

Session 11. 11/13/03. Reading Interrogations. Sociology 929.
Envisioning real Utopias. *Communitarianism: The New Golden Rule*

Note: I have added (starting on p18) a few pages of my own notes/reflections to these interrogations that I thought might be of interest to you. Many of my points overlap with yours, but there are a few different issues. These do not have to directly structure the agenda we derive from the interrogations, but I thought it might facilitate some of the discussion

1. Adam Jacobs

I think there is much to like and agree with in Etzioni's argument. And while he provides a wealth of specific examples, this is the first real utopias proposal that offers a general societal framework, rather than a specific proposal. This leads one to speculate on how well other proposals would fit within the communitarian agenda. Clearly, activities that promote civic engagement, like deliberation day, are possible (D-day is discussed on p. 115, and Fishkin's deliberative polling on p. 112). But would a proposal like Philippe van Parijs' universal basic income meld with communitarian values? I think that basic income (BI) nicely 'steadies the bicycle' between autonomy and order: people are at once given more latitude in their choices by the cushion of BI, while providing directly for the worst-off members of society would probably contribute to order and social cohesion. During our discussion, however, we disagreed on whether basic income was too individualistic in its orientation. Would BI be consonant with the articulated core values?

[This is a nice issue to explore. One general idea I would suggest here is this: one of the forces at work that undermine community and the moral order linked to community is market competition and commodification. (Indeed, I think this is a pervasive source of the problems Etzioni documents). Basic Income has the potential of being an institution that would contribute to a muting of commodification and the market: labor power would be partially decommodified and people would be less subordinated to market competition for their livelihoods. Also BI is a generic subsidy to the efforts of community-building and care-giving – i.e. it opens up the possibilities for easier choices by people to devote their energies to these purposes without worrying about the profitability of the activity. Thus, BI should be a communitarian proposal even though it is "individualistic" in its targets.]

In critiquing Habermas and Ackerman towards the end of the book, Etzioni stresses that an outcome from deliberation alone does not entail any moral gravity (p. 228). This returns to earlier discussions on Deepening Democracy and Associations and Democracy, about the scope of deliberation as problem solving. Deliberation certainly does well in resolving prisoner's dilemmas and fixing sub-optimal situations, but it seems less effective in resolving issues that drift into the realm of morals. It seems that communitarianism, even with shared values, 'can withstand a few unresolved differences. (Abortion is a case in point).' (p. 109). Perhaps deliberation is best at arbitrating practical issues like planning decisions and resources allocations, while a revival of common

values, countering extreme relativism and fostering the moral voice would deal with macro-level issues. A few issues, like abortion, would fall in the 'agree to disagree' category. How many of these intractable issues are there – only a few, or a growing portion of the political realm? **[I personally think serious deliberation of the sort Archon & I elaborate in our empowered participatory governance model has the character of moral dialogue that Etzioni advocates. By centering discussion on reason giving this can clarify moral reasoning to the actors involved, and since many problems have multiple moral dimensions, such reason-giving will help to clarify the moral complexity of social problem solving. An understanding of such complexity should make the zone for some sort of compromise, even on morally salient issues, easier, if only because it will soften up the absolutest positions of many participants in the dialogue. So, I think on many seemingly intractable issues dialogue can facilitate at least partial resolution even if it cannot produce moral homogeneity.]**

The possibility for fostering a moral space, between market and state, seems difficult in the face of economic power. It seems there would be mobilization of powerful resources against a cultural shift that would improve lives and threaten commerce, such as voluntary simplicity. This revisits the kibbutz example, where marketization and macro-economic difficulties challenged the basic values of the institution. Can communitarianism be stronger than economic forces? Will the continued existence of capitalism ultimately corrode communitarian values? Or can communitarianism, conversely, fundamentally alter and restrain capitalism? **[As I suggest in my own notes at the end of these interrogations, I think that the communitarian project does require dampening the market and subduing competitiveness, and this means increasing the social accountability of capitalism. Indeed, this is close to what I would mean by social-ism: infusing economic processes with social accountability. That cannot happen with unchecked capitalist power, so Communitarianism needs a market-constraining competition-reducing strategy, in my judgment.]** Also, reading about a 'community of communities' (p. 197) suggests issues of scale. The reconstitution of society on smaller-scale economic foundations might facilitate communitarianism. Are the barriers to, or absence of communitarianism due to alienating social structures (bureaucracy, corporations) that could be removed or scaled back?

How well does this analysis fit the political terrain seven years hence? It seems to me that the metaphor of 'oversteering' (p. 79) might aptly explain the advent of John Ashcroft et al, and the rapid reactionary turn in politics. This same metaphor might also suggest that the heartening idea that an additional readjustment is forthcoming, shifting back towards autonomy and away from excessive order.

2. Jay Burlington

Since our seminar centers on questions of institutional design, my reflections on the communitarianism readings had to do with how what sort of institutions would support a communitarian nation.

While Etzioni (1996) does not hold high hopes for deliberation, seeming to view it as a proceduralist version of democratic politics that emphasizes reason at the expense of values and emotions, I would like to suggest that deliberation in the context of the sorts of institutions and governance structures we discussed in recent weeks addresses his concerns about moral dialogue.

Etzioni stresses the important of moral voice and moral dialogue. “Values talk” (p. 102), as opposed to simple declarations of values (e.g. statements such as “I am pro-choice” or “I am pro-life”), contains an accounting. That is, through moral dialogue about values, others can critique a given value of yours by arguing that it is inconsistent with other values you hold, or that it entails other values which you wouldn’t want to hold (p. 103).

It seems to me that moral dialogue of this character would be encouraged by the deliberative components of institutions we have recently discussed, such as Ackerman & Fishkin’s (forthcoming 2004) *Deliberation Day*, and Fung & Wright’s model of Empowered Participatory Governance. In the case of *Deliberation Day*, though there is a particular procedure proposed, one would be gathered with other members of one’s (geographically-based) community and discussing which issues candidates should be addressing, a discussion through which reasons that non-academics give for supporting a particular candidate or position would come through (and since when ‘non-academic people’ give reasons for positions, they tend to rather naturally refer to values and moral judgments). In the case of EPG, deliberation occurs among a community of those affected by decisions of the governance body, and I would argue that such discussions would encourage “values talk” as well, perhaps even to some extent in the case of discussing narrow technical issues, for discussion of why to do things a certain way or not seem to me to inevitably lend themselves to a question of what should be done – and when people talk about what should be done, or how things should be, they talk about values.

Perhaps I am overly optimistic about the ‘moral’ values of deliberation, and/or perhaps deliberation of this sort does not foster enough agreement about core values to satisfy proponents of a communitarian perspective? **[As I indicated in my comments on Adam’s interrogation, I very much agree with what you say here. There is a connected issue about what sorts of arguments are “permissible” in a democratic deliberation process. Etzioni criticizes Ackerman (as I recall) for imposing some pretty strong strictures. Thus, in an abortion discussion it would not be permissible according to many deliberation theorists to argue: “I am against abortion because God says it is wrong” or “I am against it because the Bible says it is wrong.” The reason these are not “allowed” is because these are arguments that cannot count as “reasons” unless you also believe in the Bible and a particular kind of God, and it is**

unreasonable in a civic context of deliberation to insist that everyone believe this. Now, what allowable really means here is not that a fundamentalist Christian would be kicked out of the discussion for saying these things, but that the listeners cannot be expected to take the argument seriously. They would not be violating the terms of public deliberation to simply ignore such arguments.]

3. Stuart Meland

On a certain level I find it difficult to argue against communitarianism. I like that it is generally non-coercive and relies on our social nature, and the subsequent threat of exclusion, as a means of molding behavior. However, social exclusion relies on small group pressures in isolation. This was touched on briefly in chapters five and seven, but I don't think enough attention was paid to the fact that social exclusion loses much of its power whenever exit options are present. Can voluntary compliance, or even coercive measures for that matter, effectively limit these options once they are in place? **[I think the point here is that if community became a more salient feature in the lives of people, then various gradients of exclusion would have sanctioning force. Of course, in the context of weak community, acts of exclusion may have little punch. In think an interesting sociological question is whether or not instigating acts of exclusion in a weak community might itself contribute to strengthening the community? That is, is exclusionary-sanctions a plausible community-building strategy?]** And on a somewhat related note, how can communitarian pressures counter or regulate the Internet's pull toward individualism?

Historical communitarianism, by many other names, appears to be a compromise between the extremes of autonomy and social order. That said, I have to wonder if pure communitarianism, with 98% voluntary compliance (86-87), is perhaps an extreme of its own. Instead of being a compromise between two points in a linear argument, I wonder if pure communitarianism is an extreme in another direction. Compromise would then be the point in the center of the triangle rather than the center of the line. Pure communitarianism, as I understand it, would require a web of social networks and a level of consensus that can only exist in the absence of free thought. It seems to me that religion would then be the only appropriate vehicle for advancing communitarian goals. Perhaps I misunderstood the argument. Is the goal as set forth by Etzioni to promote a pure communitarian society or to encourage a communitarianism counter-current to American individualism? **[If "Communitarianism" is the shorthand for "a balanced equilibrium between a society that takes autonomy to the extreme and a society that takes order to the extreme", then "pure Communitarianism" would be "a society that manages this equilibrium in the optimal manner." I think you are taking pure communitarianism to mean pure *collectivism* or something like that, which is not Etzioni's meaning.]**

I question the use of 1950s America as a baseline for any argument at all (60-64). How can we suggest that a patriarchal, segregated society is in any way an example of "the

good society?” To his credit Etzioni does address these issues on numerous occasions, including the “peer marriage” (180). However, he relies on the 50s saying, “one cannot deny that the occurrence of antisocial behavior was in the American society of the 1950s (and that of other Western societies) was much lower than it was at the end of the 1980s” (61). If the presence of antisocial behavior alone is our primary benchmark, I question the core values that communitarianism promotes. He clarifies the point further on page 130, saying, “many contemporary communitarians, especially those who define themselves as response communitarians, fully realize and often stress that they do *not* seek to return to traditional communities, with their authoritarian power structure, rigid stratification, and discriminatory practices against women and minorities.” My question for Mr. Etzioni is, suppose that the communitarian ideals present in the 1950s can only exist in the context of an authoritarian, stratified, discriminatory society; which then would you rather have, the 1950’s model or our current individualistic society? **[That is a nice provocative question. I think Etzioni’s stand here is not that the 1950s USA represented a communitarian society, but that it was a society within which the moral order pole of the two virtues was much stronger and the autonomy pole weaker. But it was not a balanced equilibrium because the autonomy pole was too weak in very important ways. The correction to that deficit lead to the deterioration of the moral order of community, so we end up with too much unconstrained autonomy. (Perhaps not really too much autonomy as such, but too much morally unconstrained autonomy.) In places he does seem to argue that the *explanation* for the collapse of community-based moral order was the increase in autonomy – generated by the civil rights movement, the women’s movement, etc. But you don’t have to agree with that explanation to agree with the diagnosis of the present situation. In any case, I don’t think that the 1950s “baseline” is meant to be “balanced Communitarianism.”]**

Minor sub-point, can’t we consider the 1960s and 70s to be a megalogue on the merits of 1950s communitarianism? **[Nice thought – here was a megalogue that lead to too little community.]**

4. Chang

1. Methodology

Etzioni precedes his logic that the restoration of civil society is not enough. Deliberation is not enough. There is something more! What is that? That is value, and the balance between order and autonomy. In addition, this idea should be contextualized in terms of history and culture.

In his logic, the assumption, that is, rearranging the intellectual-political map is given. Nevertheless, where is class? Is his assumption right? I admit that the relationship between the individual and the community is the important axis to analyze the current situation. However, his functionalism ignores the actors’ power to advance “history”. In chapter 3, for example, he asserts that there was a considerable deterioration of social

order between 1960 and 1990. What makes such deterioration? In order to answer that question, we bring the power struggle into the analysis.

What is the history? According to his explanation, history is like the pendulum swings. Then, where is the subject (or actors) in his analysis? Moreover, what is the role of actors (for example, class or the minority) in history? Hegelian Absolute Spirit wanders in his book. **[I think, actually, that there are many actors in the argument, but not a systematic theory of actors. That is, the actors in the construction of moral order are any category of people who share sufficient identity to act collectively in the pursuit of moral order. The collective actors could be churches, unions, civic associations, political parties, or whatever. I am not sure if this is simply because the book is not about the social movements and political processes that might drive the changes that are discussed, or because Etzioni feels his arguments would meld well with a variety of theories of collective action and thus he doesn't need a specific theory here.]**

2. Community & culture

According to Etzioni, community is defined “by two characteristics: first, a web of affect-laden relationships among a group of individuals, relationships that often crisscross and reinforce one another, and second, a measure of commitment to a set of shared values, norms, and meanings, and a shared history and identity – in short, to **a particular culture** (p.127).”- Community seems to be religious-.

I agree that community is the new agenda in the 21st century. Again, Etzioni explains that the community “provides one with a normative foundation, a starting point, **culture and tradition**, fellowship, and place for moral dialogue, but is not the ultimate moral arbitrator (p.257)”. Two explanations about community imply culture really matters. What is the meaning of culture in new golden rule? What is the communitarian position on ‘Asian value’ or ‘Islamic value’? To avoid culture war, what can the communitarian do? **[I think part of the problem here is that “culture” is perhaps too broad, as is the idea of “shared values” for the specific purpose of the “good society” community. Many values that may be shared would be antithetical to the kind of community advocated by responsive-communitarians since the values would thwart the autonomy virtue. So, the pivotal problem is how to get the right kind of shared values, the ones that are consistent with morally-bounded autonomy without bringing in their wake the values that are inimical to such autonomy. A pessimistic view is that this is impossible as a stable equilibrium: the dynamics of community-strengthening are such that the only way to get good values is to bring along oppressive ones; the good autonomy-compatible values will not be stable as “shared values”, or will not provide a firm enough base for a community-generated moral order to withstand the corrosive effects of individual autonomy.]**

5. César Rodríguez

1. While Etzioni recognizes the affinity between his communitarian proposal and some works in the “civic tradition” literature like Robert Putnam’s and Almond and Verba’s, he distances himself from such a tradition (and its current incarnations, which are couched in terms of “social capital”) by pointing out that the type of social ties that he has in mind are not the weak ones fostered by voluntary associations, but the stronger attachments that communities foster based on ethnic, racial, religious and residential factors (see, for instance, p. 27). However, Etzioni also argues that the type of community he envisages is not confined to the micro scale. Indeed, a whole nation or region of the world could be a community as he understands it.

I have two questions regarding Etzioni’s treatment of “weak” and “strong” social ties. First, in plural, complex macro communities (e.g., a whole country), it is far from clear how social ties can be stronger than associational ties. After all, many secondary associations (e.g., professional associations) have the advantage of being based on *direct* ties that bridge ethnic, religious and racial divides. Why, then, draw such a clear distinction between associations and communities? **[I think this issue of strong vs weak ties is a good one to try to clarify. Obviously in the world there is not a simple dichotomy here, but more of a continuum. Perhaps the issue is that at least one of the cross-cutting communities of which we are a part need to have relatively strong ties in them to continue the conditions for moral order. Secondary associations may be able to accomplish this in specific contexts, perhaps, so his diagnosis that associations can’t constitute moral-ordering community may not be right.]** Second, secondary associations have an organizational dimension to it, in that they are set up as formal organizations capable of undertaking private and public activities. On the other hand, the types of communities that Etzioni seems to have in mind do not necessarily congeal into a formal organization, and oftentimes remain as an amorphous whole. Given the interest of communitarianism in a vibrant and participatory polity, would associations not serve as better conduits for citizen participation than communities? In general, what would be the articulation between associations and communities? **[Good problem to think about: perhaps this is the equivalent of the issue of how to link direct participatory democracy and formal representative democracy – rather than replacing the latter with the former. Perhaps the communitarian ideal requires a specific form of linkage between strong community and effective associations.]**

2. Given the topic of our class, the main omission I found in Etzioni’s interesting proposal was a focused discussion of specific institutional reforms. I suppose, however, that many such proposals underlie some of his criticisms of extant institutions. For instance, the discussion of “voluntary self-limitation by the American media” makes sense, to my mind, only under radically different institutional conditions. Indeed, in the absence of a profound democratization of media ownership, viewing such self-limitation as a sign of a society-wide condemnation of certain opinions and images would be inaccurate at best. As things stand now – i.e., in the context of the extreme concentration

of media ownership -- only a few members of society get to choose what gets seen and heard in major media outlets. **[see my comments at the end on institutional designs]**

3. As in other functionalist accounts, issues of power tend to drop out of the picture in Etzioni's proposal. For instance, in his interesting discussion of "megalogues," all the parties to the conversation are assumed to be equal. However, actual dialogues on moral issues are established between people with widely disparate endowments of economic, social, and cultural capital, which directly affect the dynamics and outcomes of the conversations. Given that Etzioni is rightly concerned about the empirical grounding of social theories, the absence of a detailed treatment of power asymmetries and of institutional mechanisms to counter them struck me as an important void in his book. Does communitarianism assume a roughly equal distribution of power? If not, what type of corrective mechanisms would it envisage in order to make moral dialogues and megalogues approach the ideal portrayed in the book? **[This is definitely worth discussing in some detail. But perhaps this is like the issue of the background power inequalities in deliberative democracy: if one waits until these power inequalities are neutralized then there is no chance of ever getting empowered participatory governance. Still, I think some degree of power-equalization should be part of the communitarian agenda – and I think it actually is, although this is clearer in other things Etzioni has written.]**

6. Matías D. Scaglione

Adam Smith, "self interest" and society

John M. Keynes wrote in the last paragraph of his *General Theory*: "the ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else". Maybe with a similar conviction, Amitai Etzioni's main methodological concern in *The New Golden Rule* is with what he calls "public philosophy, the treatment of social thought of philosophers... insofar as it has influenced public thinking and had been incorporated into social practices and public policies" (p. xx).

No doubt, one extremely influential philosopher is Adam Smith, commonly considered the champion of *laissez faire* and the founder of modern economics. (Although it is beyond this interrogation, it is worth noting that the first description is misleading and the second plainly false.) According to Etzioni's redrawing of the intellectual map, Smith belongs to the group of "classical liberals", which also includes thinkers as John Locke, John Stuart Mill, John Rawls and Thomas Nagel, among others. The group of classical liberals belongs, in turn, to the broader set of "individualist" authors, who "focus – albeit to varying degrees – on the need for autonomy, and pay relatively less direct attention to the needs for social order." However, I think that the dichotomy autonomy / social order is not well suited to classify an author like Adam Smith, albeit admitting the "varying degrees" of primacy of one category over the other.

I claim, but do not demonstrate due to the nature of this interrogation, that:

(i) Neither the Smithian concept of self-interest (“[it] is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest”) nor the famous locution “invisible hand” were “well suited to the eighteenth-century” nor a call for “more [moral] license” (Etzioni, xix). What Smith has in mind is the way to systematically increase the “wealth of Nations” through the increase of the productivity of labor and the accumulation of capital. His investigation of the nascent industrial capitalism led him to conclude that the best way to achieve a high rate of growth of the total product of a nation is through the elimination of the influence of the “modern States” on the economy. It is worth noting that he was fighting against the mercantilist view of the world, and dealing with states corrupted and in bankruptcy as England. To sum up, the moral thought of Smith as a moral philosopher is to be found in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and his concept of “sympathy” (Cf. Etzioni, 184), whereas the notion of individual freedom of enterprise is to be found in his *Wealth of Nations* and his concept of “own interest”. Having said that, we agree about the Smithian stress on what Etzioni call “autonomy”.

(ii) Nevertheless, to qualify as a classical liberal Smith should have paid relatively less attention to “social order”, in Etzioni’s terms. This is a very disputable issue and entails a discussion of a Smith quite different with respect to the apologetic versions. Smith is not only preoccupied about individual autonomy, but also focus forcefully in the mechanisms that conduce to “social order”, in the broader sense of the term. Smith realized, for instance, about the corrosive effects of the division of labor on workers, “the great mass of the population” and its deleterious effects on the society as a whole, prescribing the provision of basic public education as a remedy. He also warned about the excessive power of merchants and the dangers of monopoly, saw very clear that the independence of the American colonies was the best solution to the difficult position of the United Kingdom, worried about the design of a “good government”, etc.

The dichotomy autonomy / social order is central for the communitarian proposal of Etzioni. Assuming that our account is valid, we would like to ask the author how would he change his classification of Adam Smith and what are the theoretical implications of such a change. **[I don’t know the work of Smith beyond *The Wealth of Nations*, but it does seem to me that in some of what I remember there is a slight Polanyian tone about the importance of a moral backdrop to the market in order for it to function. I agree with you that his focus on non-interference was directed against especially corrupt states, and the market mechanism and division of labor was directed at a specific explanandum – the wealth of nations. But he also said that this preoccupation with increasing the wealth of nation was only morally justified to the extent that it eliminated poverty and that capitalism would be deemed a failure if this did not happen even if it promoted growth.]**

7. Richard Thomson

I was out of town all weekend, and I haven't had time to finish reading Etzioni's book yet, so if I bring up something that is discussed in the last fifty pages – just forget I mentioned it.

1. Not prescriptive enough – Communitarianism does not give guidance as to a “proper” path to follow, rather it is vague and provides only post-hoc rationalizations. On a case-by-case basis, and without a set of prescriptions, how would a communitarian public official be guiding in making decisions that are along the lines of communitarianism? In addition, all decisions have to be examined in context, which makes any tentative prescriptions even more difficult to make. Could communitarians derive a set of hypotheses to test their theories in the future? Or would any attempt to derive hypotheses be inexplicably confounded by the bicycle balancing act and context? **I guess the key guiding principle here is the notion of balance between order and autonomy, taking both seriously and worrying about the trade-offs when they occur. This is not exactly a specific criterion for policy, but it is more than a vague norm.]**
2. Definition of Community – Etzioni's definition of community relies upon both: a web of affect-laden relationships, and a set of shared values, norms, meanings, history and identity (p 127). In dealing with the second point, how strong and pervasive must these shared values be? Can communities and society's thrive with only a minimal set of shared values that are weakly held? To use Etzioni's example on p 86, can a “good society” thrive with people only sharing a ride on the bus and nothing more? Wouldn't it be a testament to such a society, if the society could thrive while holding together such divergent interests and values (and having such little in common in the way of shared values)? **There is some ambiguity in the text on this. Formally Etzioni affirms repeatedly that the values that are shared cannot be thin values – that they have some real substance to them. But in the more specific elaboration of the content of the relevant values, it isn't so clear to me that they are all that thick. Is, for example, the value of balancing autonomy with order a “thick” value?]**
 - a. Procedural vs. substantive – If America were to try work politically to set up a set of shared values – would these values be predominantly procedural as opposed to substantive? For example, even extremely divergent opponents can usually come to some agreement on procedures for voting, but not on the substantive public policy measures being voted on.
3. Ability to reach “shared values” in polarized political America - According to today's New York Times (11/12/03), a recent Pew study found U.S. society the most polarized politically it has been since the beginning of tracking political polarization in the late 1980's. In this context, how possible is it for the political process to agree on a set of “shared values?” As noted on the bottom of p 87, the

ability of individuals with divergent interests and values to come to an agreement on a set of “shared values” can be significantly hampered by the failure to agree on underlying assumptions such as the notion of a “common good.” **[Not all of this polarization is actually over core values – much of it is over the policy implications people feel flow from what may be not so polarized values. Thus, there may be polarization over the war in Iraq, but this is because some people think it is directly linked to Al-Quaeda terrorism and other people do not. But many people who oppose the war would support it if it were in fact the case that Saddam Hussein had been behind 9/11. This isn’t a value issue but an informational one.]**

4. How significant is it that “... communitarian societies are much more prone to a centripetal breakdown than a centrifugal one (p 50)” – Etzioni noted in the preceding paragraph that “(w)hen a communitarian society does not respond adequately to the challenging forces, centripetal forces may break it into a totalitarian or authoritarian regime (p 50).” Etzioni counters that the democratic character of communitarian society makes it “... particularly resilient, stable, and effective (p 50).” Thus, I assume that communitarian society is a balancing act between the centripetal pressures for breakdown and the stability and resiliency of the democratic form of government. But the possibility of a centripetal breakdown leading to a totalitarian or authoritarian regime; is a very costly alternative which may inhibit the desire to pursue a communitarian society? **See the comments in my notes about the problem of stable equilibria between order and autonomy and the issue of whether there is any tendency for this to degenerate in one direction or another.]**

Random Thoughts – These random thoughts do not need comments, I provide them in case anyone else wants to discuss them:

5. Do community members gain something by not having to “socially monitor” their neighbors and friends in individualistic societies? More free time, less social division, etc.
6. Does Etzioni over-emphasize the benefits of community, solidarity, and shared values? I know he discusses these in the book, but I think the critique is still relevant given the communitarian emphasis on it.
7. Does Etzioni overestimate the ability of community groups to provide government and public policy functions, especially on a large scale? Similar to the Deepening Democracy discussions, what government and centralized support would be needed to ensure effective community performance of public policy functions (and to avoid decentralization without proper supports which could lead to ineffective performance of public policy)?

8. Underestimate the ability of the current excessive individualism and disequilibrium of the U.S. to “bend, but not break” – Etzioni seems to be saying that if current excessive individualistic trends continue that American society is heading toward anarchy. Can American continue to head down the path of individualism, with only slight “bending” toward social order when society demands it?
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8. Patrizia Aurich

On his quest for a *good* society Amitai Etzioni calls for a regeneration of the social order. Etzioni argues that there needs to be a balance between individual autonomy and social order in order to have such a *good* society and that modernization with its emphasis on individual rights at some point needs to stop the enforcement of autonomy in order to preserve this balance. Autonomy and social order: these are the two virtues of communitarianism, which Etzioni stands for.

The main devices in his view to regain some social order without selling out to the traditionalists is to: 1. return power to communities (Etzioni: 149-159), and 2. to encourage moral dialogues (Etzioni: 110-117). These measures would encourage the development of a core of shared values. In order to avoid the mischiefs of traditional social orders Etzioni suggests a moral order that is based on voluntariness.

First I wonder if this presents a balance at all, since the concept of voluntary behaviour seems too closely related to the concept of autonomy. **[In some ways the proper term would be “quasi-voluntary” – to use Margaret Levi’s expression. The point is that in a strong community (or a strong-enough-community) the norms are not enforced by a specialized coercive apparatus, and in that sense the compliance is voluntary. But the idea is not that whether or not people live in community is a simple voluntary choice. In a communitarian world of real communities it could be pretty tough to opt out of community.]** One reason for this voluntary approach is that Etzioni wants to nourish authenticity of values. At one point he speaks of “truly shared values”. I wonder if such true sharing can ever be achieved without oppressing any individual mind. Certainly values do change and until they do so the first to notice an uneasiness will feel oppressed. **[Feeling oppressed by moral codes in a community is not the same as being oppressed in the normal political/coercive sense.]** That is why in review we look at traditional values as oppressing. We freed ourselves from them, because we felt they were inappropriate and this will happen again. What Amitai Etzioni suggests instead seems to assume that there is a correct way of sharing social values without being subject to such mischiefs. This correct way is reflected in his procedural approach. Although he denies a mere proceduralism of his approach (Etzioni: 199), he keeps emphasizing the democratic structure of communities, criteria for good dialogues and so on. And in the end he comes down to “framing values” such as constitutions as a sufficient social order (Etzioni: 224). **[Good point: while Etzioni insists he is not a pure proceduralist, in practice the real stuff of much of his discussion of shared values is a shared commitment of procedures. Part of the issue here, I think, is the fact that there is little sustained discussion in the book of the real substance of the values that are being shared, but simply of the accountability procedures by which they would be legitimated if they are shared.]**

I certainly think that Etzioni's insight into the importance of community as a place for communicating values is right and that these bonds of social dialogue and social accountability need to be strengthened. But in going so far as to call for a new social order Etzioni endangers himself to be understood as a conservative, which he tries to avoid in pointing out the relevance of autonomous structures such as voluntariness. His claim seems normative, but then only in a procedural way. Though the approach really is analyzing the effects of autonomy and order in assuming that they interact (Etzioni: 36).

9. Linda M. Zech

The Metalogues

Etzioni identifies the Metalogue as a method for achieving communitarian consensus on new core shared values. I am having a hard time understanding this concept --especially in light of other concepts which are described as fundamental to the process.

Two ground rules are given as essential to values talk: (1) one side cannot demonize the other and (2) one side cannot offend the deepest moral commitments of the other. These rules are said to apply to Metalogues. And yet one of the examples Etzioni gives us of new shared values which have evolved through this process is the elimination of legal segregation in the South. Apparently the civil rights movement is to be considered a metalogue. But surely there was a great deal of demonization on both sides in that movement. There was violence. There were legal battles. The environmental movement has similarly generated a lot of ill feelings and personal attacks. And it is even less clear that we have come to share some new core value as a society – even if environmental regulations have been enacted (and rolled back with the Bush administration's rise to power). **[There is an interesting difference between the civil rights movement and the environmental movement around this issue of demonization. Given that the context of the civil rights movement was rampant racism and racial oppression in which a significant issue was not simply the moral values of different "sides", but active hatred of blacks and pervasive fear by blacks – and by many whites as well – it is hard to imagine how a true metalogue with all of the required attributes could occur among all of the parties involved. A metalogue between the KKK and Martin Luther King was not possible: he would avoid demonizing the KKK, but they were committed to demonization. Still, a pivotal part of the moral transformation of the period was a metalogue among many Americans on these issues, and I think this is Etzioni's point here.]**

Etzioni also considers call in talk shows, newspapers and magazines as important places where the metalogues play out. He emphasizes the roll of a free media in enabling values talk. I wonder if the recent events, including the proliferation of conservative spun radio and T.V. "news" programs and the proposals to permit greater consolidation of media outlets in the hands of a single owner (politically conservative for the most part)

spells disaster for conducting effective metalogues. Efforts to censor the media, deprive them of access to important information concerning the war, 9/11 and the prelude to each, and to punish them by cutting off access if they don't play ball with the current administration are chilling. **[This raises the broader issue of the institutional design of contexts for metalogues – are some media systems better suited for this than others?]**

In the absence of full and unfiltered media reporting – how can people get the information they need to form new core values – or test the validity of the old? Several institutions suggest by Etzioni - e.g, teledemocracy and virtual dialogues don't seem to have anywhere near the same prominence as media dialogues. **[A related general question is: how sensitive is the metalogue process to institutional design? Perhaps it is pretty robust since much of the conversation occurs over dinner and on the sidelines of soccer games, and perhaps people are intelligent enough to process bad information in creative ways. But perhaps the process requires pretty stringent conditions for it to generate the virtuous effects hoped for by communitarians. Etzioni does believe it requires a “free media”, but does not specify how free the media must be and whether commercial domination and concentration undermines this significantly.]**

To be sure there was a popular opposition to the consolidation of media outlets – a write in campaign conveniently ignored by Commissioner Michael Powell of the FTC. And – to their credit legislators took up the charge to challenge the new rule allowing such consolidation. (is this an example of a new core value – or opposition to the authoritarian subversion of an old core value?) But if those who are in control continue to work towards domination of the media – what institutions are left to support communitarianism?

Have Exogenous Events Pushed Us Over The Edge

With the Bush administration have we already swung too far in one direction – wildly overcorrecting for liberal dominance? Is Attorney General John Ashcroft's socially conservative penchant for using legislation to further “social order” reflective of new core values agreed upon by a society – or merely the implementation of the views of a well-funded minority. Can we ever recover from an extreme shift if we examine the situation through a communitarian perspective – and the media has been compromised?

To add to the dominance of political conservatives who give lip service to regenerating core values relating to the family, etc. but ignore important welfare concerns (need for affordable health care and secure jobs) – we have recently experienced the influence of exogenous events – terrorism and war. The Patriot Act (which has all signs of leading us down the slippery slope to eroding privacy rights) was pushed through when we were at our weakest and most fearful – and the hastily executed War in Iraq may have been sold to us on shaky evidenced. A shocked people with a need to believe in a strong leader were willing – and in many cases continue to be willing – to accept what has been

questioned by many people in many fora. Where can a communitarian metalogue take place?

Perhaps the internet can aid in this process. I recently read an article in Slate magazine on line penned by liberal author (Timothy Noah – “The Right Declares Victory”- <http://slate.msn.com/id/2091059/>). He was bemoaning what he sees as a conservative victory of the “culture wars” in the wake of the forced cancellation of the t.v. special on Ronald Reagan and his wife. The problem with the internet --- may be the same with the polarized talk and t.v. “news shows”. Nobody listens except the group interested in the view a being furthered by the website or the program.

10. Elizabeth Holzer

I’d like to consider the place of power and inequality in the communitarian model Etzioni presents. In particular, I’d like to build on Etzioni’s discussion of subgroups and the source of shared values, developing these two features of the discussion and placing them at the center of the argument. The communitarian model needs to acknowledge and construct institutional devices to counteract the systematic pull of “shared values” to function in the interests of the powerful. **[I wonder if this is a good general statement – i.e. that in a context of power inequalities it is generally the case that there is a “systematic pull of shared values to function in the interests of the powerful.” I suppose this will depend upon the nature of the counterfactual, but a case can be made that shared values are one of the important constraints on the powerful pursuing their interests in some completely ruthless, nasty way. That is, if shared values bring with them shared identity, than the powerful may feel morally constrained to use their power less aggressively in pursuit of their particularistic interests. But your point is also reasonable.]**

In refining the conception of subgroups, we need to draw attention to the power relations that *define* their interaction. “Subgroups” are constituted from individuals who share a position in the power relations of the society. Etzioni says that the “sociological challenge” in dealing with subgroups is “to develop societal formations that leave considerable room for the enriching particulars of autonomous subcultures and communities while sustaining the core of shared values” (196). I disagree. I think the sociological challenge is ensure that the shared values that emerge do not primarily exist in the service of powerful subgroups. I’m reminded of Bowles and Gintis’s discussion of the public schooling, the achievement ideology, and the reproduction of inequality. **[This is a good challenge. Etzioni’s subgroups are defined primarily in culturalist terms rather than in political-economic terms. Thus the capitalist class is not a “subgroup”, but Catholics are. You are right, I think, that there is an unexplored problem here insofar as power-based subgroups may constitute a cohesive community. This is what a lot of power elite research is all about.]**

Presenting “society,” rather than “groups within society,” as the subject and primary actor obscures issues of power and inequality. Early on Etzioni writes that the functionalist paradigm that underlies the model “explains the working of society by the contributions of the parts to the needs of the whole and the requirements a society must meet to maintain itself” (6). But thinking of society as “maintaining itself” draws attention away from the actors engaged—and invested—in maintaining a particular social order and those that are struggling to undermine it—it’s this struggle to develop and maintain shared values—this struggle between groups with systematically differentiated access to power—that needs to be *harnessed* in creating a just communitarian society. The associative democracy model come to mind as one institutional design for doing this.

I think the model leaves room for addressing systematic inequality; consider if we extend the following quote to include “values” as well as social formations and public policies—“Providing structured opportunities for individual and subgroup expression balances a tendency of those in power to avoid making needed changes in social formations and public policies following changes in the external environment or in internal societal compositions” (23) I would only add that there’s a distinction between leaving room in the model for this and actively pursuing it—I’d be curious to see what these structured opportunities looked like, and I think that as the communitarian model is prone to problems of social injustice in strengthening overarching shared values, a successful institutional design for a communitarian model *needs* specific, feasible means of responding to this issue. **[The autonomy virtue is one of the ways that Etzioni addresses this issue, since the ideal of autonomy revolves around individual rights – morally constrained, to be sure, but real autonomy nevertheless. And the removal of ascriptive barriers to autonomy is one of the strong values he insists in part of a responsive community. This egalitarian implication is not played up much, but it is there, I think.]**

But the model understates issues of power and inequality—“there is a perpetual quest by those members and subgroups particularly affected by the shortfalls in societal responses to meet the basic needs, to have them more fully served” (47). These shortfalls often derive from irreconcilable problems of the system—consider the “shortfalls” the lower classes face in the capitalist system. The problems of understating power and inequality come out vividly in the discussion of America. To say that in the 1950s, “generally, the majority had the sense that theirs was an orderly and relatively tranquil society” (63) seems a bit off. Could women walk through Central Park? Could African Americans walk through a white neighborhood? If one uses the definition of “majority” as a measure of power—that same skewed logic by which women constitute a minority—then that might be true. But not according to the numbers certainly. “Life choices, opportunities for self-expression and creativity, and cultural alternatives were limited for many members of the American society”(64)—not “many” but the vast majority: women, racial minorities, subordinate classes. The obligation that is described is implicitly, obligation to “society,” (65) which implicitly meant, obligation to “us” but that’s inaccurate. Women’s self-sacrifice served the men and children they sacrificed for—not themselves, the women. **[It is a little more complicated than this, I think, since many women experienced the ways in which they enabled their children to thrive as**

meaningful, value-laden activities and thus fulfilling for themselves, while at the same time being a cost. I don't think the complexity of family relations in the 1950s is captured by saying that women got nothing out of the sacrifices they made. But still, I agree with your general point that the inequalities of power and opportunities in the 1950s should not be viewed as a secondary deviation from the autonomy value; it was a fundamental violation of autonomy values.] “Alienation” described by the phrase “do you feel the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer” (66) was not a symptom of a failing “society”—not a social ill as it is presented, but an accurate assessment of their lives and a potential source for productive social change. “This development [of more people working per household] had strong autonomy-reducing effects as more and more members of the family felt they were forced to work outside the household” (66)—not members, “women”—and it wasn't reducing their autonomy, it was considerable increasing it. **[Again, I think we should try to juggle the complexity here: to the extent that women feel that they are forced to work more than they want – that they have the double shift and are constantly frustrated by the illusions of opportunities and the disappointments of trying to do everything, then there are new forms of erosion of autonomy that have emerged. I would share your “bottom line” assessment that women generally have considerable more range of real options and choices – more autonomy now – than in the 1950s, but it is a quite contradictory increase.]** “Men and women, hardly considered distinct social groups in the 1950s, have grown apart” (68)—but they could be considered distinct social groups because systematic differential power relations creates distinct social groups. In short, the “thinning of the social fabric” does not seem such a social ill when the social fabric in question was constructed out of such injustice.

I think it's accurate to say that “To advance the regeneration of American society requires that the members of the society come together to commit themselves to a core of shared values.” It only needs to be made explicit that these shared values must not be in the service of the powerful.

EOW comments/issues for discussion of *The Golden Rule*

The comments which follow cover a range of issues, some of which were also in the interrogations. I wrote them as I was reading the book and I thought that some of them might be useful for the seminar.

1. A good deal is made in much of the book that the values which are shared in a good community are considerably “thicker” than the shared values postulated by people like Amy Gutman when they talk about the moral conditions for liberal democracy. I was somewhat surprised, therefore, in chapter seven when the “core elements” of shared values were listed that this still seemed to me to be a fairly thin set of value-commitments. That is, there was nothing like the value of the traditional family over other forms of domestic living. I am somewhat unsure, as a result, how the discussion in this chapter on core values is linked to arguments elsewhere in the book in which (for example) the decline of the stability of families is taken as an indication of the erosion of the moral community. I like the seven core elements, but it isn’t very clear how even if these were deeply shared by everyone they would significantly counter the forces that have eroded the traditional family. They would contribute to civility in the interactions among people with different values living in different kinds of community, and thus contribute to a broader social integration of communities *if those communities were strong communities*, but it isn’t clear how they would shore up the kinds of values that were highlighted in the discussion of the weakening of order. So the question is: how is the social-order aspect of community strengthened significantly by: I. Democracy as a value; II. the constitution and bill of rights; III. layered loyalties; IV. neutrality, tolerance, respect; V. limiting identity politics; VI. society-wide dialogues; VII. reconciliation?

2. It isn’t very clear what the general principle of *institutional design* is for accomplishing the communitarian equilibrium when a society is out of equilibrium. What institutional arrangements can lead to a “recommitment to moral values”? The ELPFMD proposals (education, leadership, etc....) seem like relevant strategies, but it is hard to see how they would be institutionalized in ways that would generate a sustained broad-based societal reconstruction of community. I have no objection to the megalogue agenda for putting moral issues into public discussion, but it is less clear how this plays itself out as a way of strengthening the kinds of community that effectively sustain the kind of moral order that reduces antisocial behavior. Or, another way of putting the same general issue: in the chapter “The Moral Voice” a good point is made that “There should (not) be a law” – that is, that the direct legislation of moral behavior is very often counterproductive and in any case does not generate the kind of community-centered normative order that a communitarian perspective seeks. But “there should not be a law” does not mean “there should not be new institutions”, some of which could be underwritten by public policy that encourages institution-building of various sorts, provides resources for institution-building, provides a favorable regulatory context for such institutions, etc. There are a few places in the book where such institution-building is mentioned (eg mention of state supported faith-based initiatives), but this is not given a prominent place. Is this because it is unlikely that public policy around institution-

building is not likely to make a major difference? Is there a clear institution-building project linked to the moral voice/moral community-building project?

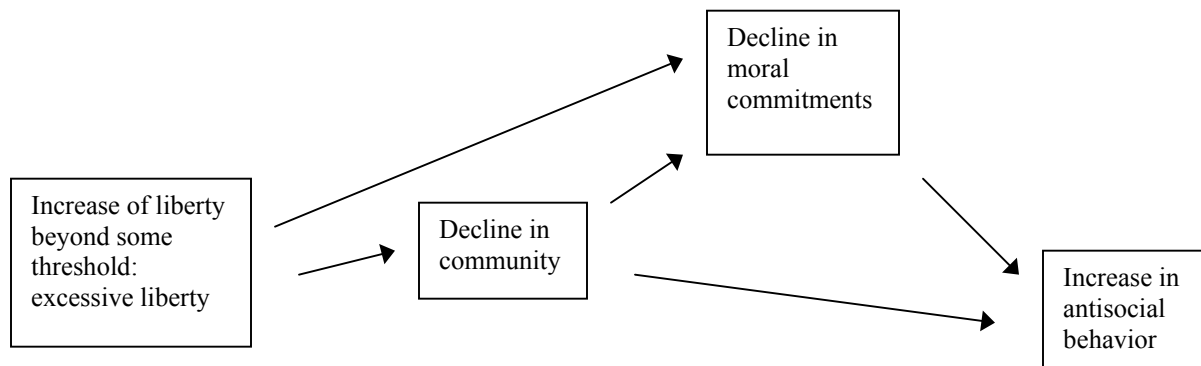
3. The explanation for the decline of virtue and moral order centers on excessive liberty – as in statements like “the antisocial *consequences* of excessive liberty” (p.xvii). Now, what is unclear here is whether the erosion of the important substantive values for social order – respect for other people’s well-being, a sense of obligation to help others, kindness towards strangers, promise-keeping, honesty in social exchanges, etc. – is actually caused by too much liberty, or, in contrast, by (for example) too much competition and commercialization of human relations. A critique of hyper-competitiveness is not the same thing as a generic claim that increases in liberty eventually erode virtue, although of course individualistic competitiveness may have a relationship to the expansion of liberty and autonomy. I would contrast, then, two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. As liberty and individual autonomy increase, at some point they begin to erode virtues and community commitments. This point can be called “excessive liberty”, excessive in the sense of too much liberty to sustain an equilibrium between autonomy and order. In this hypothesis it is increases in liberty as such which eventually erodes the relevant values, rather than a specific institutional process in which certain kinds of individual liberties develop.

Hypothesis 2. Intensification of commodification of social relations and competition among people erode other-regardingness and strengthen selfish preferences and meanings, which in turn erode community-virtues. It is not individual autonomy and liberty per se that has this corrosive effect, but the specific form of such autonomy linked to market competition.

Or, to put the contrast another way: *the market is the enemy of community rather than liberty being the enemy of community.*

4. **Potential tautology in the argument:** I think the core sociological argument is that it is the decline of community that explains increases in antisocial behavior. Excess liberty, then, is an explanation for the decline of community rather than a direct explanation of antisocial behavior. That is, the explanation is, more or less, the following:



I think this is the implicit model here. I am not completely sure if the theory posits a direct causal effect of excessive liberty on moral commitments: sometimes it seems that this is posited – that the existence of a too permissive a state of liberty is itself directly corrosive of moral values. But in other places it seems that this effect operates only via the way excessive liberty erodes community, which in turn erodes moral commitments. It matters whether there is a direct impact of excessive liberty on moral values, for if this is the case, then even if it should turn out that excessive liberty is not a significant cause of the decline of community, it could still be a culprit in the rise of antisocial behavior via its direct effect on moral values. The decline in community also has both a direct and indirect effect on antisocial behavior. The direct effect on antisocial behavior comes from the informal ways in which community constrains people’s behavior apart from the way it strengthens norms and commitments.

Now, the question about potential tautologies is this: Is there any indicator of the decline in moral commitments other than the increase in antisocial behavior? Is it therefore the case that whenever an increase in antisocial behavior occurs one would necessarily conclude that there was a decline in moral commitments? Similarly, is the only indicator of when liberty becomes “excessive”, the decline in community? Is there any way to demonstrate that it is in fact excessive liberty that *explains* the decline of community?

5. I think the entire argument in its core can be recast with the following structure:

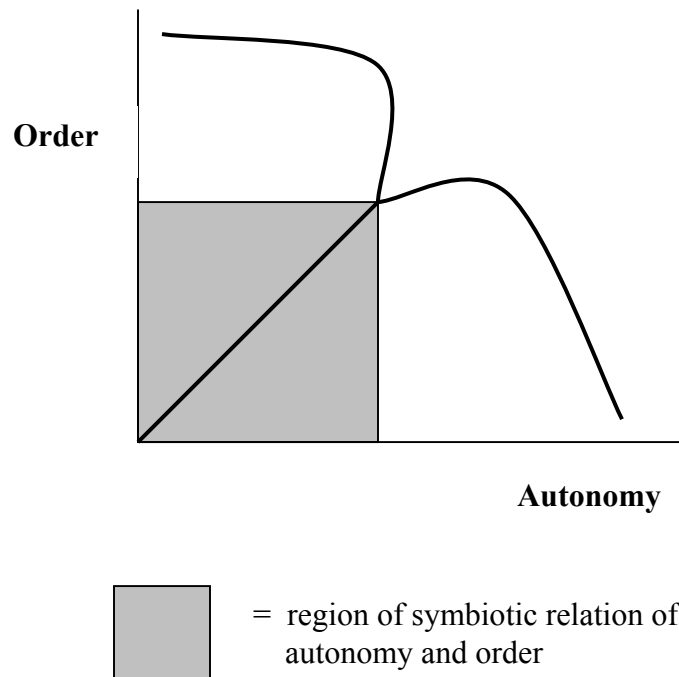
- symptom:** increase in antisocial behavior
- diagnosis:** too much liberty + not enough community: unsatisfactory balance between these principles is what explains excessive antisocial behavior
- solution:** strengthen community & reign in excess liberty
- strategy:** ELPFMD: education, leadership, persuasion, faith, moral dialogue

There are a number of issues with respect to each of these elements:

- Symptom:** is the relation between decline of moral commitment and antisocial behavior a tautology?
- Diagnosis:** While it is plausible that a decline in community is a pivotal issue in the rise of antisocial behavior, it is less obvious that excess liberty in the generic sense is really a “cause” or explanation of decline of community. Two issues occur here: (a) This is another place where there is a risk of tautology: what we mean by Excessive” liberty is a “decline of community”. If community remained strong, then the liberty would not be excessive. (b) Excessive liberty may be tightly linked to some political-economic processes which are the real causes of the decline of community rather than the excess liberty itself having effects on community. If the real *content* of the decline of moral values which are associated with community is the decline of kindness, consideration, respect, other-regardingness, and so on – the stuff of solidaristic values – then arguably these are destroyed by *competitive* individualism driven by marketization and commodification rather than by excessive liberty in the sense of behavioral permissiveness.
- solution:** The pivotal solution may be to reign in competitiveness through greater social control over capitalism rooted in collective solidarities rather than any direct attempt at strengthening moral commitment as such.
- strategy:** the ELPFMD strategy may be episodically effective as a way of countering particular instances of excessive liberty – or antisocial amoral action – but it seems implausible as a strategy for systemically re-equilibrating the community/liberty balance.

6. The functional relationship between order and liberty:

I think the model of a symbiotic relation between order and autonomy *up to a point* (p36) can be represented by the following functional form:



This is a map of correspondences, of possible values, not of a causal relation. Here there is no implication that order causes autonomy or autonomy causes order, just that these are possible forms of combination. If this is a correct representation, then, the idea is that there is a zone in the curves in which every increase in autonomy corresponds to a commensurate increase in order and vice versa, but then there is a bifurcation into two trajectories: one in which additional increases in autonomy allow for only small increases in order and eventually decreases in order, and the other in which increases in order allow for only small increases in autonomy and eventually decreases in autonomy.

Now, this functional map as laid out here has no dynamics and little content. There is no specification of the substance of the values that constitute the moral order on the order dimension, for example. One pessimistic possibility is that the bifurcation point in the above diagram is intrinsically unstable in the sense that no reproducible social equilibrium can exist at that point. Suppose for argument that the level of order at this point is insufficient to provide for the amount of order needed to seriously reduce antisocial behavior (i.e. the level of order at the bifurcation point is below the 98% voluntary compliance threshold Etzioni talks about), and the amount of autonomy is insufficient to satisfy concerns about social justice and individual expressive freedom. This means that at this junction there will be strong pressures to increase both autonomy

and order, but at this point there is no longer a simply, linear relationship between these two projects, so one or the other curves must be chosen. This will lead to either the order-intensive path or the autonomy-intensive path. Now, again for argument sake here, let us add a dynamic-political element to the model and say: suppose that in order to mobilize people to accept one or the other of these paths *at the point of the bifurcation* there is an inherent tendency to “oversteer”. That is, oversteering is not just a mistake, it is a dynamic tendency because of the political requirements of mobilizing people for one or the other of these trajectories. (Etzioni suggests that this is the case in his vignettes about the ACLU, for example.) This may mean that a balanced equilibrium can never be securely institutionalized because it will always tend to move too far along the bifurcated paths, which in turn – dynamically – will stimulate counter-mobilizations and change.

I don't think I actually believe this story, but some variant of a dynamic process like this may in fact operate in the community building agenda of communitarians. This is like my argument in my work with Archon that there is no stable equilibrium in empowered participatory governance, no institutional solution that will allow for a vibrant direct democracy of deliberation and participation to function without continual tendencies for erosion, and thus continual need to revitalize the process. Perhaps this is the case for the responsive community – no possible stable institutional equilibrium of order and autonomy?

7. The real moral meaning of “community needs” and community as a “collective actor”. I have no difficulty whatsoever in the thesis that for human beings to flourish they need strong and vibrant community; the isolated, atomized individualism is socially impossible, and that to the extent it is approximated individuals will generally suffer in various ways. But I am not sure I understand the rhetorical move that goes from this set of claims to claims about the needs of a community and the status of communities as collective actors. Now, if “needs of community” simply means that there are functional requirements that must be filled *in order for communities to adequately facilitate human flourishing*, then I understand this. But if the claim is that there are needs of communities that “must” be filled independently of the effects of meeting these needs on the lives of the individuals within the community, then I am not sure what this means. Similarly, with respect to the idea that communities are collective *actors*. I understand a claim like the following: the people in a community, because they value their communal bonds and realize that these facilitate their lives, join together to collectively sustain their community. The expression “a community is a collective actor” is thus a shorthand for “the people in a community join together in collectively-organized action to further their value in community.” But if the expression means something less elliptical, then I don't know precisely what it means.