

## SOCIOLOGICAL COMMUNITARIANISM AND THE JUST COMMUNITY<sup>1</sup>

DAVID R. KARP\*

*Skidmore College*

This paper identifies a unique sociological perspective called communitarianism. Key contributors to this perspective are noted throughout. The perspective is typified by two underlying assumptions regarding modernity and *situated agency*: three communitarian ideals: the regeneration of community, the balance of order and autonomy, and the promotion of the common good through voluntary cooperation; and three prioritized vehicles for advancing these ideals: community institutions, the "moral voice," and civic participation. Each of these aspects of sociological communitarianism are summarized.

KEY WORDS: Communitarianism; justice; community; order; autonomy; voluntary cooperation

Concerns about declining community life have been the centerpiece of an emerging communitarian perspective. One strand of this perspective concentrates on a critique of Western liberalism in political theory (for reviews, see Bell, 1993; Gutman, 1985; Lasch, 1988; Mulhall and Swift, 1992; Sandel, 1984). Another strand is articulated by a number of sociologists. Among the most important works are Robert Bellah and his colleagues' *Habits of the Heart* and *The Good Society*, Alan Wolfe's *Whose Keeper?*, Philip Selznick's *The Moral Commonwealth*, and Amitai Etzioni's *The Spirit of Community* and *The New Golden Rule*. Drawing upon these and other works, my purpose is to summarize what is distinctive about

---

\*Corresponding author. E-mail:

sociological communitarianism, illuminating central themes that provide its conceptual foundation.

## COMMUNITARIAN ASSUMPTIONS

Communitarian sociologists tend to make two important assumptions about the nature of social life in contemporary American society. These assumptions refer to conceptions of our social environment and who we are as individuals. They largely draw upon the sociological tradition. First, the communitarians assume that American society is powerfully influenced by the conditions of "modernity." Modernity, to use Blau's (1977) formulation, is a context of heterogeneity and inequality; of cosmopolitanism, rationalization, bureaucracy, and mass society. Second, communitarians assume that individuals in society are neither fully free nor fully constrained. They are "situated agents." Individuals have great potential for self-determination, moral autonomy, or free-riding, but are nevertheless conceived as highly socialized and deeply influenced by the values, beliefs, practices, and opportunities handed to them by their communities.

### I. Modernity

Modern social life is complicated by the explicit intrusion into private life of large scale social forces. Benjamin Barber (1995) has described modernity as "McWorld," while George Ritzer (1993) describes the "McDonaldization" of society. The metaphors invoke a pervasive theme in sociology since Durkheim's identification of the division of labor and Weber's analysis of the rational/legal order. That theme is the dissociation of the individual from the community, a transition from the religious to the secular, and a market order in which social relations are increasingly seen as fleeting, contractual, and instrumental. For Selznick (1992, p. 4), the distinguishing characteristic of modernity is "the steady weakening of traditional social bonds and the concomitant creation of new unities based on more rational, more impersonal, more fragmented forms of thought and action."

The context for understanding community life is modernity. We live in a society of weak social ties, which is not to say that our ties are few. Rather, the average person will have more contacts with a greater variety of people than ever before. But these contacts are short, guided primarily by the expedient exchange of cash for goods and services. Individuals feel anonymous and lost in the shuffle, hustle, and bustle.

Modernity, ironically, has created more independence and more interdependence. With occupational differentiation and specialization, individuals have more freedom to choose careers that suit their sensibilities. With greater affluence, they are free to quit jobs they do not like, leave bad marriages, ignore authoritative parents, or come out of the closet. Of course, this is not to say that such decisions are always positive in their consequences (divorce, for example, throws many women into poverty), but only that modernity makes them possible. This freedom arises from a distinct "separation of spheres" of social life. We do not work where we live, parents are not involved in their children's schools, extended families live far apart.

At the same time, the complexity of social systems creates greater interdependencies. As the provision of collective goods occurs on ever larger scales, self-sufficiency becomes an empty abstraction. We rarely barter, because our skills are generally too limited to exchange with the great variety of others that we depend upon. The most educated among us, the college professor, can only teach 10 or 20 of the 800 or 1000 courses offered in a term at a major university. We cannot produce our own food and water supplies, we cannot construct for ourselves the apartments or houses we live in, we cannot build our own cars, boats, and planes, build our own schools and hospitals, or defend ourselves from foreign invasion. We are desperately dependent upon one another to collectively provide such goods. As Alan Wolfe (1987, p. 3) puts it, "to be modern is to face the consequences of decisions made by complete strangers while making decisions that will affect the lives of people one will never know." Anonymity and interdependence converge in modern society.

The puzzle of modernity is to "discover the forms of social action and organization that typically emerge in relatively permanent, compact settlements of large numbers of heterogeneous individuals" (Wirth, 1938, p. 2). In Louis Wirth's well-known formulation, the condition of modernity, exemplified by the urban form, is best understood in the context of large populations, high levels of density, and great heterogeneity. Heterogeneity comes in many forms: occupational differentiation, multiculturalism, and perhaps most salient, social inequality. In these ways, the communitarians assume the prospect of community is deeply challenged by the conditions of modernity.

### II. Situated Agents

The sociological communitarians also assume individual action is partially, but not completely, determined by society. I use the term situated agents to reflect both the latitude that individuals have in creating their own histories

(agency) and the constraints that limit, organize, and direct the life course (situation). The assumption is particularly important for communitarians because it frames their perspective on the attribution of responsibility for individual conduct. Is the criminal offender, for example, entirely responsible for the offense or does society have some culpability in fostering the conditions that precipitate crime? The critical assumption is that individuals are free to make decisions, but in order for a society to function, this freedom is not complete. Selznick (1992, p. 369) captures this partiality: "A common life is not a *fused* life: in a fused life there would be no need for regulation or governance, no need to take account of individual differences, no need of readjustment, reciprocity, or cooperation. The tacit assumption here is that people and groups participate in any community, large or small, as individuated and self-regarding entities. They are independent as well as interdependent."

There are five important components to the communitarian assumption of the situated agent. First, individuals are *situated in time and place*; that is, in the context of specific social relationships. The experience of daily life is a social experience. Studies of human development demonstrate the necessity of human connection (Stern, 1985). The need for emotional attachments to others is a basic human motivation. Infants, separated from their mothers and not given tender care, but otherwise have their basic needs fulfilled suffer depression and fail to thrive (Anderson *et al.*, in press). We live in a world of relationships, and the more important of these have a strong affective component. These relations are not random, but are fostered by proximity and framed by their endurance. We have deep investments in our relationships and do not sacrifice them lightly. Thus, we are often quite willing to share, negotiate, reciprocate, and cooperate rather than withdraw, avoid, or antagonize.

A second component of the situated agent assumption is the necessity of *socialization*. Though some argue that cooperation is a genetic endowment (Axelrod, 1984; Caporael *et al.*, 1989), communitarians stress the myriad processes that transform a self-regarding, dependent infant into an other-regarding, independent/interdependent adult. These processes involve the transmission of language, values, beliefs, traditions, norms and practices that ensure a cooperative sensibility. Of course, socialization is neither automatic nor complete. Etzioni (1996b, p. 97), for example, notes, "The fact that cultures have a normative starting point does not mean that individuals do not play a role in sorting out values; 'all' that cultures provide individuals is a foundation. Individuals may rebel against their culture, form new cultural elements, or fashion them out of traditional elements combined with new ones; however, the background against which these

individuals rebel, and which partially defines the direction and content of their rebellion, is their society's set of values."

Cultures reproduce themselves through socialization and this is a vital means of maintaining social order. The communitarian perspective does not assume, however, that order is best found in cultural reproduction or best understood as the imposition of cultural standards upon a resistant, but mutable soul. Instead, communitarians assume the situated agent is a product of socialization and negotiation—a product of an *interaction order*. This is a third component of the situated agent assumption. This assumption has its roots in the microsociology of Erving Goffman (1959).

The central idea is that daily life is a series of social encounters and situated agents enter these encounters with predictions or expectations about how they will proceed. When we place an order at lunch, we predict with great confidence that the waiter will respond in a particular way; not pulling a gun, not bursting into tears, not sitting on our lap. Our expectations become routinized as explicitly understood social norms and this is a source of social stability. "Repeated interactions give rise to habits. They are perceived by the actors and become expectations in the sense of predictions or anticipations of behavior. Aware of what is expected by the other, each actor feels constrained to live up to the expectation, partly out of a feeling that the other will be irritated, offended, or disappointed if the expectation is not fulfilled. In short, interaction generates habits; perceived, they become reciprocal expectations; in addition to their purely predictive and anticipatory nature, sensitivity to them endows them with a constraining or even an obligatory character... Thus do norms grow in unplanned fashion out of ongoing interaction." (Wrong, 1994, p. 48). At the same time, the interaction order is context-specific and creative in its formation. Sometimes waiters do strange things, sometimes it is we who do the unexpected. Since the ritual encounters of daily life are predictable, but not pre-determined, there is room for novelty, innovation, and rebellion. Thus, the interaction order is also a source of social change.

A fourth component of the situated agent is the communitarian assumption that individuals are *moral agents*. Certainly, much behavior is instrumental and self-interested. However, the communitarians do not believe it is possible to realize common ends (at least not in the long run) either through the aggregation of self-interested action or through the coercive repression of self-interest in the service of society. Much of our behavior is voluntary and other-directed, often even at the expense of immediate self-gain. Communitarians assume that human interaction is normative as well as instrumental.

Individual and collective aspirations are constructed in concrete, social contexts by moral, situated agents. In short, individuals are guided by

a “grounded morality.” Wolfe (1987, p. 20) argues “the contribution that a sociological approach can make to discussions of moral obligation is to emphasize that no abstract and formal rules exist specifying what we owe others and others owe us. Instead, moral obligation ought to be viewed as a socially constructed practice, as something we learn through the actual experience of trying to live together with other people.” Individuals treat each other well and cooperate in collective endeavors sometimes because of threat, sometimes because of self-interest, but primarily because they learn through practice that society progresses when individuals are willing to contribute to collective ends.

The expression of moral agency is undertaken in “moral dialogues” (Etzioni, 1996b) and by the use of “moral language” (Bellah *et al.*, 1985). This is necessary because of, as Wrong (1994) puts it, the problem of order. Humans are perpetually confronted with the need to cooperate because of material scarcity. Without cooperation, we would find ourselves in a Hobbesian state of violent competition. Instead, we make use of our sociability and engage in moral discourse that defines common ends and common means.

Finally, communitarians assume that a strong measure of identity is derived by the experience of social life—communitarians believe in a *social self*. The communitarians assume the social self is constructed from the various roles performed by individuals in society and by their membership in various social groups. As Mead (1956, p. 226) once wrote, “One has to be a member of a community in order to be a self.” According to role theory, individuals enact various social roles, many of which are prescribed by well-defined cultural scripts (Stryker, 1980). Answers to the Kuhn and McPartland’s (1954) Who Am I/Twenty Statements Test is telling in this regard. Generally, when individuals provide open-ended responses to the question, “Who am I?,” many of their responses reflect social roles: daughter, teacher, activist, friend. Such responses help distinguish the individual from some others (sons, students), but obviously not from those who also share these roles (Triandis *et al.*, 1990). Thus the self is partly defined by the social categories. Moreover, these roles are accompanied by rules that help define proper performance: friends do not betray, daughters care for their parents, activists mobilize support for a cause.

The social self is also a function of group membership. This aspect of the social self is defined as “that part of the individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). We come to know ourselves by our group identifications. In contrast to a view of the self defined in distinction from the

group, group boundaries help distinguish the self from other selves who do not share the same group memberships in a process of social comparison and, often, competition. Communitarians assume that the identity of the situated agent is a function of “multiplex relations,” reflecting the great variety of possible memberships. For example, social identifications occur across ascriptive categories (sex, race, age cohort), achievement categories (occupation, education, income), personal networks (peer groups, extended families, collegial relations), voluntary associations (church choir, bowling league, union), preference affiliations (Giants’ fans, gardeners, Civil War buffs), and in concentric or “nested” identifications (neighborhood, city, state, nation). Context will determine the salience of a given membership.

#### COMMUNITARIAN IDEALS

The communitarian sociologists begin with these assumptions of community challenged by modernity and situated agency in their consideration of the meaning and purpose of contemporary community. In large part, the communitarian perspective has developed in response to a predominant Western emphasis on liberalism and individualism. Both of these related doctrines prioritize individual autonomy over social purposes. Liberalism provides a just procedural framework for the preservation of liberties and the diminution of social inequalities (Rawls, 1971). This procedural framework is especially necessary because liberalism rejects stratification orders built on tradition. In the absence of tradition, liberalism promotes self-realization through the protection of constitutional rights. Liberalism itself is predicated on a doctrine of individualism which upholds “a belief in the inherent dignity and, indeed, sacredness of the human person... (and) a belief that the individual has a primary reality whereas society is a second-order, derived or artificial construct” (Bellah *et al.*, 1985, p. 334). Thus, liberalism tends to prioritize the individual over community, emphasizing rights protection and individual autonomy.

The communitarian critique of liberalism and individualism is mistakenly viewed as a rejection of these doctrines—a reversal of priorities in which the individual ought to be “sacrificed at the altar of the public good.” Communitarians instead treat the liberalism and individualism as foundational. They view these doctrines as an ethical minimum upon which a richer understanding of the reciprocal obligations between self and society can be articulated. Communitarians argue that liberals fail to acknowledge that: (1) aggregations of autonomous, self-interested action by free individuals do not often result in the provision of the common good;

(2) proceduralism is not likely to inspire prosocial action; and (3) individuals are not necessarily fulfilled without additional moral claims than what are provided by liberalism. In short, the communitarian perspective is guided by several moral and social ideals that reach beyond the minimal framework of liberalism. Three communitarian ideals stand out: the regeneration of community; the balance of order and autonomy; and the promotion of the common good through voluntary cooperation.

### I. Regeneration of Community

The challenge of communitarianism is to preserve the achievements of modernity while actively responding to its liabilities. Communitarians do not reject reason, science, rights, or individual autonomy. But since they assume a situated agent, they argue that individuals can look to community for the transmission of wisdom, for a sense of belonging, for exchange relations based on reciprocity, commitment, and cooperation, for collective responsiveness to individual needs, and ultimately for self-definition and realization. In short, community and its concomitant social institutions and primary groups is an antidote to the atomizing forces of modernity.

The communitarians reject a dualism between the requirements of modernity and pre-modernity. In Tonnies' well-known terms, they refuse to choose between *gessellschaft* and *gemeinschaft*. Nor do they accept a dualism that "one could have either individual rights without binding moral codes or binding moral codes without individual rights" (Wolfe, 1987, p. 191). The communitarian ideal is to reawaken the moral guidance of community while maintaining rights protections from the possibilities of constricting normative conformity. The ideal community is not defined by tradition, hierarchy, fixed status, inheritance or blind obedience, but instead "arises from free communication, person-to-person interaction, and association based on mutual dependence and concern. The core values are liberation and fellowship... Good order arises from reciprocity, trust, cooperation, and a shared understanding of the common good" (Selznick, 1992, p. 372).

In its aspiration of community, the communitarians do not deny the functional interdependence of individuals or the exchange relations between them that result in use and misuse of power, the systemic coordination of the market, the rationalization associated with bureaucracy, or the motivations of individuals to strategically enhance their own social and economic outcomes. Interdependence and the need for exchange are the basis of society. Nevertheless, communitarians aspire to more than instrumental social life. "As we move to association, and from association to community,

mutuality reaches beyond exchange to create more enduring bonds of interdependence, caring, and commitment. There is a transition, we may say, from reciprocity to solidarity, and from there to fellowship" (Selznick, 1992, p. 362). The goal is not, as rational choice theorists would have it, to identify mechanisms of cooperation and coordination that are congruent with immediate, self-interest (e.g., Yamagishi, 1994; Hechter, 1987), but to cultivate voluntaristic cooperation based on shared values and a concern for the outcomes of both oneself and other members of the community.

The community ideal stresses the importance of intimate, supportive relationships. Without doubt, modernity requires innumerable contacts based purely on exchange and these will lack emotional ties or extended concern. This only heightens the need for conscious efforts to counteract such a broad tendency. In rebuilding community, it is hoped that more relations can be founded on the basis of trust and honest communication; that there can be greater recognition of members' intrinsic worth and depth as well as their need for personal development, security, and sense of belonging; and that obligations can be seen as long-term, as a basis for ongoing commitment, and not in need of careful accounting. Communitarians recognize the tension between universalism and particularism, that is between the desire to treat all people the same and the desire to maintain closer, intimate relations with whom one gives special attention. The solution illustrates the communitarian commitment to liberalism as a necessary starting point, while seeking to broaden its mandate:

It is emptying to say that universalism has the greater claim to moral worth (1) because it is so closely bound up with human rationality, which is the receptacle of so many hopes for betterment; and (2) because in principle it may draw the boundaries of moral equality wide enough to include all humans and potentially other animals as well. But universalism need not go beyond *baseline* protection of all who are included as objects of moral consideration. Taken alone, therefore, it may serve only as an ethical minimum... Only a context of commitment, in which the unique person really matters, generates full concern for the well-being of others. The idea of morality is impoverished when it is reduced to disinterestedness (Selznick, 1992, p. 199).

### II. Balancing Order and Autonomy

The communitarians recognize that protecting rights while also trying to promote the common good is tricky business. Thus the ideal is not to

maximize one at the expense of the other. Its specific critique of liberalism is the doctrine's inability to attend to the collective consequences of autonomous individual action. Indeed, "free-rider" behavior may be the greatest threat to liberalism. The maximization of individual self-interest is felt each time a father refuses to pay child-support, a commuter chooses to drive alone over mass transit, a corporate actor illegally dumps hazardous waste, a voter fails to support a school levy, a taxpayer knowingly takes a few too many deductions, and a neighbor ignores the call to join a crime watch campaign. In lieu of self-interest aggregations that repeatedly fail to provide collective goods sincerely desired by community members, they may choose authoritarian approaches to deliver these goods. The communitarians loath this resolution as much as they do tragedies of the commons.<sup>2</sup>

The communitarian ideal is not to promote the common good such that individual rights are dismissed. Order is not prioritized above individual autonomy. Instead the ideal is one of balance. "This line of argument suggests that it is as wrong to make a fetish of solidarity as it is to glorify unconditional independence. Each in its own way corrodes community. The first, in reaching for total integration, turns community into a parody of itself. The second offers an ethos too thin to sustain more than a minimal moral order. A genuinely communitarian doctrine—one rooted in the experience of common life—resists both extremes. It seeks theories and strategies that promise stable accommodation and conjoint fulfillment of all the values entailed by the ideal of community" (Selznick, 1992, p. 370).

Etzioni (1996a; 1996b) argues that the tension between order and autonomy is an inevitable feature of society. The communitarian agenda tries to identify best compromises, recognizing that imbalance or maximization of one dimension will undermine both dimensions for each helps sustain the other. Autonomy is supported not simply by liberty, but by investment into the institutions that protect autonomy and foster self-development and not simply self-gratification. Order is empty without its sincere legitimation by community members. If order undermines personal autonomy, its value is dubious.

Because the communitarians assume situated agents, order without autonomy becomes insupportable. Individuals need the freedom to develop their own understandings and their own moral commitments. "We need to understand how we failed to see that the virtue in autonomy, in the sense of personal freedom, can be realized only along with other virtues, such as care and responsibility" (Bellah *et al.*, 1991, p. 50). This occurs only as individuals become creative, empathetic, reasoning and assertive social actors. Ordinary social life is built upon day-to-day challenges. As individuals confront personal obstacles, they must select among an array of responses that have consequences for themselves and for others. As such, they need to be much

more than obedient automatons or reckless egoists, but be sensitive persons of integrity and forethought. However, such a project in human development cannot take place if the individual is persistently threatened by either a coercive social conformity or a dangerously chaotic and unpredictable social environment where concern for survival rules the day. Thus, for communitarians, community is measured both by its ability "to pull in members' commitments, energies, time, and resources for what the community as a collectivity endorses as its notion of the common good" (Etzioni, 1996a, p. 5) and by the "contribution it makes to the flourishing of unique and responsible persons" (Selznick, 1992, p. 363).

The communitarians reject a version of community where its members suffer from overwhelming conformity. It would take the contemporary suicides of ostracized Japanese high school students as seriously as the anomic suicides described by Durkheim. Etzioni (1996a, p. 5) argues that authentic communities are by definition highly responsive to the needs (particularly the need for autonomy) of its members. Therefore, "social entities that oppress their members" cannot qualify as authentic communities. Communitarians do not wish to return to Salem<sup>3</sup> or to nostalgically resurrect any other prior communal order. The ideal is forward-looking in its embrace of modern conceptions of the individual, but, at the same time, does not limit its focus on the individual as if interdependencies and enduring social attachments were trivialities in the course of individual action.

### III. Voluntary Cooperation

Communitarians distinguish themselves from rationalists who rely on market mechanisms to provide for the common good and from realists who rely on the coercive power of the state to ensure individual compliance with collective agendas (Sullivan and Karp, 1997). In criminal justice, for example, the contrasting approaches are quite distinct. Reducing crime for realists means ratcheting up coercive deterrence: more surveillance, more arrests, more convictions, more sentences. Reducing crime for rationalists is guided by the equation of self-interest with collective interests. Rationalists advocate policy initiatives that make law abidingness more attractive, either by defining deviance down, e.g., legalization of so-called victimless crimes, or by increasing incentives to play by the rules. This may range from the trivial, e.g., gun buy-back programs, to the significant, e.g., economic investment in disadvantaged communities. Communitarians do not reject either realist or rationalist approaches, both are seen as potentially necessary. But communitarians stress that obedience to the law is motivated

by much more than economic self-interest or fear of sanctions. Laws are followed largely because they have moral stature: citizens believe in their validity and in the legitimacy of their legislation and enforcement (Tyler, 1990). Thus, a third ideal of communitarianism is the possibility of moral self-transcendence.

The communitarian ideal is neither one of Hobbesian social order predicated on the desperate need for security in the face of hostile social motivations or on the benign (and groundless) assumption that the aggregate pursuit of self-interest will effectively provide for the general welfare. The communitarian ideal is that community members will voluntarily contribute to the common good without fear of sanctions and in spite of the free-rider temptation. Such voluntarism is grounded in the capacity of individuals to develop moral competence. In short, Etzioni (1996b) argues that we need to follow a "new golden rule" in which individuals commit themselves to the general welfare just as a democratic society commits itself to protecting individual rights. "The challenge for those who aspire to a good society is to form and sustain—or, if it has been lost, to regenerate—a social order that is considered legitimate by its members, not merely when it is established (as contract libertarians would have it) but continuously. The new golden rule requires that the tension between one's preferences and one's social commitments be reduced by increasing the realm of duties one affirms as moral responsibilities—not the realm of duties that are forcibly imposed but the realm of responsibilities one believes one should discharge and that one believes one is fairly called upon to assume" (Etzioni, 1996b, p. 12).

Social order is a fragile constellation. It cannot be understood purely in market terms, authoritarian terms, or even normative terms (Wrong, 1994).<sup>4</sup> Communitarians acknowledge the essential realities of market and state, egoism and coercion. But they seek a higher standard—an equation of social order with moral order. Cooperation in this equation is a moral endeavor to be cultivated in the face of economic rationality and in the absence of authoritarian control. Moreover, communitarians doubt that societies can survive without moral order. The market is too likely to result in excessive individualism, disposing "each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellow creatures; and . . . willingly leaves society at large to itself" (Tocqueville, 1945, p. 104). This outcome, based on the desire for autonomy, is likely to backfire as market failures cause increased competition for scarce goods, more mistrust and withdrawal from cooperative endeavors, and ultimately more social disorder. Where the market fails, communitarians both fear and renounce statist attempts to fill the vacuum. As Braithwaite (1989, p. 171) recently argued, "the ideology of the minimal state produces a social reality of the maximum state . . . the state

responds (ineffectively) to perceived increases in crime the only way it can—by locking more people up, giving the police and business regulatory agencies more powers, trampling on the very civil liberties which are the stuff of individualist ideologies."

The communitarian ideal emphasizes a moral order that is dependent not on rational actors or fearful conformists, but on committed agents capable of understanding the consequences of their actions for others and trusting that others will also see the benefits of collective action for all community members. These agents are not driven to cooperative coalitions because of mutual advantage. Olson (1965) compellingly argued that such coalitions cannot be sustained because rational actors would rather leave the hard work of coalition-building to others. Nor would they be driven to coalitions on the basis of individual claims to entitlements denied coincidentally to other potential coalition members. Such "rights talk" only extends the rational actor model to a higher unit of analysis without solving the essential problem of manifesting a collective will to provide for the common good (Glendon, 1991). Coalitions become surrogates for their individual members' private interests, failing to take into account the consequences of their subgroup's claims for the whole of society.

Voluntary cooperation means above all the cultivation of socially astute, "emotionally-intelligent" community members who are deeply concerned with the life of community just as they are deeply concerned with their own lives. Community concern is a moral ideal grounded in the experiences and attachments of individuals to one another over time. "Cognizance of space and time is at the heart of moral maturity. When we sacrifice for the sake of future generations or take into consideration the viewpoints of spatially situated others, we consider our obligations to our moral selves to be superior to any monetary or political advantage that might come from taking an easier option" (Wolfe, 1987, p. 217). Families, friends, neighbors, co-organizers of communal endeavors are valued as members of one's community and as such, cooperation is experienced as self-evident or natural rather than as dreaded or imposed. The communitarian ideal is a community of individuals who are free to choose, but choose wisely: sometimes taking care of themselves as need be, sometimes taking care of others, always considering the collective consequences of their choices.

#### COMMUNITARIAN MECHANISMS

The communitarians identify three social processes as critical to the fulfillment of their ideals. First, community institutions play a central role in

socializing individuals into the values of the community, in enforcing normative standards, and in protecting individuals from both alienation and domination. Second, communitarians pay close attention to "the moral voice," which includes both intrapsychic nudges to transcend oneself and interpersonal influences that cultivate and inveigle conformity to moral standards. Third, communitarians look to democratic participation as a vital form of social engagement; one that ensures both voice and loyalty.

### I. Community Institutions

Institutions are the basic building blocks of community. These institutions are partially captured by the concept of civil society: the myriad of social systems that exist between the market and the state. As such, they include the family, schools, churches, civic associations, non-profits and other mediating organizations that provide to the individual a concrete experience of cohesive social life. But, in an important way, the institutional framework is more broadly conceived than as an organizational typology or as contrasted with the market and state. Institutions function as normative constructs, from the handshake to a marriage, and as conceptual frameworks that orient individuals to their place in the larger social order. In this sense, institutions are inclusive of economic and political processes and systems. The conceptual framework does more than provide concrete social experience, but offers a sense of place and direction—in short, a sense of community.

Institutions are vital to individuals because they are an opportunity structure. Families and schools are crucial to children's development, while neighborhoods and their local organizations create social networks that provide guidance, employment, recreation and spiritual development. Institutions provide not only opportunity but frame aspirations and expectations. Bad cops, corrupt politicians, abusive parents, and indifferent teachers are striking because they stand in defiance to the cultural standards that are so closely associated with the institutional roles. "Institutions form individuals by making possible or impossible certain ways of behaving and relating to others. They shape character by assigning responsibility, demanding accountability, and providing the standards in terms of which each person recognizes the excellence of his or her achievements. Each individual's possibilities depend on the opportunities opened up within the institutional contexts to which that person has access" (Bellah *et al.*, 1991, p. 40). Thus, institutions have both instrumental and normative components.

If modernity tends to widen the gap between individual and society, then community institutions fill the vacuum. Perhaps most important is their vital function of orienting isolated individuals towards collective agendas. It is parents who plan for their children's higher education, it is teachers who shape character and teach the art of cooperation, it is the neighborhood group that forms a citizen patrol, it is the political organization that lobbies for the protection of endangered species, homeless shelters, or a new library. "Many religious, educational, legal, and political institutions are valued for their general functions and long-range benefits. They are vehicles for meaningful, self-affirming participation in the life of the community; and they may properly ask for personal sacrifice, the more readily as they become symbols of group identity or otherwise serve the general welfare" (Selznick, 1992, p. 243). Understandably, the communitarians are deeply concerned with the viability of community institutions and the development of community capacity (Chavis, 1995). When community institutions are weak, little remains to orient individuals to the collective good. The moral as well as the social order is at risk.

### II. The Moral Voice

Communitarians depend upon ongoing processes of socialization and re-socialization of individuals into the values of the community in order to minimize selfish disregard of others and coercive measures to maintain order and conformity. Instead, the communitarians argue that normative influence is a powerful tool (1) because it can effectively regulate social behavior and (2) because it does so by cultivating reasoned understandings of common purposes and voluntary commitments to fulfill these ends. Nevertheless, there is a wide margin between knowing what is best for the community and doing what is best. "Varying opportunities, pressures, and constraints account for much of the difference between the straight and the crooked. Because everyone is potentially delinquent, there is an ever-present need for effective socialization and for a web of controls" (Selznick, 1992, p. 175). A good society is one that fosters a web of controls based primarily on members' legitimation of the forms of control and the values that underlie them as well as offering much latitude for individual choice.

Etzioni (1996b) describes this web of controls as the "moral voice." Its principal components are: (1) internalization of values; and (2) what social psychologists call normative influence and criminologists describe as informal social control. Internalization simply refers to a motivation to comply with a moral injunction because the individual agrees with its

intent—one's conscience. A person might not steal, for example, simply because he or she believes it is wrong to do so, and not because the action is seen as strategically disadvantageous or because of a fear of getting caught. While internalized values may account for much self-transcendent behavior (Schwartz, 1992), conscience cannot be relied upon completely. It must continuously be supplemented by normative pressure to conform. "The moral voice is a peculiar form of motivation: *It encourages people to adhere to values to which they subscribe* . . . The moral voice is often ignored by casual observers (and, to some extent, by social scientists) because it is informal, subtle, and highly incorporated into daily life. It often works through frowns, gentle snide comments (and some that are not so gentle), praise, censure, and approbation" (Etzioni, 1996b, pp. 120, 124, italics added). The emphasis on the pressure to conform to values already endorsed is essential for distinguishing the moral voice from coercion. The moral voice appeals to internalized values, but ones that do not alone command priority in the face of counter-pressures, both internal and external, for transgression.

The foundation for the moral voice is the deep emotional and material interdependence of community members to one another. By engaging in ongoing relationships, we come to depend on and expect others to behave in regular and predictable ways. Normative order is grounded in long-term relations and the practical experience of conduct. Wrong (1994, pp. 43–44) argues that our expressed expectations of others' conduct:

... may be regarded less as threats than as efforts at what Parsons called the 'activation of commitments,' that is, as moral appeals or exhortations . . . The crucial point is that the stated expectation is not a mere prediction of occurrences that are seen as bound to take place in any event but an intentional effort to *make happen* or bring about certain behavior by other persons, as a result of influencing their minds and wills . . . I have chosen to stress a certain ambiguity in the use of the term 'expectation,' not primarily in order to call attention to power relations among persons, but rather to bring out the much more general circumstance that awareness of the expectations of others in itself may provide those expectations with a normative aura, may serve to endow them with an imperative character that constrains the actor who is conscious of them to fulfill or conform to them . . . The rule of expectations in this broad sense is basic to the achievement of social order.

In this interactionist account, the moral voice is a communication of expectations to conform to a set of socially constructed behavioral norms. The

"normative aura" and "moral exhortation" reflects the values internalization over and above the coercive aspect of normative influence. Granted, on some level, it is difficult to distinguish coercive and non-coercive elements. Indeed, the power of the moral voice is not simply to re-awaken or make salient an internalized value. It is also a threat of status loss. To the extent we are dependent upon others, it is a concrete risk to violate a social norm—stigmatization and out-casting are real costs and help explain why the moral voice is influential. When informal social control is activated for those who reject the moral injunction in principle, then this is clearly coercive (though it may still be necessary in many cases) and not an example of the moral voice. The point is that, by definition, the moral voice is a mechanism for maintaining moral and social order that re-affirms accepted values of the community. As such, it is not coercive and depends upon a motivation to conform that is based neither in egoism or fearful conformity. Instead it is based on processes of socialization and moral development grounded in day-to-day relationships, emotional attachments, and moral concern for the welfare of others.

### III. Civic Participation

Both community institutions and the moral voice orient individuals to the needs of the community. They also provide the means for cultivating social responsibility and holding individuals accountable. A third mechanism for achieving communitarian ideals is particularly necessary for guaranteeing that the needs of the community are balanced with the autonomy needs of individuals. In an interdependent community, individuals cannot pursue their own interests without regard to collective consequences because autonomous action, particular in the aggregate, has direct effects on the lives of others. Thus the autonomy of one necessarily impinges upon the autonomy of others. Just as social order is a fragile constellation, so too is the protection of rights. The only recourse that can balance needs for autonomy and order is democratic participation of individuals who are free to assert their needs, concerns, and desires, and do so in a forum that encourages reflection of the consequences of various practices for the community.

To aggregate measurable individual preferences is to undermine larger conceptions of the common good, conceptions that start by recognizing the profound interdependencies that characterize our world. To substitute this way of thinking for an informed public discussion is to abdicate

political responsibility; despite surface appearances, it is undemocratic, for it does not allow a genuine democratic consensus to emerge but depends instead on an uninformed and undebated plebiscite of transitory and unexamined desires (Bellah *et al.*, 1991, p. 119).

Civic participation is not simply an ideal, but an instrument for articulating, amending, and endorsing communal values and priorities. This "strong democracy" is predicated upon "the idea of a self-governing community of citizens who are united less by homogeneous interests than by civil education and who are capable of common purpose and mutual action by virtue of their civic attitudes and participatory institutions rather than their altruism or their good nature" (Barber, 1984, p. 117). The mechanism is a local governance process in which citizens determine local priorities, establish allocation of resources, and plan for the development of the communities in which they live. It is not abdication of responsibility through elected representation, rather it is the fulfillment of civic responsibility to participate in the continual process of citizenship.

Communities do not simply "exist" with shared values, rather they are created by the process of members' sharing their values and testing one another's' views by disagreement and transformation of views and ideas. Civic participation is a safe forum for civil discourse, but one that challenges participants to advance their conceptions of the good. "A good society needs dialogues about the common good. These, in turn, require that the values that various participants bring to the dialogue will be engaged. Therefore, substantive dialogues, those of convictions, are not only common but essential for a good society. They are the processes through which a community formulates and reformulates its shared values" (Etzioni, 1996b, p. 230).

## CONCLUSION

Community in contemporary society is sometimes thought to be a lost cause, a useless nostalgia for an era long gone and best forgotten. Sometimes it is thought to be alive and well, continuously and spontaneously re-created as if in flagrant disregard for the structural and doctrinal meta-forces that seek to undermine it. And sometimes it is thought to exist in completely new forms as a result of modern advances in communications and transportation. In this sense, community is no longer a reference to place, but to a myriad of social ties that can be sustained over great dis-

tances. In Wellman and Leighton's (1979) terms, community is sometimes thought of as lost, saved, or liberated. The communitarians do not wish to resurrect the past, accept the status quo, or limit the conception of community to place alone. They seek to identify what community offers as a foundation for social life.

The communitarian perspective is one of aspiration for a community life that is rich enough to accommodate both the interests of individuals in their self-determination and the demands of a social existence in which individuals cannot act alone, but must also cooperate with others to ensure social order, institutional vitality, and the production of collective goods. If the essence of moral conduct is the ability to act in the interests of others in addition to one's own, then the communitarian concern for the balance between order and autonomy necessarily makes the perspective a moral endeavor. The formation of community, the provision of collective goods, the protection of rights, the innovations of social change, the accountability to social norms all involve moral decisions for they require considerations of collective consequences. Thus the communitarian perspective is more than an explanatory theory, it advances a set of injunctive claims based on a particular vision of community in modern society. These injunctive claims, however, are predicated on a social philosophy grounded in the sociological tradition.

## Notes

1. The author wishes to thank Amitai Etzioni, Philip Selznick, William Sullivan, and Todd Clear for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this manuscript.
2. In Garrett Hardin's (1968) classic account, a tragedy of the commons occurred when individual herdsman on a common grazing land increased their stocks for their own wealth accumulation without regard to the inevitability of overgrazing and eventual destruction of the commons.
3. "The communitarian critics want us to live in Salem, but not to believe in witches. Or human rights" (Gutmann, 1985, p. 319).
4. "Hobbes's solution was coercive. Locke's stressed mutual self-interest, and the Rousseau of *The Social Contract* gave primacy to normative consensus. Precisely because there is no justification for assuming that one solution precludes or subsumes the others, but that on the contrary all three may operate conjointly in concrete human societies, it is important not to identify the problem of order with any of its proposed solutions. If the characteristic error of sociologists, most notably of Durkheim and Parsons, has been to overemphasize consensus on norms and values as the solution, the Machiavellian-Hobbesian tradition in political thought has tended to exaggerate the role of force, and economists, including Marx, have notoriously overstressed economic interest" (Wrong, 1994, p. 9).

### References

- Anderson, S. M., Reznick, I. and Chen, S. (in press). The self in relation to others: Motivational and cognitive underpinnings. In J. G. Snodgrass and R. L. Thompson (Eds.), *The self across psychology: Self-recognition, self-awareness, and the self-concept*. New York: New York Academy of Science.
- Axelrod, R. (1984). *The evolution of cooperation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Barber, B. R. (1984). *Strong democracy*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Barber, B. R. (1995). *Jihad vs. McWorld*. New York: Times Books.
- Bell, D. A. (1993). *Communitarianism and its critics*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swidler, A. and Tipton, S. M. (1985). *Habits of the heart: Individualism and commitment in American life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swidler, A. and Tipton, S. M. (1991). *The good society*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Blau, P. M. (1977). *Inequality and heterogeneity: A primitive theory of social structure*. New York: Free Press.
- Braithwaite, John (1989). *Crime, shame, and reintegration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Caporael, L., Dawes, R. M., Orbell, J. M. and van de Kragt, A. J. C. (1989). Selfishness examined: Cooperation in the absence of egoistic incentives. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 12, 683-739.
- Chavis, D. (1995). Building community capacity to prevent violence through coalitions and partnerships. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, 6, 234-244.
- de Tocqueville, A. (1840/1945). *Democracy in America*. (H. Reeve, Trans.) New York: Vintage.
- Etzioni, A. (1993). *The spirit of community*. New York: Crown.
- Etzioni, A. (1996a). The responsive community: A communitarian perspective. *American Sociological Review*, 61, 1-11.
- Etzioni, A. (1996b). *The new golden rule*. New York: Basic.
- Goffman, I. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Doubleday.
- Glendon, M. A. (1991). *Rights talk: The impoverishment of political discourse*. New York: The Free Press.
- Gutmann, A. (1985). Communitarian critics of liberalism. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 14, 308-322.
- Hardin, G. (1968). The tragedy of the commons. *Science*, 162, 1243-1248.
- Hechter, M. (1987). *Principles of group solidarity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kuhn, M. H. and McPartland, R. (1954). An empirical investigation of self attitudes. *American Sociological Review*, 19, 68-76.
- Lasch, C. (1988). The communitarian critique of liberalism. In C. H. Reynolds and R. V. Norman (Eds.), *Community in America: The challenge of Habits of the Heart* (pp. 173-184). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Mead, G. H. (1956). *On social psychology*. (A. Strauss Ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mulhall, S. and Swift, A. (1992). *Liberals and communitarians*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Olson, M. (1965). *The logic of collective action*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Rawls, J. (1971). *A theory of justice*.

- Sandel, M. J. (1984). *Liberalism and its critics*. New York: New York University Press.
- Schwartz, S. H. (1992). Universals in the content and structure of values: Theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 25, 1-65.
- Selznick, P. (1992). *The moral commonwealth*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Stern, D. N. (1985). *The interpersonal world of the infant*. New York: Basic Books.
- Stryker, S. (1980). *Symbolic interactionism*. Menlo Park, CA: Benjamin/Cummings.
- Sullivan, W. and Karp, D. R. (1997). *The civil society debate*. Report to the Smith Richardson Foundation.
- Tajfel, Henri (1981). *Human groups and social categories: Studies in social psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Triandis, H. C., McCusker, C. and Hui, C. H. (1990). Multimethod probes of individualism and collectivism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59, 1006-1020.
- Tyler, T. R. (1990). *Why people obey the law*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Wellman, B. and Leighton, B. (1979). Networks, neighborhoods, and communities: Approaches to the study of the community question. *Urban Affairs Quarterly*, 14, 363-390.
- Wirth, L. (1938). Urbanism as a way of life. *American Journal of Sociology*, 44, 1-24.
- Wolfe, A. (1989). *Whose keeper? Social science and moral obligation*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Wrong, D. (1994). *The problem of order*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Yamagishi, T. (1994). Social dilemmas. In K. S. Cook, G. A. Fine and J. House (Eds.), *Sociological perspectives on social psychology* (pp. 311-334). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

### Biography

David R. Karp is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York, where he teaches courses in criminology, deviance, and social issues. He conducts research on community-oriented responses to crime. Currently, he is engaged in a qualitative research study examining Vermont's community reparative probation boards. He is the author of *Community Justice: An Emerging Field*, and *The Community Justice Ideal* (with Todd Clear).