

A GLOBAL COMMUNITARIAN MANIFESTO

Comments on *From Empire to Community* by Amitai Etzioni

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This is an ambitious and challenging book. It jumps into the center of contemporary events to ask questions of great consequence. How do we put humans at center stage in our efforts to use the powerful economic, technical, military, and political tools at our disposal? (Human Primacy) What values, in a global context, can we identify that can be shared across the globe? What international institutions can we create to serve those values?

These questions are addressed in this global communitarian manifesto that envisions a global state and community. The author acknowledges that earlier schemes for one-world institutions have not fared well in the real world, but he believes that three major developments give the subject of a global polity renewed importance and possibility. These developments are:

“1. Nation-states and the Old System that relies on them have proven more inadequate for coping with transnational problems.

2. New technological developments have vastly increased the potential for worldwide communication and concerted action and hence governance.

3. As has long been argued, the world might unite if it faced a global threat, a threat that massive terrorism and weapons of mass destruction clearly constitute.”

The argument begins with a contrast between Western values of individual rights, democracy, and free markets versus the East’s emphasis on respect for authority, obligations, and social order. In their extreme form they represent “radical individualism” and “authoritarian communitarianism,” and they are difficult to reconcile. However, the

author believes that there has been gradual movement of East and West toward each other and toward a “middle of the autonomy/order spectrum.” A “soft” Islam places greater emphasis on moral suasion (not coercion), a “soft individualism” is revealed in the post-9/11 curbing of some civil liberties to enhance homeland protection.

The book is organized in three main parts. Part One focuses on the development of a global normative synthesis, or identification of those values that states and peoples will embrace. The synthesis is sought in a balance between “universalism” (those rights extended to all—free speech, voting, assembly), and “particularism,” or the communal bonds and particularistic values that can flourish within the domain of communities without violating basic universal rights. It would be a challenge to find that social space where the modern value of universalism can coexist with the traditional value of particularism. Another key issue to be worked out in creating the new balance between autonomy and social order is how to contain capitalism, by balancing the free reign of market forces with the requirements of social order. Again I wonder about how to balance the rights of capital to close plants and export jobs with the needs of people to have jobs.

The author sees evidence of a balance between individual rights and social order in two areas. First, is the growing desire of people to place less emphasis on “production and consumption projects” (an affluent way of life centered on consumption) with greater attention to projects emphasizing social safety nets and greater harmony with one’s social and natural environment. Second, is the appearance of “moral dialogues” that enable people of different nations, from East to West, “to come to share moral understandings on specific issues. There are strong examples of these moral dialogues at the intra-national

level, and the author identifies Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* as having led to the development of a moral commitment to the environment; and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* that initiated a moral dialogue on relations between men and women. I was particularly attracted to the Carson-Friedan examples because in my teaching I often use them as examples of social analysis that produced a paradigm-shift. However, I also added Michael Harrington's *The Other America* to the trio of important books from the 1960s, and suggested that Harrington's book did not lead to the same kind of long-term moral dialogue on inequality, as did Carson and Friedan on environmentalism and feminism. The difference I believe points to the difficulty of developing projects aimed at raising the income levels of people within and across countries, because economic redistribution will invariably impact the projects of the affluent. It also points to the importance of examining the "interests" of nations, classes, and elites when proposing projects that ^{are designed to} will bring people together.

The effort to build a global normative synthesis will also require a foreign policy that is less concerned with democratizing societies, and more focused on "opening societies" by encouraging travel, trade, exchanges, and the internet. Engagement, not isolation (like the 10 years of sanctions against Iraq after Gulf War I) is the key to attracting the East to consider global norms, and the best way in which the West can learn from the East.

In sum, Part One of the book is about trends and processes that are gradually synthesizing a shared body of moral understandings about the environment, human rights, and the legitimate conditions for interfering in the internal affairs of another country (e.g. stopping the genocide in Rwanda; nonproliferation of weapons of mass

destruction).

Part Two deals with the post-9/11 world, and the errors made by, and the opportunities available to the American “semi-empire.” Etzioni believes that the waging of the war in Iraq holds little prospect for building what he calls “a new safety architecture,” or a “global security system.” He is more optimistic about the “anti-terrorism coalition” of some 50 nations working together through their intelligence services, new police powers, and domestic laws to deal with terrorism. The author sees this coalition as a new global architecture that he calls a “de facto Global Anti-terrorism Authority.”

In my view, it should also be recognized that the willingness of many nations to “buy in” to the anti-terrorism coalition is that many of them have problems with their own home-grown opposition groups or insurgents. Thus, the anti-terrorism coalition provides some legitimacy and “cover” for more repressive measures against internal opposition groups.

Since concerns about national sovereignty often stand in the way of global agreements, Etzioni argues that concerns about terrorism and WMDs, as well as the transnational concerns about the environment and human rights will lead nations to accept limitations on their sovereignty in order to advance common objectives. Because the Old System cannot handle global problems, new transnational structures are required, and they are found in the form of international non-governmental organizations, transnational informal networks, and social movements. Together, these non-state actors are the “transnational communitarian bodies” that will provide “governance without government.” At present, transnational bodies function mainly to pressure nation states

and intergovernmental organizations to act more effectively. But much work is left undone when dealing with these transnational issues, and Etzioni sees signs of a new global architecture in the new specialized transnational governmental networks composed of government officials with similar missions in their own countries. Many of these networks focus on transnational business issues involving banking, insurance, securities and international accounting standards, but they are hardly the sort of networks that would be interested in “containing capitalism” (which the author viewed as essential to creating a global normative synthesis bringing East and West closer together). More promising transnational governmental networks may be found in the area of health, where concerns about AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria can serve as the basis for more enduring transnational bodies to exercise their authority.

It is clear in the present analysis, that the push for a global authority will come from the anti-terrorism coalition, which Etzioni predicts will become a Global Safety Authority. The challenge is for this Global Safety Authority to expand its mission beyond terrorism, WMDs, and non-proliferation, first focusing on other safety issues like transnational drug dealers, illegal traffic in people, cybercrime, and finally into non-safety-related transnational problems of environment, health, illiteracy, and poverty and “any other problems whose serious treatment would require a considerable reallocation of wealth between the have and have-not countries” (164). Dealing with these non-safety issues of wealth redistribution will put competing interests on the agenda for discussion, which is not the case for safety issues. In apparent recognition of the problems posed by competing interests, Etzioni attempts to minimize the political problem of redistribution by calling for establishing a global minimal standard of food, clothing, and shelter for

all.

The culmination of this effort to combine a global normative synthesis and a new architecture for global governance are supranational bodies (with the European Union as an example, and a test case of “halfway integration”—high economic integration, low political integration). Full-fledged unions will need (a) legitimate control of the means of violence, (b) the capacity to allocate resources among the member units, and (c) the ability to command political loyalties (all of the above must exceed what exists among the member units). (p. 182)

The final vision is best presented by the author himself.

“In time, measured in generations rather than years, I can envision a world of perhaps twenty regional communities, further grouped into a smaller number of supra-regional ones, crowned by a Global Authority and a global civil society. It would have many features of a nation, often defined as a community ensconced in a state. That is, it would not merely have the powers of a state but also a core of shared values, and it would command a measure of loyalty from the world’s citizens. These features are essential if what may be called a Global Nation is to be able to contain conflict and legitimately impose burdens on some parts of the citizenry for the benefit of others.” (p. 198)

This effort to invent the good society is filled with a great deal of hope and faith, with more emphasis on what “ought” to be rather than what “is.” I have difficulty getting beyond “what is.” The “is” is American Empire, whether “soft,” “lite,” or “semi.” The “is” is American military bases and troops in over 60 countries. It is a foreign policy that seems more designed to insult the East rather than to move toward an accommodation. It is a posture of super-sovereignty, that appears to ignore international law and declares the

right to preemptively strike nations that are believed to pose a threat. It is about a war that is more about the will to power than the love of freedom.

Until there is change in America's global posture, there is little hope that it can lead the rest of the world to create a global community.