Community

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"Community" refers to a group of people with two characteristics: (1) a web of affect-laden relationships that often crisscross and reinforce one another (rather than merely one-on-one or chain-like individual relationships) and (2) a commitment to a core of shared values, norms, and meanings, as well as a shared history and identity – in short, to a particularistic normative culture (Etzioni 1996: 127). Many communities are confessional, ethnic, or professional, but they are not necessarily residential. They tend to command a strong sense of loyalty and mutual responsibility – like families writ large. Critics often call them "tribal." Moreover, rather large societal entities, including nations, can develop a fair measure of the two key attributes of community – what Benedict Anderson (1983) referred to as "imagined communities."

There is a strong tendency among public philosophers, as well as among the broader public, to divide the world between the public realm and the private realm – to view the public realm as identical to the state and the private realm as the market and freestanding individuals. In this division, the important societal roles of community are either ignored or accorded relatively limited importance. Academic political analysis is much more nuanced and attentive to the community (or civil society), although it is not completely immune to the prevailing focus on the public/private divide.

The communal realm includes family life (both immediate and extended) as well as neighborhood social webs and associations. In the USA, for instance, 55 million people live in private neighborhood associations (Nelson 2009: 343). Most people in most societies are members of one or more groups, whether ethnic, religious, work-related, or some other category – groups based on affinity and particularistic values. Communities have institutions that help the community gel and express itself, including local places of worship, schools, public libraries, post offices, and neighborhood bars, among others. The same holds for local chapters of voluntary associations.

Within History

Community has a history as long as, even predating, human civilization itself. David Christian (Christian & McNeill 2005) writes that since the first agricultural revolution, over ten thousand years ago, "the increasing *density* of human settlement has been the main shaper of human social evolution, as humans learned how to live in larger and larger communities, from villages to towns, cities, and states." And, according to ethnographer George Peter Murdock (1949), community and the nuclear family are "the only genuinely universal" forms of social grouping. Born of necessity – the survival of the earliest humans depended on their ability to provide security and food for the group – communal relations developed into a central element of increasingly complex societies.

It is widely held that in preliterate and traditional communities identity was first and foremost rooted in group membership, and that the modern sense of self as an individual is a relatively more recent phenomena. In ancient Greece the *agora* (meeting place) was the heart of public life. While it is widely recognized as having been the civic space from which free male citizens governed the world's first democracy, the *agora* was much more than that. In Athens, it was also an economic and religious forum, an open public space that brought together all members of the community – including those who could not vote.

Community is a concept that philosophers and theologians have adopted over the ages in

different civilizations and parts of the world. In the writings of Aristotle, in sharp contrast to modern liberals, community is not merely the aggregate of individual interests but rather an organic entity with an explicitly ethical purpose: "the development of moral and intellectual excellence." Community is not only a psychological and biological necessity for humans – who are "by nature" social – but justified on normative grounds. Virtue and good character make for good community; good community "grows good character, supports harmonious relations, and builds a civilized common life" (DeMarco 2003).

Community holds a central place in all three of the Abrahamic religious traditions. The people of Israel are a particular community born of a covenant with God. Membership in this covenantal community forms the bedrock of the Jewish identity, and it is through the whole community, not the individual, that God enters into relationship with his people. The community has been reinforced through communal festivities and rituals, and the shared experience of exile and statelessness – in biblical and modern times (Schulenburg 2003).

The followers of Jesus Christ develop and adapt this idea of covenantal community in light of what they believe to be the coming of the Messiah. In the writings of St. Paul, the community of believers makes up "the People of God," a new Israel based not on familial and ethnic ties, cultural heritage, or social status, but baptism into a universal community of God's children (Galatians 3:28). Christianity is also infused with Hellenistic thought and culture. Paul describes believers collectively using the Greek term *ekklesia* (church). The Christian community is depicted as "the Body of Christ"; each part has different but equally valued gifts and talents, given for the service of others and necessary for the health of the whole body (1 Corinthians 12). The community is shaped by an ethos of "brotherly love," and all are called to love, give, and forgive freely. While this found radical expression in the "love-communism" of the earliest disciples (Acts 2:44–7), Christian fellowship later took on institutional trappings, from local worship congregations and social ministries, to monastic communities and the papacy (Vogt 2003).

In Islam, community is expressed in the concept of *ummah*, a term used in the Qur'an to describe both particular (nations and religions) and universal (humanity) groups. The Islamic *ummah* is understood to be one of the many communities throughout history entrusted with a divine message and "raised up for the benefit of humanity" (Qur'an 3:110) The *ummah* is essentially egalitarian; each member is a *khalifat-Allah* – a trustee of God – and there is no formal hierarchy or church with special access to God. The *ummah* is instructed to create a just sociopolitical order and reflect the perfect unity, or *tawhid*, of God. Because of this strong sense of social solidarity, Islam holds a view of personal freedom quite distinct from western liberalism. In the latter, freedom is often conceived of as freedom from constraint; in Islam, it is freedom to surrender to the divine will and "Individual freedom ends where the freedom of the community begins" (Said 2003).

To the thinkers of the Enlightenment, the story of humankind was one of an inexorable march, driven by natural reason, towards a universal world order; the "superstition and custom" that mark traditional communities represent "lesser stages in the development towards this enlightened perfect end" (Whitton 1988). Eighteenth-century theorist Johann Gottfried von Herder critiqued the rationalist, cosmopolitan conception of linear history and human development championed by his contemporaries. Herder advanced a more sanguine view of the Volk community. Climate, geography and, most crucially, language – and the distinctive cultural heritage it expresses and transmits – condition human and communal development such that "Each nation has its own centre of happiness within itself, just as every sphere has its own centre of gravity" (Herder 1969). He saw behind the supposedly universal ideals of the Enlightenment a distinctly European conception of human life that

threatened the spontaneous vitality and creativity of other cultures, each of which manifests "a reflective human understanding" (Herder 1968). His thought has been criticized for its extreme cultural relativism, which excludes any universal principles by which to judge or criticize human behavior from outside any given community.

From *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* and Back

Leading sociologists in the nineteenth century held that the social world was moving from a communal model to a modern one. Societies were believed to progress from closely knit, "primitive," or rural villages to unrestrictive, "modern," or urban societies. The former were depicted as based on kinship and loyalty in an age in which both were suspect; the latter, however, were seen as based on reason (or "rationality") in an era in which reason's power to illuminate was admired, with little attention paid to the deep shadows it casts. The two types of society have often been labeled with the terms employed by a German sociologist, Ferdinand Tönnies (Tönnies 1988). One is *Gemeinschaft*, the German term for community, the other *Gesellschaft*, the German word for society. French sociologist Émile Durkheim's terms for the same major societal transformation were famously "organic" and "mechanical" society (Durkheim 1984). Though the positions of both sociologists are much more complex and nuanced, they are mainly known for the way their thoughts were distilled as pointing to the march of history from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*.

In later writings, especially after the rise of fascism in Europe before and during World War II, sociologists focused on the danger of *Gesellschaft* and started to extol the value of the lost *Gemeinschaft*. Thus, William Kornhauser wrote about the "mass society," in which people had no close relationships with one another and were hence subject to appeals of demagogues, an appeal they were protected from in the communal world (Kornhauser 1959). Erich Fromm (1941) referred to the same process as "an escape from freedom" into nationalistic movements that gave people the substitute communities for which they yearned. Robert Bellah and his associates showed in *Habits of the Heart*, a much-cited study first published in 1985, that the ills of American society required a change toward greater recognition of the importance of the community, rather than mere legal rights and responsibilities. Robert Putnam added considerable evidence to this trend in his *Bowling Alone*, published in 2000. Other scholars have linked the decline of local community organizations with increased alienation from the political process and advocated not just rebuilding such local institutions, but linking them more closely to political life (Warren 2001). Amitai Etzioni pointed out that a community's first attribute (the web of affection) does indeed contribute to human well-being as an antidote to the ills of isolation. However, the second attribute (the shared values) can turn a community into one that extols racism, nationalism, or other prejudices against nonmembers. In short, communities are not "good" on the face of it. They are a strong social vehicle, but one that can carry both pro- and antisocial loads (Etzioni 1993: 41).

Communitarianism: A Community-Centered Philosophy

Communitarianism is a social philosophy whose core assumption is the required shared formulations of the good, that which communities consider the common good. The assumption is both empirical (communities exhibit shared values) and normative (shared values ought to be formulated). Communitarianism is often contrasted with liberalism (especially as based on the works of contemporary liberals, particularly John Rawls, and to a much lesser extent on the classical works of John Locke and John Stuart Mill). Liberalism's core assumption is that what people consider right or wrong, their values, should strictly be a matter for each individual to determine. To the extent that social arrangements and public policies are needed, these

should be based on voluntary arrangements and contracts among the individuals involved, thus reflecting their values and interests. Communitarians, in contrast, see social institutions and policies as affected by tradition and hence by values passed from generation to generation. These become part of the self through nonrational processes, especially internalization, and are changed by processes such as persuasion, religious or political indoctrination, leadership, and moral dialogues.

In addition, communitarianism emphasizes particularism, the special moral obligations people have to their families, kin, communities, and societies. In contrast, liberalism stresses the universal rights of all individuals, regardless of their particular membership. Indeed, liberal philosopher Jeremy Bentham declared that the very notion of a society is a fiction.

Communitarianism has changed considerably throughout its history and has various camps that differ significantly from one another. It seems that the term was first used in 1840, when Goodwyn Barmby, a British utopian, founded the Universal Communitarian Association. Yet writings concerned with communitarian issues go back as far as Aristotle's comparison of the isolated lives of people in the big metropolis to the closer relationships found in the smaller city. Both the Old and the New Testament deal with various issues, such as obligation to one's community, that would be considered communitarian today. The social teachings of the Catholic church (especially concerning subsidiarity) and of early utopian socialism (regarding communal life and solidarity) all contain strong communitarian elements, although these works are not usually considered as communitarian works per se.

Different communitarian camps are no closer to one another than National Socialists (Nazis) are to Scandinavian Social Democrats (also considered socialists). It is hence important to keep in mind which camp one is considering. The differences concern the normative relations between social order and liberty, and the relations between the community and the individual.

Authoritarian communitarians (some of whom are often referred to as "Asian" or "East Asian" communitarians) argue that to maintain social order and harmony, individual rights and political liberties must be curtailed. Some believe in the strong arm of the state (such as former Singapore prime minister Lee Kuan Yew and Malaysian head of state Mahathir bin Mohamad), while some extol the virtue of very strong social bonds of the family and community (for example the kinship-centered society of Japan). Among the arguments made by authoritarian communitarians is that social order is important to people, while what the west calls liberty actually amounts to social, political, and moral anarchy; that curbing legal and political rights is essential for rapid economic development; and that legal and political rights are a western idea, which the west uses to harshly judge other cultures that have their own inherent values (Bauer & Bell 1999). The extent to which early sociological works, for instance, by Tönnies, and *Community and Power* by Robert Nisbet (1965), include authoritarian elements, is open to question.

In the 1980s communitarian thinking became largely associated with three scholars: Charles Taylor (1989), Michael Sandel (1981), and Michael Walzer (1983). They criticized liberalism for its failure to realize that people are socially "situated" or contextualized, and for its negligence of the greater common good in favor of individualistic self-interests. In addition, as Chandran Kukathas relates in *The Communitarian Challenge to Liberalism*,

> communitarians … argue that political community is an important value which is neglected by liberal political theory. Liberalism, they contend, views political society as a supposedly neutral framework of rules within which a diversity of moral traditions coexist … [Such a view] neglects the fact that people have, or can have, a strong and "deep" attachment to their societies – to their nations. (Paul, Miller, & Paul 1996: 90)

Early in 1990, a school of communitarianism was founded which included scholars such as

William A. Galston (political theory; 1991), Mary Ann Glendon (law; 1991), Thomas Spragens, Jr. (political science; 1990), Philip Selznick (1992) and Alan Ehrenhalt (1995). The group, founded by Amitai Etzioni (1996, 2003) took communitarianism from a small and somewhat esoteric academic discipline and introduced it into public life, and recast its academic content. Its tools were "The Responsive Communitarian Platform: Rights and Responsibilities," a joint manifesto summarizing the guiding principles of the group which was widely endorsed; an intellectual quarterly, *The Responsive Community*; several books; position papers on issues ranging from a communitarian view of the family to organ donation and to bicultural education; and numerous public conferences, op-eds, and a Web site (http://communitariannetwork.org/).

Communitarian terms became part of the public vocabulary in the 1990s (especially references to assuming responsibilities to match rights). Scores of organizations amended their bills of rights to turn them into bills of rights and responsibilities. Both Bill Clinton and Tony Blair drew on communitarian themes in their first successful national election campaigns, captured in the motto "opportunity, responsibility, and community" (Clinton 1996). During his presidential campaign, Barack Obama championed responsibility (Obama 2006: 244), and in 2011, the British Tories championed the Big Society, which relies on charity groups and activists instead of the state, and which has strong communitarian elements (Blond 2010).

Responsive communitarianism draws on the assumption that societies have multiple and not wholly compatible needs and values, in contrast to philosophies that derive their core assumptions from one overarching principle (for instance, liberty for libertarianism). Responsive communitarianism assumes that a good society is based on a carefully crafted balance between liberty and social order, between individual rights and social responsibilities, between particularistic (ethnic, racial, communal) and society-wide values and

bonds. In that sense, far from representing a western model, the communitarian good society combines "Asian" values, especially those of Confucius (Reid 2000) – as well as tenets of Islam and Judaism that stress social responsibilities – with a western concern for political liberty and individual rights.

Although this communitarian model of the good society is applicable to all societies, responsive communitarianism stresses that different societies, during various historical periods, may be off balance in rather different ways and hence may need to move in different directions in order to approximate the same balance. Thus, contemporary East Asian societies require much greater respect for individual and communal differences, while in US society excessive individualism needs to be reined in. To put it differently, communitarianism suggests that the specific normative directives that flow from the communitarian model of the good society are historically and culturally contingent – although the end state of the good society is the same.

The same point applies to the relationship between the self and the community. Political theorists have tended to depict the self as "encumbered," "situated," or "contextualized," all of which imply that it is constrained by social order. Responsive communitarians stress that individuals within communities are able to be more reasonable and productive than isolated individuals, although they note that if social pressures to conform reach a high level, such pressures undermine the development and expression of the self and the society's capacity to innovate and adapt.

The view of human nature most compatible with communitarianism is a developmental view that holds that people at birth are akin to animals. But unlike social conservatives, who tend to embrace a dour view of human nature, and who often view even adults after socialization as impulsive, irrational, or sinful, communitarians maintain that people can become increasingly virtuous if the proper processes of value-internalization and reinforcement via communal institutions – the "moral

infrastructure" – are in place. At the same time, communitarians do not presume that people are as rational or as given to naturally harmonious peaceful relations based on their self-interest as liberals assume them to be from the onset.

The moral infrastructure's main elements are families, schools, communities, and the community of communities. These four elements are arranged like Chinese nesting boxes, one within the other. Infants are born into families, which, communitarians stress, have been entrusted throughout human history with beginning the process of instilling values and launching the moral self. Schools join the process as children grow older, further developing the moral self ("character") or trying to remedy character neglect suffered under family care. Schools are hence viewed not merely as places of teaching, where the passing of knowledge and skills occur, but as educational institutions in the broadest sense of the term – and as some scholars emphasize, a place to nurture and promote communities (Gereluk 2006).

Human nature, communitarians note, is such that even if children are reared in families dedicated to child-raising and moral education, and children graduate from strong and dedicated schools, these youngsters are still not sufficiently equipped for a good, communitarian society. This is a point ignored by social philosophers who often assume that once people have acquired virtue and are habituated, they will be guided by their inner moral compass. The very concept of "conscience" assumes the formation of a perpetual inner gyroscope.

In contrast, communitarians assume that the good character of those who have acquired it tends to degrade. If left to their own devices, individuals gradually lose much of their commitments to their values unless these are continuously reinforced. A major function of the community, as a key element of the moral infrastructure, is to reinforce the character of its members. This is achieved by the community's "moral voice," the informal sanction of others, built into a web of informal affect-laden relationships, which communities provide. In general, the weaker the community – because of high population turnover, few shared core values, high heterogeneity, and so on – the thinner the social web and the slacker the moral voice.

In this context, the communitarian perspective of voluntary associations is especially important. Previously, the significance of these associations has been highlighted as protecting individuals from the state (a protection they would not have if they faced the state as isolated or "atomized" individuals), and as intermediating bodies that aggregate, transmit, and underwrite individual signals to the state. Communitarians point out that, in addition, the very same voluntary associations often fulfill a rather different role: they serve as social spaces in which members of communities reinforce their social webs and articulate their moral voice. That is, voluntary associations often constitute a basis of communal relationships. Thus, the members of a local chapter of the Masons, Elks, or Lions care about one another and reinforce each other's particular brand of conservative values. Similarly, the members of the New York City Reform Clubs and local chapters of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) reinforce one another's particular brand of liberal values.

Communitarians pay special attention to the condition of public spaces as places communities happen (as distinct from private places like homes). Even though one may carpool with friends or have them over for a visit, these are mainly activities of small friendship groups. Communities need more encompassing webs, and those are formed and reinforced in public gathering places from school assembly halls to parks, from plazas to promenades. To the extent that these spaces become unsafe, communities lose one of their major sources of reinforcement; recapturing them for community use is hence a major element of community regeneration. The fourth element of the moral infrastructure – the community of communities – will be discussed later in the entry.

The Structure of Communities

Critics have argued that the term community is vague and "touchy feely," and may best be abandoned altogether. Robert Booth Fowler wrote a whole book dedicated to the thesis that the term community harbors a large variety of meanings (Fowler 1991). He writes, "The picture is thus confused and complicated. The meaning of community is elusive, a word without an essence or a text without meaning" (Fowler 1991: 3). In *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, Stephen Holmes asks "But what is community? What does it look like?" (Holmes 1993: 177). Jack Crittenden argues that communitarians avoid difficult questions concerning community by "remaining vague about the nature of community" (Crittenden 1992: 136).

However, if one adheres to the definition provided above one has no difficulty in recognizing communities and determining whether a given group of people share bonds of affinity and a core of values. Moreover, far from disappearing, communities continue to flourish in all modern societies and are particularly strong in all others. In an early study Herbert Gans showed that cities are not composed of millions of isolated individuals, but often of ethnic neighborhoods (Gans 1962). Thus major cities have neighborhoods known for their ethnic composition (e.g., Chinatown, Little Italy, etc.), bohemian, gay, Sunni, Shia, or some other such binding communal attribute. This is not to deny that there are parts of the cities in which people lack communal bonds, but these are not necessarily the dominant feature of even the most "modern" cities – many of which have parts that have unique and robust traditions of communal bonds (Dilworth 2006).

Other critics ague that indeed communities continue to function, but that they are inherently oppressive (Bauman 2001). Amy Gutmann pointedly remarks that communitarians "want us to live in Salem" (1985: 319), a community that accused nonconformist members of witchcraft during the seventeenth century and executed them by hanging and other methods.

Communitarians counter that behind many of these criticisms lies an image of old, or total, communities, which are neither typical of modern society nor necessary for, or even compatible with, a good communitarian society. Old communities (traditional villages) were geographically bounded and the only communities of which people were members. In effect, other than escaping into no-man's-land, often bandit territories, individuals had few opportunities to choose their social attachments. In short, old communities had monopolistic power over their members. New communities are often limited in scope and reach. Members of one residential community are often also members of other communities – for example work, ethnic, or religious ones (Delanty 2003). As a result, community members have multiple sources of attachments, and if one threatens to become overwhelming, individuals will tend to pull back and turn to another community for their attachments.

Marxists and other critics from the left associate communities with what has been called the "consensus" model and argue that it should be replaced with a conflict model (Dahrendorf 1958). According to these critics, those in power urge those oppressed by them to acquiesce in order to maintain the community, to protect unity, to maintain stability – for the common good. These critics argue that there are no true communities, that there are but arenas in which clashes take place between classes. Indeed, one can point to numerous situations, both on the local and national level, in which various groups – such as labor unions or minorities – have been asked to scale back their demands in order to advance the goals or well-being of the community, such as during wars or looming deficits.

The alternatives community members face, though, are not limited to either giving up on their demands or engaging in all-out conflict. A third option is illustrated by a wife who seeks to renegotiate the division of labor and control of financial assets with her husband – without breaking up the union. She may well pursue her agenda by advancing reasons concerning

fairness, call on other members of the family or friends of the couple to support her case, withhold work she is doing and so on – without threatening to walk out or accusing her husband of bad faith. In popular terms, she may engage in a fight with one hand tied behind her back, assuming the husband will similarly restrain his responses. In the society at large, such struggle occurs when social movements engage in nonviolent civil disobedience, raise consciousness, go on strikes, and build alliances and collaborations, all in the name of reform rather than to dismember the society by, say, secession or an attempt to overthrow the regime. All this is not to suggest that revolutions, just like divorce, are never called for. The preceding observations merely show that communities are not limited to either allowing those in power to continue to lord over the others or breaking into an all-out fight.

Values and Bonds as Foundations of Social Order

Social norms (specifications of values) and informal social controls (drawing on bonds of affection) are the mainstays of social order in communities, rather than laws and law enforcement authorities. Social norms work by shaping individual predispositions to render them prosocial, relatively compatible with each other and the common good, and in service of the shared normative culture. Beyond affecting the content and intensity of numerous particular predispositions, social norms help form (and re-form) the self, by profoundly influencing people's identities, their worldviews, their views of themselves, the projects they undertake, and thus the people they seek to become.

Given the billions of transactions people engage in each day, a communal order based on laws can be maintained without massive coercion only if most people most of the time abide, as a result of shared social norms undergirded by informal social controls, by the societal tenets embedded in the law. That is, laws work best when the need for coercive enforcements by the state is minimized as a result of communal compliance. For example, the failure of Prohibition is often attributed to the populace's unwillingness to accept temperance as a norm, while the ban on smoking in public requires next to no law enforcement because it is a widely accepted social norm.

Diversity within Unity

From a communitarian viewpoint, a good society formulates and promotes shared moral understandings for the members of each community, rather than merely pluralism. Hence, the society is far from value-neutral. This does not mean, however, that a good society must set a "thick" moral agenda; a core of shared values can suffice. And the shared values are subject to change, as a result of moral dialogues among the members of the community. These are often initiated by secular and religious public intellectuals, moral authorities, community leaders, and other opinion makers, and nourished by the media.

Developing and sustaining a core of shared values does require reaching into what is considered the private realm. A good society, for instance, fosters trust among its members not solely or even primarily to enhance their trust in the government or to reduce burdens on the general public (for example, the problem of litigiousness), but rather to foster what is considered a *better* society (Lippman 1943; Bellah et al. 1991). Similarly, a good society may extol substantive values such as stewardship toward the environment, charity for those who are vulnerable, marriage over singlehood, having children, and showing special consideration to the young and elderly. These are all specific goods with regard to which the society, through its various social mechanisms, prefers one basic form of conduct over all others. For instance, contemporary US society considers commitment to the well-being of the environment a significant good, although differences regarding what exactly this commitment entails are considered legitimate.

To suggest that the scope of the private realm needs to be reduced, however, does not mean

that all or even most private matters need to be subject to communal scrutiny and control, nor to normative definitions of that which constitutes good behavior. Indeed, one major way the communitarian position differs from its totalitarian, authoritarian, theocratic, and social conservative counterparts is that in this view the good society seeks to cultivate only a limited set of *core* virtues rather than a thick set of values. A good society does not seek to ban moral pluralism on many secondary matters. For example, US society favors being religious over being atheist, but is relatively "neutral" with regard to what religion a person follows. Similarly, US society expects that its members will show a measure of commitment to the US creed, but is quite accepting of people who cherish their divergent ethnic heritages, as long as such appreciation does not conflict with national loyalties. Unlike totalitarian regimes, US society does not foster one kind of music over others (both Nazis and communists tried to suppress jazz). There are no prescribed dress codes (e.g., no Mao shirts), no correct number of children to have, and so forth. In short, although one key defining characteristic of the good society is that it defines shared formulations of the good, in contrast to the liberal state, the scope of the good is much smaller than that advanced by holistic governments.

The Moral Voice and Liberty

One main instrument of the community is the moral voice, which urges people to behave in pro-social ways. While there is a tendency to stress the importance of the inner voice, and hence good parenting and moral or character education, communitarians recognize the basic fact that, without continual external reinforcement, the conscience tends to deteriorate. The opinion of fellow human beings, especially those to whom a person is attached through familial or communal bonds, carries a considerable weight because of a profound human need to win and sustain the approval of others (Wrong 1994).

The question has arisen whether compliance with the moral voice is compatible with free choice, whether one's right to be let alone includes a right to be free not only from state controls but also social pressure. This issue is highlighted by different interpretations assigned to an often-cited line by John Stuart Mill. In *On Liberty*, Mill writes,

> The object of this Essay is to assert one very simple principle, as entitled to govern absolutely the dealings of society with the individual in the way of compulsion and control, whether the means used be physical force in the form of legal penalties, or the moral coercion of public opinion. (Mill 1975: 71)

Some have interpreted this statement to suggest that the moral voice is just as coercive as the government. Similarly, Alexis de Tocqueville, years earlier, wrote that "The multitude require no laws to coerce those who do not think like themselves: public disapprobation is enough; a sense of their loneliness and impotence overtakes them and drives them to despair" (Tocqueville 1991: 261). If one takes these lines as written, the difference between reinforcement by the community and that by the state becomes a distinction without a difference. One notes, though, that Tocqueville is also known for having highlighted the importance of communal associations in holding the state at bay. From a communitarian viewpoint, it is essential to recognize not only that there is a profound difference between the moral voice of the community and coercion, but also that, up to a point, the moral voice is the best antidote to an oppressive state.

At the heart of the matter are the assumptions one makes about human nature (Etzioni 1996: 160–88). If one believes that people are good by nature, and external forces merely serve to pervert them, one correctly rejects social pressures. It follows that the freer people are, the better their individual and collective condition. If one assumes that people possess frailties that lead to behavior that is damaging not only to self but also others, the question arises of how to foster pro-social behavior (or the "social order"). Classical liberals tend to solve this tension between liberty and order by

assuming that rational individuals whose interests are mutually complementary will voluntarily agree to arrangements that provide for the needed order. Communitarians suggest that reasonable individuals cannot be conceived of outside a community-based social order; that the ability to make rational choices and to be free itself presumes that the person is embedded in a social fabric. Moreover, communitarians posit that there is an inverse relation between the social order and state coercion: tyrannies arise when the social fabric frays.

One further notes that the moral voice of the community leaves the final judgment and determination of how to proceed to the acting person – an element that is notably absent when coercion is applied. The society persuades, cajoles, censures, and educates, but that final decision remains the actor's. The state may also persuade, cajole, and censure, but actors realize a priori that, when the state is not heeded, it can and often does seek to force the actors to comply.

The basically voluntaristic nature of the moral voice is the profound reason why communal life can, to a large extent, be reconciled with liberty, while a state that fosters good persons cannot. It is the reason the good society requires a clear moral voice, speaking for a set of shared core values, which a largely normatively neutral civic society and a liberal state do not.

Virtues in Social Institutions

The other main instruments of communities are social institutions. Institutions are societal patterns that embody the values of the particular community (Bellah et al. 1991). A large volume of interactions and transactions is greatly facilitated in that they are predated by social forms upon which actors draw. Contracts are a case in point. Not only can actors often build in whole or in part on texts of contracts prepared by others, but the actors find the very concept of a contract and what this entails in terms of mutual obligations and the moral notion that "contracts ought to be observed" ready-made in their culture. While these institutions change over time, at any one point in time many of them stand by to guide communal life (Epstein 1997).

Social institutions are important for the characterization of communities because typically institutions are neither merely procedural nor value-neutral; in effect, most are the embodiment of particular values. For instance, the schools of a given community serve not merely as neutral agencies for the purpose of imparting knowledge and skills. They typically foster the core values of the community, such as empathy for the poor; inter-racial, interethnic, and other forms of mutual respect; patriotism; stewardship toward the environment; or some rather different set of values – but they are never neutral.

Community of Communities

Societies, including the most modern ones, are not composed of millions of individuals, but are composed largely of communities. These may war with each other – as tribes often did in earlier European history and in this age in many parts of the world – or allow the nation to develop as a community of communities. That is, as a supra-community that has some of the affective commitments and promotes a core of shared values, similar in this sense to the member communities.

All societies face the question how thick the national community is to be. Some seek *assimilation*, in which members of different communities (such as immigrants from North Africa in France) are expected to give up their particularistic values and loyalties to become undifferentiated members of the overarching community. This is what the USSR tried to achieve in its dealing with the members of several minorities, especially the Jews, and mainland China in its dealing with the Tibetans. Both combined strong acculturation efforts with forceful suppression of cultural differences. In US society, those who favored assimilation have largely sought to rely on acculturation, although occasionally pressures that border on the coercive have been applied. Children have been

prohibited from speaking their native language even in playgrounds and laws have been enacted in several states requiring that all ballots, street signs, and official transactions be in English only (Porter 1990: 211).

From a communitarian viewpoint, there is no compelling reason to *assimilate* people into one indistinguishable blend, without any particular distinction, history, or subculture. Indeed, nations benefit from a measure of diversity, from moving from a uniform cuisine to a much more varied one – to better being able to deal with people of other cultures in a globalizing world.

The sociological challenge is to develop societal formations that leave considerable room for the particulars of subcultures and communities, while sustaining the core of shared values. The concept of a *community of communities* (or diversity within unity) is captured by the image of a mosaic of pieces that differed in shape and color but are held together by a solid frame, which itself may be recast.

A third view favors recognition of differences with little attention to the need for the shared framework. The champions of unqualified diversity tend to view the existing framework as one that reflects traditional white, male, or western values. These advocates of diversity tend to ignore the question of whether diversity needs to know any bounds, let alone what its content might be if it is to be regenerated rather than simply protected. Extreme versions of unqualified diversity hold that there is no society at all, only various groups confronting one another or one group that dominates the others (Parekh 2000).

This concept of *unbounded* pluralism threatens to balkanize the USA, to turn it, as Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. writes in his *The Disuniting of America* (1991), into a bunch of warring tribes. The nation would break up into groups without a shared vision, without a commitment that all share a common fate – that is, without shared perspectives that are essential to work out major differences among the constituent communities. As reported by Paul Berman (1992: 3), who has collected writings on the subject:

> The educational emphasis on ethnic distinctions and the suspicion of American democratic institutions are going to wear down the bonds that hold the country together. And sooner or later, according to these accusations, problems that are political and social, not just educational, will come of all of this, and the United States will break up into a swarm of warring Croatias and Serbias.

It is basically this notion of putting group loyalties and identities above the commons that sent Yugoslavia into civil war in 1991, that endangers Canadian society, and that threatens Indian society and many others. The American Civil War illustrates that confrontations on basic values between antagonistic communities are cruel and devastating. Civil societies seek to resolve differences without internal wars – by drawing on shared values. The position followed here is based on the observation that societies whose framework weakens are subject to tensions, if not civil war, that diminish both order and autonomy – developments that are incompatible with a good society. In contrast, those who suggest that the existing framework be recast do not threaten the foundations of the communitarian society because they recognize the basic functional need to have a framework. (For additional discussion of diversity within unity, a platform dedicated to it, and those who endorse it, see Communitarian Network n.d.)

Moral Dialogues

Communities require a core of shared values. Initially, these values are handed down from earlier generations. However, the values are also constantly being "edited," that is, revised and reformulated and even changed. This observation raises the question, how do communities collectively reformulate their shared values?

One answer to this question is provided by the liberal way of thinking. Liberal thought maintains that typically the way people ought

to proceed (and/or do proceed) is for them to assemble and dispassionately discuss the facts of the situation, explore their logical implications, and examine the alternative responses that might be undertaken. They then choose the one that is the most appropriate. The process is often referred to as one of *reasoned deliberation*, and it is commonly exemplified by images of a New England town meeting or of the ancient Greek polis.

Deliberations and civility (and democracy) are often closely associated. According to James Kuklinski and his associates, "In a democratic society, reasonable decisions are preferable to unreasonable ones; considered thought leads to the former, emotions to the latter; therefore deliberation is preferable to visceral reaction as a basis for democratic decision making" (Kuklinski et al. 1991: 1). Deliberations have been contrasted with an irrational and harmful way of attempting to chart a new course.

Deliberations are also often contrasted with culture wars, a term used to suggest that the people are profoundly divided in their commitments to basic values, and that segments of the public confront one another in unproductive manners instead of dealing with the issues at hand (Hunter 1991). In culture wars, two or more groups of members of the same community or society confront one another in a highly charged way, demonizing one another, turning differences into total opposition. Such culture wars tend to make reaching a shared course more difficult and they often invite violence (from bombing of abortion clinics to outright civil war) (Hunter 1994: viii).

Given such a contrast between deliberations and culture wars, reason and passion, amicable resolutions versus emotional deadlock (or war), it stands to reason that many favor the deliberative model. They argue that even though deliberations of the relatively pure kind are almost impossible to achieve, they provide a normative model to which one ought to aspire.

An examination of the actual processes of sorting out values that take place in well-functioning societies shows that rather different processes are taking place, which neither qualify as rational deliberations nor constitute culture wars (Mansbridge 1983: 47–58), and that, furthermore, these processes, referred to here as "moral dialogues," are fully legitimate. In moral dialogues, the participants combine working out normative differences among themselves in a nonconfrontational manner, drawing on moral arguments in addition to considering empirical and logical arguments.

Moral dialogues occur when a group of people engage in a process of sorting the values that will guide their lives. Discussions about whether to allow gay marriages, to reduce the deficits so as not to burden future generations, and the extent to which a nation's youth should be put into harm's way in order to promote democracy in other nations, are all cases in point. Society-wide moral dialogues come in two basic forms: the piecing together of a myriad of local dialogues through organizations that have local chapters, including numerous ethnic, religious, and political associations, and through national media such as call-in shows, televised town meetings, and panel discussions.

Such dialogues constantly take place and, in well-formed societies, they frequently result in new shared normative understandings – and thus in the affirmation of a new direction for the respective societies (albeit sometimes only after prolonged and messy discourse). For instance, moral dialogues led in the 1960s to a shared normative understanding that legal segregation had to be abolished, and in the 1970s, that as a society we must be much more responsible in our conduct toward the environment than we used to be. The interplay between moral dialogues, which lead to new normative understandings, and democratic institutions, which put those understandings into law, is exceedingly complex. Some scholars hold that changes in the law can lead to changes in attitudes of the community. For instance, an executive order to desegregate the US military in 1948 is said to have preceded a shift in the normative rules governing the relationship between whites and blacks in the American South. Others hold that normative changes lead to

changes in the law; for example, changes in the ways young Americans view homosexuality are leading to the legalization of same-sex marriage. History suggests that both dynamics are at work. Yet even where democratic deliberations lead to new norms and laws – which may in fact favor individual rights over the will of the community – the resulting shift is not only the product of voting. The political procedures themselves rest upon basic shared values, which determine how laws are made (e.g., democracy) and a sense of community, which lends legitimacy to the results. Without some shared values and a sense of community, democratic polities are prone to gridlock and conflict.

Tomorrow the World?

The term community is often applied to entities that encompass nations, for instance when one refers to the European Union (EU) as the "European community" (Risse 2010). Others even write about the global community (Iriye 2002). Most of these references reflect aspirations but do not meet the criteria here followed in the definition of community. So far, it seems that the expansion of the horizons of even imagined communities has not reached far beyond the national level, which continues to be the focus of loyalties or the source of communal identity for large parts of humankind (unless they are bound into smaller communities that take precedent over the national one, which is the case for many minorities in developing nations). The EU, by far the most advanced attempt to form a supranational entity, lacks the bonds of affinity and, above all, a core of shared values that a community requires. Moreover, most citizens of the nations involved continue to identify themselves with their nation and not with the EU (Petithomme 2008: 16). The limited transfer of loyalty and commitment from the national to the regional came into sharp relief when four members of the EU (Greece, Ireland, Portugal, and Spain) experienced financial difficulties and the more affluent members of the EU proved to be unwilling to make major sacrifices on their behalf – the kind of sacrifices they did make for segments of their own populations (e.g., Germans in the former West Germany for their fellow Germans in the East after reunification).

The global community is a particular vision rather than a sociological reality. In effect, few serious scholars employ this term. However, it should be noted that several developments that somewhat increase the potential for such a community to eventually arise, have taken place. These include rising personal ties across national border, an increase in the number of people holding passports from more than one country, the development of worldwide moral dialogues, and evolving global consensuses on issues such as opposition to land mines and human trafficking (Etzioni 2004).

SEE ALSO: Civil Society; Common Good; Communitarianism; Deliberative Democracy; Durkheim, Émile (1858–1917); *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*; Liberalism; Relativism; Sandel, Michael J. (1953–); Walzer, Michael (1935–)

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