56. Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Random House/Vintage, 1978) 5,259,264.

57. Genesis 2.

58. Rabbi Levi Meier, *Ancient Secrets* (Woodstock, VT.: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1996) 10-11.

59. *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) 8.

60. *Felix culpa*, a concept sometimes found in early Christian thought, found expression in the Latin version of the Holy Saturday Mass, which was in use in the Catholic Church almost universally until the early 1960s. It carries something of the sense of T.S. Eliot's use of the old English word "behovely," meaning "of use, necessary," in reference to "sin." "Little Gidding," in *Four Quartets,* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1971) 56; see also Douglas John Hall, *Professing the Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1993), 220.

61. 28:16.

62. Lawrence Kushner, *God Was In This Place and I, i Did Not Know* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1991), especially 11-19.

63. *Between Past and Future*, 94.

64. Christian Smith, *Disruptive Religion*, offers a good sociological discussion of how "disruptive" religion can be constructive.

65. McWilliams, "Faith and Morals," 20.

66. Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 205-206.

67. See Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (St.Louis: Chalice Press, 4th ed., 2001) and *Overhearing the Gospel* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002) and Walter Bruegge-mann, *Finally Comes the Poet* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989).

68. On the nature and influence of "classical texts," see David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981; Herder & Herder reprint edition, 1998) 115ff.

69. *The Active Society*, 623-626.

70. Italo Calvino, *Mount Palomar*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace/ Harvest, 1985), 126.

71. *The Active Society*, 241,157-168,14,32,198-199,32-34.

72. *Ibid.*, 550-551,602-607.

73. Isaiah 46:8-10, abridged.

74. Eliot, "Little Gidding," *Four Quartets*, 59.

Chapter 11

The Eagle and the Worm: *The Active Society* from a Community Organizer's Perspective

Mike Miller

It would be only a slight exaggeration to say that Amitai Etzioni burst onto the University of California campus in the early 1960s. I was then a graduate student in sociology and at the center of the activity of the burgeoning student movement at Berkeley. The Cold War was still on. The Bay of Pigs was still fresh in every-one's mind. The peace movement was divided between those who thought the fault lay with the United States and those who placed blame more or less equally on both sides. In one camp, there was an effort to ignore the role of the Russians, so that people interested only in U.S. responsibilities could participate in the same movement as those who thought the Russians relatively blameless. Others argued that if the peace movement didn't clearly identify with the West, or at least even-handedly blame both camps, it would never convince a majority of Americans of its point of view. In those days, Berkeley had most varieties of radicals: pro-Com-munists (nobody was yet a declared member of the Communist Party), Trotsky-ists, Schachtmanites ("third camp" socialists), anarchists, Spartacists (for whom Rosa Luxemburg was the key Marxist theorist and heroine), Utopian socialists, to say nothing of those I'm probably forgetting. While active in domestic issues, and taking a stand on specific issues in the international arena (A-bomb, H-bomb, anti-Apartheid, opposition to Russian intervention in the Hungarian Revolution,

support for the Polish dissident student movement), I shied away from any continuing participation in the peace movement.

Enter Etzioni. He advocated what was called "the gradualist way to peace." I don't remember the details of Etzioni's program or strategy. But I vividly remember the "ah ha" experience I had at the time. Here was a practical way to do something that might contribute to a lessening of the likelihood of an atomic disaster. Etzioni's enthusiasm and energy were infectious. Students found Etzioni engaging. One undergraduate friend of mine remembers her experience: "he was a terrific professor whose classes were lively, interactive and provocative. He was admired and talked about on the campus." It didn't take long for a group to be formed on the campus and activity to commence.

Etzioni was young enough to almost be one of us, but old and knowledgeable enough for us to give what he had to say serious attention. He also had directness, bluntness, and perhaps at times an arrogance, that could be both engaging and off-putting. In his case, I think this was part of his heritage as an Israeli who had grown up at a time when the very existence of the State of Israel was threatened. Israel was a highly politicized country, as it had to be. Even twenty-plus years later when I visited there, that energy around politics was still present. There was faith that government institutions could solve problems, and that by their participation people could shape what those solutions would be. People loved to debate ideas, and took those debates very seriously because they would clarify action that could, and often did, follow. I think that Etzioni mistakenly transferred that view of what government could be to the United States. That led to difficulties to be discussed later in this essay.

The Problem Etzioni Addresses

The development of modern technology in all its aspects means that societies will be controlled. The question is, toward what ends? The choice is stark: between the objectification and passivity of most people, reduced to being consumers with mythical choices between products and services that are different only in marginal ways, and "the uninhibited, authentic, educated expression of an unbounded membership" in the collectivity.[2]

Etzioni was not alone in these dire warnings that were a continuing part of the sociological criticism of the 1950s and 1960s, but he was unique in having a vision of an alternative and a strategy for getting there. His energy led later to the development of the Communitarian Movement, now an important voice against American rugged individualism and against the polarized debates between interest and identity groups now characteristic of much of our politics.

Agency and Action

Etzioni sees humans as capable of shaping their environment, with nothing inherently unresponsive to human action. He opened the door to the careful study of what civil society organizers and leaders actually do that makes it possible for them to move large numbers of people into collective action, to sustain their participation in that action in the face of setbacks, to stand against a consumerist culture, to transform themselves from a posture of victimhood and defeatism to one of agency and participation. Etzioni wrote, "*To be active is to be in charge*; to be passive is to be under control, be it of natural processes, of social waves and streams or—of active others…(M)en (have the ability) by changing their social combinations, to change themselves, to be the creator."[3] The alternative is bleak: advances in "social engineering" raise the possibility of an increasing passivity, acquiescence, being acted upon without reacting—"man's reduction to a non-conscious, a-normative, passive object." [4]

It would pay here to take a look at Organizing 1-A, and take a worm's eye view of how change comes about.[5] Imagine a dangerous intersection in a low-income neighborhood. Cars crash there; children and elderly people have been hit trying to cross the street. Especially after people have been injured in accidents, calls are made to "the city" to try to get a traffic control device installed. Maybe a city department is called or maybe an elected politician. Whoever it is, the response has been inaction. People living near the intersection no longer try to bring about change; instead, they claim added evidence for the proposition that "you can't fight city hall." This withdrawal is often mistaken for apathy. But it is not for lack of interest or concern that people withdraw. Rather, it is because of the painful rejection of what appears to them as a legitimate request for responsiveness from institutions that are—so they were told in school and so they are told every election season by candidates for office and by the news media—supposed to be responsive to them.

Enter a community organizer. In not too much time, a good organizer will turn this situation into a request for a meeting with the traffic engineer responsible for the intersection. There will be a date established by which time the residents want a reply. The engineer will either agree to meet, say he won't or ignore the request. With local people, the organizer outlines these possibilities. In case a meeting is held, what has to be done to prepare for it? What stories will people living near the intersection tell to make it possible for the civil servant to stand in their shoes? What proposals will be made to him? What research has been done to generate these proposals? And what if he refuses to meet or doesn't respond at all? What are the next steps that might be taken? How do we evaluate his response or lack thereof? What, in the light of the secular values of democratic citizenship and our religious traditions regarding the dignity and worth of every human person, is

the meaning of what we are doing? As we engage in action, what are we learning about how "the system" works? When will we meet again to decide our next step? And a big question: if we succeed here by the use of our "people power," what concerns might we next address with it?

In individual, informal small groups and more formal meetings and workshops, organizers ask questions like these. Underlying all of the questions is a commitment to move people into civic engagement, away from an overwhelmingly private life. (Etzioni properly notes that the ancient Greeks defined an "idiot" as one whose life was totally private.[6])

A growing number of mostly youthful Americans are joining the ranks of a body of professional community organizers who work in the tradition of Saul Alinsky. Their work is art, craft and profession. It has come a long way from the seat-of-the-pants operations that characterized the labor organizers of the 1930s, though it stands in that tradition. It can be understood to take place in this framework:

- careful, empathic listening to people to learn what they care about;
- challenging people to act on those concerns, the process often called "agitating";
- thinking through with people what can be done;
- training people in the skills required to pursue their values and interests.

And the whole framework is prompted by the question: do you want to build a "people power" organization that will make others who now ignore you pay attention?

In Mississippi in the early-to-mid 1960s, young people acted along these lines to engage the poorest and most excluded of American citizens. Denied the right to vote, segregated in every aspects of social life, living at the economic margins, large numbers of black citizens of the Mississippi Delta were moved from fear, withdrawal and public subservience to non-violent participation in a great social movement.

Invited and Uninvited Organizers

Organizers are either invited into communities by some known and respected group who "credential" them among the people targeted for organizing or come uninvited. Both approaches were present in Mississippi, where a relative handful of African-American organizers on the staff of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) earned the trust of local people. An uninvited organizer in the town of Greenwood slept in his car for a month until a courageous local women who owned her own farm put him up at her place. The times were dramatic and uncertain. In Greenwood, the first organizer was understood as a "freedom rider"

("freedom riders" sat in the front seats of interstate buses to challenge the legal requirement that they sit in the back), even though he was a community organizer and voter registration worker. Over time, he won trust with his persistence and a refusal to be driven away by the local police and sheriff and his respect for local people. The issues in Greenwood were clear. Blacktop streets ended at the edge of the ghetto, to be replaced by dirt roads; concrete sidewalks became muddy paths; segregated schools closed during cotton picking time so that cheap child labor would be available to plantation owners; jobs were few and far between; officers of the law and white private citizens could harass and beat black people with impunity. The typical plantation worker earned $3.00-$5.00 a day. Women who did domestic work earned about the same. Underlying all the issues, SNCC workers argued, was "the right to be a first class citizen, to register to vote."

These young organizers connected the day-to-day problems of life to political disenfranchisement. In counties where 80% of the residents were black, less than 5% were typically registered to vote, and in some cases, a mere handful. A voter registration test, administered in such a way as to exclude almost all applicants, made sure the percentage remained low. Agitating a local person to go down to the county court house (the only place you could register) to apply for and take the test meant asking that person to risk losing his or her job, or to be beaten or to have her or his house firebombed or, in some cases, to face death. By their presence, by the risks they themselves took when they placed their bodies on the line, young blacks persuaded men and women old enough to be their parents or grandparents to go to the courthouse. As "the movement" unfolded, these organizers trained local leaders to convene, prepare agendas for and chair meetings, to speak in public, to discuss and reach consensus (or compromise agreements) on tactics, to deal with reporters when print and electronic media started showing up from the North, and to negotiate with representatives of the Justice Department as the walls of segregation and discrimination started to crumble.

Today, in all major, and most minor, metropolitan areas, there are community organizers working in situations that are less dramatic and less violent, but every bit as demanding. In the 1960s, hope for nonviolent change was widespread; now, it is in scarce supply. A history of setbacks and defeats accompanies any stories of success. The task of moving people from withdrawal to participation is far more difficult than it was forty years ago.

Social Science Theory and the Role of the Intellectuals

Etzioni elaborates a theory of the active society. Obviously, it is largely meant for social scientists. As part of his argument, he outlines an important role for intellectuals. If they are convinced, they can become change agents. As agents

of change, they can speak truth to power. A strong appeal to intellectuals is made early in the book: "The active society would be closer than modern society to the city-state in the intensity and breadth of its political life. In the active society, as compared to a modern one, a higher ratio of assets would be invested in political action, and intellectual reflection would have a higher, more public status. The status of political and intellectual activity combined would approximate the status of economic processes in modern society."[7]

To whom will intellectuals address their ideas? Etzioni identifies their audience as an educated and committed minority who lead the members of societal units. It is worth quoting at length his view of the precursor of his societal guidance theory. "The forerunner of a societal guidance inter-disciplinary theory... may well be found in a major line of development in organizational analysis."[8] For a "typical statement," capable of epitomizing this "line of development," Etzioni turns to Philip Selznick—one of Etzioni's supporters at Berkeley and also one of my highly respected professors there:

> ...the leader is an agent of institutionalization, offering a guiding hand to a process that would otherwise occur more haphazardly, more readily subject to accidents of circumstances and history. This is not to say that the leader is free to do as he wishes, to mold the organization according to his heart's desire, restrained only by his imagination and the strength of his will.[9]

Etzioni continues, "The role of leadership in society is, under most historical situations, much more limited than that of leadership in many corporations. The form may also be quite different, with control centers—such as The White House staff or planning agencies—taking over large segments of the functions fulfilled in organizations by leading personalities. In general, however, there is much promise in the application of the sociology of organizations to the study of society;...postmodern society is becoming more and more like a very complex organization."[10]

Etzioni's strategy is to persuade intellectuals to address the leaders of society in order to convince them that their decisions should seek to realize the active society. In assessing the persuasive power of an idea, most intellectuals think first and foremost, if not solely, of its merit and the skill with which it is presented; self-interest is, at best, an afterthought on their list of criteria that make an argument convincing. Organizers look at things differently: politicians are thinking ahead to the next election, corporate executives to the next quarterly report and to their own salary and benefits review and package, bureaucrats to the next appropriation hearings and to any effects on the status of their agency. There are statesmen among them who look at the long-range picture and who rise above immediate self-interest; and on occasion, especially when the institution is in crisis, the statesmen prevail. But not usually. In his appeal, Etzioni is part of an old and ongoing tradition of intellectuals addressing those who are in positions of authority and power. And that tradition always stands in need of a warning: the

only thing worse than powerlessness is the illusion of power, and intellectuals are easily seduced by the illusion.

Community

We can see Etzioni's strategy applied in a recent piece of writing. "In Communitarian Update #57, we asked: 'The U.S. Justice Department has started to use anti-terror laws to fight garden-variety crime including money laundering, pedophilia, and drug smuggling. Civil libertarians argue that law enforcement officials now have an enormous amount of special powers that were granted to them to fight terrorists, in the wake of 9/11, because of the special threats they pose. Others hold that these new tools would serve the nation well if also used with drug lords, pedophiles and other criminals. Thus, if in the course of an anti-terror investigation TSA officers in an airport uncover other incriminating evidence, say searching for a bomb but finding drugs, should the officers be required to look the other way?'"[11] Communitarians are asked to consider what the U.S. Justice Department should do, in the hope that their reflections will affect power.

In a somewhat different form, that approach is prefigured in *The Active Society.* There, Etzioni presents a specific and carefully delineated understanding of the idea of community, and particularly of political community—the community of greatest interest to him because it is the necessary counterweight to the market and to economic institutions generally. "Community building" consists in the movement away from "tribal systems," in favor of a system in which the whole is stronger than its parts (or "units'). Etzioni writes, "in a community, the supra-unit relations which bind the units (of society) and regulate their relations to each other are more powerful than the intra- or inter-unit bonds." And a political community is characterized by three sorts of "autarkic integrative processes," coercive power sufficient to "countervail the coercive power of any member unit or coalition of units," a decision-making center able to "affect significantly" the distribution of "assets" within the community, and one that is also the "dominant focus of political loyalty" for the great majority of active citizens. "A political community is, thus, a state, an administrative-economic unit, and a focal point of loyalty."[12]

A community, Etzioni observes, does not require a "general sharing of values." In fact, "significant differences in religious and other 'ultimate' values and identifications" exist in societies that are otherwise "highly integrated." Such diversity is consistent with "community-level integration" so long as these "foci of identification" are either apolitical or are compatible with the dominant political institutions. And even commitment to sub-communities or collectivities is not disruptive so long as loyalty to the community as a whole is strong enough to prevail in any case of conflict. For Etzioni, community is the integrative super-

structure under which sub-units—religious institutions, unions, political parties, bowling leagues, families, neighbors, ethnic groups and informal gatherings—are joined together.

In this view, the political institutions essential to the functioning of the national community are those that must manage the integration process: for example, the "administrative-economic unit" of the political community needs the ability to "affect the allocation of assets," among other reasons, in order to "focus the attention of the publics and interest groups on the community rather than on the sub- or supra-units."[13] It is to those institutions that Etzioni wanted his band of intellectuals to speak. Implicit in his approach is the conviction that most of the leaders in these institutions can become, if they are not already, the statesmen who rise above particular interests in the name of the whole.

With the benefit of thirty-five years of hindsight since the publication of *The Active Society*, it appears that there is little likelihood of this kind of statecraft without the pressure generated by organizing "from below." At the conclusion of his message on civil rights legislation, Lyndon Johnson could tell the U.S. Congress that "we shall overcome" only because a powerful civil rights movement was in the streets (and because, in the world arena, the Soviets were using scenes of peacefully-demonstrating southern blacks washed away by police fire hoses to serve their propaganda aims). Similarly, it now appears that Johnson—in another statesman's act—genuinely was seeking peace in Vietnam before the end of his presidency, but there too, pushed by the peace movement's demonstrations in the United States and the determination of his Vietnamese antagonists.

The Worm's View of Community

From the worm's eye view, one develops a different understanding of community. Out of my work as an organizer came this definition of community: "a group of people, sharing a common bond of tradition or belief, who support and challenge each other to act powerfully, both individually and collectively, to affirm, defend and advance their values and self-interests." Community organizers distinguish "self-interest," concern for oneself in relation to others, from "selfishness," concern for oneself to the exclusion of others, and from "selflessness," concern for others to the exclusion of oneself. The community organizer who started with the stop sign at the dangerous intersection is likely to be interested in building a "people power" organization that harnesses a variety of communities that make up a city or metropolitan area, so that together they can challenge and hold accountable to their values and interests the dominant structures that otherwise adequately serve a very few of the citizenry, and even fewer of the non-citizen residents.

If community means powerful action in defense of values and interests, then among other things, "community building" means building organization. The community organizer starts with the powerless and the relatively powerless, those who also suffer from discrimination, economic exploitation and exclusion from real political power. In this view, the integrative community that Etzioni seeks is built from below, not by elites. The bridge that extends narrow self-interests to broader ones, and that ultimately becomes an enlightened self-interest that stands for the whole and is built by carefully fostering relationships among the powerless and nearly powerless. Initially, these people come together to use each other's power to realize their own particular interests, as well as common interests that are otherwise unattainable because of the ability of the powerful to divide and disempower those who might hold them accountable.

People learned the lesson of accountability when they got the traffic engineer to put a stop sign at the dangerous intersection. "If we can do that with thirty people," the organizer asks, "what could we do with 300?" Later, when the numbers are believable, the numbers they increase: with 3,000? With 30,000? With 3,000,000? With 30,000,000?

Indeed, across the country, community organizations now routinely get 3,000 people to participate in actions on issues and to reach out to tens of thousands in election get-out-the-vote efforts. Looking beyond today, thirty million diverse, organized, confident and active people could shape the policies of the country. They could define issues that elect a president or a majority of members of Congress. They could boycott a corporation that failed to recognize that neighborhoods, workers, consumers, local institutions such as churches and local governments are stakeholders in their business just as much as stockholders are. And they could invent new institutions that better express democratic values, and are better able to build a nation that, in Etzioni's words, is the "uninhibited, authentic, educated expression of an unbounded membership" in the collectivity.

From the worm's point of view, community is built piece-by-piece in civil society—in churches, mosques, synagogues and temples; in labor union locals; in athletic, social, fraternal, sororal and other "nonpolitical" groups; in senior citizen, homeowner, block club, tenant, small business and other interest groups; in associations of people of color, women, youth and other "identity groups." If we want to rebuild community in the United States; if we want to restore the face-to-face give and take that is necessary to anything like the town hall ideal of democracy; if we want to overcome the media hype-bite message that purports to be political debate—if anything can overcome the forces that Etzioni so properly warns us against, it must be founded on a strong civil society.

Building a strong civil society is simple but not easy. Our voluntary associations, the core of anything that can be called civil society, are themselves in disarray. In the typical union local, the idea of members being each other's brothers and sisters has been replaced by the idea that the union is a combination law

firm, insurance company and social service agency. Indeed, union leaders think of themselves as people who provide services for their members and speak on their behalf, although they go on to wonder why union members speak of the union as a third party ("what's the union going to do about x?") separate from themselves. In the typical Roman Catholic or mainline Protestant church, the pastor is a counselor and lecturer: the idea of the pastor as a builder of a vibrant voluntary association is almost non-existent. In neighborhoods, a proliferation of "community-based nonprofits," dependent on government, foundation and corporation funding, with self-perpetuating boards of directors, an executive director and a paid professional staff, have pushed aside older voluntary associations. At the national level, the same kind of organization exists, though here it is direct-mail or Internet driven. "Members" are people who respond from their homes to inquiries regarding their interests and who send money to people in distant headquarters, who lobby or otherwise act for them. The experience of engaging in deliberation, compromise and consensus building, along with all the other arts of democratic citizenship is growing more rare, if not on the way to being lost.[14] Whether, and to what extent, real community can be built from Internet-assembled lists of like-minded people is now being explored by such groups as MoveOn. These explorations are very important because they may turn Internet technology into something that can foster community rather than further undermine it.

If we build community piece-by-piece from the bottom up, we can imagine delegates or representatives from each of these individual communities—and remember that I'm using "community" in a very specific way—coming together and defining a larger community. For example, a continuing body of delegates from fifty civil society "communities" (organizations) could engage in a process in which the diversity of interests of these fifty groups could be turned into a lowest significant common denominator for civic action and a space where people begin to cherish and celebrate their unity in diversity. Imagine 50 groups averaging 150 participating members, sending an average of five delegates each to a larger continuing body that seeks to defend and advance the common and particular interests of the fifty organizations, their members and their wider constituencies.

Without vibrant, participatory democratic bodies underneath the 250 delegates, there would be a strong tendency for them to form interests with one another and separate from the interests of those in whose name they spoke. Robert Michels called it the "iron law of oligarchy."[15] But a tendency is very different from an iron law.[16] We can imagine a level of organizational vitality and mechanisms of accountability to keep the 250 deeply connected to the 7,500 members of the fifty constituent organizations. Not only can we imagine it: we can point to union locals of the 1930s and find precisely the sort of organizational life described here.[17]

Communities (organizations) of this type share these characteristics, at varying degrees and at different times in the annual cycle of their organizational lives:

In the world at large, they engage in:
- action (negotiations, confrontations, boycotts, strikes, electoral activity, etc.) to hold dominant business, government and other institutions accountable to the interests and values of their members—values broadly expressed in the democratic tradition and the moral teachings of the world's great religions;
- self-help and mutual aid activities in which members assist one another by pooling their time, talents and dollars; and
- direct service and sometimes advocacy, in which members help others or speak on their behalf.

In their internal lives, these communities engage in:
- reflection, in which deeply held values are connected to day-to-day action in the world—making the former more alive, and the latter more meaningful;
- social activities in which people enjoy each other's company in picnics, dances, dinners, and other kinds of activities where fun is the major "agenda;"
- celebration, in which new heroes are created in the community and a continuing story is written as the body creates a common history, born of its struggle to realize values in a sometimes hostile world; and
- education, in which more abstract concepts are made concrete by the illustrative material provided by the group's action in the world. An active citizen understands "democracy" in a way different from one who simply votes—even if regularly. Someone active in an organization working to change institutions understands "power structure" in a way very different from a passive observer.

Too often, organizers treat "organizing" and "service and advocacy" as opposed to one another. If we think of organizing as the process that builds powerful communities, we can imagine circumstances in which services and/or advocacy are used—sparingly to be sure—because there may be people who need the assistance of others. (The danger, of course, is the risk of making dependency a more or less permanent condition for beneficiaries, the antithesis of organizing, which shifts people from passivity to activity on their own behalf.)

Building such a group means a continuous process of leadership and potential leadership identification, recruitment and training. Like an amoeba, the organization grows by cells splitting and creating new cells. In some churches, the core member unit is a twelve to fifteen family "house church" or "auxiliary," which serves as the "family group" within the larger structure. New members' appetites for leadership are encouraged, and as they grow, these members are offered the

opportunity to start their own base group. It is not fanciful to imagine multi-thousand member organizations built in this way. In fact, in Brazil, elements of this way of building are the roots of the 300,000 member Movement of the Landless, one of the most significant civil society action organizations in the world.

What Then for the Intellectuals?

A growing number of faculty members at universities, colleges and seminaries around the country are trying to look at the world from the perspective of the worm: how do things look from the bottom up? In asking this question, they are seeking to align themselves with the community organizing movement. This has led to many positive things. Students are serving internships in community organizing projects, writing term papers about the experience and receiving credit for both the writing and the time spent with the organization. Faculty members with specialized knowledge are offering expert testimony at public hearings before administrative and legislative bodies. The testimony is based on the agenda of community organization; it often counteracts the bought testimony of intellectuals who sell their souls for the mighty dollar. Other faculty members are doing studies to offset claims made by corporate America—for example, the contention that an increase in the minimum wage, or establishing a living wage, will undermine the health of the economy. Sociologists and others are writing more and more books on the phenomenon of community organizing and what it means for American democracy. Increasingly, seminaries are questioning current clergy training programs which make counseling the core activity of the pastor's relationship to the flock, and asking whether it is more important for the pastor to be a community builder and whether one can be a community builder without addressing issues of social and economic justice.

The worm and the eagle can coexist and, in fact, can strengthen each other. From the eagle's perch, broad visions can easily turn into abstract programs and goals unrelated to the political constituencies necessary to reach them. This results in a "speak truth to power" approach to politics. Hundreds of public interest groups come up with terrific ideas to improve the character of American democracy, but lack any connection to the base of civil society where these ideas should be discussed and, if supported, meaningfully be struggled for. On the other hand, from the worm's hole, there is a tendency toward parochialism, an insistence that "we'll take care of ours, and the heck with everyone else."

The worm's view requires that we look carefully at the local terrain, at local people, local interests and local cultures—in a phrase, that we "begin where people are, in the world the way it is." The eagle's view pushes the worm to consider

the bigger picture and to recognize that "No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main."

But a caveat is in order. Those who occupy the eagle's perch tend to think that they can tell the worms what to do and when to do it. In my experience as a community organizer, as well as that of others in the field, those who claim to have the best interests of the people at heart typically caution against direct action in the streets. From the worm's perspective, democracy is a messy, untidy, give-and-take process that involves conflict, negotiation, compromise, settlements that reflect the relations of power at a given time, and (when people-power organizations don't get co-opted) a repeat of the process, only with higher stakes, as politics "from below" gains more self-confidence, competence and numbers—in a word, power. For those who do their political business in city halls, state capitols and the halls of Congress—and who are often on a first-name, "let's talk about it over dinner or a drink" basis with those they lobby, this disruptive action by large numbers of people is a threat to both their status as advocates for "the people" and as lobbyists who have a distinctive, "inside the Beltway" understanding of how change comes about.

Would that the academy had more intellectuals like Etzioni. While I hope to have convinced the reader that his strategy is flawed, that shouldn't detract from the intelligence of his ideas, the moral vision to which he is committed or the energy he has devoted to its realization. Etzioni's warnings regarding the direction of modern society stand the test of time well: he was right on target. His strategy, however, is like walking on one leg: speaking truth to power is more effective when supported by power. Etzioni needs to connect with the worms.

Notes

1. Amitai Etzioni, *The Hard Way to Peace*, New York: Collier, 1962 and *Winning Without War*, Garden City: Doubleday, 1964.

2. Amitai Etzioni, *The Active Society: A Theory of Societal and Political Processes*, New York/London: Free Press, 1968, 13.

3. *The Active Society*, 4. Emphasis in the original.

4. *The Active Society*, 6.

5. Saul Alinsky's *Reveille for Radicals*, New York: Vintage, 1989, and *Rules for Radicals*, New York: Vintage, 1972, are the seminal works for understanding grassroots organizing in the United States.

6. *The Active Society*, 7.

7. *The Active Society*, 7.

8. *The Active Society*, 83.

9. Phillip Selznick, *Leadership in Administration: A Sociological Interpretation*, New York: Harper & Row, 1957, 27.

10. *The Active Society*, 83.

11. "Feedback from Communitarian Update #57," October 21, 2003 (www.gwu.edu/~ccps/communitarian_feedback_n57.html).

12. *The Active Society*, 550-551,554.

13. *The Active Society*, 554-555.

14. Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003.

15. Robert Michels, *Political Parties*, New York: Free Press, 1966.

16. For an early statement of this position, see Alvin W. Gouldner, *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy*, Glencoe: Free Press, 1954.

17. For a discussion of both the democratic character of some CIO unions and of Michels' "iron law of oligarchy, see Judith Stepan-Norris and Maurice Zeitlin, *Left Out: Reds and America's Industrial Unions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Chapter 12

Searching for Active Citizenship

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When Amitai Etzioni wrote *The Active Society* 35 years ago, his treatise on alienation and inauthenticity in society must have seemed a bit out of step with much of the American populace.[1] As we often (admittedly nostalgically) recall, the period of the mid-1960s when the work was composed, was an era of fervent political engagement on issues of civil rights, the war in Vietnam, poverty. However mixed the results, and whatever side of the various issues one took, this was a moment in the United States when the connection between the political process and the everyday lives of American citizens was readily apparent. The "active ones" to whom Etzioni dedicated his book were more plentiful and likely more hopeful about the possibilities of creating fundamental changes in American society than any generation before or since. In this milieu, Etzioni's highly technical analysis was not going to enjoy the popular success of such provocative works as Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* or Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Yet, Etzioni's rich examination in *The Active Society* of the diminishment of politics in what he termed "post-modern" society has proven to be a prescient warning of life in these United States.

So common is the refrain (if not the precise language) decrying the apathy and disengagement of the American people, so common is the description of America as an inactive society, that one is hard pressed to discover whether there are many "active ones" left in this country. To be sure, the wars first in Afghani-