

Readers may redistribute this article to other individuals for noncommercial use, provided that the text and this note remain intact. This article may not be reprinted or redistributed for commercial use without prior written permission from the author. If you have any questions about permissions, please contact Klaus Nellen at IWM, Spittelauer Laende 3, A - 1090 Vienna, Fax +(431) 31358-30, e-mail <nellen@iwm.at>.

*Preferred Citation:* Gawkowska, Aneta. *Neutrality, Autonomy and Order: Amitai Etzioni's Communitarian Critique of Liberalism Under Scrutiny*, in: *A Decade of Transformation*, IWM Junior Visiting Fellows Conferences, Vol. 8: Vienna 1999



## **Neutrality, Autonomy and Order: Amitai Etzioni's Communitarian Critique of Liberalism Under Scrutiny**

Aneta Gawkowska

A prominent liberal once wrote: "The hard truth is this: There is no moral meaning hidden in the bowels of the universe."<sup>1</sup> I take these words as expressing the most essential core and creed of the liberal faith. Why faith? Because it requires an initial premise like the one just stated, which is not supported with unquestionable evidence but, instead, remains a proposition open for debate. It seems to me that precisely this initial premise gives the best account for subsequent liberal postulates such as pluralism of values, the autonomy of the individual and the neutrality of the state. However, the practice of liberal states has recently shown some negative side-effects of following these ideals. Preoccupation with protecting the rights of the individual, which became the ultimate goal and concern of the liberal regime, resulted in the substantial growth of the atomization of modern liberal societies. Consequently, a number of scholars and political activists in the 1980s and 1990s raised the issue of the loss of community in Western political thought and practice.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ackerman (1980: 368).

Quite understandably, they soon came to be recognized as communitarians, though most of them were uneasy with the new label.

The obvious and profound differences in the ways in which the particular scholars addressed the problems of liberal philosophy and practice make it quite difficult to establish the essence of communitarianism. Still, the point remains that all the intellectuals considered communitarian do address more or less the same issues, such as the place of the individual versus his community, the status of rights and duties, the relationship of negative and positive freedom, the problem of the identity of the self, the nature of the good life and the importance of social virtues for the continuity of the liberal state. Similar concerns draw diverse people under one label.

Who are the communitarians? Typically, the political analysts include here the names of Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, Michael J. Sandel, Michael Walzer, Robert N. Bellah and William Sullivan, as well as the group associated with Amitai Etzioni's Communitarian Network and its quarterly journal *The Responsive Community: Rights and Responsibilities*. Quite recently, there have been some developments of communitarian forums in a few European countries, including the United Kingdom, Spain, Germany and Finland. However, even if they locate themselves in the European traditions of concern with community, their coming to existence was stimulated by communitarian developments in the Anglo-Saxon, particularly American, environment.<sup>2</sup> While the philosophical analysts of communitarianism usually focus on the first four names only, the sociologists concentrate on the activities of the Communitarian Network.<sup>3</sup>

As the term "communitarian" can be understood quite broadly, it is sometimes used to include ideas as diverse as those described by Karl Marx and the ones analyzed by the so-called post-modernists. The term itself, according to Etzioni, was first created in 1841 by the founder of the Universal Communitarian Association.<sup>4</sup> However, as we can further learn from the Introduction to *The Essential Communitarian Reader*, the modern meaning of the word ("of, pertaining to, or characteristic of a community") replaced the nineteenth-century meaning ("a member of a

---

<sup>2</sup> More on this subject can be found on the communitarian web site at <<http://www.gwu.edu/~ccps>> or by subscribing to "The Communitarian Updates" also available on the Internet. The e-mail address of the Communitarian Network is as follows: [comnet@gwis2.circ.gwu.edu](mailto:comnet@gwis2.circ.gwu.edu).

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Fowler (1991); Holmes (1996); Kymlicka (1990); Mulhall and Swift (1992).

<sup>4</sup> Etzioni (1998: ix).

community formed to put into practice communistic or socialist theories") around the turn of the century, as it appeared in the 1909 edition of the *Webster* dictionary. Thus, communitarian elements can easily be discovered in ancient, medieval or early sociological papers.

To the common accusations stating that communitarianism is so diverse that it cannot be properly described and, consequently, does not exist, I would respond that the same problem befalls liberalism. Both its modern and older versions are difficult to grasp under one overarching set of ideas or values. However, as is the case with modern communitarianism, it is possible to talk about liberalism as such, though its protagonists have had multifarious views on its content. The core can still be found, as I claimed at the beginning of this dissertation. Whether one goes back to John Locke, Adam Smith, Benjamin Constant, James Madison, John Stuart Mill or any modern liberal thinker like Isaiah Berlin, John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, Bruce Ackerman or Robert Nozick, the crucial value in their theories appears to be freedom understood as individual autonomy - freedom to establish, define and pursue one's goals without constraints or obstructions. Such a view is implemented in the legal and political practice of the first truly liberal state in the world. The Supreme Court of the United States of America aimed to define the nature of the country's main ideal: "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."<sup>5</sup> According to Dworkin, autonomy is the right to life structured by someone's own values.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the liberal theory necessarily presupposes the existence of the plurality of conflicting values as well as the notion that there is no single good or value common to all human beings. One might claim that liberalism does not exclude the possibility of there being such a common value; it just operates on the premise that its existence cannot be proven beyond doubt. However, by promoting the neutrality of the state and the safeguarding the rights of the individual as the only legitimate goal thereof, it actually forbids the people in their collective capacity from expressing their common ideas about the good, provided they ever appear, and thus it precludes the possibility of ever discovering any common good. The early premises of liberalism (concerning the lack of a common good for all individuals) are not open enough to allow for any possible future finding of there actually being one or many of such goods. Once liberal theory becomes implemented in political practice, it does not leave the question open. It then oper-

---

<sup>5</sup> *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 744 U.S. 902, (1992).

<sup>6</sup> Dworkin (1993: 225).

ates on the supposition of the lack of such goods, and it actively speaks against the maximalization of any single value. Whatever is allowed in theory, the practice does not leave any question open. It seems to be always the issue of either/or: either you operate on the idea that there is no common telos of humanity and you allow each individual to define it (or abstain from defining it altogether) for himself; or you operate on the notion that there is such an objective telos, and you try to do your best to discern its content and pursue it.

It seems to me that liberals chose the first path, somehow hoping that they still leave open the question of the essential common good. After all, if any such good exists, it should come out by itself in reality, they might say. The problem is that such a telos may exist but not be intrusive enough to impose its existence on the human race. Liberals, who believe in human freedom, should take this freedom seriously: human beings are free enough to affirm or reject any good, even their common telos, if there is such a thing. Thus, the important issue is not only whether it exists, but also what position we take towards it, especially since it is so difficult, if not absolutely impossible, to prove beyond all doubt and describe with concrete precision the complete nature of any common good. Liberalism requires us to provide this precise account of the common good before we can live by its standards. However, it does not provide its own account of pluralism of conflicting values or its implementation of the pseudo-neutrality of the procedural state.

I take the above-mentioned views to be central to the nature of liberalism. In light of these ideas I will analyze the arguments put forward by one of the communitarians, namely Amitai Etzioni, to determine whether his theory offers plausible solutions to the drawbacks that can be found within liberalism. The reasons I chose Etzioni for my analysis are twofold: first, he is the one who openly identifies himself as a communitarian, whereas some other thinkers are only commonly perceived as such; second, while his practical proposals receive a lot of attention and criticism, his theory remains, to the best of my knowledge, largely ignored. To judge the plausibility of his proposals, I will critically analyze his arguments using his own terms of discourse. Thus, I will look for contradictions present in his theory first. Only after identifying any contradictions will I try to situate them within the liberal paradigm, compare them with their liberal equivalents and suggest possible ways of overcoming them. My study will involve analyzing Etzioni's views on the issues of the self, the autonomy of the individual, the community and its order, the pluralism of values and goods, and the neutrality of the state to determine where his arguments might be situated vis-a-vis the initial opposition of "one telos" versus "the conflict of values."

Looking through the long list of writings by Amitai Etzioni, one notices a fairly consistent line of reasoning. Such a quality is rather hard to find in a world that has recently been witness to major political, economical and societal changes of a revolutionary scope. When Etzioni compared the Anglo-Saxon states with the totalitarian ones in 1969, he naturally found the former to be pragmatic and abhorrent towards the long run, encompassing planning, while the latter were obviously seen as overplanning and riding roughshod over the rights of individuals. What he recommended then was a balance between the two: "The most effective decision-making strategy is a happy medium between democratic underplanning and totalitarian overplanning."<sup>7</sup> Of course, such ideas have never been particularly striking or innovative, though the fact that after thirty years the same person still clings to the ideal of the golden middle is somewhat more puzzling, especially since the tendency to look for a Third Way is no longer as popular as it used to be. The balance he now promotes is one between individual universal rights and the common good, between the self and its community, between autonomy and order.<sup>8</sup> Both kinds of balances seem attractive, satisfactory to both sides of the relevant conflicts and appealing to the common sense. However, they present one major question: Are they really feasible? Can they be implemented into practice and change the predicament they are supposed to solve in a way that would overcome the aimed conflict? Do they really propose an innovative way beyond the balance that usually is present in the reality of settlement between any conflicting values that are espoused by political entities? Finally, do they perceive and describe the conflict or lack of it in an adequate light? These are the kinds of questions that are going to preoccupy me here when I try to analyze Etzioni's communitarianism and his standing relative to the liberal paradigm sketched in my introduction. The thesis I would like to analyze and defend is that Etzioni's proposed solutions are not adequate or feasible. In his theory, he either accepts the core contradictions of liberal assumptions or creates some further contradictions of his own. Consequently, he is not able to address the liberal failings. I also will claim that he needs to exchange the conflictual core of his theory for the assumption that there is an objective order of values, which presupposes the existence of a common human good, the realization of which can constitute a legitimate positive goal of political institutions without endangering the freedom of the individual. For that purpose, he needs to redefine his notion of freedom and abandon the liberal ideal of individual autonomy. Unless

---

<sup>7</sup> Etzioni (1969: 409).

<sup>8</sup> Etzioni (1996: xviii, 4, 28, 248, 257).

he chooses to do this, his theory will remain contradictory and self-destructible. To prove my point, let me first present the basic assumptions and arguments of Etzioni's theory.

### *1. Etzioni's Theory Summarized*

The founder of The Communitarian Network stresses throughout all his publications the point that communitarianism offers a new way of going beyond liberalism in many aspects. Moreover, we can find political thinkers agreeing with such position, too.<sup>9</sup> However, when Etzioni opens one of his recent articles by saying that the communitarian position, much like its liberal cousin, opposes the state regulation of moral behavior,<sup>10</sup> he concedes that communitarianism is just another face of liberalism. When he later tries to give both liberal and communitarian reasons for abstaining from involving the state in regulating morality, he claims that liberalism favors moral pluralism, while communitarianism perceives the *society* as the proper agent for the promotion of moral behavior. Of course, similar arguments allowing the society, not the state, to be preoccupied with promoting morality might easily have been issued and actually have been issued by a liberal.<sup>11</sup> Is there no major difference between liberalism and communitarianism then? The key assumptions about the self seem to prove there is a difference, after all.

#### *1.a. Etzioni's Picture of the Self*

First of all, Etzioni denounces the individualistic presuppositions often underlying the liberal paradigm. He claims that there never have been the free-standing individuals that individualists envision. The selves are not free-floating atoms within their society, and any attempts to perceive them as such are flawed, even for heuristic purposes. "People are socially constituted and continually penetrated by culture, by social and moral influences, and by one another."<sup>12</sup> To what extent are they constituted by the social forces? "While individuals shape collectivities, as collectivities shape individuals, the influence of collectivities is greater."<sup>13</sup> However, a community is not to be perceived as superior to individuals. Both have the same concep-

---

<sup>9</sup> E.g., Goodin (1998/99: 87).

<sup>10</sup> Etzioni (1999b: 90).

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Kymlicka (1990: 219).

<sup>12</sup> Etzioni (1996: 21).

<sup>13</sup> Etzioni (1990: 253).

tual and moral standings. People are not born with any built-in values but only with a human potential, with a potential to become virtuous. This potential is not self-realizing, though. People "must be made human,"<sup>14</sup> must turn from the savage stage into the virtuous stage with the help and enrichment of society. What humans share is their social nature (society nourishes, sustains and enhances their individuality) and their natural needs for affection and human attachment, recognition, context (wholeness and meaning), transcendental means and connection to ultimate values fostering moral obligations as well as frequent gratification and stability. But even something as basic as these needs has to be discovered by humans through their participation in shaping their social structure, without which the needs would not come to sight.<sup>15</sup> While Etzioni views individuals as sociable, he does not see them as fully implicated in the social or fully embedded. Over-socialization is as harmful as under-socialization, which brings us to his key concept of the golden middle: only in good measure do the community and individuality enrich each other.<sup>16</sup> The individual and the society stay in a perpetual and partly creative conflict. The individual himself is a site of a permanent conflict as well. It is the conflict between the lower (debased) self and the higher (nobler) self, between "the call of nature" and "the moral voice." So, the existence of natural needs still does not make us human. "What makes us distinctive [as humans] is that we can *evaluate* our choices and desires through what Frankfurt terms "second-order desires," which are essentially desires about what to desire (or will)."<sup>17</sup> What is the basis for such evaluations? The basis is "the moral voice," both an inner, personal source of guidance and an expression of the community - something that encourages people to adhere to values to which they subscribe.<sup>18</sup> Not all human beings possess the moral voice, according to Etzioni. A small number of people within a communitarian society might lack it completely or might not experience it strongly enough, so that the voice can be disregarded; that is why the society needs to express its values in law, which would help to maintain order.<sup>19</sup> Etzioni's crucial assumption is that "we experience certain moral statements as binding moral duties, compelling from within." He thus describes his ethical theory as a moderate version of deon-

---

<sup>14</sup> Etzioni (1996: 166-7).

<sup>15</sup> Etzioni (1968: 624-6; 1996: 26, 174-5).

<sup>16</sup> (Etzioni draws here on the work of George Herbert Mead) Etzioni (1999a); (1996: 26).

<sup>17</sup> Etzioni (1996: 170). Etzioni refers here to an article by Frankfurt (1971: 6).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 120, 123.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p. 146.

tology.<sup>20</sup> However, it is a moderate, not fully-fledged, version since he also agrees that "while the ultimate foundation of morality may be commitments of individual conscience, it is communities that help introduce and sustain these commitments."<sup>21</sup> So, on the one hand, the individual is free to consult his conscience in his moral choices but, on the other hand, he needs the community to both become rationalistic/able to choose and to stay committed to his originally affirmed choices. The major tasks of the community, then, are to provide individuals with a framework of values and reinforce the individuals in their commitments.

### *1.b. Community and Autonomy in Etzioni's Theory*

What is Etzioni's definition of a community? "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 (rather than merely one-on-one or chain-like individual relationships), 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."<sup>22</sup> Etzioni also refers here to the ideas of David E. Pearson, who writes that communities are groups that "are able to exert moral suasion and extract a measure of compliance from their members."<sup>23</sup> A communitarian society in Etzioni's theory is based on commonly shared and affirmed values, which in turn are embodied in societal structures, frameworks and laws. However, Etzioni himself does not describe such a society as coercive since all its structures are voluntarily affirmed by its members. The values are not imposed, he claims, but debated, defined and limited only to those that are shared by all. Here is where he finds a difference between liberal and communitarian societies: in opposition to liberal society, the communitarian one defines the shared formulations of the good, though they are narrower than in holistic (totalitarian or authoritarian) governments.<sup>24</sup> The framework is not neutral on the question of the good since it aims to define it in some ways and goes beyond the merely civic society by openly fostering some additional values that a particular society decides to

---

<sup>20</sup> Etzioni (1991: 12).

<sup>21</sup> The Responsive Communitarian Platform: Rights and Responsibilities in Etzioni (ed.) (1998: xxxvi). A similar point is made in Etzioni (1996: 257).

<sup>22</sup> Etzioni (1996: 127).

<sup>23</sup> Pearson (1995: 47); quoted in Etzioni (1996: 285).

<sup>24</sup> Etzioni (1999b: 92).



promote.<sup>25</sup> These are the values that a particular community hands down to its present members by means of its history, tradition and culture; the precontractual values and normative commitments that have given it a specific shape and which are necessary for that community to function. The values of a community which are voluntarily affirmed by its members comprise a thick social order: a shared set of assumptions on what is right and wrong, a starting point for the existence and a future dialogue of the members of the community.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, the communitarian society goes well beyond proceduralism by openly embracing its support for substantive values and convictions, although it is supposed to limit itself in this respect. The limits are provided by individual autonomy. The term "autonomy" "encompasses both what is typically considered as individual freedom and the needs for self-expression, innovation, creativity, and self-government as well as legitimation of the expression of subgroup differences."<sup>27</sup> This autonomy, however, is socially constructed, institutionalized and bounded. It represents "a range of legitimate options within an affirmed normative framework."<sup>28</sup> And that is why its very existence requires that it be balanced with the aforementioned social order. Hence comes the key equilibrium of the communitarian society: an equilibrium between tradition and modernity; between *order* based on virtues and *autonomy* consisting of rights; between the self and community. Such a balance is not something we can easily locate; it is something we can pursue. So, Etzioni invites us to join this quest for the magic blend of liberty and order by coining the slogan that is supposed to enlighten us in our pursuit - the "new golden rule": "Respect and uphold society's moral order as you would have society respect and uphold your autonomy."<sup>29</sup> Both of our ideals are basic and primary in their own right. They conflict with each other when they are pushed to the extremes. However, they are mutually supportive when limited. To show our steady commitment to both these virtues, we must not maximize them (or any other virtue), but we must keep them balanced against each other.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 96, 98.

<sup>26</sup> Etzioni (1996: 10-12).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p. 24.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* p. 71.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p. xviii.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 4, 36, 248.

*1.c. Layered Loyalty and Its Fostering*

The viability of the balance between autonomy and order requires another balance, that between horizontal commitments. Following the injunction against the maximization of any single virtue is the advocacy for multi-community attachments that would strongly secure individual autonomy: when a person belongs to many communities, none of the groups can monopolistically control him or her.<sup>31</sup> Another balance is also essential, a balance between our commitments to various local, religious, ethnic or secular ethical communities and to the higher overarching framework (such as the Constitution and the Bill of Rights in the American context or basic democratic rules in the context of other countries). However, the so-called rules of democracy are not perceived as replacing, preempting or "trumping" the local laws. It is rather the values of local communities that can "trump" the more general rules, provided they do so within certain normative boundaries. Thus, the local values enjoy a higher standing, though bounded by limits to not disregard the principles of the democratic environment in which they exist.<sup>32</sup> To ensure the genuine commitment to the overarching framework, we must aim at building a world community by means of cross-cultural and cross-societal moral dialogues,<sup>33</sup> to establish the community of communities. Although he speaks in favor of using the law as a legitimate means of enforcing the community's commitment to its values, dialogue is nonetheless a crucial word in Etzioni's analysis of the communitarian problems since he finds the methods of persuasion through the educational system and societal pressure to be more consistent with the communitarian agenda.<sup>34</sup> One of the reasons for this is the fact that however helpful the moral standards given by traditions are, the final moral arbitrators are the individual members of communities who themselves need to be persuaded about the value of their commitments before they voluntarily subscribe to them.<sup>35</sup> The two core self-evident values of bounded autonomy and voluntary moral order both presuppose this ultimate reliance on the individual in the project of building a viable and responsive community.

---

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* p. 128.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 191, 224-5.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 227, 239-40.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 13, 28.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* p. 257.

## 2. Etzioni's Theory Criticized

### 2.a. A Critique of Etzioni's Portrayal of the Self

The last sentence of the previous paragraph already hints at some of the difficulties we might find in Etzioni's theory. However, in order to grasp them in a better light, I will start with analyzing his picture of the self. His claim that individuals are not free-floating atoms but are always embedded and constituted by their societies is not particularly original or revolutionary. Even the heuristic project of John Locke perceived humans as social in the state of nature.<sup>36</sup> John Rawls's model might be more problematic since his participants in the original position gather to establish the rules of society without somehow being shaped by this society itself.<sup>37</sup> Of course, his picture might be defended as purely heuristic and painted solely for the purpose of accounting for the existent rules of a liberal democratic regime. Etzioni's argument does not seem to invalidate the liberal theories in toto. It breaks the open door because most liberals have been sufficiently aware of the social influences upon the individuals. Where he seems to differ from the classical liberals (both Hobbes and Locke) is in his claim that all rights are vested neither in a sovereign state nor in individuals.<sup>38</sup> However, his assumption about the individuals, who "are not well formed unless they are members of collectivities,"<sup>39</sup> does not stay with the substantial conflict of Locke's vision of the self as a blank slate.<sup>40</sup> Instead, it might point to an inconsistency in Locke's thinking, although it does not break fundamentally with the liberal tradition as it claims to do in this respect. Without further minding the alleged differences or similarities, which by themselves do not really contribute much to the debate about the value of his theory, let us determine if the theory itself is coherent.

On the one hand, Etzioni says there is something as a basic human nature which cannot be altered<sup>41</sup> and which comprises our basic needs. On the other hand, the universal human needs "are not genetic or god-given" but they are the product of

---

<sup>36</sup> Locke (1956).

<sup>37</sup> Rawls (1971).

<sup>38</sup> Etzioni (1990: 8-9).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p. 179.

<sup>40</sup> Locke (1987).

<sup>41</sup> Etzioni (1991: 126).

basic forms of socialization that all people undergo.<sup>42</sup> Though the natural scientists might disagree with his judgment of human needs as not being genetically based, I will leave this question aside and pose another one: What is the status of the first claimed human nature, if all its contents come later to be recognized as the effects of socialization? Etzioni attempts to solve this conundrum by claiming that what we as humans receive from nature is the potential to become human, which in turn needs the nurturing of society before it can show its structure and fully flourish. The statement is problematic for at least two reasons. First, Etzioni's theory lacks consistency because he sometimes writes that human nature as such consists of needs that cannot be changed, while on other occasions he claims that this human nature is nothing else but human potential. Is it the needs or the potential for needs which is the essence of this nature? Second, he assumes that the individual and the community enjoy the same conceptual and moral standing. How is this possible if the individual is not fully formed without the help of the community? Clearly, he ascribes a higher status to community, and thus he does not resolve the conflicting assumptions within his own theory. And yet, he assumes that the aggressive impulses that humans have cannot be extinguished; instead, they need to be channelled into socially constructive outlets.<sup>43</sup> In the same vein, he writes that the human nature needs to be perceived as a constraint on societal attempts; societal efforts cannot contradict human nature, they always have to take it into account.<sup>44</sup> This premise substantially weakens the claim about the preeminent role that the community supposedly plays in shaping the individual. There seems to be little left for shaping if one takes the vision of human nature as aggressive and unalterable.

Similar incongruities can be observed when analyzing Etzioni's concept of the moral voice. On the one hand, the moral voice is described as an inner, personal voice - something that we would suppose to be given by nature to human beings. On the other hand, not all people are in the possession of this asset, as I said earlier while outlining Etzioni's theory. Moreover, at some point in his analysis, the sociologist clearly *opposes* the moral voice to the call of nature, thus making the former into a purely social creation. He further complicates his description by differentiating between the virtuous and errant moral voices. The former are the ones that are compatible with individual autonomy and voluntary moral order, while the latter are not. "All communities have moral voices, but because they speak for val-

---

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* p. 126.

<sup>43</sup> Etzioni (1996: 184).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* p. 172.

ues we judge differently, we must separate moral voices that support community values we find deficient from those that enhance values we deem to meet all our normative criteria."<sup>45</sup> Here, Etzioni stands on the position that moral voices are embedded in communities and have no origins in nature since these voices are as numerous as human groupings are.

So, when he describes the individual as divided between the lower and the higher self, (i.e., the conflict between the call of nature and the moral voice), he might be understood as saying that the individual is not social by nature. The whole differentiation between the people who have the moral voice and those who do not, or those who have it in a weaker version, does not make much sense if the moral voice is not provided by nature but is inculcated in our development by society. Simply speaking, nobody has it unless society imbues him or her with it. Consequently, Etzioni's explanation of the moral voice as something that encourages people to adhere to values to which they subscribe does not fit into his theory as a whole. Such a definition would make perfect sense if one assumed that all human beings were somehow endowed with the moral voice of some sort, that they had a natural inclination to subscribe to a certain range of values which society would later legitimately foster. Obviously, Etzioni does not assume any such thing. Paradoxically enough, he seems to hope that somehow all people will subscribe to the same values of autonomy and order. Unfortunately, he does not give a satisfactory account for his optimism if he leaves the individuals with their freedom of choice in the context of their varying societal environments.

A solution to this dilemma can be identified in his deontological leanings. Human beings are supposed to experience certain values and notions as compelling from within, as self-evident, self-explanatory, in need of no further account. If we assumed that we all instinctively recognize the value of autonomy and order, Etzioni's crucial ideals, then what could be the basis of this deontology if we also agreed with Etzioni's earlier assumptions that human nature in itself does not give us the tool for this recognition and that the differences between societies are so big that they sometimes even allow for the promotion of the errant moral voices? What could be the ultimate basis of this deontology if neither the individual nature nor the social environment can be relied on? These are the questions that are left unanswered in Etzioni's writings and, as such, severely diminish the viability of his project.

---

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p. 247.

Likewise, the model is flawed by another inconsistency within this relativism-versus-universalism area. By unhesitatingly claiming that autonomy and order constitute the highest universal values, Etzioni criticizes any relativistic claims to the contrary.<sup>46</sup> By using the terms "lower" and "higher" or "nobler" to describe the various parts of the divided self, he presupposes the existence of an objective order, a normative system of measurement, against which we could evaluate our values and our positions. This, in turn, would lead us to a logical assumption about the existence of a human telos. After all, if we know what is good and what is bad, we can soon discover what is the best, one could conclude. However, Etzioni does not seem to agree here. He does not even leave the question about the human telos open. Instead, he clearly speaks against maximizing any single value and in favor of balancing the two values that remain inherently conflicting. Thus, his opposition to value-relativism is rooted in the liberal idea of value-pluralism and its consequent limit on the choice of goals a community may pursue. Of course, Etzioni, like anyone else, is perfectly entitled to profess any liberal view. However, his clinging to the conflictual vision of values invalidates his right to claim that we can still pronounce judgments on what is good or bad, better or worse. Someone might protest here by saying that it is pretty obvious that whatever contributes to the balance between autonomy and order is good and whatever destroys it is bad. Does it mean, then, that the balance is allowed to aspire to the status of the highest value in his theory? What about the stipulation against promoting any single value? If we allow ourselves to pursue the balance, how can we still abide by following the two ultimate virtues? Does not the idea of the balance invalidate their primary standing? I will take up the question of the plausibility of the balance later in my paper, but the questions asked here will preoccupy me now. How serious is Etzioni's treatment of his two core values? Let me start with autonomy.

### *2.b. Etzioni's Standing on Autonomy Examined*

Throughout his writings Etzioni stresses that communitarianism is a kind of liberalism rightly understood, although this right understanding is what differentiates communitarianism from liberalism as it is generally described. As I pointed out earlier, his definition of autonomy comprises the concepts of individual freedom, needs for self-expression and self-government as commonly taken. Never does he question the supreme position that autonomy has always enjoyed in the liberal tradition. On the contrary, he leaves the autonomy where it belongs according to lib-

---

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* p. 247.

eral assumptions, which is at the top of all values that can legitimately be pursued. However, he also postulates that individual autonomy (or liberty, as he uses the terms interchangeably) is socially constructed and bounded to a range of certain legitimate options, existing only within the confines of the normative framework. In order to secure our autonomy, we have to let our community do everything that is necessary to protect its order and thus make sure that the conditions of liberty will survive and even be nourished. Such is the justification for the enforcement of the respect due to society and its rules, if we want to keep our autonomy safe. This sounds like a pretty logical reasoning, even from a liberal point of view. After all, it has always been a liberal awareness of the fragility of freedom and a liberal concern with how to protect it with the help of some kind of institutional/societal context. However, this concern with freedom naturally leads to the formulation of laws that should be as neutral about moral commitments as possible, ideally restricted to laws that would come solely from the general commitment to autonomy, however possible this is. Here is where Etzioni seems to part ways with such a view. He says that law is "first and foremost the continuation of morality by other means."<sup>47</sup> Laws embody virtues; they express the community's values and are completely ineffective without the moral backing. *Leges sine moribus vanae*, as Etzioni proudly refers to the old truth. So, he abandons the project of pursuing the neutrality of the law. "Laws represent, in every society, a method of expressing social and moral values and of signaling conduct that the community considers proper or abhorrent."<sup>48</sup> We can summarize Etzioni's argumentation in the following manner: In order to protect autonomy, we need effective laws; in order to have effective laws, they must be based on moral values; in order to have laws and autonomy, we must protect morality. "Without punishing those who do serious injury to our commonly held values - child abusers, toxic polluters, fathers who renege on child support, corporations who market unsafe drugs - no moral order can be sustained."<sup>49</sup> Of course, Etzioni provides some limits on the roles that the law can play. First of all, the law must be supported with the moral voice, which in turn must express our voluntary adherence to values.<sup>50</sup> Laws are not allowed to diverge from the values affirmed by society. Second, for the same reason, the main social body in his theory is said to be the society, not the state. The social order might promote its values by relying on

---

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* p. 143.

<sup>48</sup> Etzioni (1998: 45).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* p. 45.

<sup>50</sup> Etzioni (1996: 139).

normative means through education, leadership, consensus building, peer pressure, pointing out role models, and the exhortation and expression of the moral voices of communities.<sup>51</sup> The assumption is that members of a society voluntarily share a commitment to a set of core values and behave by those values most of the time without being forced to do so.<sup>52</sup> The pressure that the society might execute on the individual is seen as perfectly legitimate since it is based on the original individual's declaration of allegiance to the values of society. This is how Etzioni describes the proper functioning of social pressure: "Nobody is excommunicated or exiled, let alone stoned, for failing to discharge a community duty. People are, however, made to feel appreciated when they act responsibly and uncomfortable when they do not."<sup>53</sup>

What is problematic in this whole vision is that such a program should receive much criticism from anyone who cherishes the idea of autonomy. If one treats the idea seriously and defines it as the right to formulate one's own rules, free from any imposition, one experiences all kinds of pressure as coercive and illegitimate. Although Etzioni writes much about how bounded and socially constituted autonomy is, he still claims to stand by its traditional definition since he defines it as encompassing what we typically take to be individual freedom. If he accepts the rules of the American Constitution and its Bill of Rights, as he also does,<sup>54</sup> he must be aware of the way of defining liberty by the U.S. Supreme Court in the recent years, which I quoted earlier and which is consistent with the modern mainstream liberal understanding. Since I have not found him disclaiming this particular understanding, I take him to be in agreement with this view. In this case, I do not find any persuasive arguments within his theory that could justify the policies of social pressure that he recommends. If an individual has a right to define his own rules of conduct and his own meaning of the good, and if the state is supposed to protect his right to do so (because autonomy is supposed to be the virtue of the communitarian society and state), then he has a perfect right to be free from both state coercion and social pressure in this respect. The concept of autonomy itself rests on a presupposition that individuals do not necessarily agree on values and do not necessarily hear the same moral voice. This assumption makes Etzioni's model look unjustifiably optimistic. No degree of social constitution of individuals is able

---

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* p. 13.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* p. 13.

<sup>53</sup> Etzioni (1998: 43).

<sup>54</sup> Etzioni (1996: 224).



to ensure that they will share the necessary core values either. When Steven Kautz writes that individuals must be free from government and from the traditions or orthodoxies of community since liberalism is based on the consent of individuals, which assumes that individuals are "not, or not wholly, constituted by their communities,"<sup>55</sup> he claims more or less the same thing. Had Etzioni supported the opinion that individuals were totally constituted by their communities, he might have had a point. However, he agrees with scholars, such as Kautz, that people are not absolutely conditioned. Moreover, he often pronounces his unadulterated allegiance to autonomy as a core value, and that is precisely why his position on supposedly legitimate pressure policies can be questioned. It actually is questioned by some scholars. David Gauthier attacks a communitarian discussion of identity and autonomy by stating that the fact of the social constitution of individual identity does not ruin autonomy. Its meaning remains the same: "What makes a being autonomous is his capacity to alter given preferences by a rational self-critical, reflective procedure, not a capacity to produce preferences with no prior basis."<sup>56</sup>

Although he often writes that it is the society, not the state, which is responsible for moral education and enforcement, Etzioni's arguments are prone to additional attacks since he does not remain consistent about this injunction. If he envisions society as an adequate agent of social-conduct regulation, why does he still allow for such an important role to be played by law? Does he perceive law as part of the society or the state? His discussion on these problem does not make the issue clear. "The communitarian society is not first and foremost one of law-and-order, but one based on shared moral values that the members affirm. It is a society primarily based on virtues and on laws that embody them."<sup>57</sup> Here he clearly blends the laws with the society and still argues for the differentiation between the state and the society on the next page! He does not even want to limit the role of the law to the necessary minimum. He claims that the heavy reliance on law is compatible with communitarianism provided that the law reflects the moral values of a community.<sup>58</sup> "Morality rests on the intricate interaction among three factors: individual consciences, social and community voices, and the state. Each one helps to sustain the others. Hence, while it is best to build up individual consciences and commu-

---

<sup>55</sup> Kautz (1995: 192-193).

<sup>56</sup> Gauthier (1992: 157).

<sup>57</sup> Etzioni (1996: 140).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* p. 148.

nity voices, communities must also resort, on occasion, to the force of law."<sup>59</sup> In saying this, he obviously abandons the ideal of the neutrality of the state, which seems essential enough for the safeguarding of individual autonomy as it is defined by its protagonists. When pondering the problem of abortion, Ronald Dworkin writes: "The crucial issue in the constitutional controversy is...whether states have a legitimate power to dictate how their citizens must respect the inherent value of life."<sup>60</sup> So, even if we assume that all citizens subscribe to the same value, autonomy does not allow the state to take sides on how to express this subscription, according to Dworkin. Etzioni, who claims to defend autonomy and still advocates the legal promotion of values, cannot possibly take autonomy seriously.

A similar point is made by William R. Lund, who suggests that Etzioni's position might easily result in harsh and freedom-denying approaches: "When rational persuasion and other efforts to induce voluntary change fail, there is the law and less coercive, but still heavily manipulative, mechanisms such as shame that will undermine the equality and autonomy of many citizens."<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, "since individuals seeking good lives in a pluralistic context will inevitably come into conflict, our chief problem is protecting - from coercion and manipulation - those who fall outside the 'affect-laden relationships' and who reject some or many of the 'shared values' of a particular community." If, as Etzioni concedes, the communitarian societies need to be constantly kept from encroaching on the individual's decision-making, "the liberalism of equal respect, stringent individual rights, and public neutrality on the proper balance of conflicting ethical requirements may still be the best course for those who want to take autonomy seriously."<sup>62</sup> This line of reasoning might be further vindicated by noting Etzioni's treatment of the nature of autonomy. Rather than seeing it as the area where the highest human aspirations might be realized, he pushes it to the sphere of instincts. "In part, the need for autonomy reflects the animal base of universal human nature," a need that is not fully malleable or absorbable into pro-social roles.<sup>63</sup> Pronouncing such views on autonomy and yet claiming for it the supreme status together with the value of order seems at least slightly inconsistent from my point of view.

---

<sup>59</sup> Etzioni (1998: 45).

<sup>60</sup> Dworkin (1993: 168).

<sup>61</sup> Lund (1998/99: 21-22).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* p. 22.

<sup>63</sup> Etzioni (1996: 169).

### *2.c. Etzioni's Standing on Social Order Examined*

Let me now delve deeper into how Etzioni treats his second supreme value of social order. He makes it clear that what he means by it is not a collection of procedures, a neutral set of rules, or a *modus vivendi*. He says that the social order is "thick" in that it contains a set of values that are affirmed by the members of a particular community, and which make up a framework for its existence and development. It goes beyond proceduralism because, as Etzioni writes, "most institutions are neither merely procedural nor value-neutral."<sup>64</sup> Having that in mind, the citizens of a communitarian society do not follow the ephemeral neutrality but officially promote the values of their community by expressing them in their institutions. As I mentioned earlier, they thus justify the pressure that the society may exert on the individuals. In this light, the term "peer pressure" loses its exclusively negative connotation. When it is viewed as primarily helping to internalize the values of the community of which one is a member and on which one's freedom ultimately depends, peer pressure is no longer experienced as an external force. "Such peer pressure does take place, but to focus exclusively on pressures is to ignore that peers can help one another to reach higher levels of accomplishment, delight, complement, and enrich one another. The term 'peer (mutual) fostering' should find its place right next to 'peer pressure.'"<sup>65</sup> My earlier discussion on the problem of social pressure led me to the conclusion that Etzioni's understanding of the term does not give full justice to the implications of autonomy. His use of words such as "fostering," "higher levels of accomplishment" and "enrichment," or his earlier value-judgments concerning the debate on the virtues of a community, seems to rely on a view of an objective moral order - all the more so considering his claim that certain values do not need further justification since they are self-evident and compelling from within. Yet, such hints are misleading. A conclusion that Etzioni's theory is based on a stable, pre-existent, objective order would not be correct for some of the reasons I mentioned in the previous paragraphs, such as his allegiance to the ideal of autonomy, his belief in the voluntary nature of the moral voice, and his emphasis on the need to balance our commitments to various communities, that is to various visions of the social order. What is the essence of the overarching framework, of the unity above the pluralism, is the value of the (bounded, but still) individual autonomy. It is perplexingly unclear what becomes of Etzioni's deontology, if the ultimate arbitrator of morality is the individual. It is clearer, though, what becomes of

---

<sup>64</sup> Etzioni (1999b: 95).

<sup>65</sup> Etzioni (1996: 168).

his notion of social order when he further defines it as just "pro-social behavior."<sup>66</sup> Such a narrow understanding is striking, especially when uttered by someone who claims to offer this value a definitely higher standing than liberal philosophy does. It is no wonder that it makes Etzioni's position particularly vulnerable to criticisms, such as the one from Steven Lukes, who rightly points out that Etzioni's communitarianism is not a new idea or even a new variant of an old idea. It is just an attempt to provide an answer to an old dilemma of how to cultivate social cohesion in the market economy.<sup>67</sup>

Sometimes one could conclude from Etzioni's writings that his theory does not aspire to anything more. His insistence on the status of communitarianism as a simple, though vital corrective to liberalism proves this point. When he describes the major tenets of Martin Buber's paradigm, the one he embraces, he writes that the central goal of the community is liberty. "The I & We paradigm is as much concerned with individual liberties as is the neoclassical. However, it assumes that liberty requires a viable - albeit not overbearing - community, and seeks to study the conditions under which such a community evolves and is sustained."<sup>68</sup> Is the community treated instrumentally here? In Etzioni's particular understanding, I would say yes, although in some of his other statements that I quoted, it seems to the contrary. The difficulty, as I see it, lies in his contradictions and inconsistencies. Let me support it with one more citation from him. "Social order is not the result of imposition by authority, or an aggregation of individual pursuits, but a community setting within which people are free, and without which they are not, and within which they continuously vie over the borderline between freedom and order."<sup>69</sup> It looks like Etzioni confuses his definition here by using the term "order" both as the concept he wants to define and as an element of what he defines; order is both the community setting and one of the values involved in the struggle within this setting. If Etzioni places order on par with autonomy, he cannot possibly claim that autonomy is bounded and socially constructed as he does at some point in his analysis. And yet, his final claim about the equal status of the two values is enshrined in the new golden rule, calling on us to respect the social order as much as we would like the society to respect our autonomy. By treating the two values as equal and at the same time conflicting, Etzioni, in fact, abandons the view of the

---

<sup>66</sup> Etzioni (1999b: 94).

<sup>67</sup> Lukes (1998: 88).

<sup>68</sup> Etzioni (1990: 10).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11.

social order as the community setting, the value framework shared by the community members, or the bounding context for autonomy. He does not fully grasp the practical as well as the theoretical contradictions underlying his golden rule. They are noticed and chastised by his critics: "Fidelity to the new golden rule ... may not be achievable in certain cases, most obviously when the community's norms expressly disapprove of certain forms of personal belief and behavior (even if such behavior is not legally proscribed). In such instances, one cannot exercise one's personal liberty without treading on the community's values. Individual freedom and conformity to the norm that restricts that freedom cannot simultaneously be upheld."<sup>70</sup> Etzioni does not take the social order seriously. He ignores its necessary implications as he does with respect to autonomy, as I showed earlier in my study. By first clinging to the traditional definition of autonomy and still wishing to somehow fit it with the vision of social order, Etzioni does not recognize that the two values need not be pushed to the extremes in order to be conflicting. They remain opposed to each other even at the minimal level if one defines them the way he does. And it is precisely this fact that makes me say that he does not do justice to either of the values he claims to enthrone. The existence of this conflict, which he admits, though not to the sufficient degree, has important implications for the relationship between the individual and the community, as we are going to see in the next paragraphs.

#### *2.d. Conflicts and Equilibria Scrutinized*

Etzioni notes that communitarians are often criticized for the naive rejection of the sociological model of conflict and its exchange for the model of consensus. They "have been charged with suppressing conflict in the name of cultural conformity and consensus."<sup>71</sup> He responds to this charge by asserting that communitarians actually do have their own model of conflict: they seek to relocate power and assets among the members of community and yet to keep the community intact. It is quite significant that instead of firmly defending the model of consensus, Etzioni rather chooses the strategy of proving that communitarians have a kind of conflict, too, though their conflict is supposed to stay within the confines of the overarching consensus - a pluralism within unity. However, the conflict he mentions as the particularly communitarian one is not the most important conflict to be found there. The tension between autonomy and order, provided we take the two seriously, is a

---

<sup>70</sup> Chong (1998/99: 109).

<sup>71</sup> Etzioni (1999a: 5).

potentially more disruptive one. To describe their mutual relationship, Etzioni comes up with the term "inverting symbiosis": autonomy and order enrich each other to a certain point, past which they diminish each other.<sup>72</sup> So, at high levels they are contradictory. As I discussed earlier, the conflict does not erupt at the mysterious high level. If the values have a conflicting standing, they have it all the way down, regardless of their "amount" or "level," so to speak. Their inherent conflict might only be solved, it seems to me, by subordinating both of them to some kind of a preeminent value. Etzioni, however, does not see such a possibility: "As I see it, moral order and autonomy, the twin virtues, crown the communitarian normative account; they provide the final, substantive normative criterion this account requires."<sup>73</sup> For him, both core virtues have the status of self-evident truths; reasons for that are not needed. Are they really superfluous? Sometimes the lack of good reasons for the values we hold dear results in the lack of consensus on their practical application, as the earlier quoted example of Dworkin's debate about the respect for life clearly shows. (If we do not give the reasons for cherishing life, and if we do not even try to give the reasons, then no wonder we have no idea about how to show our respect in practice.) I do not try to claim here that autonomy and order are not accepted as high ideals on the worldwide basis, though I can imagine people doing that. I would just like to say that if they are treated as such, they are usually, if not always, supported with some kind of reasons. What is more, I would call such reasons substantive, pointing to our deeper understandings of what is good, not just restricted to what is pragmatic, seemingly useful, or stemming from quasi-procedural solutions. Self-evidence does not satisfy the human need for substance, which is the prerequisite for a deep commitment, at least such would be my claim. And such would be the reason for my objection to Etzioni's project of building the society dedicated to both freedom (individual rights) and substantive good.<sup>74</sup> His vision does not treat freedom as a good here. Neither does it draw freedom *from* a substantive order of goods. One can come to the conclusion that freedom, which is otherwise treated as a self-evident value and placed at the highest position on par with the social order, is somehow both disrespected and artificially squeezed into the equilibrium out of purely pragmatic grounds.

Here I will just signalize the problem of the viability of such pragmatism, which I hope to develop later. However, the problems intertwine to such a degree that

---

<sup>72</sup> Etzioni (1996: 36).

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* p. 245.

<sup>74</sup> Etzioni (1991: 139).

they need to be noted at various parts of this study. The reason for signaling the problems of pragmatism at this point is that such an approach to values does not help to secure the citizens' commitment to their framework. Consequently, it does not help us build the much longed-for community. For what can be the basis of such a community? Theoretically, the members stay committed to both autonomy and order, and that is why they best promote both if they keep them in balance. They are not allowed to maximize any single value. The responsive community is supposed to follow the goals that "incorporate the full range of legitimate needs and values rather than focusing on any one category, be it individualism, autonomy, interpersonal caring, or social justice."<sup>75</sup> At the same time, Etzioni concedes that "in a communitarian society (and in quite a few others) *values are handed down from generation to generation rather than invented or negotiated* [author's emphasis]."<sup>76</sup> Supposing that an individual no longer approves of the values of his community and wants to practice the autonomy that is the crowning value, he enters the area of conflict from the very first moment of entertaining the idea of changing anything within the society. If one is not allowed to do it, one does not exercise one's autonomy; this is obvious. But if one has the permission to do it *within limits*, does that already create the opportunity for exercising one's autonomy? The essence of the values is that they are the limits, from the perspective of an autonomy-follower. Thus any practicing of autonomy is proscribed. Practically, then, not only the maximization, but also the mere practice of individual's preferences which are not approved by the community, are constrained by default. The conflict between the crowning values of autonomy and order thus is translated into the inexpugnable conflict between the individual and society. The basis for a "common" life is necessarily restricted to mutual tolerance and respect for individual rights. If that is the hard substance, it is soft enough to be accepted by any liberal. "The collective life of a political community includes its official political acts: legislation, adjudication, enforcement, and the other executive functions of government. An integrated citizen will count his community's success or failure in these formal political acts as resonating in his own life, as improving or diminishing it. On the liberal view, nothing more should be added."<sup>77</sup>

Nothing more *can* be added, if one follows the prescriptions given by Etzioni, for anything more would either violate autonomy or presuppose the existence of a telos

---

<sup>75</sup> Etzioni (1996: p. xxvii).

<sup>76</sup> Etzioni (1996: 93).

<sup>77</sup> Dworkin (1989: 500).

common to all human beings, neither of which is advocated in Etzioni's theory. His community is based on the common goal of securing the individual autonomy and, as such, does not differ from the projects of the liberal visionaries of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The sentence by John Locke, quoted in a critical light by Etzioni, paradoxically fits into his own stipulations about the voluntary character of communitarian institutions: "The only way whereby any one divests himself of his natural liberty, and puts on the bonds of civil society, is by agreeing with other men to join and unite into a community."<sup>78</sup> The idea of balance between liberty and authority was fundamental in the English political tradition, was present in the writings of the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, and recurred in the concerns of the American Founding Fathers. Is Etzioni's treatment of the problem more persuasive? So far, we have seen that it does not take any of the values seriously, while their conflicting nature is reproduced in the permanent tension between the individual and community. Is the second balance, that between local communities and an overarching community, going to solve the problem? What is the viability of this balance of "layered loyalty"?

A good society, in Etzioni's definition, is the "one that lives up to the shared conceptions of virtue."<sup>79</sup> It openly professes its allegiance to certain norms that constitute the identity of its members and it promotes them through the means of social institutions as well as laws. Such a society, however, cannot stop there. Besides being true to its own particularistic norms, it has to combine them with faithfulness to some universal principles.<sup>80</sup> It has to balance the two kinds of commitment, local and universal, by means of fostering the "layered loyalty." "This entails nurturing a split loyalty, divided between commitment to one's immediate community and to the more encompassing community, and according priority to the overarching one on key select matters."<sup>81</sup> These "select matters" include the democratic values and rules stemming from them, and the individual rights. They cannot be overridden by any particularistic commitments; they provide the universal framework; they take priority in cases of collision with the local community's norms. This last statement may sound contradictory to the one I used while describing the basic ideas of Etzioni's communitarianism in the starting paragraphs of this study. Following Etzioni's own words, I have written there that the local

---

<sup>78</sup> Locke (1956: 168-9).

<sup>79</sup> Etzioni (1999a: 4).

<sup>80</sup> Etzioni (1996: 248).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* p. 203.



values "trump" the more general rules, provided they do it within certain normative boundaries, provided they do not violate the framework. Still following Etzioni's emphasis on the difference between liberal individualism and communitarianism, the universal values in his view do not *preempt* the local values (they do not replace the traditional, local rules); they *frame* them in a sense by giving them a particular shape that is consistent with the universal values. As I see it, such a view does not amount to a contradiction if we interpret the democratic rules as a minimum that has to be respected, though which can be transcended by the local values. The latter have to conform to the minimum, but once they do, they can be maximized and claim a higher standing because they go beyond the minimal aspirations. Thus, democracy may shape, but not limit the local values. So far, so good. Nevertheless, I am not saying that the theory is free of contradictions on the whole. While the contradiction does not lie in the opposition between framing and preempting, it lies somewhere else: in the ever problematic issue of the balance. For I can easily imagine a situation where a community is loyal both to its particular values and to the democratic framework because the framework rules stem from the substantive particular values, though they do not exhaust them, whereas I cannot possibly imagine a community being faithful to its particular values that do not already presuppose a democratic minimum, and yet remain loyal to the democratic framework. Simply speaking, I cannot envision the split loyalty as described by Etzioni. I understand him to be saying that it is possible for a person to sometimes be directed by the local norms, and on other occasions to allow the precedence of the universal ones. This requires a sharp division between the area covered by community standards and that covered by universal standards. The project is not feasible, if one admits, like Etzioni does, that the local community's moral order is a thick one, going beyond mere procedures to the substantive or comprehensive account of the good. My puzzlement over Etzioni's assent to this balancing between the local and the universal is the more justified, since he himself criticizes the sharp and unworkable division between the public and private spheres. If the latter "does not hold empirically,"<sup>82</sup> as he says, why should his own split work? His layered loyalty is thus a double loyalty, split between at least two or even more communities. In this case, the overarching values do not just frame the local values, but they do preempt them in the incident of a conflict. They preempt, not frame or transcend them, because they do not stem from the local ones; they do not embrace them as their

---

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* p. 92.

roots; the framework remains external, not equally grounded in community and, as such, it can never claim the equal loyalty of the community members.

The split loyalty relies on the earlier criticized assumption of the self-evidence of the crowning virtues and is thus vulnerable to attacks for its precariousness. Etzioni's project of the equilibrium between commitments is, despite his claims to the contrary, both similar to and weaker than the liberal project put forward by John Rawls.<sup>83</sup> Although Rawls's "overlapping consensus"<sup>84</sup> has been widely criticized for its own weaknesses, it is stronger than Etzioni's "overarching framework" because the former is supposed to rely on the rules already present in the existent particularistic commitments; it thus originally draws on the comprehensive doctrines in building the overall agreement and, at least theoretically, does not require the split of loyalty between the comprehensive and "political" spheres. Rawls's priority of the right over the good might be defensible, if we bear in mind that his right is actually a good because it came from the good of comprehensive doctrines; but Etzioni's project of switching priorities cannot be a solution for the situations where both the universal and the local values pronounce their conflicting judgments on the same issues. The areas for the preeminent domination of both kinds of values are not marked, while the ultimate standard of individual autonomy is such a broad concept that it does not leave enough space for the standard of the social order to rule anywhere.

Consequently, the balance is unequal. Though it does not treat seriously any of the two core values, its theoretical implications seem to put autonomy first. The criteria of the provision of the golden rule allow only for the minimally intrusive autonomy-curbing mechanisms and those used only under clear and present danger.<sup>85</sup> The social order does not present itself as something objective, compelling or self-standing. It becomes valuable only if it is voluntarily supported. The individuals are fundamental moral arbitrators. The various regulations of a communitarian society (such as a simple speed limit), are justified because they serve best the foundations of liberty (in this case, sustaining life) and of the "social order" (not causing harm to others and the common good).<sup>86</sup> I deliberately put the term "social order" in inverted commas to show how limited Etzioni's understanding of it is. His use of the term proves that he does not mean an objective, normative standard against

---

<sup>83</sup> I refer here to the theory presented in two books by Rawls (1971) and Rawls (1996).

<sup>84</sup> Rawls (1996: 133-172).

<sup>85</sup> Etzioni (1996: 52).

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* p. 33.

which one could measure the validity of one's particular projects here. What he means is a state of relative stability, a set of minimal conditions for exercising one's autonomy. So, community with its order is necessary for creating a rational human being as well as for giving him the opportunity to practice his autonomy. It is sustained for the same purposes, too. It is instrumentalized for achieving the higher goal of realizing autonomy. The problem with such an approach is that it not only subordinates community; in fact, it either destroys it or presupposes its nonexistence. Let me support my views with a lengthy, though enlightening quote from Jeremy Waldron:

*Communitarians seem to think it appropriate within our society to say of some widely accepted norm, 'This is one of the norms that gives our community its distinctive character, and that is why it is appropriate for us to enforce it.' But to describe a norm in this spirit is already to take an attitude towards it that is somewhat different from that of a person who actually subscribes to it. To subscribe to a norm like 'Sodomy is wicked,' is to be convinced of the wickedness of sodomy. To subscribe to a norm like 'Racism is wrong,' is to sincerely and wholeheartedly condemn racism. By contrast, describing the norm in terms of the contribution it makes to our communal identity means abandoning that essentially moralistic stance, and adopting a standpoint that is more external, more like the position of an anthropologist who wants to know what distinguishes one community from another ... A communitarian betrays rather than participates in our communal identity by taking that particular identity as itself a ground for moral or political action. By asking what is really right and really wrong, the liberal is closer to participating in the spirit of our traditions than the communitarian who says that what matters to us is nothing more than that these happen to be our traditions.<sup>87</sup>*

Of course, Etzioni says that the local standards always need to be checked against the universal framework, but his prescription does not defend his theory because the essence of the framework is not substantively defined. Its autonomous and voluntary character cannot provide a measure for judging the validity of particular norms without at the same time violating these norms' claims to objectivity. Similar arguments are put forward by Benjamin R. Barber, when he writes that by asking us to combine our commitment to a local community with the respect for the

---

<sup>87</sup> Waldron (1989: 578-9, 581).

choices made by others, Etzioni "subordinates communitarianism to another prior value, in this case tolerance, which becomes a constraint and limit on the category 'community.' Communities that cannot or will not respect other communities are presumably pushed outside the pale; which is to say, they are being judged by a criterion other than their intrinsic character as a community ... Layered loyalty undermines a specific community identity, tolerance may attenuate solidarity, limiting identity politics undercuts community, and the Bill of Rights is a document that fortifies individuals against communities. Sure it is nice to honor all these liberal values, but how does a communitarian do it and remain a communitarian?"<sup>88</sup> Being faithful to autonomy requires embracing the neutrality of the state. Etzioni is thus inconsistent with respect to his own norms when he declares that the crucifixes in Bavarian public schools, in the Anglican Church establishment in England or in the Lutheran Church establishment in Scandinavia are legitimate examples of promoting the religious values constituting an integral part of a good society.<sup>89</sup> Such a good society does not conform to his description of it and, as such, it receives a just deal of criticism.<sup>90</sup>

All in all, Etzioni's various equilibria do not pass the test of their own standards. They seem to rest on the purely pragmatic grounds of avoiding the total war of conflicting values and commitments. His community is nothing more than a peace treaty or an armistice among the still hateful opponents. This, in turn, makes it impossible for his communitarianism to be even a corrective to liberalism, since, first, it follows the wide liberal tradition together with repeating its mistakes, and second, it blurs the picture, distorts the meanings of values and underestimates the weight of many arguments. Etzioni openly reveals his pragmatism by saying that communitarians should "throw themselves to the side opposite that *toward* which history is tilting" to avoid oppression, anarchy or the collapse of their good society.<sup>91</sup>

However, his position has all of the dangers of the middle ground without enjoying any of the thick arguments of genuine value-maximizers. After all, what is the community in its collective capacity allowed to do? It can promote respect for difference, reason, authenticity and its particular values always to a minimal degree, always cautiously and always with an eye to the test of autonomy, all the time with

---

<sup>88</sup> Barber (1998/99: 100, 101).

<sup>89</sup> Etzioni (1999b: 99).

<sup>90</sup> Steiner (1999: 107).

<sup>91</sup> Etzioni (1996: xx).

the support of the majority. This goal is minimal. The essence of the things to be promoted is vague; it is left to be decided by particular communities. As long as individual autonomy is protected, whatever comes out of the democratic process is perfectly right. Did Etzioni have to start the whole new movement just to repeat the old understanding of the liberal democracy? His theory presents too little for the critics of liberalism and too much for its supporters. It does not satisfy either side of the debate, while its balancing is more or less already present in the practice of the modern liberal regimes, where the state is theoretically supposed to be neutral to the questions of the good, but practically always takes some kind of stand towards it. Etzioni's position seems to be equally contradictory, though it starts from the opposite grounds. On the one hand, his talk about the good society sounds like the total abandonment of the idea of neutrality. On the other hand, his aim of a minimally coercive state follows the neutral path. To make the story more complicated, one must remember that he still allows for quite a lot of social pressure, which surprisingly to some, though not to him, is defined as non-coercive. What we receive is a lot of confusion, which could have been provoked by a genuine concern with the modern predicament; but any attempts to make sense of his puzzles boil down to the priority given to the autonomy of the individual and neutrality of the state.

Of course, Etzioni might naturally object to this accusation and claim that he envisions a society committed to the twin virtues, but I tried to prove so far that his portrayals of the divided self, the permanent conflict of autonomy and social order, the balance between the two values with no prospect of an overarching one as well as the layered loyalty, are not viable. What rents them apart is the ineradicable conflict within all of these concepts. The more striking seems Steven Lukes's comment on Etzioni's method of argumentation: "The terms in which communitarians typically frame issues optimistically assume social actors potentially open to moral persuasion rather than intractably divided by conflicting interests and values."<sup>92</sup> Where is the alleged optimism, if we are constantly reminded of the existing conflicts of all kinds? True, his faith in establishing a political system based on the conflicting values is optimistic because it seems impossible. But this optimism does not come from his theoretical assumptions or implications. His optimism looks groundless. Strict reliance on his theory cannot produce any optimism, while its logical outcomes greatly discourage from even trying to build a society on his balance.

---

<sup>92</sup> Lukes (1998: 89).

*Conclusions: No Way Out of the Conflict?*

Does the inadequacy of Etzioni's overall argumentation prove the hopelessness of his concerns? On the contrary, the concerns are well-grounded. What is more, his discussion begs for some solutions, the search for which must never be abandoned if one wants to stay true to one's belief in human creativity. What I find in Etzioni's theory is a picture of the divided self, though I cannot find there any obstacle to perceiving this self as striving for integration. The state of division does not need to be unchanging; the amounts of conflicting urges and calls might fluctuate, allowing the possibility of diminishing the conflict.

The second conflict (between autonomy and order) does not seem resolvable if we treat both values seriously. However, Etzioni makes a big mistake by equalizing autonomy with freedom. While the former involves the right to create one's own set of values, the latter does not necessarily reject the existence of an objective order of values which remain to be chosen, affirmed or rejected, but the questioning of which would not invalidate their status. Such freedom, understood as consisting in the possibility of choice, not the possibility of creation of values, rests on a heavy presupposition of the existence of an objective order. The presupposition may be groundless but it is no more groundless than the one of nonexistence of such an order, while it is necessary for any projects of building a community. Although the respect for freedom is a workable idea within a community based on a social order, the respect for autonomy is not. Etzioni agrees that communities need a thick social order to exist. He does not see that the comprehensive doctrines (a necessary basis for a thick social order) may include freedom in its order of values, though they cannot possibly find a place for autonomy, as defined earlier, because the notion would question the existence of the order itself. Thus a community based on comprehensive doctrines that presuppose respect for individual free choice might promote its substantive good without harming the individual freedom because it is safely placed within a hierarchy of their values.

Such freedom is not even socially constituted or bounded within social constraints, like Etzioni's autonomy supposedly is. It enjoys a status independent of society because it is located within the framework of the pre-existent order. What is socially constituted is only the respect for this freedom, which does not endanger the position of the value. Once its standing is secure, it does not need any overarching framework. External safeguards are superfluous if we assume that the respect for freedom is derived from the comprehensive, substantive, one might say "local" doctrines. Consequently, there is no need for practicing the split loyalty, no

need for the shaky balance between various commitments. The way seems open for a safe maximization of the crowning value that overcomes the conflict by embracing the freedom as its sub-unit, though not exhausting its essence. As we can see, subordination in this project does not equal annihilation. Priority of the first value does not involve destruction or domination of the lower values. On the contrary, only their hierarchy seems to secure their survival and flourishing, since the higher one provides the best guarantee of the lower, while respecting that the lower is a condition of following the higher. Of course, this whole theorizing is just a thought experiment. For the question of what could constitute the crowning value is open to contest. Generally speaking, any value that respects the human freedom can be put to the test. Love of humanity, the mutual care for persons, or anything along these lines seems attractive enough and vague enough that it makes for a perfect object of debate as to its validity.

My purpose here is not to defend any value like this. My purpose is only to introduce an assumption about the existence of such a crowning value that overcomes the conflict of lower values. The assumption amounts to the claim that there is a good, the following of which does not violate the right - that the right is not opposed to the good because it stems from the good. No lesser an assumption can save Etzioni's theory from being contradictory and self-destructible. No other assumption can bring the good legitimately back into the common sphere of social, communal or political life without the double danger of either treating the right or the good itself not seriously. Somehow, the story quoted in one of the issues of *The Responsive Community* might suggest the move in the right direction: "H.G. Wells once asked for Gandhi's views on a document Wells had co-authored entitled 'Rights of Man.' Gandhi did not agree with the document's emphasis on rights. He responded with a cable that said, 'I suggest the right way. Begin with a charter of Duties of Man and I promise the rights will follow as spring follows winter.'"<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup> Quoted after Nair (1998: 90).

## *Bibliography*

ACKERMAN, Bruce A. *Social justice in the liberal state*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.

AVINERI, Shlomo, DE-SHALIT, Avner (eds.). *Communitarianism and individualism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

BARBER, B.J. Tough questions for liberal communitarians. *The responsive community*, Winter 1998/99, vol. 9, pp. 99-104.

CHONG, D. Roadblocks on the deliberative path. *The responsive community*, Winter 1998/99, vol. 9, pp. 105-112.

*Communitarian Website* [online]. Available at: <<http://www.gwu.edu/~ccps>>.

DWORKIN, R. Liberal community. *California law review*, 1989, vol. 77, no. 479, p. 479-504.

DWORKIN, R. Life's dominion: an argument about abortion, euthanasia, and individual freedom. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.

EHRENSAFT, Philip, ETZIONI, Amitai (eds.). *Anatomies of America: sociological perspectives*. London: Macmillan, 1969.

ETZIONI, Amitai. *A responsive society: collected essays on guiding deliberate social change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1991.

ETZIONI, Amitai. *New developments in communitarian thinking*. The Communitarian Summit: Washington D.C., February 1999a.

ETZIONI, Amitai. *The active society: a theory of societal and political processes*. New York: Free Press, 1968.

ETZIONI, Amitai. The good society. *The journal of political philosophy*, March 1999b, vol. 7, no. 1, p. 88-102.

ETZIONI, Amitai. *The moral dimension: toward a new economics*. New York: The Free Press, 1990.

ETZIONI, Amitai. *The new golden rule: community and morality in a democratic society*. New York: Basic Books, 1996.



ETZIONI, Amitai (ed.). *The essential communitarian reader*. Boston: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998.

FOWLER, Robert Booth. *The dance with community: the contemporary debate in American political thought*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991.

FRANKFURT, H. Freedom of the will and the concept of a person. *Journal of philosophy*, 1971, vol. 68, no. 1.

GAUTHIER, David. The liberal individual. In AVINERI, Shlomo, DE-SHALIT, Avner (eds.). *Communitarianism and individualism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 154-167.

GOODIN, R.E. Making communities more responsive. *The responsive community*, Winter 1998/99, vol. 9, p. 87-92.

HOLMES, Stephen. *The anatomy of antiliberalism*. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1996.

KAUTZ, Steven. *Liberalism and community*. Ithaca (NY): Cornell University Press, 1995.

KYMLICKA, Will. *Contemporary political philosophy: an introduction*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.

LOCKE, John. *An essay concerning human understanding* (ed. with an introduction by Peter H. Nidditch). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.

LOCKE, John. *Two treatises of government* (ed. by Thomas I. Cook). New York: Hafner, 1956.

LUKES, S. The responsive community. *Dissent*, Spring 1998, p. 87-9.

LUND, W.R. Taking autonomy seriously: some liberal doubts about the new golden rule. *The responsive community*, Winter 1998/99, vol. 9, p. 10-22.

MULHALL, Stephen, SWIFT, Adam. *Liberals and communitarians*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.

NAIR, K. Right about rights? *The responsive community*, Summer 1998, vol. 8, p. 90.

PEARSON, D.E. Community and sociology. *Society*, July/August 1995, vol. 32, no. 5

*Planned parenthood v. Casey*, 744 U.S. 902, 1992

RAWLS, John. *A theory of justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.

RAWLS, John. *Political liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

STEINER, H. Permissiveness pilloried: a reply to Etzioni. *The journal of political philosophy*, 1999, vol. 7, no. 1, p. 104-110.

WALDRON, J. Particular values and critical morality. *California law review*, 1989, vol. 77, p. 561-589.

