

[Vol 23 No 1](#)

[Home](#) / [Archives](#) / [\(2003\)](#) / [Articles](#)

Book Review: Who Owns What and What For?

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Abstract

Introduction: Bodies are like fences. In our world they partition humanity into individual humans and they serve to distinguish us from each other. Generally speaking we do not regard this individuation as a limitation upon our interaction with other individuals. In other words, my being me and you being you does not of itself hinder friendship or relationship, but it does provoke the question of our relationship to each other. Moreover, while not regarding our separateness as an obstacle to human relationship, we can regard it as making relationship possible. Our individual identity, if recognized and respected as such, is the condition for community in which there is meaning in saying: Love your neighbor as yourself, or Do unto others as you would have them do to you. Or for those not Christian, but Confucian, in the Analects it is written Is there anyone word, asked a disciple, which could be adopted as a lifelong rule of conduct? The Master [Confucius] replied Is not sympathy the word? Do not do to others what you would not like yourself. In the context of this pluralism we are separate and distinct, but nevertheless sometimes unequal, other times equal. It is notable therefore that separateness and distinctness do not by themselves ensure equal treatment-sometimes they provoke discrimination-but they do provide two things (a self and another self) upon which relationships of equality become possible and intelligible. Therefore, the maintenance of distinct persons who are not all one is a necessary first step toward community, because the distinction of separateness presents the reality of something outside of our separate self, which is not our self, but an other.

THE
COMMUNITY
OF INQUIRY
JOURNAL

NOVEMBER 2002
Volume 23, Number 1

*A*nalystic *T*eaching

Published by
VITERBO UNIVERSITY
LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN



Susan Schaffer

 PDF

Issue
[Vol 23 No 1 \(2003\)](#)

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