

# I AND WE: THE CASE FOR THE OPEN COMMUNITY

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## A SYNTHESIS

Out of opposition to collectivism grew the celebration of the individual. Long before libertarians objected to totalitarianism in the name of individual rights, laissez faire conservatives challenged the collectivism that had been entailed in nationalism, Catholic and Anglican church doctrines, and secular pessimistic theories of human nature (theories that favored collective institutional and cultural restraints "to keep the lid" on individual urges). However, it is now recognized, admittedly only by a small body of social philosophers and social scientists, that the celebration of individualism has been carried too far, beyond the challenge of authoritarian and totalitarian doctrines, to undercutting the legitimation of the community and of the public realm. Champions of individualism are now arguing that individuals are able, and obligated, to fend on their own. They ought to find jobs (even if the government via the Federal Reserve Board causes a deep recession, i.e., a massive shortage of jobs); rely on philanthropy rather than on welfare (even if the government undercuts a major motivation for giving, the tax deductions); and decide how much medical service to purchase (even when they command no professional medical knowledge). And, individual needs, under the banner of expressing self, have been used not merely to challenge specific sets of institutions, but to reject all institutions and question all service to collective needs. In response to all this individualism, the quest is on for a synthesis that invests rights in both the person and society, and views individuals and their union as both commanding primary status. This position is referred to here as the Open Community, or, in deference to my master-teacher Martin Buber, as the I & We.

The forming assumption of the Open Community is that both individual members, and the community from which they hail, have the same fundamental moral standing. The merit of one is not a derivative of, or dependent on, that of the other. Second, the two primary components are joined in a perpetually strained bond because at all times both centripetal forces are at work, forces that seek to diminish the rights of individuals in the name of the collective needs, as well as centrifugal forces, that work to destroy the community in the name of individual rights. The concept of I & We captures the duality of the forces, their main anchoring in the individual and in the community, and the fact that in such a society, responsive to its members, the common bonds, are perceived as "ours" (hence the "we") rather than as imposed by "them" or as "theirs".

The strain built into the I and We concept, and the costs it exacts, has a significant constructive consequence: It keeps challenging both individuals and the community to redefine the bond so as to reduce the tension, even if it cannot be eliminated. This is attempted, on one side, by rendering the community to be more responsive to human nature (e.g., by reshaping the family relations), on the other—by improving the ability of individuals to function as members of a community (as reflected in the current debate over education), and by enhancing civic obligations. The resulting predisposition to restructure provides a side-benefit: It enhances the adaptation of the body society to the constantly changing environment, and provides an internal "engine of change", thus providing a firm response to those who criticized main stream sociology for having become "static".

As the position arises out of a quest for a synthesis between two previously opposed camps, well represented in social philosophy and in social sciences, these camps are briefly visited before the evolving synthesis is outlined. The best way to depict the important differences between the two camps is to focus on the elements already delineated. One camp focuses on the We to neglect of the I, the other—on the I to the neglect of the We. They may be referred to respectively as

Closed Community and No Community viewpoints, or, in deference to their historical origins, as Tories and Whigs. After briefly outlining the main relevant position of these two camps the reasons for the slow development of a synthesis are indicated, early contributions to the conception of an Open Community are introduced, its changing historical context explicated, and a resulting theory of change is introduced. The article closes with a response to psychological Whigs.

### **The Closed Community, Tory Perspective**

The Closed Community viewpoint is historically associated with church doctrine, nationalism, and Tory conservatism. These approaches view the society as an integrated body and the individuals as cells incorporated into the more encompassing entity. The collective body—if it is mother church, the fatherland, or the invisible college, is viewed as the source of value. Individuals gain a standing by serving the collectivity. Authority, the legitimate power of the commons, places and guides individuals, who, it is assumed, are inherently unable to guide themselves and subject to urges to debase society and themselves. Hence the need to keep the societal “lid” on by the use of moral persuasion and/or force.

In social sciences the Closed Community, in a moderate version and not always in a self-conscious way, is evident in major branches of anthropology, sociology, and political science. Anthropologists relied on it when they studied tribal cultures and assumed that members will more or less automatically reflect it in their personalities and behavior (see, for example, an early classic, Benedict, 1934). In sociology this notion was applied to modern societies by Durkheim and by Parsons, who, it might be of interest to note, was greatly influenced by biologists and their concept of the body and its integral “parts”.

Durkheim argued that morality is a system of rules and values provided by society, imbedded in its culture, and that individual children acquire those as part of the general transmission of culture. Non-rational processes, such as identification with parents, (which lead children to “internalize” values of their elders) play a key role. (Durkheim developed this position in direct response and opposition to the utilitarian view that moral values were the product of individual adults, and their intelligent judgement of other adults’ actions.)

For Parsons, the core concept is functionalism: individuals’ acts are, in effect, evaluated in terms of their contribution to the societal order, which in turn is introduced into the individuals via socialization and reinforced by social control. These concepts do not exactly parallel but reflect the notions of a strong community (focused around one set of ultimate values, drawing on tightly knit social relations) and a potent state (to back the values of the community). Typically authority is viewed in this context as legitimate power. This position acquired the label of “the oversocialized view of man”, following an often cited essay by Wrong (1961). Socialization is a bit of sociological jargon that might be worth tolerating because it helps call attention to the fact that the processes of introducing new members into a society (newborns, immigrants) entails more than education in schools; it is an encompassing process that begins within the family, continues in peer groups and neighborhoods, takes place in schools, and never completely stops after graduation.

In political science Leo Strauss has been a strong advocate of the doctrine of absolute values. Absolute values provide positive direction to the members of society, and constitute in his terms, the true liberalism, in contrast to false liberalism that treats all desires (of individuals) as equal, and leads to spurious freedoms and a decaying society, a very Tory viewpoint. In contemporary USA the “social agenda” of the Reagan Administration, including its efforts to prohibit abortions, to force prayers in schools, to decide which medical treatment is to be provided to handicapped infants, is a direct policy outcome of the Tory position supported by the Moral Majority and other fundamentalist groups.

## No Community, Whig Perspective

The Whig position rose in direct challenge to the Tory dominance. (No attempt is made here to do justice to many other differences between the two positions or sub-positions within each camp and changes over time. The focus here is on the main positions.) In the opposing view the individual is not merely the center of the societal universe but the only legitimate actor and entity. There is, in principle, no need for societal order; it arises automatically out of the interaction among individuals, whose self-interests are complimentary and harmonious. There is no justification for external coordination, let alone for an imposed order, by anybody above and beyond that introduced by individuals themselves. Not only is the legitimation of the state at best minimal, typically, and negative, but community bonds, if they are mentioned at all, are not part of the main Whig conceptual framework. While the position is as old as *The Wealth of Nations* (and it continues to disregard the "other" Adam Smith, the author of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*), its contemporary legions are numerous, including both laissez faire conservatives and libertarians. Among its most forceful proponents are Friedman (1962,1982), von Hayek (1945, 1960) and Nozick (1974). Their "undersocialized" view of persons is still dominant in neo-classical economics (Granovetter, 1985), a new school of political science ("public choice") (Mueller, 1979), and in a sociological branch known as "exchange theory" (Blau, 1964) and in psychology (Kelly and Thibaut, 1978).

An illuminating example of the way the two perspectives differ is found in the way institutions, such as church, state and family, and the mores that back them up, are treated. Tories view them as preceding in time, status and power the individual. Individuals are to find their place in institutions, adjust to their dictums, or face the consequences. The institutions themselves are typically viewed as the result of long historical and cultural evolution if not as God-given; in either case, they are seen as immutable at least in the short run and certainly not as a proper subject for the actions of ordinary individuals.

In sharp contrast the Whigs see institutions as reflecting design, either of individuals (entrepreneurs of firms; leaders of policies) or of groups of individuals negotiating or renegotiating institutional arrangements (for example, in a legislature). Institutions are thus viewed as highly malleable and as reflecting the aggregation of the preferences of numerous individuals rather than the institutions setting the context if not the content of such preferences. Two recent major examples are the work of economist Williamson (1975) and historian North (1981).

In contemporary USA the Whig position is dominant not only in social sciences but also in the government economic policy, or at least in its ideological manifestations.

## Synthesis: Merely Beginnings

Before a bare outline of a possible synthesis is presented it might be worth briefly deliberating why it is so slow in developing and in gaining a following. The philosophy of Open Community that sees the relationship between individuals and their society as a perpetually strained bond, as a tug-of-war between individualism that seeks to break out of societal containment, and also committed to the collectivity and societal forces that seek to diminish individuality but also nurture its core, has no wide following in intellectual circles, let alone in wider educated circles. One reason seems to be that other positions that recognize inner contradictions either see a potential resolution (in Marxism, at the end of history, after the revolution), or see one force clearly dominating (for example, in Freud's civilization); both avoid the notion of a perpetual tension that seems unsatisfying.

More important: each of the sides that the tensed-bond perpetually joins, has strong advocates who only grudgingly acknowledge the merits of the other side. Their one-sided positions make for cleaner presentation and more focused arguments, for "better copy" as they say in the book trade. In an intellectual world that is in part politicized and in part media-sized, one-sided

positions run better. For example, Sandel discusses the way the two stark positions are usually opposed, as if the world could be reduced to this-side or that-side dichotomies: "What is at stake for politics in the debate between unencumbered [free-standing] selves and situated [integrated into community] ones? What are the practical differences between a politics of [individual] rights and a politics of the common goods?" (p. 17, 1984). Politics may indeed often be earmarked by a polarized struggle between advocates of two claims, those of individuals and those of their community. In social sciences, neo-classical economics, a one-sided, individualistic conception par excellence, has raised the merits of simplification, in the name of Occam's Razor, to the level of a central tenet, to be heeded even if the result is a highly unrealistic conception of the societal world. The exposition of Open Community registers a plea for more tolerance for a measure of complexity (Hirschman, 1984).

### Early Contributions

Advocates of the Open Community are not a large camp. Among the classical social philosophies Jean Jacques Rousseau comes closest, although he can barely be viewed as a clear proponent. There are two main schools of interpretation of Jean Jacques Rousseau. One makes him the ideologue of collectivism, the "total surrender" of individual rights to society, and thus an extreme Tory, if not a father of totalitarianism. However, according to the "best interpretations" of Rousseau, as philosopher Robert Derathe put it, Rousseau saw in liberty the most precious of possessions; individuals "can no more be deprived of it rightfully than they can be deprived of life itself" (*International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, p. 567. 1968).

Rousseau is closest to being entitled to be viewed as a forerunner of the Open Community position when he calls attention to the difference between the "general will" (common interest) and "particular will" (exclusive interest). We must work out the contradictions generated by two forces, without obliterating either.

Walzer, among contemporary social philosophers, is a representative of the Open Community, although its articulation is not a central theme of his works. He is properly critical of No Community or Whig position, which he calls "liberal utilitarianism". He writes, in *Radical Principles*, "Its standard of utility is the welfare of an individual *absolutely* free to make his own choices and measure his own happiness" (p. 37, 1980) (Italic provided). "In fact, however, no such individual has ever existed". He goes on to explain that people live in groups. These either set standards for them or—they must choose new standards, "...in some cooperative fashion, arguing among themselves, reaching a common decision" (ibid.).

Walzer is equally correct in pointing out that the decline of Toryism and the rise of Whigism (in the mid-Nineteen Sixties and Seventies) are but two sides of the same coin. Neo-conservatives, he writes, see the collapse of authority, not merely in government but also in corporations, churches, universities and ultimately within the family, as the source of our malaise. However, he explains, the condition is just as much a result of "capitalism, the free market, governmental laissez faire in religion and culture, the pursuit of happiness: all these make powerfully for hedonism and social disintegration" (Walzer, p. 95, 1980). (The term "liberal" is confusing; earlier liberals argued for free markets; in recent decades, in the USA, for the welfare state. Today's liberal position on the matter is best characterized as confused. Hence the term Whigs, which stands for individual rights and opposition to any form of collectivism seems clearer).

Philosophers who seek to base their positions on universal rights, as Whigs do, who stress that all individuals have the same basic moral standing, will approve of Walzer's position that all individuals have a universal right, to form particular ties to select individuals and communities. There is a contradiction between such bonds and individual rights if they are imposed, not—if they are freely chosen. Libertarians commonly fail to recognize this point because they are caught in a sterile opposition between individuals and the state, ignoring the realm of community,

especially of Open Community. In short, there is room for libertarian communitarianism, an awkward term which stands precisely for what is referred to here as the I and We position.

### I and We in a Changing Context

We saw, as a starting point, that the Open Community assumes that a legitimate tug-of-war arises out of partially contradictory needs: to serve common and shared needs to which no individual may attend but all require, and the need to protect individuals from encroachment by the community. While the two primary composing forces are not incompatible in all matters, each force does seek to maximize itself and to undercut the other, raising the specter of either diminished individuals or of collectivism; hence the merit of each containing the other.

There is no precise balancing point at which the two forces are in the ideal juxtaposition, neither threatening one another nor deficient, and there is room, within the Open Community position, for varying viewpoints, as to where this balance lies, and, most significant, the "proper" balance changes according to historical conditions.

The treatment of patriotism provides a revealing prism for the issues at hand, illustrates the fruitfulness of the Open Community position, in a specific context, the contemporary USA. The Whig position, Fried points out "...has had trouble accounting for patriotism as it has accounting for love and friendship ... Precisely because its moral perspective is so demanding and universalistic ... it has offered no basis for more particular affections and loyalties, loyalties to particular persons or to communities" (p. 40, 1984). When Whigism is applied to patriotism, as Janowitz (1983) has shown in a recent book about contemporary USA, more is attacked than the Tory demands for unquestioning compliance, for my Country Right or Wrong, for chauvinism. It undercuts the moral basis of any and all obligations to community, that of civic consciousness. One of the most telling findings Janowitz cites is that young Americans in the late 1970s, an era of heightened ego-centered mentality ranked highest among their rights a trial by jury, and low among their obligations—to serve on a jury.

Janowitz is also correct when he points to bi-culturalism, championed in the 1960s and 1970s, as an instance where the I and We balance is lost. Individual immigrants and ethnic sub-groups, need to balance their commitments to their separate sub-cultures with the commitment to the shared culture. This balance is thrown off by movements that seek to accord equal status to minority and the shared culture, or more extremely to accord first standing to a minority culture (for example, the TESL movement, Teaching English as a Second Language, or in black nationalism). They carry individual and sub-group rights to the point the common bondage, the We-ness, is undermined.

How widespread was adherence to the ego-centered mentality in the USA in recent decades? Yankelovich's studies led him to estimate that 17 percent of Americans in late 1970s were deeply committed to a philosophy of self-fulfillment, and another 63 percent embraced it in varying degrees in the late Seventies. (Twenty percent were traditionalists) (p. 91, 1981.) Yankelovich describes their philosophy as one of duty to self, a preoccupation with ego, and a sense that ego-needs both are pivotal and take priority over others' needs. Duty to self is expressed in insensitivity and disregard for others and community. Among the indications Yankelevoch used were that these people said they "spend a great deal of time thinking about myself"; that "satisfactions come from shaping oneself rather than from home and family life"; that they expressed a strong need for "new experiences" and for more excitement and sensation. They also tended to feel free to look, live, and act however they wanted, even if this violated others' concepts of what is proper (*ibid.*, p. 82).

Lasch added some evidence to the existence of a culture of narcissism, in his recent book, *The Minimal Self* (1984). His interpretation of the evidence suggests that excessive individualism in the 1960s and 1970s resulted not only in undercutting the community but also in diminution of

the self, which is compatible with the thesis advanced here: individuals need society just as it builds on them. *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, Tipton, 1985), by five social scientists, based on over 200 extensive interviews, reaches a similar conclusion.

These developments called for a position stressing the needs of the community. In contrast, the early 1980s, responding to the Moral Majority quest for imposed prayers, pregnancies, death sentences, and a tight traditional moral code, to support the Open Community position calls for stressing individual rights to choose, without questioning the need for a voter's moral community. Thus, which side of the I & We balance needs shoring up depends on the direction the historical condition pushes the relationship. The more it leans in one direction, the more the other needs support.

### **A Theory of Change**

The assumption that individuals and society necessitate one another is not to deny that there are very significant differences in the ways the two elements are intertwined. Individuals require socialization and social roles but not all roles are equal in the extent of repression they cause. Individuals are not endlessly malleable, and moral codes and societal regimes may be compared as to which are more vs. less responsive to human nature. Hence, the way to reduce the strain of the human condition is not to seek to diminish society or the individual but to seek ways to reformulate the I & We bond.

Societal change finds here a systematic source: individuals and groups of individuals whose roles are particularly repressive, are more likely to either withdraw from society and its codes (and hence engage in a variety of a- or anti-social behavior), or provide the support for social movements that seek to redefine the I & We bond in a less strained manner. Indeed, if ever a full resolution would be found, it soon would yield to new sources of strain due to the fact that external, environmental changes, which never cease, affect some members of society more adversely than others as Americans in the Northeast and Midwest witnessed in the last decade following the energy crisis and the Japanese challenge. Hence, even if there was no unresolved residue Freud identified, the ever-changing environment provides a perpetual need and force to re-define the individual-social bond. This is but one more reason rationalistic and psychological individualistic Whig positions as well as Tory collectivist positions provide a much less valid perspective on the ever changing social realm than the unpopular, complex, Open Community viewpoint.

### **Response to Psychological Whigs**

The individuals discussed so far, deified in *lassiez faire* conservatism and libertarianism, and the social science theories that draw on them for their core assumptions, are self-reliant, rational persons. They are carved in the folkloric image of the earlier settlers, striking out West "on their own", or that of self-employed artisans. They do not need, it is argued, a society because they are largely self-sufficient, or advance their goals through exchanges that are self-enforcing because they pay off to all participants. (In social science jargon they constitute zero-plus or win-win "games"). And, the participants can design and implement whatever collective arrangements are necessary. To reiterate: government, society, and even moral codes are hence viewed as largely unnecessary and as secondary derivation rather than co-equal in status, in legitimation.

There is, however, a second major strand of individualism, that is similar in its deification of the person and implicitly anti-societal and opposed to codes, but the rationale and the concept of the individual are radically different. The main source of legitimation here is various psychological theories that have been popularized and absorbed in a popular philosophy of sorts. Basically the position builds on a view of a person who is psychologically largely self sufficient

in his or her natural stage (a model reincarnation of the notion of the happy savage). Society, including its moral code, is viewed as repressive. The position favors liberation not merely from the requirements of specific codes (many which might indeed be repressive) but from codes in general. If people would retreat from their social roles of homemaker, wife, employee, citizen, and express themselves freely, act on their feeling, this would be not merely of therapeutic value, as a transition stage toward new socialization and commitment, a step toward less repressive roles and codes, but a blessed end stage. Free individuals are depicted as persons "in touch with their inner self" which means that they are free from internal conflict between their urges and external expectations because the latter have been ditched. The possibility that expectations, will be internalized, and the person will gain satisfaction from living up to one's moral obligations to others and to the community, are not acknowledged.

For the purposes at hand, it is essential to note the social condition, to the extent that it is explored at all, is perceived as the carriers of imposed expectations of a They vs. I, but no We is recognized, no partial intertwining of person into a collective whole that itself is a source of genuine satisfaction. Psychologists Newman and Berkowitz write: "We are accountable only to ourselves for what happens to us in our lives" (p. 7, 1971). They advise people how to change the way they relate to their parents:

In a very ruthless, primitive way, you have to choose yourself over them. If you go on subordinating your needs and impulses and wishes to theirs, you will never come into your own (ibid., p. 32).

A much cited quote of Perls, father of Gestalt therapy, promotes ego-segregation if not isolation:

I do my thing and you do your thing . . . I am not in this world to live up to your expectations, and you are not in this world to live up to mine. You are you and I am I; if by chance we find each other, it's beautiful. If not, it can't be helped (Friedman, p. 26, 1976).

Yankelovich sees the "self" psychologies as self-defeating:

You do not get in touch with the essence of self solely by looking inward. There is no "real" me—a tiny homunculus hidden beneath layers of frozen feelings. You are not the sum of your desires. You do not consist of an aggregate of needs, and your inner growth is not a matter of fulfilling all your potentials. By concentrating day and night on your feelings, potentials, needs, wants and desires, and by learning to assert them more freely, you do not become a freer, more spontaneous, more creative self; you become a narrower, more self-centered, more isolated one. You do not grow, you shrink (op. cit., p. 242).

Maslow's treatment of the hierarchy of human needs is particularly revealing because his failing is much more subtle than the outright advocates of psychological Whigism. Maslow recognizes a need for affection which is a vital link to others. Now the need for affection refers to the need to have a deep, positive, emotional involvement with another person, usually on a reciprocal and basically egalitarian basis. Love and friendship are the prime examples, but "caring and being cared for" and "belonging" also express this need. Unrequited love, without mutuality, does not meet a person's need for affection. And while there is affection up and down the status structure (as in a relationship between father and son), even in these hierarchical relationships, the affection element is relatively egalitarian. To assume people have a basic need for affection is to assume that they require a strong, reciprocal interpersonal bond.

The need for self-respect is less obviously tied to a positive involvement of ego in interpersonal or group relationships. If self-generation and self-validation were possible, they would provide a sustainable psychic foundation for an egoistic orientation. But nothing is further from the social reality. Self-respect rests on validation by others, others who matter, often close others—that is, on respect. As the terms suggest, self-respect is ego's appreciation of ego; respect of the standing ego is accorded by others. While the two never correlate perfectly, in "normal" people they are closely associated most of the time. Ego can tell himself that he is an outstanding runner, provider, or parent; but if the referee declares him last to cross the finish line, the court declares him bankrupt, or his kids run away from home, he will adjust his self-respect downward—or is at least partially psychologically maladjusted.

Nor can self-respect usually be anchored in pursuits in conflict with the values of the community. (Revolutionaries are an exception.) Studies show that while thieves and prostitutes may find some respect in their subcultures, they are aware that their activities are not validated by the prevailing value systems. (Of course, when there are no such value systems, people have varying degrees of difficulty in anchoring their self-respect, but this is not an indication that self-respect can be disassociated from the community and the respect of others when these systems are intact.)

In contrast to this pro-social emphasis on affection and self-respect, as vital society-building steps preceding and mitigating self-actualization, Maslow often plays up self-actualization per se. As a result it tends to encourage egoistic orientations because it focuses on individual needs; it makes self-actualization the pinnacle of human needs; that is, it sees affection and self-respect as "lower" needs than self-actualization; it does not explicitly call for duly attending to affection and self-respect before and as the highest need is sought; and it does not face the needed balance between self-actualization on the one hand, and affection and self-respect, the personal bases of mutuality, on the other.

The distinction between psychological Whigism and the mainline interpretation of Freud deserves to be briefly noted because it serves to highlight the issue at hand. The notion that civilization (society, moral codes) exacts some measure of a cost is part of the main interpretation. Sublimation of the natural urges cannot be successfully completed; a residue of unsublimated, and hence repressed, urges remain. However this cost is both limited and inevitable because without it more than civilization is lost, there is no person either. An unsocialized creature is unable to function on its own; it is an uncontrolled bundle of urges—not a psychologically self-sufficient individual. To put it differently, the individual (as a person) and society are created together, and are dependent on one another. Anybody who has children and observed their socialization, is familiar with studies of individuals in isolation (such as children raised in attics and prisoners of war), or with the immense body of findings of experimental psychology, can have little doubt about the empirical validity of the concept of joint creation over psychological Whigism.

The following quote from Hornstein (p. 8, 1976) captures well the line of argument advanced here:

Psychological investigations involving ten thousand and more human beings have confirmed Adam Smith's insights: on some occasions, human beings experience a sense of community, a feeling of oneness with their fellows.

Adam Smith? not the author of *The Wealth of Nations*, the godfather of the Whigs, but Adam Smith the author of *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, who wrote: "How so ever selfish man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature which interest him in the fortune of others and render their happiness necessary to him."



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