

## NEUTRALITY, AUTONOMY, AND ORDER: THE THEORY OF AMITAI ETZIONI UNDER SCRUTINY

### Introduction

When one looks through the long list of writings by Amitai Etzioni, one is able to notice a pretty constant line of reasoning. Such a quality is rather hard to find in a world that has recently been witness to major political, economic, and societal changes of a revolutionary scope. When in 1969 Etzioni compared the Anglo-Saxon states with the totalitarian ones, 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>1</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 the one between the individual universal rights and the common good, between the self and its community, between autonomy and order.<sup>2</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

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<sup>1</sup> Amitai Etzioni, “Guiding Social Change,” in: Philip Ehrensaft and Amitai Etzioni (eds.), *Anatomies of America. Sociological Perspectives*, London: Macmillan, 1969, p. 409.

<sup>2</sup> Amitai Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society*, New York: Basic Books, 1996, pp. xviii, 4, 28, 248, 257.

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 something innovative 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.

Let me first present the basic assumptions and arguments of Etzioni's theory. The founder of The Communitarian Network stresses throughout all his publications the point that communitarianism offers a new way going beyond liberalism in many aspects. Moreover, we can find political thinkers agreeing with such position, too.<sup>3</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>4</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 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>5</sup> Is there no major difference between liberalism and communitarianism then? The key assumptions about the self seem to prove that there is such 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 have never been freestanding individuals that individualists envision. The selves are not

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<sup>3</sup> E.g. Robert E. Goodin, "Making Communities More Responsive," *The Responsive Community*, Vol. 9, Winter 1998/1999, p. 87.

<sup>4</sup> Amitai Etzioni, "The Good Society," *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 7, No. 1, March 1999, p. 90.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy. An Introduction*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, p. 219.

free-floating atoms within their society and any attempts to perceive them as if they were 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>6</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>7</sup> However, a community is not to be perceived as superior to individuals. Both have the same conceptual and moral standing. 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>8</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 the 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 the humans through their participation in shaping their social structure, without which the needs would not come to our sight.<sup>9</sup> While Etzioni views the 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>10</sup> The individual and the society stay in a perpetual and partly creative conflict. The individual itself is a site of a permanent conflict, as well. It is the conflict between the lower (debased) 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,’

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<sup>6</sup> A. Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> A. Etzioni, *The Moral Dimension: Toward a New Economics*, New York: The Free Press, 1988/1990, p. 253.

<sup>8</sup> A. Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, pp. 166–7.

<sup>9</sup> A. Etzioni, *The Active Society: A Theory of Societal and Political Processes*, (New York: Free Press, 1968), pp. 624–6; A. Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, pp. 26, 174–5.

<sup>10</sup> (Etzioni draws here on the work of George Herbert Mead) A. Etzioni, “New Developments in Communitarian Thinking” (an outline of presentation at the Communitarian Summit, Washington D.C., February 1999); A. Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, p. 26.

which are essentially desires about what to desire (or will).”<sup>11</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>12</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 as strong enough, so the voice can be disregarded and that is why the society needs to express its values in law, which would help to maintain order.<sup>13</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 deontology.<sup>14</sup> However, it is a moderate, not fully-fledged, version because at the same time he 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>15</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. So, the major tasks of the community 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 chainlike individual relationships), and second, a measure of commitment to a set of shared

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<sup>11</sup> A. Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, p. 170. Etzioni refers here to an article by Harry Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 68, No. 1, 1971, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 120, 123.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>14</sup> A. Etzioni, *A Responsive Society: Collected Essays on Guiding Deliberate Social Change*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1991, pp. xvi, 12.

<sup>15</sup> “The Responsive Communitarian Platform: Rights and Responsibilities,” in: A. Etzioni (ed.), *The Essential Communitarian Reader*, p. xxxvi. Similar point is made by Etzioni in *The New Golden Rule*, p. 257.

values, norms, and meanings, and a shared history and identity – in short, to a particular culture.”<sup>16</sup> Etzioni refers here also 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>17</sup> A communitarian society in Etzioni’s theory is based on commonly shared and affirmed values, which in turn are embodied in the societal structures, frameworks, and laws. However, he himself does not describe such a society as coercive because all of 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 the 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>18</sup> The framework is not neutral on the question of the good, it aims to define it in some ways, it goes beyond the merely civic society by openly fostering some additional values that a particular society decides to promote.<sup>19</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 the members of this community make up a thick social order: a shared set of assumptions on what is right and wrong, a starting point for the existence and a future dialog of the members of the community.<sup>20</sup>

Thus the communitarian society goes well beyond proceduralism by openly embracing its support for substantive values and convictions but it is supposed to limit itself in this aspect. The limits are provided by the 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

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<sup>16</sup> A. Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, p. 127.

<sup>17</sup> David E. Pearson, “Community and Sociology,” *Society*, Vol. 32, No. 5, July/August 1995, p. 47; quoted in A. Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, p. 285.

<sup>18</sup> A. Etzioni, “The Good Society,” p. 92.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 98.

<sup>20</sup> A. Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, pp. 10–2.

legitimation of the expression of subgroup differences.”<sup>21</sup> This autonomy, however, is socially constructed, it is institutionalized, it is bounded. It stands for “a range of legitimate options within an affirmed normative framework.”<sup>22</sup> And that is why its very existence requires that it be balanced with the forementioned 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 on our pursuit – the “new golden rule:” “Respect and uphold society’s moral order as you would have society respect and uphold your autonomy.”<sup>23</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 have to keep them balanced against each other.<sup>24</sup>

### 1.c. Layered Loyalty and Its Fostering

The viability of the balance between autonomy and order requires another balance, that between the horizontal commitments. Following the injunction against the maximalization of any single virtue is the advocacy for multicomunity 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>25</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 (like e.g. 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

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. xviii.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 4, 36, 248,

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

values of local communities that can “trump” the more general rules, provided they do it within certain normative boundaries. Thus the local values enjoy a higher standing, though bounded by limits; they may not disregard the principles of the democratic environment, in which they exist.<sup>26</sup> To ensure the genuine commitment to the overarching framework, we must aim at the world-community building by means of cross-cultural and cross-societal moral dialogues,<sup>27</sup> to establish the community of communities. Dialogue is a crucial word in Etzioni’s analysis of the communitarian problems because, though he speaks in favor of using the law as legitimate means of enforcing the community’s commitment to its values, he finds the methods of persuasion through the educational system and societal pressure as more consistent with communitarian agenda.<sup>28</sup> One of the reasons for that is the fact that however helpful the moral standards given by traditions are, the final moral arbitrators are the individual members of communities and they themselves need to be persuaded about the value of their commitments, before they voluntarily subscribe to them.<sup>29</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.

## 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>30</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

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 191, 224–5.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 227, 239–40.

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

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 257.

<sup>30</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, Thomas I. Cook (ed.), New York: Hafner, 1956.

by this society itself.<sup>31</sup> Of course, his picture might be defended as purely heuristic and painted solely for the purpose of accounting for the existent rules of 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 when he claims that all rights are neither vested in a sovereign state nor in individuals.<sup>32</sup> However, his assumption about the individuals, which "are not well formed unless they are members of collectivities"<sup>33</sup> do not stay with a substantial conflict with Locke's vision of the self as a blank slate.<sup>34</sup> Instead, it might point to the inconsistency within Locke's thinking, though 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 me see whether the theory itself is coherent.

On the one hand, Etzioni says there is something as a basic human nature which cannot be altered<sup>35</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 basic forms of socialization that all people undergo.<sup>36</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 firstly 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 nurture of society, before it can show its structure or full flourish. The statement is problematic for at least two reasons. Firstly, Etzioni is not consistent because he sometimes writes that human nature as such consists of the needs that cannot be changed, while on other occasions he claims that this human nature is

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<sup>31</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.

<sup>32</sup> A. Etzioni, *The Moral Dimension*, pp. 8–9.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>34</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. with an introduction by Peter H. Nidditch, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975/1987.

<sup>35</sup> A. Etzioni, *A Responsive Society*, p. 126.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*



nothing else but the human potential. Is it the needs or the potential for needs which is the essence of this nature? Secondly, he assumes that the individual and the community enjoy the same conceptual and moral standing. How is that 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; they need to be channeled into socially constructive outlets.<sup>37</sup> In the same vein, he writes that the human nature needs to be seen as a constraint on societal attempts; societal efforts cannot contradict human nature, they always have to take it into account.<sup>38</sup> This premise, as it seems to me, substantially weakens the claim about the pre-eminent role that 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 incongruencies can be observed when analyzing his 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 the individual autonomy and the voluntary moral order, while the latter are not. "All communities have moral voices, but because they speak for values 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>39</sup> Here, Etzioni stands on the position that moral voices are embedded in communities and have no origins in nature, because these voices are as numerous as the human groupings are.

So, when he describes the individual as divided between the lower and the higher self, meaning the conflict between the call of nature and the moral voice, he might be understood as saying that the individual

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<sup>37</sup> A. Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, p. 184.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

is not social by nature. The whole differentiation between the people who have the moral voice and those who have 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 a perfect sense, if one assumed that all human beings are somehow endowed with the moral voice of some sorts, 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 kind of solution of 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, what could be the basis of it, if we also agreed with Etzioni on his earlier assumptions that the human nature in itself does not give us the tool for this recognition, while 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 kind of questions that go unanswered in Etzioni's books and as such severely diminish the viability of his project. 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>40</sup> By using the terms "lower" and "higher" or "nobler" for describing the various parts of the divided self, he presupposes the existence of an objective order, a normative system of measurement,

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

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. His opposition to value-relativism is thus rooted in the liberal idea of value-pluralism and its consequent limit on the choice of goals a community may pursue. Of course, Etzioni is perfectly entitled to profess any liberal view, like anybody else is. However, his clinging to the conflictual vision of values invalidates his right to claim that we can still pronounce judgements 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 study, 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, though 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 concept of individual freedom, needs for self-expression, self-government, etc., 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 liberal assumptions, which is at the top of all values that can legitimately be pursued. However, he also postulates that the individual autonomy (or liberty, as he uses the terms interchangeably) is socially constructed and bounded to the 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 the 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 the 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>41</sup> Laws embody virtues; they express 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 gives up 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>42</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>43</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>44</sup> Laws are not allowed to diverge from the values affirmed by society. Secondly, 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 normative means, through

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>42</sup> A. Etzioni, “A Moral Awakening Without Puritanism,” in: A. Etzioni, *The Essential Communitarian Reader*, p. 45.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> A. Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, p. 139.

education, leadership, consensus building, peer pressure, pointing out the role models, exhortation, and expression of the moral voices of communities.<sup>45</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 it.<sup>46</sup> The pressure that the society might execute on the individual is seen as perfectly legitimate, because based on the original individual's declaration of allegiance to the values of society. This is how Etzioni describes the proper functioning of the 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>47</sup>

What is problematic in this whole vision is that such a program should receive a lot of 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 a lot about how bounded and socially constituted autonomy is, he still claims to stand by its traditional definition, because he defines it as encompassing what we typically take to be individual freedom. Well, if he accepts the rules of the American Constitution and its Bill of Rights, as he also does,<sup>48</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 it (because autonomy is supposed to be the virtue of the communitarian society and state), he has a perfect right to be free from both the 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 they do not necessarily

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> A. Etzioni, "A Moral Awakening Without Puritanism," p. 43.

<sup>48</sup> A. Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, p. 224.

hear the same moral voice. This assumption makes Etzioni's model look unjustifiably optimistic. No degree of social constitution of individuals is able 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, because liberalism is based on the consent of individuals, which assumes that individuals are "not, or not wholly, constituted by their communities,"<sup>49</sup> he claims more or less the same thing. Had Etzioni stood by the opinion that individuals were totally constituted by their communities, he might have had a point there. However, he agrees with scholars like 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 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>50</sup>

Etzioni's arguments are additionally prone to attacks because, though he often writes that it is the society, not the state, which is responsible for the moral education and enforcement, 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 problems 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>51</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

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<sup>49</sup> Steven Kautz, *Liberalism and Community*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995, pp. 192–3.

<sup>50</sup> David Gauthier, "The Liberal Individual," in: Shlomo Avineri and Avner De-Shalit (eds.), *Communitarianism and Individualism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 157.

<sup>51</sup> A. Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, p. 140.

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>52</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 community voices, communities must also resort, on occasion, to the force of law.”<sup>53</sup> In saying this, he obviously abandons the ideal of the neutrality of the state, which seems essential enough for the safeguarding of the 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>54</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. Similar point are 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>55</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>56</sup> This line of reasoning

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>53</sup> A. Etzioni, “A Moral Awakening Without Puritanism,” p. 45.

<sup>54</sup> Ronald Dworkin, *Life’s Dominion*, p. 168.

<sup>55</sup> William R. Lund, “Taking Autonomy Seriously: Some Liberal Doubts about *The New Golden Rule*,” *The Responsive Community*, Vol. 9, Winter 1998/1999, pp. 21–2.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

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>57</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.

### 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:" 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>58</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>59</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 the words like "fostering," "higher levels of accomplishment," "enrichment," or his earlier value-judgments

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<sup>57</sup> A. Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, p. 169.

<sup>58</sup> A. Etzioni, "The Good Society," p. 95.

<sup>59</sup> A. Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, p. 168.



connected to the debate on the virtues of a community seem to rely on a view of an objective moral order. The more so because he claims that certain values do not need further justification; they are self-evident, 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, like for example, his allegiance to the ideal of autonomy, his belief in the voluntaristic 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 his notion of social order, when he further defines it as just the "pro-social behavior."<sup>60</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. There is no wonder that it makes Etzioni's position particularly vulnerable to criticisms, like 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>61</sup>

Sometimes one could get the feeling from reading Etzioni's books that he himself does not aspire to anything more. His insistence on the status of communitarianism as a simple, though vital corrective to liberalism prove 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>62</sup> Is the community treated instrumentally here? In this particular Etzioni's understanding, I would say yes, though in some of his other statements that I quoted, it seems to the contrary. The difficulty, as I see it, consists

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<sup>60</sup> A. Etzioni, "The Good Society," p. 94.

<sup>61</sup> Steven Lukes, "The Responsive Community," *Dissent*, Spring 1998, p. 88.

<sup>62</sup> A. Etzioni, *The Moral Dimension*, p. 10.

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>63</sup> It looks like Etzioni confuses here his definition 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 a 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 social order as the community setting, the value framework shared by the community members, or the bounding context for autonomy. He does not grasp fully the practical as well as 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>64</sup> Etzioni does not take the social order seriously. He ignores its necessary implications pretty much like he does it with respect to autonomy, as I showed earlier in my study. By first clinging to the traditional definition of autonomy and still wishing to fit it somehow 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

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>64</sup> Dennis Chong, "Roadblocks on the Deliberative Path," *The Responsive Community*, Vol. 9, Winter 1998/1999, p. 109.

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 this set of 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>65</sup> He responds to this charge that communitarians actually 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 potentially more disrupting 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>66</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 pre-eminent 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>67</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

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<sup>65</sup> A. Etzioni, “New Developments in Communitarian Thinking,” p. 5.

<sup>66</sup> A. Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, p. 36.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245.

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, 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 world-wide 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>68</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 a par with the social order, is somehow both disrespected and artificially squeezed into the equilibrium out of purely pragmatic grounds.

Here I just indicate the problem of the viability of such pragmatism, which I hope to develop later. However, the problems intertwine to such a degree that they need to be noted at various parts of this study and 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>69</sup> At the same time, Etzioni concedes that "in a communitarian society (and in quite a few others) *values are handed down*

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<sup>68</sup> A. Etzioni, *A Responsive Society*, p. 139.

<sup>69</sup> A. Etzioni, "The Responsive Communitarian Platform," in: *The New Golden Rule*, p. xxvii.

from generation to generation rather than invented or negotiated [author's emphasis]."<sup>70</sup> Supposing that an individual no longer approves of the values of his or her community and wants to practice the autonomy that is the crowning value, he or she 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 practising 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 is constrained by default. The conflict between the crowning values of autonomy and order is thus translated into the inexpungeable 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>71</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* 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 visioners of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The sentence by John Locke, quoted in a critical light by Etzioni, paradoxically fits to 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>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> A. Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, p. 93.

<sup>71</sup> Ronald Dworkin, "Liberal Community," *California Law Review*, Vol. 77, No. 3, 1989, p. 500.

<sup>72</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, pp. 168–9.

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>73</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>74</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>75</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 case of collision with the local community's norms. This last statement may sound contradictory with 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 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 they give 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

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<sup>73</sup> A. Etzioni, "New Developments in Communitarian Thinking," p. 4.

<sup>74</sup> A. Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, p. 248.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

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 democratic minimum, and yet 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 allowing 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 sphere. If the latter "does not hold empirically,"<sup>76</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 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 self-evidence of the crowning virtues and is thus vulnerable to attacks for its

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

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>77</sup> Although Rawls's "overlapping consensus"<sup>78</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 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 provision of the golden rule allow only for the minimally intrusive autonomy-curbing mechanisms, and those used only under clear and present danger.<sup>79</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, eg. 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>80</sup> I put the term "social order" deliberately in inverted commas to show how limited Etzioni's understanding of it is. His use of the term proves that he does not here mean an objective, normative standard against which one could measure the validity of one's particular projects. What

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<sup>77</sup> I refer here to the theory presented in two books by John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*; and *Political Liberalism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993/1996.

<sup>78</sup> J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, pp. 133–72.

<sup>79</sup> A. Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, p. 52.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.



he means is the 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 practise 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 the lengthy, though enlightening quotation by 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 taking up a standpoint that is more external, more like the standpoint 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>81</sup> Of course, Etzioni says that the local standards need to be always 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 judgment of 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 choices made by others, Etzioni "subordinates communitarianism to another prior

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<sup>81</sup> Jeremy Waldron, "Particular Values and Critical Morality," *California Law Review*, Vol. 77 (561), 1989, pp. 578–9: 581.

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>82</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, the Anglican Church establishment in England, or the Lutheran Church establishment in Scandinavia are legitimate examples of promoting the religious values making up an integral part of a good society.<sup>83</sup> Such a good society does not conform to his description of it and as such it receives a just deal of criticism.<sup>84</sup>

All in all, Etzioni's various equilibria do not pass the test of their own standards. They seem to rest on 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 adversarial opponents. This, in turn, makes it impossible for his communitarianism to be even a corrective to liberalism, because, firstly, it follows the wide liberal tradition together with repeating its mistakes, and secondly, it blurs the picture, it distorts the meanings of values, it 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 collapse of their good society.<sup>85</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

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<sup>82</sup> Benjamin J. Barber, "Tough Questions for Liberal Communitarians," *The Responsive Community*, Vol. 9, Winter 1998/1999, pp. 100, 101.

<sup>83</sup> A. Etzioni, "The Good Society," p. 99.

<sup>84</sup> Hillel Steiner, "Permissiveness Pilloried: A Reply to Etzioni," *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1999, p. 107.

<sup>85</sup> A. Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, p. xx.

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 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 present already 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 off from the opposite grounds. On the one hand, his talk about the good society looks like the total abandonment of the idea of neutrality. On the other hand, his aim of 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 noncoercive. 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 rends them apart is the ineradicable conflict within all of these concepts. The more striking seems Steven Lukes's comment on Etzioni's way 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>86</sup> Where is the alleged optimism, if we are constantly reminded of the existing conflicts of all kinds? True, his

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<sup>86</sup> S. Lukes, "*The Responsive Community*," p. 89.

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 conclusions greatly discourage from even trying to build a society on his balance.

### **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 numbers 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 is more and more often understood as 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, as Etzioni's autonomy supposedly is. It enjoys a status independent of society, because it is located within the framework of the preexistent 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 practising 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 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 for a contest. Generally speaking, any value that respects human freedom can be put to the test. Love of humanity, the mutual care for persons, or anything along the line 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, 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 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 both dangers 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 coauthored 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>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Quoted after Keshavan Nair, "Right about Rights?," *The Responsive Community*, Vol. 8, Summer 1998, p. 90.