

Communitarianism

1. Critique of individualist assumptions made by Mill

The abstract individual does not exist.

a) Every person is embedded in a *social context*. Identity, role, obligations are all dependent on context or community. There are perhaps certain features of our existence that define us. We cannot (and should not) exist independently of these.

b) We are creatures of routine and order. The freedoms we do experience normally arise only when the routine breaks down. The experience of freedom is not the dominant feature of our lives. Mill therefore emphasises something that isn't really that central to our experience.

2. Prescriptive Politics

Politics should preserve the contexts that define who we are. Policies that destroy communities are bad ones. Politics should not be about allowing autonomy to abstract/atomistic beings

Communitarianism relies on a concept of the good life. It is therefore an example of positive freedom. Living within one's context with a stable identity is the good life.

Problems

Aren't some contexts repressive? Some people may be trapped by their identity and culture. Communitarianism lacks the philosophical resources to help these people escape.

In a globalised world, the concept of community (in the narrow sense) seems very limited.