

THE COMMUNITARIAN PLATFORM

BY AMITA ETZIONI

Communitarian ideas have been around at least since the days of the Old Testament. In the modern era, they have played an important role in a variety of social movements ranging from the social democrats to the environmentalists. The new communitarian movement, however, dates to the beginning of the 1990s, with the launching of the journal, *The Responsive Community: Rights and Responsibilities*. I serve as its editor, working with co-editors William Galston, Mary Ann Glendon and James Fishkin, and an editorial board that includes both liberals, such as Jane Mansbridge and John Coffee, and conservatives, such as Nathan Glazer and Ilene Nagel.

The essence of the communitarian position is that strong rights entail strong responsibilities. We have a sound base of rights (although they need to be constantly and vigilantly guarded). However, we have not matched our concern with the preservation of rights with a commitment to personal and social responsibilities. Americans demand the right to be tried before a jury of their peers, but are very reluctant to serve on one. They favor more government services of many kinds but tend to oppose the measures required to pay for them. They seek greater public safety and public health but are leery about any attempts, however carefully crafted, to enhance the ability of authorities to deal with crime or AIDS. We no longer attempt to answer the directive: "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country."

Communitarians seek to shore up social responsibilities by shoring up values education in the family and in

the schools and by strengthening community bonds, which are the best carriers of moral commitments.

In its first year, the new communitarian movement has focused largely on developing its basic philosophy.

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But how would a communitarian philosophy be enacted through specific legislation? The following are a few thoughts on various policy areas that would be addressed by communitarians to illustrate the policy implications of the basic approach.

The family. The communitarian movement favors the new familism: recognizing the importance of the family without favoring a return to the traditional one. Both women and men now have the freedom to work outside the household. Both parents must live up to their responsibilities to their children. Extensive research has shown that, on average, two-parent families are more effective educators than child-care institutions, especially for the very young; and marriage is preferable to divorce because the family is the basic building block of all viable societies.

If additional funds are made available for domestic programs as a result of the peace dividend or higher taxes, first priority in allocating this money

should be given to children. Children, the future generation, have long been neglected; it is time to reemphasize their importance.

In the current revisions of the tax code, we should realize that creating a child allowance is much better than increasing the tax-dependent exemption for children. A child allowance would benefit all families equally while the tax exemption favors high-income households, usually those in which both parents work outside the home. The child allowance, unlike the child exemption, does not discriminate against those fathers or mothers who dedicate part or all of their time to bringing up their children.

Laws that govern marriage and divorce should be changed to encourage people to undertake both less easily. Educating the young on ways to resolve conflicts and providing counseling sessions before marriage are steps in the right direction. A delay period may be appropriate for those planning to marry or filing for divorce. These measures are not meant to be punitive, but rather to signal society's concern for the preservation of the family.

Welfare. Communitarians favor a new paternalism which asks welfare recipients to accept some responsibility for themselves and contribute to the community even if they cannot find jobs. Welfare recipients should be encouraged to stay in school, participate in training, and avoid pregnancy.

But welfare reform should rely less on punishment and more on inducement by providing rewards, along with penalties. For instance, rather than finding a welfare mother if one of her chil-

dren is truant, she should be rewarded by an additional sum if she succeeds in keeping her children in school.

Hate Speech. Hate speech and intolerance are serious problems that afflict our society, but the best way to deal with, say, students who are verbally abusive to minorities, women, or any other group is to draw on non-legal remedies (for example, courses on tolerance or one-on-one interracial lunches and dinners). All regulations and codes that limit so-called hate speech should be voided because they impinge on free speech.

Multicultural Education. Universities should welcome courses that add to the European tradition as well as information about other cultures. Pluralism is, of course, a basic element of the Western tradition. However, expanding a curriculum and multicultural education must work within the framework of a core of basic shared values and neither the federal government nor local ones should provide public support to colleges that eliminate European elements from their core curricula. Our core values — the Constitution, the democratic tradition, and values of mutual tolerance — come to us from our European heritage, not from the other cultures. Eliminating them from the university undermines our national foundations and unity.

Public Health. In this area, communitarians practically require an enhancement of social responsibility. This should be achieved first, second, and third by drawing on the moral voice of the community and only drawing upon the government as a last resort.

Measures that would enhance public health include: requiring that hospitals strongly encourage patients who are having their blood tested for any

reason to also have it checked for HIV and provide counseling if the virus is found. (Research by the Centers for Disease Control found this to be very cost-effective.) The community should strongly urge people who are likely HIV carriers to come forward and be tested; and, if found to be carriers, to disclose it to all their sexual contacts either by themselves or through public health authorities. Concomitantly, we should increase penalties for violating the privacy of HIV carriers and discriminating against them.

We should consider it a crime to engage in a contact that is likely to transmit the AIDS virus, without warning the person who might become affected.

We should require all who enter a hospital to sign a form indicating their disposition toward donating their organs. We should consider all people who die without signing a form to have agreed to have their organs donated, unless the person prior to death, or the family, registers an objection. This measure would greatly improve the quality of life for thousands each year who now cannot get organs.

Public Safety. The greatest danger to freedoms at this stage does not lie in excessive police powers, although there are serious abuses that must be curbed, especially concerning police relations with minorities. The main problem, however, is that if the state does not provide effective measures to restore public safety, the public may turn to extremists like David Duke to restore order. Already half the public is willing to suspend the constitution in order to help fight the war against drugs. Limited, carefully crafted measures to make public protection more effective must be considered.

For example: We should restore the good-faith, exclusionary rule which

allows the use of evidence even if it was collected in a technically flawed manner, as long as there is no deliberate police bias or bad faith. Under this policy, criminals will not walk simply because someone used the wrong form or some other such technical error occurred.

We should allow 'suspicionless' searches (for example, airports screening gates, drug checkpoints, and sobriety checkpoints) when the intrusion is minimal, the danger to the public is substantial, and there are no effective alternatives.

We should support drug and alcohol testing of all groups in positions of potential high risk to the public (such as school bus drivers, air traffic controllers, pilots, and train engineers), but not testing en masse, of the population at large. We should revoke the licenses of drunk drivers.

Finally, we should allow carefully crafted new anti-loitering laws that enable a community to drive out drug dealers without allowing discrimination against minorities or hippies or any other social group.

Public Education. Communitarians believe character formation is a prerequisite for all learning and moral education is necessary and possible without opening the door to indoctrination.

Thus, schools should systematically review their inner structure from the viewpoint of experiences they generate in relations between teacher and student, in public spaces (for example, the cafeteria, corridors, and parking lots), ensuring that they are supportive, rather than corrosive, of character formation.

Schools should provide courses on human relations that teach people how to resolve conflicts and relate better to one another as spouses, co-workers, and fellow citizens. They should also provide courses that focus on transmis-

sion of those numerous values we share.

Schools should work with corporations so that the education of students who work for them will be enhanced as the result of these work experiences.

Political Reforms. Campaign contributions by special interests tend to generate obligations that are inimical to democratic representation. We should curb this flow of private money into public life as much as possible.

PACs should be abolished. If they are continued, donors should be required to designate the recipient of funds to prevent oligarchic pooling by PAC managers.

We should prohibit corporations, trade associations, and labor unions from covering the costs of setting up and administering PACs.

We should provide public financing of congressional campaigns. To the same end, we should provide free air time on TV and radio to all candidates.

These are but a few public policy measures that illustrate, rather than exhaust, the new communitarian approach. Much more needs to be done to restore social responsibility and repair the web of community life. This will not be achieved by any one policy analyst or writer or group; it is a task in which we all urgently need to participate.

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