

13. Ibid., p. 226.
14. Ibid., p. 121.
15. Ibid., p. 147.
16. Ibid., pp. 158, 169.
17. Ibid., p. 295.
18. Ibid., p. 43.
19. Ibid., p. 262.
20. Ibid., p. 142.
21. Ibid., p. 183.
22. Ibid., pp. 138–40.
23. Ibid., p. 143.
24. Ibid.
25. Talcott Parsons, *The Social System*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951, p. 64.
26. Young, *Justice*, p. 59.
27. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann, London: Paladin, 1970, p. 7; first published in English translation by Grove Press inc., 1967, originally published as *Peau noir, masques blancs*, Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1952.
28. Quoted in Young, *Justice*, p. 60.
29. Ibid., p. 90.
30. Fraser, 'From Redistribution to Recognition?'
31. E.g. Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.
32. Ibid.
33. Jeremy Waldron, 'Minority Cultures and the Cosmopolitan Alternative', in Will Kymlicka, ed., *The Rights of Minority Cultures*, Oxford and New York 1995, pp. 99, 100; originally published in *The University of Michigan Journal of Law Reform* 25 (1992): 751–93 (minus 766–77).
34. Ibid., p. 107.
35. Will Kymlicka, 'From Enlightenment Cosmopolitanism to Liberal Nationalism' in Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular. Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 203–220.
36. Margalit, *The Decent Society*, p. 181.
37. Ibid., p. 183.

The Communitarian Voice

(i) From the Communitarian Pulpit

'Communitarianism' has only entered the language within the last twenty years. You will not find it in the 1975 edition of Webster's dictionary, though you will find a 'communitarian' there defined as a 'member of a society that practises communism'. What does this new 'ism' signify? Is it, as Tocqueville wrote of 'individualism' in 1835, 'a new word to which a new idea has given birth', or does it name a distinctive new variant of a very old idea? Is the idea (if there is one) a theory, or the prospect of one, or a doctrine, or is it rather a perspective from which to develop ideas, theories and doctrines, like environmentalism? Against which positions does it define itself? With what issues is it concerned and in what terms does it frame them? By whom and to whom is it addressed? And is *The Responsive Community: Rights and Responsibilities*, the journal founded by Amitai Etzioni and three academic colleagues, the place to look for answers to such questions?¹

If we answer 'yes' to the last question, then perhaps the most revealing approach to answering the others was formulated by Mary Ann Glendon in 1994,² when she wrote of the general problem faced by 'every society within the democratic world' of finding how to achieve the 'optimal mix in a democratic economy, how to procure a just balance between individual freedom, equality and social solidarity': that is to say, 'the great dilemma of how to hold together the two halves of the divided soul of liberalism – our love of individual liberty and our sense of a community

for which we accept common responsibility'.³ 'Communitarianism,' she proposes, 'can be understood as democracy's environmentalist movement, helping to heighten awareness of the political importance and endangered condition of the seedbeds of civic virtue.'⁴ Communitarianism, on this account, is concerned with 'America's endangered social environments' on the assumption that they hold the key to 'simultaneously maintaining a liberal regime of rights and a compassionate welfare state'.⁵ 'Reflecting on our own tradition,' she suggests, can help overcome 'the disdain for politics that underlies so much American thinking about legal and social policy' and politics may become 'not only a way of advancing self-interest, but of transcending it'.

Communitarianism, in short, is not an idea, theory or doctrine, new or old, but a perspective informing at least *The Responsive Community's* editors, contributors and readers whom the editors see as forming a 'network' and, beyond that, a budding social movement with political ambitions, chief among them that of transforming the very meaning of politics. That perspective was set out in 1991 in the 'Communitarian Platform', signed and sealed by a variety of mainly academic sympathizers. It is high-minded and declaratory ('Restoring the Moral Voice' ... 'Start with the Family' ... 'Schools - the Second Line of Defence' ... 'Cleaning up the Polity' ... 'The Human Community'.) In the journal's first issue the editors declared themselves 'as a group, neither right nor left, liberal or conservative, but dedicated to providing a voice to address and articulate issues that we believe concern us all'.

Into whose ear does the voice speak? One clear answer emerged early. 'The Communitarian movement has a key role to play in the struggle over the soul of the Clinton Administration ... Clinton and Gore have shown strong communitarian commitments ...', wrote Etzioni in 1992.⁶ In 1994 it is cheerfully reported that 'President Clinton, who has been reading Amitai Etzioni's latest book, *The Spirit of Community*, extolled communitarian values ...'⁷ and Hillary Rodman Clinton's 'courageous speech about America's greatest crisis' is noted as in 1995 are other political speeches by Clinton, William Bennet and the Reverend Jesse Jackson from what *The Responsive Community* revealingly calls 'the Communitarian Pulpit'.⁸

Thereafter the focus shifts from the rhetoric of high politics to 'Community News' of local activism: such as civic participation by taxpayers in Missoula, Montana, 'Saving Lives in Seattle: A Model for Civic Responsibility', 'Welfare Reform: New Hope in Milwaukee', 'Keeping the Elderly in the Neighborhood in St. Paul', 'The Morningside Gardens Project in Harlem' and so on. *The Responsive Community*, in short, seems to have lost

interest in speaking its Truth to Power, preferring instead to record and amplify the voices of civic and community activists.

Yet a larger - or as the Communitarian Voice would say a higher - purpose survives: to forge some coherence out of the contributions of *The Responsive Community's* diverse but bounded clientele of political philosophers, sociologists and political scientists, lawyers and public and social policy experts, practitioners and consultants.

Some classical philosophical themes are pursued across the volumes (how to think about rights, the public/private dichotomy, the failings of neutrality, problems of medical ethics, equality and difference, the universality of human rights) and also familiar sociological questions (can the welfare state establish universal rights without subverting its legitimacy and efficiency? are voluntary associations in terminal decline? how to model the dynamics of ethnicity in the US? how do the legal and political cultures of the US and Canada differ in their views of the individual's relation to the community?). Sometimes philosophers address social-scientific and policy issues, and vice versa: so we have Charles Taylor on theories of modernity and William Galston defending the two-parent family, and Philip Selznick defending communitarian liberalism and theorizing about justice.

The lawyers expound and debate such matters as the role of community in relation to the First and Fourth Amendments, and to property and welfare rights, the rights of the homeless, the de-regulation of family law, and issues of legal ethics. But the bulk of *The Responsive Community's* contents of the seven volumes to date is directed at policy issues in the broadest sense - from, say, 'What makes a Good Urban Park?' via 'Can Associations of Business be True Community Builders?' to 'Making Responsibility Clearer: A New Federal/Local Division of Labor and Resources'.

Alongside all this, *The Responsive Community* offers book reviews, running commentary (on occasion by none-too-hostile non-communitarians), sociological data to measure 'The Community's Pulse', a 'Kaleidoscope' with snippets of relevant news from elsewhere on the planet, and selected salient news items that point up 'libertarian' and 'authoritarian' as opposed to communitarian morals.

How far has the larger, or higher, purpose been achieved? Has *The Responsive Community* helped to bring what Etzioni calls 'the moral voices across the land' into unison or harmony or at least intelligible discord? Are we any clearer about what communitarians stand for?

We know from *The Responsive Community* what they are against: libertar-

ianism and authoritarianism. Is communitarianism, then, an interpretation of liberalism (on the grounds, perhaps, that liberalism is too important to be left to the liberals)? In early issues Thomas A. Spragens offered a two-part critique of 'The Limits of Libertarianism', arguing that 'liberalism at its best has never fallen prey to the simple-minded individualism promulgated by libertarians' – a theme which Selznick develops but with which Etzioni takes issue, holding that 'communitarians have established a fundamentally different paradigm' (to which, for example, poor Professor Rawls can only bend without abandoning what Etzioni oddly calls his libertarian position). Etzioni foretells a 'moral reawakening without puritanism'. He writes here and in his books as the prophet of a new idea; and perhaps such a (secular) faith provides the needed energy to run a journal, organize a network, catch the ear of an American President and (it is said) a British Prime Minister and inspire a social movement.

But, as the evidence gathered in *The Responsive Community's* pages show, communitarianism is not a new idea, or even a new variant of an old one. Professor Glendon's statement cited above gets it right. Communitarianism responds to the old and general liberal dilemma of how to generate solidaristic motives and behaviour in the unpromising conditions of a market-driven economy in a liberal-democratic framework. It is the collective name for a range of strenuous attempts to confront that dilemma in the United States today, where ethnic divisions, mass immigration, economic globalization, the erosion of cultural capital and the absence of socialist let alone social democratic traditions render it all the more acute.

Which is why Alasdair MacIntyre was right to explain in 1991 that he is not and never has been a communitarian, since he believes 'fundamental moral conflict' to be 'so widespread and politically disabling' that community can only be built 'at the level of particular institutions'. Communitarians hang on to the hope of society-wide community (what Etzioni calls 'The Community of Communities') while remaining systematically ambiguous about where precisely 'community' is located, and evasive about conflicts between communities that compete for resources or allegiance. The hope (to quote Etzioni once more) is for 'layered loyalties'.

The Responsive Community makes it clear that politically communitarians are, indeed, liberals in the sense of defending liberal freedoms (protecting free speech, resisting paternalist welfare policies and the excesses of identity politics). They are at least united in the object of their various

concerns, and in their rejection of libertarian and authoritarian solutions. But does it actually make sense to suppose that that object can be adequately addressed, in theory or in practice, from a perspective that is neither right nor left, liberal or conservative? That assumption has, I believe, three interlinked consequences, amply illustrated in the pages of *The Responsive Community*.

For one thing, it drastically limits the topics addressed. The major absentee is the economy. There is very little here about the moral and cultural consequences of market processes and virtually nothing about the ramifications of economic inequality. This point was well made, in *The Responsive Community* itself, by Charles Derber in 1996–7.⁹ Communitarians have been silent about 'corporate networks and contingent labor markets, both of which profoundly atomize employment and do violence to bonds among workers as well as between workers and companies'. And they are no less silent about the degradation of employment and collapse of wages – particularly among the bottom third of the labor force – which 'brutally sabotages communities, parenting and family values'. In short, they are 'disinclined to focus on the structural side of our communitarian disrepair'.

Second, the assumption in question leads communitarians, in their attempts to account for that disrepair in politically and socially non-divisive terms, to avoid precisely what divides left from right, and to focus instead on culture and 'values' or at most on legal and institutional barriers to the missing solidarities. What is systematically avoided is concern with uncovering relations of power and dependency that render individuals resistant and often immune to calls for moral reawakening and mutual concern.

For the left, by definition, structured inequalities and power relations demand rectification through political action; whereas for the right they may be defended as desirable or as an inevitable cost to pay for other objectives. For communitarians, it would seem, they are best ignored, since attending to them threatens to undermine the very moral consensus that their perspective promises as both immanent ('in our tradition') and imminent (of realization). Thus 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.

In this respect, Etzioni exemplifies in an extreme or pure form what very many of the contributors to the journal exhibit in varying degrees: the belief that the various values of a 'pluralistic community' are all jointly

realizable without too much strain, that wealth creation, social cohesion and individual freedom and the various goals of all kinds of different 'communities' can all be fitted together and 'optimized'. For a contrast to this optimizing optimism, readers should consult Ralf Dahrendorf's rehearsal of the painful trade-offs and sacrifices under alternative regimes in the *The Responsive Community* of summer 1995, not to mention the writings of Sir Isaiah Berlin.

This leads me to the third and final aspect of communitarianism's resolute non-partisanship: its *tone of voice*. Its accents are liberal, optimizing, reconciliatory, ecumenical and, above all, serious. Indeed, reading *The Responsive Community* is a serious undertaking and its contributors are, as I have sought to stress, grappling with very serious issues. But there are various ways of being serious and the communitarian way is (with few exceptions such as Nat Hentoff's commentary on politically correct thinking) both earnest and uplifting. Yet such relentless elevation can be depressing. Is the idea of communitarian irony or satire a self-contradiction?

(ii) The Rhetoric of Thick Consensus

Values, Weber thought, must conflict and will always divide us: for the 'ultimately possible attitudes towards life are irreconcilable' and 'the individual has to decide which is God for him and which is the Devil'. For Durkheim, values can cohere and will eventually unite us: within our modern pathological, anomie-riven societies, there is a latent social morality that will cure our public and private ills. Professor Bellah and his colleagues are in this sense latter-day Durkheimians. They also claim to be Tocquevillians. But their *Habits of the Heart* and this,¹⁰ its institution-focused sequel, also exemplify the more distinctly American tradition of 'public philosophy': the authors they cite most are Dewey, Reinhold Niebuhr and Walter Lippmann. They believe that 'our problems will be solved in new forms of moral reflection and in practices that embody them. In a word . . . by changes in our institutions', and 'our fundamental problems are moral and political and can be solved only by public discussion and democratic decision'. Their style is, accordingly, intended to be accessible to 'educated lay people'. It is elevated and exhortatory and at times moralistic and even religious: the sociologist as lay preacher. What they offer is social diagnosis and the promise of a 'coherent pattern of living together'.

The main lines of their diagnosis are clear enough. From *Habits of the Heart* they take the theme that Americans are 'trying to live by the Lockean language of individualism in an institutional world it can no longer describe'. This is a 'cultural tradition that assumes that culture, community and history do not matter much in the long run'; it favours 'an economistic way of thinking' that 'blocks out the truth that . . . goods and interests are culturally constituted and historically variable, and any notion of a common good embodied in the institutional life of society is ruled out in advance as illusory'. Such an 'overly abstract' and 'morally thin' individualism portrays human beings as 'atomistic self-interest maximisers' and is 'inadequate for our new level of interdependence'. It is blind to the truth that 'what people want is itself shaped by their institutional experience'.

This position is decidedly on the defensive within the social sciences today and it needs robust arguments in the face of powerful theoretical alternatives. It is no refutation of James Coleman, for instance, to state that for him 'the problem is how institutions, conceived as socially shared and enforced norms, are created by individuals whose private short-term interests conflict with common long-term interests' whereas 'we would understand this conflict as shaped by the nature of the institutions we live in'. Rather than arguing these issues out, Professor Bellah and his colleagues treat their composite 'Lockean individualism' as a narrowing and distorting ideology. In this vein, they have much of interest to say, in condemnation, for example, of cost-benefit analysis as applied, among other things, to the value of life. They are certainly right to think that the language of rational and social choice, of 'preferences', 'aggregation' and 'trade-offs' is ideological in the sense indicated; and they offer various telling instructions of where its inappropriateness is especially manifest – as when, for instance, an Environment Protection Agency economist, asked 'What about the theory that human life is priceless?' answered, 'We have no data to support that.'

The other two themes of their diagnosis are closely connected: 'Our institutions have become corrupt; means have wrongly been turned into ends'; and 'economic institutions have invaded other institutions (politics, religion, family, etc.), making it harder for them to do what they were originally intended to do' (an oddly teleological – or is it theological? – formulation this). Family life is troubled and impoverished, and has become the instrument for personal satisfactions. The market has become 'tyrannical' and is immune to considerations of the common good, as are corporations to the requirements of 'accountable democratic citizenship'

and much work is meaningless despite high-tech opportunities to transform it. The regulatory state depends on 'an uninformed and undebated plebiscite of transitory and unexamined desires', political parties are mere interest coalitions embodying 'claimant politics' and the Law offers only a limited forum for public debate, restricted to the claiming and enforcement of rights and unable to examine the interdependence of choices. Education has become dominated by a cognitive paradigm of technical knowledge; it has lost its unifying, 'life-enabling' role. 'Ethical reflection about the good life and the good society, drawing on the religious, philosophical and literary heritage of the West' is 'no longer at the centre of higher education'. The Churches (the focus is on Methodism) have lost 'a moral vision and sense of social mission'. And in the international sphere, the United States faces a new 'global predicament' in which military and economic superiority are no longer guaranteed, so that a new 'global New Deal', involving new international institutions, needs to be forged.

Such is the diagnosis, inspired, its authors acknowledge, by Jürgen Habermas and R.H. Tawney, among others. But the question arises: what is its normative basis? What is the latent 'coherent pattern of living together' with which this litany of ills contrasts? We are offered some suggestive dichotomies: 'private acquisition' versus 'human wholeness', 'instrumental' versus 'communicative' reason, 'claimant' versus 'civic' politics, 'distraction' versus 'attention', 'exploitation' versus 'cultivation', 'narrowly self-interested individualism' versus an 'overall philosophy of generative interdependence'. But to what exactly do these latter terms point? What characterizes the 'good society' latent in the present? It will, of course, be democratic, 'democracy' being 'a political system in which people actively attend to what is significant'. It will exhibit a 'deeper moral consensus', a 'larger moral meaning', a 'richer public life', a 'deeper understanding of public and private happiness'; it will 'sustain forms of character and community that would give choice substantive meaning'. It will 'reinvigorate an active citizenry' concerned with 'the larger meaning of things' and committed to 'the search for a common good'. It will be a 'pattern of settlement and cultivation'. Its institutions will encourage 'mutual trust and civic responsibility' and 'the practical enactment of goodwill'. It will be a 'discursive community capable of thinking about the common good, of taking the point of view of Adam Smith's Impartial Spectator'.

But what all these resonant phrases avoid is the hard question of the limits of feasible consensus in a democratic society. On what should

democratic citizens be expected to agree? As things stand, 'we' already differ, not only about what is 'significant', but about what 'depth' and 'richness' consist in. We certainly disagree about 'the larger meaning of things' and 'the common good'. John Rawls's 'veil of ignorance' (unlike Adam Smith's Impartial Spectator) is intended, among other things, to abstract from such differences. Is democracy to overcome them? Professor Bellah and his colleagues speak of a 'cultural coherence underlying moral disagreement'. Perhaps the United States is exceptional in this, as in so many ways. But I am inclined to think, with Weber, that ultimate moral disagreements are, for the most part, irreconcilable and, with Rawls, that an 'overlapping consensus' in a Good Society must take them as given and therefore be thinner and less substantive than the rhetoric of this book implies.

Notes

1. *The Responsive Community: Rights and Responsibilities*, a quarterly journal founded in 1990.
2. *Ibid.*, 1994, 4, 2.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, 3, 1, p. 4.
7. *Ibid.*, 4, 2, p. 78.
8. *Ibid.*, 1995, 5, 3.
9. *Ibid.*, 1996-97, 7, 1, pp. 90-93.
10. R.N. Bellah et al., *The Good Society*, New York: Arnold A. Knopf, 1991.