution is to rely on "our shared understandings of social goods" (1983, xiv). This solution makes the question not what ideal contractors would choose behind a veil of ignorance, but "what would individuals like us choose, who are situated as we are, who share a culture and are determined to go on sharing it?" (ibid., 5). But given the likelihood that different cultures will have different shared understandings of social goods, Walzer's particularism will lead to pluralism--and, it would appear, relativism.

Walzerian pluralism has two faces. On one side there is its strategic face: intercultural pluralism in the service of democratic

socialism. One aspect of the strategic face of Walzer's pluralism is a subsidiary form of pluralism--a pluralism of spheres of justice within a given culture; for Walzer is persuaded by Nozick's critique of the tyrannical potential of the difference principle that a truly democratic socialism, one that enhances freedom and equality, must rely on a fragmented form of distributive justice. Without Nozick, Walzer would have a strategic rationale for communitarianism, but one that might simply appeal to a culture's monolithic shared understandings, a la Sandel or Taylor. Since, however, Walzer is convinced that this might produce the kind of tyranny Nozick fears--state tyranny--he sets himself the additional task of diversifying the shared understandings he will interpret. The impulse to pluralize the spheres of justice within a given culture is secondary, derived from Walzer's desire to save socialism from tyranny; the primary, and distinctively communitarian, impulse is to derive socialism (e.g., the difference principle) from shared understandings.

The other face of Walzer's pluralism is described by his characterization of his position as "radical particularism," meaning that it eschews any claim to "an objective and universal standpoint" (1983, xiv). Walzer seems to think that radical particularism is justified by his strategic rationale, and therefore sanctions complex equality, but it is not and does not. One can see this by asking whether, in trying to make democratic socialism politically palatable to "ordinary people," Walzer himself isn't acting as a "philosopher" convinced of the objective and universal truth of his prevenient convictions--regardless of their congruence with public opinion. A

truly radical particularism would have to reject the strategically justified imposition of complex equality as itself a form of philosophical imperialism.

Walzer's strategic rationale for communitarianism (like those of Sandel and Taylor) presupposes the validity of the norms being advanced. Yet the radically particularist epistemology he uses to advance these norms undercuts their validity--if the epistemology is supposed to be valid, not just politically convenient.

From Political to Epistemic Egalitarianism

Walzer comes perilously close to making the universalist normative dimension of his strategic rationale explicit. He forthrightly avows that his goal is "an egalitarianism that is consistent with liberty" (1983, xiv); but this runs directly counter to his claim that complex equality relies on no objective or universal standpoint. Walzer admits this contradiction, albeit occasionally and half-heartedly. "In some sense," he writes,

the philosophical impulse is unavoidable. Even if we choose pluralism, as I shall do, that choice still requires a coherent defense. There must be principles that justify the choice and set limits to it, for pluralism does not require us to endorse every proposed distributive criterion or to accept every would-be agent. Conceivably, there is a single principle

and a single legitimate kind of pluralism. But this would still be a pluralism that encompassed a wide range of distributions. (Ibid., 5)

Complex equality, in short, can be seen as a monistic doctrine, albeit one that produces the two forms of pluralism contained in the "first face": complex equality distributes different goods according to different criteria within a single society; and it could produce "a wide range of distributions" across different societies, depending on the criteria used to demarcate and interpret plural spheres of justice in each of them.

The single motive for the twofold pluralism of the first face is to keep a dominant position in the goods of one sphere from translating into a monopoly of goods in all spheres. This motive constitutes a tactical rationale for the secondary, intracommunal pluralism of complex equality. Meanwhile, the desire to find a more persuasive, forceful rationale for redistributive principles than is offered in such books as A Theory of Justice provides the strategic rationale for intercommunal pluralism, which derives the distributive criteria of complex equality from a given culture's "shared understandings." But if, in accord with the second face of Walzer's pluralism, complex equality is interpreted as radically particularist, then a given culture's understandings must be valid. Therefore, if a culture's shared understandings were monolithic, it would be wrong to force participants in that culture to distribute goods according to variegated criteria belonging to different spheres. By the same token,

if a culture has variegated understandings of different spheres, but understandings of them that are not compatible with democratic socialism, then so much the worse for democratic socialism.

Since, as Walzer admits, complex equality (the first face) can be seen as resting on a single "philosophical" principle--the undesirability of tyranny--its validity relies on the validity of that principle, not on whether the people of a given culture agree that tyranny is desirable, let alone on their view of how to divide up goods into spheres, or of what good is served by a given sphere (the second face). In the (putatively valid, transcultural) interest of preventing tyranny, the intracommunal and egalitarian, anti-tyrannical pluralism sanctioned by complex equality could, in principle, be established by being forcibly imposed on societies whose members are monists and have nothing against inequality or tyranny. To preclude tyranny in such societies, complex equality need not even rely on shared understandings of the principles that govern different social spheres; it could rely on a philosopher-king's understandings of the principles governing spheres of her own devising, or on a random division of social life into different spheres, each with its own arbitrarily imposed dominant good--just so long as different spheres were established, preventing all-encompassing monopolies and thus tyranny. For the two forms of pluralism--between societies and within them--produced by Walzer's first face (the one that sanctions complex equality) are themselves monistic in their justification. One end is served by all of them: equal freedom. And since this end is liberal in content, its advocates could be seen as nothing more than liberal tacticians. (Liberal

strategists, by contrast, promote something like the second face--
epistemic pluralism, which in Walzer's schema takes the form of
 inserting "shared understandings" into complex equality--for political
 reasons.)

Although he does not expressly go this far, Walzer does, in
 effect, admit that he is a liberal tactician when he writes, in the
 passage extracted above, that there are "limits" to his pluralism.
 These limits are the provisos he attaches to it, discussed below.
 Walzer might not even want to deny that he is a liberal tactician;
 liberalism is, after all, the doctrine of his community, and it is his
 highest priority to "stand in the cave, in the city, on the ground"
 (1983, xiv), rather than try to transcend his social roots, as
 "philosophers" attempt.² Since his own community is liberal, Walzer can
 admit that complex equality may be a monistically justified form of
 liberalism that uses pluralist tactics to preclude tyranny--and
 particularist understandings of different spheres merely as a strategy
 for making democratic socialism politically palatable (cf. *ibid.*, esp.
 16).

But Walzer subtly undermines the universality of any norm,
 including the liberal norm served by complex equality and embodied in
 democratic socialism, when, in the extracted passage, he begins
 shifting from the first to the second face of pluralism, moving away
 from the strategic rationale for value pluralism and toward epistemic
 particularism as true. In the same breath that he concedes the
 monistic dimension of complex equality, Walzer suggests that it is
 merely "conceivable" that there is "a single legitimate kind of

pluralism" (1983, 5). In other words, complex equality might not be universally valid--even though he will assume its universal validity in order to "limit" his otherwise-radical particularism.

It is clear why Walzer would want to have it both ways: if complex equality were not universally valid, then his particularism would be so radical that it would entail "endors[ing] every proposed distributive criterion or...accept[ing] every would-be agent" of distribution: anything goes (1983, 5), including tyranny and other deviations from democratic socialism. But if complex equality were universally valid, even in monistic or inegalitarian societies, it would lose its association with "shared understandings." In the second case, complex equality could be sufficiently constrained to avoid embracing illiberal communities, because its purpose would be merely strategic. In the first case, where complex equality must incorporate shared understandings because of their truth-value, it would be unconstrained and relativistic.

Walzer writes, in the preface to Spheres of Justice, that

A society of equals lies within our own reach. It is a practical possibility here and now, latent already, as I shall try to show, in our shared understandings of social goods. Our shared understandings: the vision is relevant to the social world in which it was developed; it is not relevant, or not necessarily, to all social worlds. (1983, xiv, emphasis original.)

A strategic rationale for communitarianism could hardly be more explicit: ~1. "our shared understandings," if ~2'' . enacted politically, will produce ~3. "a society of equals." Assuming Walzer is correct empirically, there is nothing in the first two sentences of this passage to which a universalist liberal philosopher could object. By all means, let us capitalize on "ordinary people's" shared understandings (ibid.) to achieve what we liberal philosophers independently know is desirable: equal freedom. Yet in the third sentence, in denying the relevance of his theory to other social worlds, Walzer lays the groundwork for his self-portrayal as an epistemic particularist who does not "claim to have achieved any great distance from the social world in which [he] live[s]" (ibid.). Thus, a few pages later, he finds it merely "conceivable" that there is only a single justification for pluralism--although he has presented only one: one based on preserving equal freedom.

What explains Walzer's move, not only from the tactical pluralism of complex equality, sanctioned by monistic, universalist liberalism--and thus liable to being imposed on unwilling societies by liberal authorities--toward the strategic insistence that complex equality incorporate "shared understandings"; but toward the epistemically pluralist caveat that his liberal normative goal may not be valid for some societies? The psychological as well as logical motive force is his notion that the alternative to relying on shared understandings to achieve equal freedom, and to relying on them as being true, is undemocratic.

As we saw in Chapter 2, Walzer denounces as invalid, not just

politically maladroit, the urge "to walk out of the cave, leave the city, climb the mountain, fashion for oneself (what can never be fashioned for ordinary men and women) an objective and universal standpoint" (1983, xiv). This denunciation entails the epistemological³ claim that "shared understandings" are not only convenient dikes against tyranny and sources of persuasive rhetoric, but are correct. As with Sandel and Taylor, then, there is, alongside Walzer's attempt to buttress equal freedom by deploying "ordinary men and women's" understandings of goods in different spheres (~2'''), the claim that it would be inherently wrong to override these understandings, suggesting that they have intrinsic (~2), not just instrumental value. Thus, Walzer's most quoted, relativistic pronouncement: "Justice is relative to social meanings" (1983, 312). This--a pluralism among social meanings taken to be equally true, not just variably (and therefore constrainably) useful in building democratic socialism or blocking tyranny--allows Walzer to deny the liberal "philosopher's" claim of access to 1. universal 2. truths. For if such "truths" existed, they could justify interfering with "shared understandings," and this would be 3. undemocratic. Conversely, if Walzer's own reliance on shared understandings were to be seen merely as a stratagem, he would be claiming access to universal truths, and this would be undemocratic.

Walzer writes that "we are (all of us) culture-producing creatures"; "we make and inhabit meaningful worlds," and "there is no way to rank and order these worlds with respect to their understanding of social goods" (1983, 314). Walzer is driven to this radically relativist conclusion by the elitism he sees embodied in the Platonic

alternative. Lest we denigrate the ideas of ordinary people, we must conclude that these ideas are--regardless of their content--as meritorious as those of "philosophers." The philosopher's search for transcommunal truths is inherently inegalitarian; and--given Walzer's understanding of freedom as the flip side of equality--this makes it inherently "authoritarian" (1981, 381).

A universalist who accepted Nozick's critique of Rawls (as Walzer does) might worry that the difference principle exemplifies the possibility that political philosophy can be tyrannical. But this concern would lead merely to some tactical remedy such as the (monistically justified) pluralism of complex equality. For example, Walzer might have restricted himself to arguing for the principle that health care constitutes a sphere in which financial considerations should be banished--regardless of whether this is how people other than Walzer understand health care. A number of such principles, the stock-in-trade of the liberal "philosopher," might be assembled to produce a picture of many spheres of justice, but a society that adhered to the principles governing these spheres would still serve universally valid ends.⁴ Similarly, a strategically justified form of complex equality, in which the principles defining each good were drawn from shared understandings rather than from universal criteria, might be justified on universalist grounds, since one might agree with Walzer that this would be a good tactic for giving egalitarianism "force" in the eyes of "ordinary people."

But Walzer wants to go farther, toward the radical particularism and pluralism of equally valid "shared understandings." His claim

about philosophy, therefore, is much more sweeping: all un-"connected" philosophy is tyrannical, of necessity. For the philosopher's project--Nozick's just as much as Rawls's--would, if successful, invalidate those shared understandings that contradicted the "universal truth" the philosopher "discovers," and in so doing it would traduce the epistemic equality of those who created the allegedly invalid social meanings.

Democracy and Truth

The doctrine of epistemic equality is Walzer's pure communitarian moment. Without this moment, complex equality need not rely on shared understandings. If democratic socialism is universally right, then it could hardly matter, except for reasons of prudence, that imposing it upon, say, a hierarchical society might clash with the benighted understandings shared by its members. And to the extent that one did impose a scheme of complex equality based on shared understandings, one could view them as useful in preventing tyranny, but not necessarily as true. The "one" doing the viewing and imposing is, of course, the "philosopher."

To the extent that the philosopher is a universalist, she may come to disagree with her community, not to mention with other communities not her own. In the philosopher's view, if her understandings match up with those of a given community, this validates the latter, for--as Walzer says with more than a hint of sarcasm--they now coincide with "objective truths, 'true meaning,' 'right answers,' 'the philosopher's stone,' and so on" (Walzer 1981, 379). If the

community's understandings do not happen to coincide with those of the philosopher, however, the philosopher might seek the power to impose so-called right answers over against the wrong ones held by the people. Knowing "what ought to be done," the philosopher could employ force to do it. "A pliable prince" is one instrument of her will, "but in principle any instrument will do--an aristocracy, a vanguard, a civil service, even the people will do" (*ibid.*, 383)--but only if they are "wise."

The philosopher's allegiance to democracy, therefore, is far too tenuous for Walzer. Any understandings of justice she might come up with are potentially at odds with those of the demos. "Imagine," Walzer suggests, "a philosophically and then judicially recognized right to welfare" (1981, 391); he uses the difference principle as his illustration (*ibid.*, 392). The enforcement of such a right "would radically reduce the reach of democratic decision," for "the judges would decide, and as cases accumulated, they would decide in increasing detail, what the scope and character of the welfare system should be and what sorts of redistribution it required" (*ibid.*, 391). For Walzer, this is a decisive consideration against such rights. Walzer agrees, in effect, with Tocqueville: democracy is primarily a matter of equal status. In a democracy, nobody is better than anyone else; therefore (it is said), nobody's opinions are better than those of anyone else. The philosopher's pretensions to transcend the community and discover universally applicable truths threaten democracy by subverting epistemic equality.

Even Rousseau is insufficiently democratic for Walzer: the very

idea of the general will is authoritarian, because it presumes to measure collective decisions against some extra-popular standard of rightness (Walzer 1981, 384). In distinguishing the general will from the will of all, Rousseau noticed that the will of all may be wrong; Walzer counters that a self-governing people has the right to do what is--by the standards of the universalist philosopher--wrong (ibid., 385; cf. 1983, 304). Walzer therefore advises someone who is in a position to be a philosopher-king, a founder, or a legislator, to decline to impose policy A, the policy he thinks best, against the wish of the people for policy B.

Surely I cannot [enact] A simply because I have decided that A is right. Who am I? As a citizen of a democratic community, I must wait for the people's decision, who have a right to decide. And then, if the people choose B, it is not the case that I face an existential choice, where my philosophical arguments point toward A and my democratic commitments point toward B, and there is no way to decide between them. There is a way to decide. (Ibid., 386.)

The way to decide is for the would-be philosopher-king to submit to the people's decision, whatever it is.

Here we reach, ironically, the sense in which Walzer is, despite the manifestly relativist implications of epistemic egalitarianism, opposed to subjectivism. If philosopher-kingship is not consistent with the "way to decide"--that is, the right way to decide--it stands

to reason that the philosopher-king must be incorrect in claiming to perceive universal truths. Otherwise, there would be no reason to portray the coercive imposition of these putative truths as wrong (except by appealing to the universal undesirability of coercion--an appeal Walzer, in radical particularist mode, must eschew). The very epistemic egalitarianism that gives the lie to philosophical claims of Truth by relativizing them nonetheless relies on a Truth-claim of its own: namely, that all Truth-claims are false. The transition from strategic to alethic rationale is now complete. Shared understandings are not only useful in building socialism; they are also true. They have to be true, lest philosopher-kings find warrant to violate them.

Walzer's argument for the truth of shared understandings, then, is motivated by the same normative impulse that makes complex equality a putatively useful liberal strategy. Walzer does not, any more than Sandel or Taylor, give us an independent reason to judge whatever the people of a community think good to be, in fact, good. Indeed, the very notion that shared understandings are true undermines such a judgment, since it means that two peoples with contradictory understandings of the good must both be right, which is incompatible with any independent standard of rightness.

Instead of an independent argument for the validity of epistemic equality, Walzer gives us a strategic rationale not just for its usefulness but for its truth. His reasoning seems to be that if epistemic equality is not true, then the people might err, and this would undermine the legitimacy of democracy--rule by epistemic equals. If shared understandings are not valid, then there might be reason to

override them: reason, that is, to depart from democracy.

Arrayed against shared meanings, Walzer insists that all candidates for philosopher-king are epistemic pretenders. "All anti-democratic arguments," Walzer writes, "if they are serious, are arguments from special knowledge" (1983, 285). Since special knowledge might justify rule by those who possess it, serious defenders of democracy will deny as false, not just as dangerous, all claims to special knowledge. Any "general will" that can be distinguished from the will of all, therefore, must be nothing more than a philosopher's particular will dressed in universalist robes. Despite Walzer's admittedly transcendent commitment to freedom and equality, then, he denies that there are any truths that transcend the demos. His claim is not that the errors of democracy are, on balance, worth accepting; it is that democracy is incapable of error, since if this were not the case, we would not be epistemic equals with an equal right to political rule. If the reliance on shared understandings were simply a stratagem in the pursuit of political ends, some circumstances might call for the use of different, more coercive means, tarnishing the purity of the end. But if fealty to shared understandings is dictated by their truth, because we are all epistemic equals, then equal freedom cannot be imposed; it must emerge democratically.

None of this, however, proves that we are epistemic equals, or that democracy is in fact incapable of error.

The Moral Minimum: Particularist or Universalist?

Thus far, I have discussed only the dynamic of Walzer's communitarianism. This dynamic manifests itself in the characteristic pattern of a pure communitarian moment followed, not in time but in logic, by the imposition of constraints that render it moot. Even though Walzer commits himself to epistemic egalitarianism, the rule of the will of all, and therefore radical particularism, he also "set[s] limits to it" (1983, 5) that avoid a relativism among communities that would undo the strategic purpose of his particularism.

Individuals everywhere, Walzer contends, regardless of their societies' values, have basic "rights," and behind these rights there is a "minimalist" moral code that allows the intervention of one society into the affairs of another (1983, 79). The minimal moral code entitles people to "some claim on communal resources for bare subsistence" (1983, 79), even if this claim is not accepted by the community in question. Furthermore, all communities' social meanings "must meet certain criteria....They must actually be shared across a society, among a group of people with a common life; and the sharing cannot be the result of radical coercion" (1994b, 26-27). It is plain that these "limits," constituting what I will call the minimal proviso, are universalistic. Indeed, they have all the markings of the "philosopher's" arrogant claim to knowledge that conflicts with the will of all, since they function precisely to constrain that will. This is not surprising, as they emanate from the strategic, liberal, and admittedly monistic pluralism that justifies complex equality. But since Walzer opposes just this sort of philosophical imperialism as not only inconvenient but false--on grounds of our epistemic equality--the

constraints that protect complex equality against relativism end up contradicting his radical particularism.

Walzer deals with this contradiction exactly as Taylor does: by portraying the limits on particularism as being, themselves, particularistic. "The moral minimum," he emphasizes, "is necessarily expressive of our own thick morality" (1994b, 9, emphasis added). "We intervene," but "on behalf of 'life' and 'liberty,'" "not on behalf of 'truth' and 'justice'" (ibid., 16). By particularizing the minimal proviso, however, Walzer's appeal to "our own thick morality" defeats the constraining purpose of the minimum. If it is nothing but a social meaning created by the people of one society, what right have we to impose it, as a "philosopher" might, on people in societies that do not share it?

Walzer's response to this problem is to re-universalize the proviso. This might seem to return him to square one--contradicting his own particularism--but his neo-universalism is of an exceptionally vulnerable sort. He attributes belief in the content of the universal moral minimum to people in all cultures: he claims that "pretty much anybody looking on will see," in any conception of justice drawn from any culture, "something here that they recognize. The sum of these recognitions is what I mean by minimal morality" (1994b, 6). "It consists in principles and rules that are reiterated in different times and places" (ibid., 17). Walzer has been driven to adopt exactly the type of universalism that is usually greeted with incredulity by particularists, including Walzer himself: the type that asserts some "underlying unity" beneath the diversity of opinion among "ordinary

people" in different times and places (1983, 4). This is a frail basis for Walzer's minimalism, since it seems manifestly vulnerable to empirical falsification. Walzer seems convinced, however, that his minimum would be accepted by anyone who did not have a vested interest in rejecting it.

One might undermine this conviction by considering what a Nazi community would think of Walzer's minimum. Taylor, for one, has grown so tired of the Nazism rejoinder to communitarianism that he calls it "predictable" (Taylor 1995b, 104), but the only way he and Sandel answer it is by constraining communitarianism in ways that amount to jettisoning it. Walzer's moral minimum does the same thing, but the universalist effect--not to mention the credibility--of the minimum is undercut by the plainly false claim that people in all cultures would accept it. Rather than simply saying that the minimum is right regardless of what people think--which would fly in the face of Walzer's entire project--he seems to feel compelled to re-particularize the minimum by deriving it from everyone's "shared understandings."

What has gone wrong with Walzer's strategy? The original idea was to protect social democracy from the political vulnerability Nozick identified in Rawlsianism: the danger of tyranny. This could be accomplished, Walzer argued, by means of complex equality; but he combined this strategic rationale for diverse spheres of justice with a radical particularism that implies that complex equality itself, and the standards of distributive justice it employs, must be derived from shared understandings, lest it be considered elitist and authoritarian. Had Walzer merely proposed using particularist rhetoric to allay the

political defects of conventional liberalism, he would not have been able to claim that there is anything inherently wrong with universalism, a.k.a. "philosophy." By donning the mantle of radical particularism, however, Walzer shifts his argument from strategy (2') to metaphysics (2), making himself, for the moment, a pure communitarian, but inviting relativism along with particularism.

Walzer avoids this result by constraining his pure communitarianism with a universal minimum. Fending off the contradiction this entails, he portrays the minimum as merely an emanation of our particular culture. To sidestep the possibility that this means an anything-goes pluralism, a particularism without "limits," he depicts the minimum as accepted by all particular cultures. Walzer is not finished. As if to avoid completely negating the radical particularism he aims for, Walzer emphasizes the "thinness" of what is universally accepted. If it were too "thick," it would preclude any diversity of social meanings across different societies, and Walzer would patently be a "philosopher." Some ways of life that liberals would abhor, therefore, are allowed to escape prohibition by the minimal proviso. For instance, hierarchical communities, while they must abide by the minimal proviso, need not accept the tyranny-avoiding procedures of complex equality. "It's not impossible to imagine a society where dominance and monopoly are not violations but enactments of meaning, where social goods are conceived in hierarchical terms" (1983, 26). Such a society should be left alone.

Yet Walzer is quick to note that he finds such a society difficult, if not impossible, to imagine. We should not "assume that

men and women are ever entirely content with radical inequality" (1983, 27). This caveat is consistent with Walzer's tendency to privilege dissent over conformity as the test of shared meanings. "Resentment and resistance are (almost) as pervasive as belief," he cautions. "There are always some people, and after a time there are a great many," who reject the dominant view in any given society (ibid., 12). But in the meantime, one wonders how the vastly outnumbered dissenters could have any legitimacy, in their own minds or those of anyone else, if they took Walzer's teaching to heart. They, after all, are rejecting the shared understandings of their societies, or at least they are rejecting their societies' shared interpretations of their shared understandings. What basis could they claim for dissenting other than that arrogated to herself by the anathematized "philosopher": the claim to know truths that transcend the conventional wisdom? Walzer answers this question with his second proviso: his allowance for "connected criticism" of shared understandings.

Connected Criticism: Particularist or Universalist?

A pure communitarian would not allow any dissent from shared social understandings; all, no matter how abhorrent, would be considered equally legitimate. This would be consistent with Walzer's radically particularist epistemic egalitarianism, but it is incoherent, given the possibility of contradictory social meanings not only between but within societies. Walzer therefore allows dissent from shared meanings, just as Sandel and Taylor do; and just as in their communitarianisms, this constraint would collapse Walzer's

communitarianism into liberalism--unless the constraint were itself constrained, as was the moral minimum. Thus, Walzer limits the scope of legitimate social criticism to that which is immanent, that which criticizes shared understandings by drawing on them rather than on external sources.

If the connected-criticism proviso is to be compatible with pure communitarianism, it would be as incoherent as the shared understandings it is designed to constrain. Contradictory connected criticisms of shared understandings are as easy to imagine as contradictory shared understandings themselves, making connected critics and their followers--and even critical prophets without followers--communities unto themselves whose interpretations are, ipso facto, valid. If it is truly to constrain radical particularism, then--if it is not to return us to pure communitarianism--connected criticism will have to smuggle in criteria that do, in fact, transcend shared understandings in order to trump some of them. Walzer will thus find himself in the position of Sandel, arbitrarily ruling in some forms of criticism as illegitimate compared to others.

Let me take as innocuous an example as I can find. Walzer is fond of holding officials to their public statements of principles; from such statements he generates an entire, very important sphere of justice, the sphere of "security and welfare." "There has never been a political community that did not provide, or try to provide, or claim to provide, for the needs of its members as its members understood those needs," he writes; "every political community is in principle a welfare state. Every set of officials is at least putatively committed

to the provision of security and welfare" (1983, 68). But is it the officials' practice of making these commitments that confers value on the provision of security and welfare, by suggesting that such provision is widely valued? Or is it the fact that this provision is just?

Walzer wants to deny that it is a matter of transcendent justice. Like the prophet Amos (Walzer 1985, pt. III), he identifies the officials' putative commitments with their society's shared meanings, and then, of course, equates these shared meanings with the good. But why not locate the shared meanings in what people do, rather than what they say? When officials fail to provide what Walzer considers an adequate welfare state, their actions reflect somebody's interpretation of what they should do: their own, or that of their class. Perhaps, in the officials' view, the pieties they mouth concerning their welfare obligations are forced on them by their ties to people with different shared understandings than their own. These would be ties of subservience: the officials' hypocrisies would demonstrate their subjection to and dependence on this other body of people with alien understandings. But Walzer has no sympathy for the downtrodden officials, because he unproblematically views them as part of the same "society" as "the people," and he assumes further that the source of the society's interpretive authority must be popular, not official. By defining the boundaries of the relevant community in such a way that it contains both groups, officials and people; and by then applying an unstated principle (majority rule?) that makes the people's understandings definitive, Walzer invalidates the shared understandings

of the officials without seeming to invoke universal principles. My point is not to defend officialdom, but to ask how, where there is disagreement in the community about social meanings, the issue can be arbitrated--if not by appealing beyond shared understandings.

Boundary decisions are even more ubiquitous than intracommunal disagreement. Any intracommunal disagreement can be reinterpreted as a boundary dispute, but there are other boundary decisions to be made beforehand that determine the possibility of dissent. Its boundaries determine what counts as a society, and thus the content of a regime of complex equality: a society's boundaries determine the number, nature, and definition of the spheres within them, as well as whose opinions constitute the shared meanings governing these spheres. With a few "connected" dissenters and the right boundaries, almost any conception of justice or enumeration of spheres is possible.

When Walzer notices the need for boundary decisions, he responds by explicitly constraining communities. For example, he grants to people who, in effect, fall between the borders of nation-states the right to immigrate when there is extra land to be had, regardless of local sentiment; and he would compel communities to grant citizenship to guest workers and other modern metics, regardless of local shared understandings about the nature of community membership. The effect of such constraints is to draw community boundaries as the "outsiders" would like to see them drawn, not as the "insiders" would. Generally, though--if the people's understandings rather than the philosopher's boundaries are to do any work at all--Walzer has to assume that the social world resolves itself rather neatly into different societies,

usually coextensive with nation-states (1983, 44); that these societies are divided into discrete spheres of justice, transparently reflected in the social policies adopted in mass democracies (ibid., 81, 90); and that, within each sphere, it is relatively obvious what the inner logic is that issues in a principle of distribution.

These assumptions lead Walzer into many empirical oversimplifications. For instance, he asserts that "when we give out food," "the purpose of the giving" self-evidently is "the relief of hunger" (1983, 75). A writer of Walzer's sensitivity would normally be the first to recognize the mixed motives involved even in such a simple case of charity, but he is compelled to iron out many complications if he is to derive useable social meanings without the benefit of transcendent standards. Similarly: "Once the community undertakes to provide some needed good," he writes, "it must provide it to all the members who need it in proportion to their needs"--not because of Walzer's prevenient socialism, but because "all other criteria, beyond need itself, are experienced as distortions and not as limitations of the distributive process" (ibid., emphasis added). Arguably, this is true only when those experiencing the process are socialists.

It is the implicit claim that shared understandings are not only useful but true that forces Walzer to impose these oversimplifications on the social world. For this claim requires that shared understandings automatically, or with tweaking from connected critics, produce just conclusions without the intervention of philosophers. To the extent that he disagrees with ordinary people, Walzer will inevitably find himself in the position of doing violence to the social meanings of

goods that ordinary people actually share.

Consider, then, how Walzer would treat the social meanings generated by a society of libertarians. Libertarians would like to see most things for sale, from health care to heroin, and therefore they have a much wider conception of the appropriate sphere of money than Walzer allows. Walzer considers a laissez-faire economy to be a sort of "totalitarian state, invading every other sphere, dominating every other distributive process" (1983, 119). But among libertarians, the shared understanding of money is such that to them, Walzer's spheres themselves would represent a totalitarian invasion by what are, at bottom, egalitarian principles that cannot be justified except to those who, unlike libertarians, already accept them. I am no more defending libertarianism than I earlier defended public officials; I wish only to point out that Walzer is, in fact, ranking the "meaningful world" that he has made, as a culture-producing creature, above the world made by libertarians. The point would hardly need laboring but for the fact that its very obviousness provides an important clue as to how it is that the optimistic communitarians have selected particularism as their preferred strategy (as opposed to the question of why they choose to portray this strategy as a truth-claim).

Communitarianism as Decadent Liberalism

Why does Walzer think radical particularism is the best way to advocate democratic socialism? He contends that "we have to start from where we are" (1985, 16). Sandel, Taylor, and Walzer agree that we have to

start with "our own principles and values" (ibid., 17). This "have to" may be interpreted tautologically: "there is nothing else" but arguing over the interpretation of one's tradition, Walzer contends; "there is no other starting point for moral speculation" (ibid., 29, 16). The implication is that even if one begins with the socially given but repudiates it, one can be considered a connected critic.

The tautological interpretation of "have to" is akin to Sandel's and Taylor's reflexive and dissensus provisos: it requires Walzer, like the other optimistic communitarians, to consider all criticisms of the communally given to be acceptable. This would obliterate the distinction between critic and community. All forms of argument would count as connected criticism. Even A Theory of Justice had to start from Rawls's "principles and values"; indeed, Walzer cites the use of intuitions and of "reflective equilibrium" as exemplifying the canons of connected criticism (1985, 17, 17n). If even universalistic intuitions express "ourselves, our own principles and values" (ibid., 17), connected criticism is no longer a constraint on radical particularism; but the effect is, ironically, to legitimate universalism as just another expression of localism. If there is no difference between Walzer and his favorite target, Rawls, because even Rawls starts from intuitions that reflect his own (community's) values, then Walzer's repudiation of universality is to no effect; "philosophers" should proceed exactly as before.

There might be something to be said for a tautological definition of connected criticism if the only alternative would be to deny that ethics is a thoroughly human activity. We do have to start from where

we are in an empirical sense. One can find local origins for even the most impersonal principle: in Rawls's biography, or in the intellectual history of the United States, we can locate causal factors that explain why A Theory of Justice appeared when and where it did, and these factors can always be identified with some community. But the philosophical relevance of such genealogy is as dubious as the form of "philosophy" (that which is derived from God's will or natural law, for instance) that it unmasks. The proper "philosophical" claim--that is, the type of claim that is minimally inconsistent with particularism--is not that the source of a value transcends human community, culture, or history; it is rather that a value can be truly good regardless of its origins--and therefore regardless of whether it is attractive to a given community, culture, or society. When the universalism of the "philosopher" is understood this way, the empirical, tautological interpretation of Walzer's "have to" becomes irrelevant. We have to start from our community (defined tautologically), but this has no bearing on the validity of our conclusions.

On the other hand, Walzer's "have to" can be seen as something more than a tautology, enjoining us to accord respect to the intuitional, local starting point of all value-claims. "We do justice to actual men and women by respecting their particular creations," Walzer writes (1983, 314). Such sentiments explain why Walzer turns his strategic arguments for listening to "ordinary people" into truth-claims; but why might he view such arguments as strategically useful in the first place?

To Walzer, what is evil is self-evident: "coercion and

uniformity" (1994b, 8), "domination" (1983, 112), and inequality.

This is why it is important to note Walzer's insensitivity to the implications of, for example, a libertarian understanding of the meaning of money--or of any shared understanding that, like libertarianism, is radically at odds with Walzer's. His interest in Nozick appears to be limited to the insight that a Rawlsian state could inadvertently undermine Walzer's own ideals. Walzer does not seem to factor in Nozick's disagreement with these ideals--an indication that there are people who do not share the understandings that are essential to complex equality. Just as he expressly denies that anyone could repudiate the moral minimum, Walzer implies that the boundaries between, and interpretations of, the different spheres of justice are mere articulations of the essentially egalitarian understandings people already accept, and that only venal interests could stand in the way of implementing these understandings (e.g., 1983, 91). In short, Walzer is convinced that the people are on his side. Drawing the boundaries between communities and interpreting their principles of justice will not force him to do violence to ordinary people's shared understandings because, he is certain, he shares those understandings.

Walzer points out that we do have welfare states, that they have enormous electoral appeal, and that they embody a conception of the market in which "'exchanges born of desperation'" are ruled out (1983, 121, quoting Benjamin Franklin). Therefore, he might well and justly believe, "we" do not, in fact, accept the libertarian understanding of money. Walzer concludes that we have already accepted the principles that are dearest to him as a democratic socialist.

It is not surprising, then, that most of his fire is directed against his left flank, not his right. Walzer pays little attention, in other words, to those who disagree with his basic "philosophical" precepts; his quarrels are instead strategic disputes with leftists: leftists who (it goes without saying) agree with his normative precepts, but who want to abolish the market entirely; or who restrict themselves to envisioning a better world; or who judge the goods of all spheres against the absolute standard of equality; or who would countenance a vanguard party. The first and second types of leftist are, I believe, who Walzer has in mind in taxing "Utopian speculation and world rejection" as "two forms of escape from particularism" (1985, 68). As for the fourth type, the Leninist, Walzer repudiates those social critics "who regard the critics as the 'head' and the proletariat as the 'body,'" as Brian Barry puts it (1991, 12). And out of Walzer's confrontation with Leninism comes his answer to the third type of leftist: the Rawlsian. The left must come to realize, Walzer writes, that although "one could no doubt extract universal rules" from the understandings of a community, one could not do so "with the same words, images, references"; "the power of a prophet like Amos derives from his ability to say what oppression means, how it is experienced, in this time and place" (1985, 77, emphasis added). "The hypothetical experience of abstract men and women" is no doctrine suited to "the rough and tumble politics" of the real world (1981, 395, 381).

What would be realistic, then? Having come of age when being on the left meant being a critic of Soviet Marxism, Walzer has little choice but to embrace populism as the strategy through which socialism

must be achieved, lest it produce the opposite of its intended effect. As a result, he is bound to believe either that there is no hope for democratic socialism, or that there is hope because the people are on his side. To try to lead the people would be Leninist, and that is why the "philosopher" must be shunned. But there is an alternative: follow the people. In this direction lies a powerful--persuasive--form of democratic socialism.

Considering the milieu in which Walzer operates, his optimism is not so farfetched. Despite his experience team teaching with Robert Nozick (who himself, of course, favors what he considers to be individual freedom), Walzer has probably had very little contact with people who are not, in fact, on his side. When Walzer grounds egalitarianism in "our recognition of one another as human beings" (1983, xii, emphasis added), when he asserts that no effort to impose a single vision of justice can be "sustained in any particular society except at a cost (in coercion and uniformity) that human beings everywhere will recognize as too high to pay" (1994b, 8, emphasis added), when he claims that "all other criteria, beyond need itself, are experienced as distortions and not as limitations of the distributive process" (1983, 75, emphasis added), he is giving voice to the only context in which his apotheosis of popular sentiment could have any plausibility as a liberal stratagem: one in which ideals of (equal) freedom are, or seem to be, taken for granted by virtually everybody, so that the task of establishing their validity can be safely ignored. The people, Walzer correctly observes, are not much for abstruse speculation. But if they already hold to egalitarian

principles, speculation is unnecessary. What is needed, instead, is to come up with a mechanism that will translate their inchoate intuitions into democratic socialism in practice. Hence a form of complex equality that incorporates shared understandings; hence radical particularism, if reliance on shared understandings is not to be seen as a manipulative liberal stratagem.

Similarly with Sandel, whose strategic deployment of the intersubjective being presupposes that our community is egalitarian enough to accept the difference principle as constitutive of its identity--i.e., that Rawls's operative community is that of the United States as a whole. When Sandel makes the further claim that an intersubjective ontology is "true to our experience" of feeling the tug of communal loyalties, he can believe this, as can his readers, only to the extent that he, and they, are so comfortable with the egalitarian-liberal ideas with which they have been brought up that these ideas constitute their communal "identities." If one has few doubts about one's ethical precepts, one can seriously propose that moral reflection is a matter of exploring one's identity; and if these precepts are congruent with the received wisdom, it becomes plausible not only that one's identity is socially constituted, but that whatever identity is socially constituted is, ipso facto, normative, so that moral reflection should be a matter of weighing moral claims according to the intensity with which they seem to emanate from the social groups one considers salient. Taylor, indeed, finds it literally impossible to accept that anyone who is a product of Western culture could "fully, seriously, and unambivalently" reject "the characteristically modern

understandings of freedom and dignity and rights," the "ideals of self-fulfilment and expression," or "the demands of universal benevolence" (1989, 503). "However unsuccessful mankind has been in attaining 'the blessings of self-government,'" he declares, "no other aspiration ultimately incompatible with this is now avowable" (ibid., 396, emphasis added). In those who adhere to distorted versions of liberal ideals, then, there must be a liberal element Taylor can work with.

What makes communitarianism attractive as a strategy also makes it seem acceptable as a truth-claim: the conviction that no serious person could possibly disagree with liberal values. This conviction not only makes the appeal to collective identity seem a good way to secure those values, but a plausible representation of what moral reasoning should do. For if one is a complacent modern liberal, moral reasoning is a matter of expressing one's socially constituted identity. The only pressing questions--the only questions that produce genuine divisions among those comfortable with liberal norms--are questions about how best to consolidate and extend the hegemony of those norms. So political philosophy becomes coextensive with political strategy.

The ideological complacency shared by Walzer, Sandel, and Taylor fit well with the world of English-speaking political theorists of the early 1980s, when Sandel's Liberalism and the Limits of Justice (1982), Walzer's Spheres of Justice (1983), and Taylor's Philosophy and the Human Sciences (1985) appeared. At that time, the theoretical revolution spawned by A Theory of Justice (1971) had been fully institutionalized, and no serious opposition was in prospect. Nozick's

1974 challenge to Rawls derived private property from an overtly unjustified theory of self-ownership and labor-mixing, and his famous Wilt Chamberlain example simply begged the question against Rawls (Nagel 1984, O'Neill 1974). Other versions of classical liberalism, such as Hayek's, relied on clearly indefensible equations of negative freedom with private property, ignoring the coercive aspects of deprivation under capitalism (on which see Cohen 1979). Utilitarianism had been off the agenda of political theory since Rawls had embodied the postwar fear that it would justify atrocities against unpopular minorities, in the form of his claim that it did not take seriously the distinction between individuals. Marxism was never very robust in Anglo-American political philosophy. Feminism and postmodernism-- which, in any event, largely accept the liberal apotheosis of equal freedom, despite presenting anti-liberal methodological challenges similar to those posed by communitarianism--had yet to appear in force. Given the dominance of liberal theory and, in the Western world at large, liberal practice, a philosophy that reified the accepted wisdom of one's constitutive community would have had understandable appeal to liberals.

At the same time, the then-recent political successes of the Tories and Republicans may have suggested to Walzer and Taylor the impotence of Rawlsian liberalism as a political strategy with any prospect of success beyond the confines of the academy. Liberal values might be threatened, then, not by argument, but by being made to appear incompatible with group loyalties, nationalism, tradition. And earlier, for Sandel, the threat would not even be taken as seriously as

that. Hence optimistic communitarianism: a recasting of liberal values as particularistic. Why trouble with unpersuasive foundationalist arguments when everyone already accepts the liberal norms--if not the liberal policies--that "we" seek to establish? Even Walzer's fear of the authoritarian potential of universalist philosophy seems connected to a deep-seated confidence in the cultural hold of liberal values. With public opinion essentially in the liberal camp, the task was to permit powerful institutions like the state from falling into the hands of false (i.e., right-wing) patriots and traditionalists who threatened liberal goals.

Considered in the abstract, communitarianism is risky: it licenses whatever values a community happens to hold. Considered in the context of the late twentieth-century West, it was much safer--or it was if one was a liberal who believes that we are all liberals now. As the theoretical challenges to liberalism were overcome, as the felt need to defend it declined, the very idea of justifying it came, for many, to seem passe. This may explain the credibility communitarianism has been accorded from the moment of its appearance, despite its manifold and obvious theoretical--as opposed to strategic--deficiencies.

It would be easy to say that, at the end of 2001, we learned that we should now abandon liberal complacency. But this does not seem to be happening: political theorists are still voluntarily unarmed against a robust conception of the good, in the form of Islamism. Islamists do not want toleration; they seek to impose their "shared understandings" of Islam on the infidels. Patiently explaining to them that this

violates the multicultural rights of the infidels would be to no effect, since they don't believe in such rights--because they don't share "our" understanding that one has to believe in them, a la Taylor. If we ourselves even try to understand why--arguably--liberal societies are superior to theocracies, we might in the process come up with arguments that are more persuasive to those who aren't already liberals than the claim that we are all liberals, or the implicit claim that whatever one's community holds to be good is, ipso facto, good.

The essential complacency of the strategy embodied in optimistic communitarianism leaps from the pages of Walzer's paean to the Italian socialist writer Carlo Rosselli, a proto-New Leftist jailed by Mussolini. Pondering the strategic failings of the Old Left, Rosselli repudiated a host of Leninist "errors": historical determinism, the role of the vanguard, class struggle, statism, hostility to nationalism, an instrumentalist view of democracy, the primacy of the Soviet experiment (Walzer 1994a, 39-40). Rosselli "put all the rejections together and saw that they add up to an acceptance of liberal and democratic politics" (ibid., 40). Walzer, following Rosselli, is thus committed to a political strategy, but one that validates democracy as not only prudent, but as "rooted in a fundamental respect for other people" (ibid., 40). Consequently, he must not only seize on popular sentiments that are conducive to the predecided leftist direction if he is to be politically effective; he must validate these sentiments as good. Particularly striking along these lines is Walzer's defense of nationalism (cf. Walzer 1990b): "If you are going to create an Italian socialism," Walzer notes

approvingly, Rosselli realized that "you have to attend to the historical life forms of the Italian people," and this means breaking "'the absurd monopoly on patriotism held by so-called national parties'" (Walzer 1994a, 40, quoting Rosselli). Where previous liberal theory had avoided or attacked nationalism because of its incompatibility with the equal worth of human beings, now political theory is to be subordinated to the needs of democratic socialism; and if democratic socialism requires nationalism as a buttress, so be it. "Parochial solidarities," after all, "serve in fact as 'a powerful source of political allegiance to institutions which deal equitably with members of the group'" (Walzer 1992, 31, quoting Thomas Nagel). "Impartiality doesn't much reach beyond our fellow citizens," rendering the nation-state, which relies on partiality, suspect at best. But by capitalizing on partial, parochial solidarities, we "would make possible far more egalitarian socioeconomic policies than any we are likely to see in the United States today" (ibid., 32). So nationalism could be useful for a democratic socialist.

All of this, taken strictly as an empirical analysis of contemporary political realities, is not only unexceptionable; it is astute. But because Walzer, and his fellow optimists, are committed to treating contemporary political realities (in a general, nonpartisan sense) as good, they are led from optimism into the self-cancelling structure of communitarianism. It is paradoxical, at first glance, to find members of the political left drawn into the essentially conservative position of affirming existing opinion, leading to the relativist ratification of even immoral community values. But in the

end, the explanation for this conservatism may be not just the assumption that, if individualism is wrong, communitarianism must be right, but the conviction that the political success of the Left rests on a defense of the nationalist welfare state. In a world of nation-states that pursue leftist policies, albeit on a halting and nationalistic basis, defending patriotism is not a bad leftist tactic.

Optimistic communitarianism is leftism that realizes its fundamentally conservative position in modern political life. Out of this realization grows not only a strategic impatience with foundational inquiry, but a fundamental failure of imagination: an atrophied sense that there might be something to political theory beyond left-wing strategizing. Consider the implausibility of optimistic communitarianism in a society whose values were deeply repugnant to the communitarians in question, such as the borderless theocratic state envisioned by radical Islamists. It would hardly be credible, in such a context, for defenders of equal freedom to suggest either that whatever the community believes is true, or that indulging such beliefs would better secure equal freedom than would indulging the "philosopher's" quest for transcultural truth. Only where freedom and equality are, indeed, traditional values can liberal communitarianism, or communitarian liberalism, be a plausible political strategy.

NOTES

1. Cf. Walzer 1992, 32: "The actual moral conflicts that most people

live with are not between self-concern and universal impartiality....It

is my commitment to particular other people, the experience of working

with them on common projects or for the sake of a common life, that

lifts me out of myself." Here Walzer emphasizes the particularity of

the beneficiaries of moral concern, rather than, as in Spheres of

Justice, that of the principles by which moral concern operates in

distributing goods among its beneficiaries. But in both cases, Walzer

questions not what people's obligations are, but how most effectively

to get people to realize essentially liberal obligations. The answer,

in both cases, is to seize on people's particular allegiances, whether

to specific people or specific understandings of the good.

2. In "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism" (1990a), Walzer

endorses "the communitarian correction of liberalism," suggesting that

he considers his communitarianism to be a mere coda to his liberalism--

as indicated by the epigraph to this chapter. But in this article,

Walzer's topic is sociological, not philosophical communitarianism. To

counter social atomization, he favors the encouragement of social

groups in civil society; and, he contends, social groups "bonded by

shared ideas of toleration and democracy" (1990a, 15) require support

from the state (ibid., 16). In this context, Walzer does not confront

the question of what makes toleration and democracy valuable. It is in

answer to that question (e.g., in his article on "Philosophy and

Democracy" [1981]) that Walzer's pure communitarian moment--his

"radical particularism"--emerges.

3. In lumping together communitarian ontologies such as Sandel's with

communitarian epistemologies such as Walzer's under the rubric of

"metaphysics," I do not mean to suggest that all moral epistemology

necessarily presupposes an ontology. Indeed, Chapter 7 is designed to

advance a metaethics that strips moral epistemology of ontology. I do

mean to suggest that epistemologies such as Walzer's have something in

common with ontologies such as Sandel's: the conviction that some agent

has the authority to confer normative legitimacy on the actions it

values.

4. David Johnston's "humanist liberalism" follows this pattern to some extent. It is "particularist in details" rather than being, like Walzer's theory, "radically particularist" (Johnston 1994, 176).