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## **From breaking to blending: the renaissance of contemporary Western communitarianism**

**Abstract.** The concept of subject-object dichotomy first arose as a result of Descartes' notion of subjectivity. The point of view of "solipsism", "scientism", and many other views have led to the break in the communication between man and man, between man and nature, and even people with themselves. As society enters the era of dialogue, it is necessary to blend all conversations to establish long-term social connections. The emergence and growth of the era of dialogue have facilitated the revival of ideas of social solidarity, which is the basis of the revival of contemporary Western communitarianism.

**Key words:** communitarianism, globalization, Industrial Age, solipsism, the internal intersubjectivity, scientism.

The process of globalization has allowed people to get closer together and connect the most easily. However, those connections are still in a "broken" status. The generation gap exists worldwide, and so does military strength among states. Even in schools, teachers and students have not found a common. There are still numerous inconsistencies between parents and children and a lack of empathy and sharing. Everyone desires to live in a community, a place of love, care, and safety in such a society and era. Each individual can only find security and pleasure when he is a part of a community. It is like a house preventing us from wind and rain and a stove that warms hands on cold winter days [5, p. 75]. In a community, we can support each other, be respected, and shared. Besides, if we fail, others will help us through it. No one mocks or laughs at our

clumsiness [5, p. 128]. Community is not a "losing heaven", but a real environment that creates dialogue.

### **1. The breakup - A limitation of the Industrial Age**

The ancient agricultural civilization is the domination of the natural object, which means that the object dominates the subject. Later, when industrial civilization had turned the world upside down, humanity considered itself the subject and the sole center of governing, transforming, and enhancing natural objects. This kind of "subject-object" approach was expressed by the French philosopher - Descartes with the proposition: "I think, therefore I am" [4, p. 30]. "I think" refers to a conscious activity, the type of cognitive activity that takes self-awareness as an object. Thus, "I think" is the ability that people conduct to adjust their self-conscious ac-

tivities. With this control, man can exist as an entity – “therefore I am”.

Descartes has created the subject-object dichotomy. From there, the subject is imprisoned in the ego. In essence, it is an inherent construction of the subject based on solipsism. The relationship between “I” and other people and between “I” and the objective world has become a relationship between understanding and using the object. It also refers to the relationship between conquering and being conquered and between transforming and being transformed. The subjectivity of human being established in the traditional practical conception of “subject-object” has led to a long breakup for man’s dialogue, between man and man, between man and nature, and even within man himself. These manifests are shown in two aspects:

*Firstly*, solipsism considers reality the behavior of the human subject, promoting the spirit of the human subject. However, this has pushed the ego to solipsism and gradually turned into an extreme trend. This solipsistic character is first expressed in the relationship between “I” and others. It considers other people objects, which is similar to Sartre’s analysis in “Being and Nothingness” that states: “At the moment others look at “I”, “I” seems to be motionless because the excitement itself suddenly becomes the object of others in the eyes of the object. According to Sartre, the Other was an object of existence, which was not like the thing. He not only existed but also created a threat to “I”. This view provided the theoretical basis for the Fascists to commit brutal murders of different races during World War II. Specifically, they committed depraved acts such as raping women and children and murdering them in the most horrible methods, including dismembering, removing their liver, hanging children and the elderly on the fire, dropping dissidents into deep wells, or burying them while they were alive. The question is: “Why did they do that?” Simply because they considered people they killed to be aliens, not humans. The relationship between man and nature that is associated with emphasizing the human-centered doctrine states that human beings are the mes-

sengers of the natural world. Everything is based on meeting people’s interests and needs. According to this concept, man’s creation of material wealth in the industrial era also brings great destruction, degrades the natural environment, and threatens human existence. Once again, when dealing with the relationship between people and society, the emphasis on human rights and freedoms ignores integrity, ethics, and responsibility to society. Therefore, moral decline has become a significant concern in the current contemporary world. Finally, in the matter of himself, due to over-focusing on conquering and controlling the object, he becomes unfree. Like Bentham’s “Panopticon House”, he lost himself due to trying to track and monitor others.

*Secondly*, the concept of scientism to create a “subject-object” structure in the tradition is based on social reality. People believe that the subjectivity of the individual is a kind of scientism. The rapid development of science and technology has allowed humanity to enjoy prosperity and fullness, making their power limitless. They have also made man become an almighty force. However, if viewing from another perspective, the development of science and technology not only doesn’t bring happiness but also threatens the security of humanity. They are threats of nuclear weapons, moral decline, lack of spiritual life, the crazy pursuit of lust and money without regard to conscience and personality. This situation is occurring in developed capitalist countries in Europe and many places in the world. For example, the U.S. is considered a country with a developed economy, high standard of living, and outstanding development of science and technology. Moreover, machines are gradually replacing human labor in production activities. In the future, the development of medicine can help people conquer the aging process and reproduce human beings. Thus, Americans seem to have everything. However, when asked about their happiness level, most of them said they were not the happiest citizens in the world. They often worry about security, illness, and especially the lack of family affection, sharing, and sympathy in the community. In the context of

contemporary American society, Putnam warns that America's social capital is declining sharply. Husserl said, "In principle, positive science has refuted the proposition, that is, in our unfortunate times, there is an immediate response to changes destined for fate when asking about the meaning of life" [1, pp. 271-272]. American scholar - Fred Reinhard Dallmayr said, "Suppose this notion of subjectivity is the basis of modernity and needs to be replaced if there is a deeper and more precise conception rendering society null and void, it will create the meaning of a new age" [2, p. 218].

## **2. The call for blending and communicating in contemporary society**

In the second half of the twentieth century, the world's politics, economy, and society developed rapidly. The era of dialogue began, prompting thoughts about the breakup in interpersonal relationships regulated by the "subject-object" structure in the industrial age. At this point, the thought of intersubjective began to change direction in the historical period.

Philosophical hermeneutics supposed that the relationship between man and things, between man and man, and between man and the world could be summed up by the relationship between understanding and communication. Heidegger raised understanding to the level of ontology and believed that knowledge was the fundamental mode of human existence. Then, Gadamer continued to develop Heidegger's understanding of ontology and stated that understanding was the process of dialogue between knowledge and the object of knowledge. Communication was the highest level of understanding, so understanding based on it was the true one. Gadamer pointed out that understanding was a question-centered dialogue, and a dialogue was the presence of both sides that attracted each other, tolerated, participated, and accepted each other. At the same time, the understanding was also the process of listening to each other. Dialogue placed itself in the dynamic activities of interacting subjects. Jaspers believed that reciprocity was the primary mode of human existence and that "I" could

only exist in relation to other people. According to him, four specific forms of human relationships from low to high were: (1) The communal subjectivity. It is the primordial relationship. (2) The interobjectivity. The individual's self-consciousness and subjective consciousness are enhanced, and man becomes an independent social atom. (3) The external intersubjectivity. Its outstanding feature is the relationship of "comradeship" based on understanding the Other as a self-conscious subject. (4) The internal intersubjectivity. It is the ideal relationship because it fully guarantees human freedom and achieves true unity between individuals and others and between individuals and society. Martin Buber formulated a theory of objectivity centered on "communication theory" based on the division of the world between "I - He" and "I - You". He pointed out that under the guidance of modern philosophy, people believed in the principle of conquest. On the one hand, they depended on technology and constantly escaped from nature, which had pushed them to the brink of solitude and collapse. In society, the individual was immersed as a part of the "collective" apparatus, which separated from one person to another. The notion of responsibility gradually disappeared. In faith, people moved away from the sacred and lost faith. Therefore, the meaning of the world existed only on the surface, and the world became the one without foundation. According to value relativism, indulgent lifestyles and moral decay had become the features of this world. Based on the concept of "I - You" dialogue, Martin Buber proposed three main characteristics of dialogue: "immediacy", "interoperability", and "reciprocity".

In the 1970s and 1980s, Jürgen Habermas proposed the theory of communicative action. He pointed out that the prerequisite for the emergence of communicative action was based on communicative competence. To achieve mutual understanding, a person participating in communicative action shall pay attention to the level of intelligibility in the sentence's content. Besides, he shall make himself understandable and gain mutual understanding or consensus [3].

### 3. From the breakup to the blend - the renaissance of western communitarianism

The overexpansion of the right to freedom in industrial society and socio-cultural fragmentation led to the emergence of the social phenomenon of individualization. Because individuals living in contemporary society tended to be self-centered and focus on themselves, they tended to withdraw from collective discussions and waive social and political responsibilities, which led to the “breakup” of the “diagonal” relationship. The industrial society encouraged people to separate from the community and turned them into atomic, fragmented, and solitary ones. At the same time, it also placed people in the “Panopticon House” of modern and disciplined organization, turning them into instrumental ones.

No one can control his destiny alone in the information society, and no one can exist independently. The challenges that people are facing can only be solved through discussion or collective dialogue. Therefore, the development of the “inter-subject” movement at the end of the 20th century triggered the rebirth of communitarianism. The community can only be revived in the current society because it possesses specific values for contemporary society, as follow:

*Firstly*, the community always ensures publicity that is its fundamental characteristic. It has broken individual limits of people by rationality in communication and subjectivity among subjects. Moreover, it helps people achieve personal growth and reflects essential personal values. The community will ensure that individuals are maximized their value and receive consensus through participation and critique. It also correctly addresses individual interests, collective interests, and national interests to achieve general unity in society. Therefore, promoting the public interest and rebuilding the community-based public life play a vital part in the revival of community spirit in contemporary society.

*Secondly*, it is the reasoning of the community. Communitarianism has evoked traditional moral values to reduce moral deg-

radation in post-industrial society. It was initially the thought of utopian socialists envisioned in the model villages they would create. They didn't rely on draconian rules but betting on ethical standards of workers, the richness of family life, and their trust in the heart of their bosses. They hoped for a good master-servant relationship, benevolence, and a community spirit that was like fatherhood in a competitive and profit-seeking environment.

Elton Mayo conducted the Hawthorne experiment to reshape the community spirit that had been underestimated and forgotten. Elton Mayo believes that if employers can instill a sense of “we are all in the same boat” in employees, employee loyalty will be promoted. If they respect the pursuit of dignity, worth, honor, and the unprofitable inherence of workers, the issues of bonuses, salary increases, and close supervision will not be important.

*Thirdly*, it is the individuality of the community. The publicity does not mean eradicating human subjectivity. The group spirit advocated by communitarianism is based on the individual spirit of the members of that community. According to the traditional sense, the community didn't need to care about individuality and support people from “cradle to grave” (that meant from birth to death). It was not necessary to choose and identify a human identity. The notion of identity proposed by Zygmunt Bauman emphasized the difference between the modern community and the primitive community. He thought that identity was attractiveness and difference. Through that difference, it became unique [5, p. 168]. At the same time, identity meant belonging. According to the modern sense, the community is the product of tensions among individuals seeking their independence and belonging.

Although the current society has entered the era of dialogue, people have fallen into a condition of broken communication that is difficult to resolve due to the powerful impact of the traditional “subject-object” view. Community is the ideal place for communication, so people would like to stay in the com-

munity and enjoy the warmth of interpersonal harmony.

#### 4. Conclusion

Our contemporary society faces many huge problems such as a growing crisis of trust, moral degradation, erasure of identity, poverty in spiritual life, and psychological crisis, which has prompted views to re-

consider the community and call for dialogue to revive traditional values, enliven beliefs, and uphold community values in the process of forming identity. The era of dialogue plays a fundamental part in reviving views on friendship and community solidarity and becomes the solid foundation for a revival of communitarianism in the West.

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