

5-2011

Emerson and the Communitarian and Classical Liberal Viewpoints

Chloe Kessinger
Pacific University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://commons.pacificu.edu/cashu>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kessinger, Chloe, "Emerson and the Communitarian and Classical Liberal Viewpoints" (2011). *Humanities Capstone Projects*. Paper 4.

This Capstone Project is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Arts and Sciences at CommonKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in Humanities Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of CommonKnowledge. For more information, please contact CommonKnowledge@pacificu.edu.

Emerson and the Communitarian and Classical Liberal Viewpoints

Abstract

Ralph Waldo Emerson valued individuality and expressed that view strongly in his essay "Self-Reliance". More recently there have been movements in political philosophy that focus upon the individual in terms not just of society but in government. The Classical Liberals view the individual as something almost sacred, and argue for minimal government so that individuals maybe more free within society. Under the Communitarian viewpoint people are valued for their individual talents and connected with one another through communities in ways that bring out their strongest personal traits. Communitarians feel that to push for minimal government will only act to further separate and alienate individuals from society and their communities. Emerson's essay "Self-Reliance" suits the Classical Liberal view almost to a tee, but there is a subtle yet powerful undercurrent in Emerson's writing that speaks to the Communitarian viewpoint. Though on the surface his view of the individual may seem to coincided with that of the Classical Liberals (and indeed in many ways it does) his persistent opinion of the individual as being creative and close to nature opens up the gates and lets the Communitarian views take hold.

Document Type

Capstone Project

Degree Name

Bachelor of Arts

Department

Philosophy

First Advisor

Ramona Ilea

Subject Categories

Arts and Humanities

Rights

[Terms of use for work posted in CommonKnowledge.](#)

Emerson and the Communitarian and Classical Liberal Viewpoints

Chloe Kessinger
Department of Philosophy
Senior Thesis
Faculty Advisor Ramona Ilea
Pacific University
May 10th, 2011

Abstract

Ralph Waldo Emerson valued individuality and expressed that view strongly in his essay “Self-Reliance”. More recently there have been movements in political philosophy that focus upon the individual in terms not just of society but in government. The Classical Liberals view the individual as something almost sacred, and argue for minimal government so that individuals maybe more free within society. Under the Communitarian viewpoint people are valued for their individual talents and connected with one another through communities in ways that bring out their strongest personal traits. Communitarians feel that to push for minimal government will only act to further separate and alienate individuals from society and their communities. Emerson’s essay “Self-Reliance” suits the Classical Liberal view almost to a tee, but there is a subtle yet powerful undercurrent in Emerson’s writing that speaks to the Communitarian viewpoint. Though on the surface his view of the individual may seem to coincided with that of the Classical Liberals (and indeed in many ways it does) his persistent opinion of the individual as being creative and close to nature opens up the gates and lets the Communitarian views take hold.

Table of Contents

Section:	Page:
Introduction	3
Nozick and Emerson	5
Etzioni and Emerson	19
Emerson's Individual	34
Bibliography	39

Introduction

Moreover, as I see it, a wholesome relationship between community and member-individuals is based on a creative tension and a continuous search for balance, not domination of one by the other. (Etzioni, 20)

Ralph Waldo Emerson was a Transcendentalist. He valued individuality and expressed that view strongly in his essay “Self-Reliance”. More recently there have been movements in political philosophy that focus upon the individual in terms not just of society but in government. The Classical Liberals view the individual as something almost sacred, and argue for minimal government so that individuals may be freer within society. The Communitarians see individuals and community as interdependent with one another, and consequently inseparable. They feel that to push for minimal government will only act to further separate and alienate individuals from society and their communities. Under the Communitarian viewpoint people are valued for their individual talents and connected with one another through communities in ways that bring out their strongest personal traits. Emerson’s essay “Self-Reliance” suits the Classical Liberal view almost to a tee, but there is a subtle yet powerful undercurrent in Emerson’s writing that speaks to the Communitarian viewpoint. Though on the surface his view of the individual may seem to coincide with that of the Classical Liberals (and indeed in many ways it does) his persistent opinion of the individual as being creative and close to nature opens up the gates and lets the Communitarian views take a stronger hold of his writings. This especially can be seen in regards to materialism.

In the following sections I will first identify the similarities between Emerson’s “Self-Reliance” and Robert Nozick’s *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. Second I will compare

Emerson's essay to Amitai Etzioni's book *An Immodest Agenda: Rebuilding America Before the Twenty-First Century*. Through these two comparisons I will show that Emerson's view of the self-reliant individual can be bent to fit both the Classical Liberal and Communitarian viewpoints. However in the last section of this paper I will re-examine some of the similarities between Emerson and Nozick, and show how when looking closer at the details of Emerson's words and overall view of the individual, the Communitarian's idea of the individual within society speaks louder than that of the Classical Liberal when looking through the lens of Emerson's essay "Self-Reliance".

Nozick and Emerson

Robert Nozick is a well-known philosopher within the Classical Liberal viewpoint. In his book *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* Nozick argues for a version of the Classical Liberal ideal society: a society in which the influence of state is minimal, individuals have their personal rights protected, and instead of one large national community there are smaller communities, all governing their own people. Through Nozick's views on equality, self-esteem, and his idea of utopia it can be argued that Nozick's philosophy can be closely tied to Emerson's essay "Self-Reliance".

The greatest similarity between Nozick and Emerson is their value of the individual. "Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind" (Emerson, 261). Emerson places the individual mind above that of the collective society. Society to Emerson is a poison, which infects the individual and limits their ability to be self-reliant: "Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members... The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs" (Emerson, 261). Emerson seems to be arguing that society leaves no room for individuality because it requires that people conform to its rules and regulations.

Emerson would argue that nonconformity is not valued in society, but that it is something valuable to society. "Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but explore if it be goodness" (Emerson, 261). In today's corporatized and industrialized times this aim to find what is good, and what is not, and to go against those things that

society may call good but in the end are personally judged to be bad can be very difficult. In the context of a corporation like McDonalds which makes sure all of its food tastes the same from restaurant to restaurant and tries to recruit as many people as it can as customers, Emerson would argue the customers should not just jump in blindly, but think about where the food comes from, how it is made, and how the McDonalds Corporation itself is affecting other businesses and people.

Nonconformity is valuable to society as a whole because it is through nonconformity that businesses like McDonalds are enabled to come into being. Without the first entrepreneurs like Henry Ford who created the first assembly line that skyrocketed the number of cars that could be built in one day, McDonalds would not have developed into the monopoly it now is because the original McDonalds patterned its cooking methods after the innovation of the assembly line, cooking more burgers faster and bringing in more profits. Secondly to producing more per minute the assembly line also allows business owners to pay their workers less because instead of needing to know how to build an entire car, or cook an entire menu people could now be trained to do just one simple task and were easily replaceable. This may not be good for the individual workers, but is good for the corporation and to some extent the overall economy. For something new to be discovered or invented people must branch out past the norm of what is already accepted by society, and that is exactly what Henry Ford did.

There are those that would argue that the assembly line is not valuable to society because of all of its negative effects, but the fact remains that with the assembly line came great profits to many business owners, and the possibility for more jobs even if those jobs were all minimum wage. Americans today greatly benefit from the products

that come off of an assembly line, from our prepackaged food to our computers and cars, there are few things left in America that have not been affected by Henry Ford's idea for mass production.

One could refute my interpretation of Emerson's opinion by arguing that the invention of the assembly line was nonconformist at the time, but that society was not against it but for it because of the great financial benefits it provided. And that may be true. However, looking further back in history there is Galileo who claimed against all other respected scientists and philosophers at the time that the Sun was in the center of the solar system, not the Earth. It is well understood that society in Galileo's time was hostile to such an idea, but today the Sun being the center of our solar system is accepted world wide and with being accepted has opened up the field of astronomy for many other people to discover more about our universe as a whole. The end point being that both Galileo and Henry Ford did not stick to the norms of their society at the time of their inventions, they worked to create new ideas and systems that would, accepted at the time or not, bring some sort of benefit to society.

What Emerson doesn't like is the way the nonconformist ideas get assimilated and turned into something society demands to be followed and adhered to. "Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater" (Emerson, 261). Going back to Henry Ford for example, today McDonalds is not just in the United States but also all over the world, and their food is known to be unhealthy. However coupled with the masses of minimum wage jobs made possible by assembly lines, there are fewer people today who can afford organic, or healthier food in general. Although McDonalds cannot

be pointed to as the only reason for the growing obesity epidemic in the United States, society in most of America does push people to work long hours for little money, leaving less time for people to cook at home or buy healthy food. Some of the result of that is people buy meals from fast food chains like McDonalds. Many people are aware that McDonalds is not the best choice for dinner, yet McDonalds is still serving millions of people a day, because the corporation has grown so powerful and so profitable.

McDonalds has become so incorporated into society that regardless of the negative effects McDonalds food has on the customer's health it is still running strong, pushing out family owned restaurants and replacing a home made meal with a deep fried one. McDonalds is just one example of how an innovative, nonconformist idea, such as the assembly line, can be accepted by society and used with such ferocity that it becomes an almost inescapable part of daily life of every person within a society, ultimately leading to many negative effects that are hard to overcome because the innovation has become too incorporated and powerful within the society.

A slight difference between Nozick and Emerson's view on the individual is that Nozick's philosophy is politically oriented in that it is directed straight toward changing the way democracy works. Emerson's view is not as strongly tied to a want to change the way democracy works. Nozick puts a lot of value on the individual within a society and opens his book with: "Individuals have rights, and there are things no person or group may do to them (without violating their rights)" (Nozick, ix). Nozick places a great amount of value on individual rights versus on self-reliance of the mind. However, in regards to society Nozick and Emerson seem to see the same thing. When arguing for minimal state Nozick says: "Two noteworthy implications are that the state may not use

its coercive apparatus for the purpose of getting some citizens to aid others, or in order to prohibit activities to people for their *own* good or protection” (Nozick, ix). Nozick would argue that people should be free to hold onto their own earnings so that they maybe better able to use their own money for their own wellbeing. He seems to believe that people should not have to pay into a state fund to provide for those who are not working for their own food. Individuals, Nozick would say, have a right to spend their money how they wish to.

If you take this back to the issue of nonconformity Nozick’s opinion gets sticky. Nozick wants people to have the right to earn as much as they wish. This opens the road up to the corporate leaders of monopoly groups. Under Nozick’s ideal government corporate leaders would be left to earn as much as they wish without taxation:

The man who chooses to work longer to gain an income more than sufficient for his basic needs prefers some extra goods or services to the leisure and activities he could perform during the possible non working hours; whereas the man who chooses not to work the extra time prefers the leisure activities to the extra goods or services he could acquire by working more. Given this, if it would be illegitimate for a tax system to seize some of a man’s leisure (forced labor) for the purpose of serving the needy. How can it be legitimate for a tax system to seize some of a man’s goods for that purpose? (Nozick, 170)

Nozick maybe talking about a ‘man’ but is it not ultimately individuals who run corporations? And as individuals Nozick does not seem to want people to have to conform, they should be free to work as they want and to have as much leisure time as they want without having to transfer any of that earned money to anyone else’s hands. Nozick in this opinion is inadvertently pushing the conformity he is against on the general populace through supporting the idea of free markets where the top dog can create a monopoly and drastically limit the consumers’ choices. This ultimately butts

heads with Emerson, because although Emerson wants individuals to be free minded, he does not want them to be in support of conformity, nor does he value money or profits in the same way Nozick does.

However, Emerson would agree with Nozick in his lack of support for donating to organizations that provide for the poor or unemployed, but not exactly for the same reasons:

Then, again, do not tell me, as a good man did to-day, of my obligation to put all poor in good situations. Are they *my* poor? I tell thee, thou foolish philanthropist, that I grudge the dollar, the dime, the cent, I give to such men as do not belong to me and to whom I do not belong. (Emerson, 262)

Emerson did not like the pressure of society to take care of those who were not taking care of themselves. Part of the reason for this is that he viewed society as vicious circle that never got better, but constantly took as much as it gave: “Society never advances. It recedes as fast on one side as it gains on the other” (Emerson, 279). It is arguable that Emerson’s view of society as something that never improves backed his value that people need to be self-reliant. He seemed to feel that people needed to feed themselves, instead of being fed through the forced obligation of other members of that society.

Emerson also saw himself as a part of a particular group of people within society. “There is a class of persons to whom by all spiritual affinity I am bought and sold; for them I will go to prison, if need be...” (Emerson, 262). Emerson does not illustrate who exactly these people are, or why he would go to prison for them but the point is made that it is not a matter of taking care of ‘all man kind’ but instead taking care of ‘your own kind’ that is important. For Emerson it seems it is not that people should never be charitable for one another, but that they should not have to be charitable for every single person society.

For both philosophers the notion of giving money to the poor touches on the notion of equality. For Emerson it is not directly talked about, but merely implied that society pressures its citizens to care for the poor because there is a lack of equality. Nozick being more politically minded points this implication out directly: “In the absence of magic wands, the remaining means toward equality of opportunity is convincing persons each to choose to devote some of their holdings to achieving it” (Nozick, 235). What is left then is what Emerson calls: “. . .miscellaneous popular charities; the education at college of fools; the building of meeting-houses to the vain end to which many now stand; alms to sots; and the thousandfold Relief Societies. . .” (Emerson, 263) which are pressuring and pushing citizens to give up their time and money to help the poor and redistribute equality. Emerson’s tone makes it quite obvious what he thinks of these social organizations--corrupt, tedious and inefficient--they are not helping the public but hindering them, creating collectives and enabling people to be carried along on the backs of others.

Nozick however, does not see the act of giving as something that is selflessly self-sacrificing as Emerson may when he talked above about having “spiritual affinity” with a group of people he would go to prison for. Instead Nozick sees the exchange of acts or goods as something through which the individual always gains something back from what is given. “He chooses to transfer to someone who satisfies a certain condition (for example, who can provide him with a certain good or service in exchange, who can do a certain job, who can pay a certain salary), and he would be equally willing to transfer to anyone else who satisfied that condition” (Nozick, 236). This leads to division of equal opportunity because if a person does not have what another wants they will not be offered

this job or that relationship. For Nozick every exchange is selfish and beneficial to the individual because they are all directly connected to giving and taking.

How this relates to the problem of society pushing citizens to provide for one another on a grand scale basis (donating money to charities, taxes used for government run homeless shelters) for Nozick, is the 'fairness' of the situation. "If it *would* be fairer, can such fairness also justify overriding some people's entitlements in order to acquire the resources to boost those having poorer opportunities into a more equal competitive position?" (Nozick, 236). Nozick claims that for equal opportunity the rights of other individuals must be in some way impeached upon. It may be fairer for someone who owns two homes to give one away to someone who is homeless, but would that not impede upon that homeowner's right to own two homes? There are those who are already rich, and do they not have the right to be rich? Who are we to impose our taxes on the rich in order to provide more opportunities of equality to the poor? What entitlement do the poor have to the money of the rich? There is no way to create more opportunities to the poor without impeding the rights of the rich to their own money.

I would say that Emerson would view the pressure of social organizations on the upper classes to donate their money to government organizations, acts as a blinder to the need people have on being self-reliant, because it creates collective societies that work for the benefit of others who are arguably not working for themselves. Emerson would have people who are self-reliant incorporate themselves into society in a way that would not go against their principles. When speaking of how an individual should act Emerson says: "All men have my blood, and I have all men's. Not for that will I adopt their petulance or folly, even to the extent of being ashamed of it. But your isolation must not

be mechanical, but spiritual, that is, must be elevation” (Emerson, 273). Mechanical isolation would mean a person literally withdrawing from society as much as possible. This is difficult to do short of becoming a hermit in the woods, and inefficient in influencing society to change. If all those who are self-reliant hide from the greater public’s view, the masses will be left with little idea as to how one becomes self-reliant. Self-reliant people instead need to stay visible in society, and not let society bend them into conformity by strictly sticking to their principles even if this means they are often misunderstood.

How does one function as a self-reliant person in a society that values conformity so highly? Emerson gives a concise answer: “Your genuine action will explain itself, and will explain you other genuine actions. Your conformity explains nothing” (Emerson, 266). Through conformity people lose themselves. They lose their ability to be creative through repetitive copycat behavior. But Nozick better defines how they lose themselves when he confronts the concept of conformity in regards to self-esteem.

Conformity itself is a big problem for Nozick because how conformity affects a person’s self-esteem. “Self-esteem is based on *differentiating characteristics*; that’s why it’s *self-esteem*” (Nozick, 243). As a society moves towards making more opportunities of equality, society inevitably creates more ways in which an individual has to conform. Individuals are to have the same pay, same work hours, and same amount of material goods, and so on. Nozick argues that “...*if* the number of dimensions is not unlimited and if great strides are made to eliminate differences, that as the number of differentiating dimensions shrinks, envy will become more severe. For with a small number of differentiating dimensions, many people will find they don’t do well on *any* of them”

(Nozick, 245). When Nozick speaks of 'dimensions' he is talking about dimensions upon which people's self-esteem is based. With the growing need for conformity people are left with fewer things within themselves to feel proud of. Nozick values the individual specifically because the individual is different from others in society. Individualism and nonconformity allows people to find these different dimensions that allow them to have self-esteem. However there is still the loophole in Nozick's ideal government that would lead to monopolies and the build of conformity through consumerism, like McDonalds. This is something that I have not seen Nozick specifically address.

There is one great conflict between Emerson and Nozick that must be mentioned in regards to their views of the individual and society. Emerson and Nozick do not agree on the value of money in regards to the value of the individual. As Emerson sees it, people who are after money "...measure their esteem of each other by what each has, and not by what each is. But a cultivated man becomes ashamed of his property, out of new respect for his nature. Especially he hates what he has, if he see that it is accidental..." (Emerson, 281). For Emerson ultimately ownership is insignificant. Instead people need to hold a value of themselves, of what they can do to sustain themselves outside of the sphere of economics. When talking about those who hate themselves because what they have is accidental Emerson is referring to people who gain their riches through inheritance, or perhaps the lottery (Emerson, 281). There is a sense left to Emerson's philosophy that those who may be both cultivated and rich may be happy in their richness if they worked for it. But at the same time it seems that Emerson is against the issue of having things in excess or by chance people need to work for what they do own.

Emerson seems to think that richness and self-reliance are not necessarily good to combine. “Our dependence on these foreign goods leads us to our slavish respect for numbers” (Emerson, 281). The tendency for people to find more value in the material possession of things seems to be what Emerson is trying to point out. For Emerson it is arguably far more important that people value themselves and their personal immaterial achievements more than their finically enabled material consumption. Or really what makes a ‘man’ is not what he owns, but who he is, and how through his work can create things of substance that may or may not have market value. A person may work for all that they have, but if they are constantly stuck working towards the future and counting their earnings, in Emerson’s opinion they are not living, they are obsessed with market value and their meaning of life gets twisted up in a codependent relationship with their property:

And so the reliance on Property, including the reliance on governments which protect it, is the want of self-reliance. Men have looked away from themselves and at things so long, that they have come to esteem the religious, learned, and civil institutions as guards of property, and they deprecate assaults on these, because they feel them to be assaults on property. (Emerson, 281)

Emerson wants people to detach from the idea of material ownership, and shift back to personal development. It is arguable that a thing like fashion would be irrelevant to him. Fashion would just be the recycling of trends and an addiction to materialism. A person who is fashion conscious to Emerson would be someone who is stuck forever looking towards the future, for the next hot trend, yet another little bit of property to add to their overly large closet.

Nozick on the other hand is quite defensive of people’s right to possession of material goods that they are able to acquire: “Why should we treat the man whose

happiness requires certain material goods differently from the man whose preferences and desires make such goods unnecessary for his happiness?” (Nozick, 170). It is implied that people who work for what they want should not be punished via taxation and held back from gaining what they want. Though this relates to the idea of self-reliance in that Nozick is positing that people are working for what they personally want, it still places a lot of weight on the value of possession of earnings.

Regardless of this difference, Nozick still falls in line with Emerson on the value of individual freedom. When speaking of his own writings on ‘Utopia’ Nozick says: “Utopia is a framework for utopia’s a place where people are at liberty to join together voluntarily to pursue and attempt to realize their own vision of the good life in the ideal community, but where no one can *impose* his own utopian vision upon others” (Nozick, 312). Nozick goes on to admit that tradeoffs will have to be made, because simultaneous agreement is never truly attainable, but his general idea that people should be free to live how they please with other people who wish to live the same way still holds. This arguably falls back into the problems with collectives; would not all these individual communities potentially require strict conformity of its members? Well, yes and no. The community should be made of people who all hold the same goals and morals, thereby creating a collectivity that is not forced, but unanimously created. Moreover Nozick stipulates that people should be free to move from community to community as they wish until they find one that suits them best (312).

Emerson does not address the idea of utopias or creating new communities instead he focuses on power of the individual: “He who knows that power is inborn, that he is weak because he has looked for good out of him and elsewhere, and so perceiving,

throws himself unhesitatingly on his thought, instantly rights himself, stands in the erect position, commands his limbs, works miracles;” (Emerson, 282). Emerson is claiming that one can break out of the cycle of conformity. That individuals can realize the power they have within themselves and start achieving, presumably at any time. But at the same time Emerson is implying that to break from the cycle one must know that following others is a weakness, and that allowing others to determine the course of one’s life is wrong.

But as has been argued above, Emerson is not wholly against communities. When Emerson puts forth his closing lines he says:

A political victory, a rise of rents, the recovery of your sick, or the return of your absent friend, or some other favorable event, raises your spirits, and you think good days are preparing for you. Do not believe it. Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles. (Emerson, 282)

For Emerson society at large does not provide peace to the individual, only constraint.

For Nozick society is not the grand evil, but it is flawed in its operation because of the conformity that it requires. But both have shown that they hold value in the solidarity of smaller groups. Emerson claimed there was a class of people for which he would go to prison for. These people must have been people he felt some sort of solidarity with.

Nozick felt that individuals should be free to work as they chose, have rights to the things they earned, and live collectively in communities built up by people who shared the same wants. Though Emerson does not value material goods and money as much as he may initially seem to, he still shares his disapproval of conformity and the value of the individual person with Nozick. Both philosophers admit the importance of some sort of

social network, be it a new kind of self-governing community, or just a group of people who strongly identify with one another.

Etzioni and Emerson

Amitai Etzioni is not the only Communitarian worth reading, but he is a fair representative of their viewpoints. Communitarians believe that communities are an essential part of a functioning society and government. Etzioni's book *An Immodest Agenda: Rebuilding America Before the Twenty-First Century* outlines a new form of government based upon the incorporation of the community as a key part of a functioning society. Etzioni's views on individualism, community, and society can be closely related to the thoughts Emerson puts forth in his essay "Self-Reliance".

Emerson felt that each person had a specific 'nature' and viewed it as sacred. "No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature" (Emerson, 262). This strikes as a statement that could be argued by a Classical Liberal who may say that the will of an individual is most important above many of the laws enforced by government, but importantly it is a statement that could be argued by Etzioni as well:

People do not relate to one another only as participants in economic transactions or as subjects of a government. They relate as parents and children, as brothers and sisters, and neighbors and friends, as co-workers and members of the same ethnic groups and national community. (Etzioni, 9)

What Etzioni is arguing is that the individual is not just a greedy consumer only focused on the rights of their own properties. Instead, an individual must be seen within the context of the other individuals that surround them. An individual person is a complex entity, built up by many different relationships.

Etzioni points out that an individual cannot be seen as a thing created separate from all others, but a thing that is at least influenced by others. "The nature of these relationships is captured by such terms as affection and mutual respect, sense of duty and

concern, involvement in the community” (Etzioni, 9). When Emerson says: “No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature” (Emerson, 262) he is blatantly stating that no law can be more important to him than that dictated by his own sense of self, or ‘nature’. In a way even the laws that Emerson sets down for himself are in some way created by his interaction with others. By ‘nature’ people are social and it is through communities and social interactions the individual is enabled to develop. “These relationships point to the existence and significance of a third realm between government and market, the realm of community” (Etzioni, 9). The ‘realm of the community’ is something that is currently lacking representation in American government. Government today seems to be restricted to the duality of consumables created for individuals to keep the economy running, with the role of a law creator and enforcer.

Nozick would strongly defend individuals’ rights to private property by way of minimal government, but Emerson and Etzioni both take issue with this deeply held value of private property. When speaking of society Emerson says: “They measure their esteem of each other by what each has, and not by what each is. But a cultivated man becomes ashamed of his property, out of new respect for his nature” (Emerson, 281). Emerson would argue that when a person’s self-value is based on the things they own their self-value has no real foundation. Where is the person within all the things? The problem is that the concept of ‘individual’ has become blurred. By judging a person by what they have, one is defining that individual by the things they own. In this sense an individual can be seen as lazy if they do not own their own property, or as hard working if they do. But these kinds of assumptions take out the reality of availability of jobs, and the existence of inheritance. Were community more present people would be more able to

cope with things like the lack of jobs, but instead people are trained to be entirely self-sufficient. This has caused a great conflict between the way many people are living, and the way they are told they should be living:

...we have experienced a hollowing of America, in which community was whittled down. Greater reliance on government has been accompanied by promotion of a particular brand of individualism best labeled as egotism... (Etzioni, 3)

Through egotism Americans have arguably become more concerned with their ability to own 'things' such as cars or houses. Community involvement has become less important and personal ownership of things has become a priority, pushing people farther and farther into separation from one another and into alienation.

Now one problem with the argument I have just made (that materialism as a way of life has led to the separation of individuals from their community) is that there are societies that are very materialistic but still have tight knit communities like that of rural Japan. In Japanese culture children are raised to have a deep sense of honor in regards to their family. For example, when I was in a Buddhist temple in Sado Japan, in June of 2009, my classmates and I met with a Buddhist Monk about the Lotus Sutra. He pulled from a box left out in the middle of open, unlocked room, just feet from the entrance of the temple, an 800-year-old scroll copy of the Lotus Sutra. He unrolled the scroll and let my fellow classmates and I look at it. In America, such a text would be locked up, possibly kept secure behind glass in a display case. The Sutra that was shown to us that day was culturally priceless, and on the black market worth maybe \$100,000. The reason this sutra was safe, left in a little box in a room anyone could get to, was because in Japan people follow a code of honor so strong that to steal anything would be to shame your

entire family. At the same time however, Japan is well known to be just as much a consumerist culture as any, and technologically competitive with the United States.

How is it that consumerism and tight communities both thrive in Japan and not in the United States? My only answer is that the value of family honor in Japan has blanketed the country for hundreds of years, and unlike America, Japan is not built from a melting-pot of wide ranging cultures and religions. There is diversity in Japan to be sure, but their culture is more cohesive in fundamental family and religious values than that of America, simply because America was built on the backs of immigrants some 250 years ago whereas societies like Japan have been building for thousands of years.

In America the separation of the individual from the community as a result of materialism can be seen vividly in many apartment complexes, and suburban neighborhoods, where people live in their personal homes or apartments and do not talk to or trust their neighbors. Children are routinely taught nationwide to check their Halloween candy because someone could have poisoned it or put razors in it. Instead of knocking on someone's door to ask them to quiet down on a weeknight people call the police or their apartment managers to file noise complaints. But look inside these homes and everyone has copies of the same things, they have the same stereo system, and the same flat screen TV.

Take this back to Emerson: "They measure their esteem of each other by what each has, and not by what each is" (Emerson, 281). There is always seems to be the girl in school who is picked on because her clothes are home made or from Goodwill instead of being from some popular designer label that is advertised as unique and original, but is in fact mass marketed to millions of Americans every year. These people have the newest

iPhone, and many can be found buying their clothes in shopping malls where everything is mass-produced and priced by the label. Abercrombie costs more than Hollister, but their clothes look exactly the same, and the same corporation owns both labels.

Americans can easily be argued to be caught up in a rat race of who can get the newest product, or who can own the hottest fashion, but many refuse to share. They all need to own their own TV, and Abercrombie sweatshirt, or else they are not complete as a person. Instead of seeking comfort in other people, people are seeking comfort in their possession of material goods.

Emerson and Etzioni fall most in line with one another in their opinion of the growing defectiveness of the individual in within society:

We want men and women who shall renovate life and our social state, but we see that most natures are insolvent, cannot satisfy their own wants, have an ambition out of all proportion to their practical force, and do lean and beg day and night continually. (Emerson, 274-275)

What Emerson sees is the growing dependence individuals have on their government financially. This dependence of the person on the government can today be tied directly to the power of the monopolies in place, which have a strong control of the government policies of America. It is the corporations that want people to buy buy buy. This has led many Americans to sign up for credit cards, and take on debt that they cannot pay off.

What Emerson was seeing then can be viewed in an even more exacerbated form today. Emerson does not directly talk of credit, but the credit card debt is a large issue today, and it is furthering the amount of dependency people have on the government. People are continuously propelled to obtain more than they can afford to own, because owning things has become how they can define themselves. Credit has been created to keep people buying above their means, but the credit bubbles cannot always support the

market as seen by the recent housing market crisis in America. The creation of credit in a way only helped to further increase the individuals' dependence on the government because it perpetuated the ideal of ownership of property beyond a person's means and created many opportunities for people to fall into bankruptcy.

Etzioni argues that the growth of government in America is directly tied to the increasing divide between the individual and the community. He gives this example: "The demand for more police was accompanied by less neighborly vigilance, and the demand for more government imposition of ethical standards, by less ethically committed individuals" (Etzioni, 4). Emerson and Etzioni in a way are seeing the same thing. People are becoming less independent in regards to the government, and yet more independent in regards to their want to own 'things'. Through valuing things above community people are becoming more isolated and more separated from their communities. Though on the surface this seems like something Emerson would not care about, look back to his admittance to having a group of people who he would go to prison for (262). Whoever those people are, they are a part of Emerson's community. A community does not have to be made of hundreds of people; communities come in all shapes and sizes. When people stop turning towards each other for communal support and instead turn towards material things the very great problem of isolation and detachment occurs. "More government lessens the individual, and diminished individuals foster more government" (Etzioni, 4). 'Diminished individuals' are individuals that lack community involvement. Communities can provide many of the things that people need to survive. The growing lack of community in America, Etzioni would argue, coincides with number of people blinded by

the market-perpetuated ideal of material ownership and are those same people who have become diminished.

Though Emerson seems whole-heartedly against the influences of society, he would agree with Etzioni that community is important. As noted earlier, Emerson said “There is a class of persons to whom by all spiritual affinity I am bought and sold; for them I will go to prison, if need be...” (Emerson, 262). Emerson recognizes that at some level he too can be deeply connected to others. As much as Emerson is ‘self-reliant’ he is also arguably reliant on those closer few he cares about. There is a balance that must be met between the individual and the community.

Etzioni argues that today there is a growing tendency for people to adhere to an “ego-centered mentality” (Etzioni, 39). He finds the term ‘ego-centered’ to be directly damaging to individuals, as “...it violates what is known about human social nature and that hence it is ultimately self-defeating and socially destructive” (Etzioni, 39). To be truly ‘ego-centered’ would be to hold the value of one's self above all others: but the problem is that were all people to hold only themselves as important there would be destructive chaos. Should a person value himself or herself? Yes absolutely, but should they place their wants always above the needs of all others? For example, what about Nozick’s idea of not paying taxes that the government could potentially use to fund social welfare programs? Etzioni thinks that this is against human nature.

Etzioni believes that the individual can function within a community without sacrificing their entire sense of ‘self-reliance’.

If we view the community as merely an aggregation of individuals temporarily joined for their convenience, we leave out the need for commitment to serve shared needs and for involvement in the community that attends to these needs. If we see the community as the source of

authority and legitimacy, and seek, in the name of duty to it, to impose behavioral standards on individuals, this leaves insufficient basis for individual rights. (Etzioni, 20-21)

To be joined temporarily would be to perpetuate the idea of the 'ego-centered' individual.

Moreover, it would strip community of the things that would encourage the creation of deeper relationships among individuals, something that even Emerson feels he has.

Turning community into an authoritative ordinance would quite easily impede upon individual rights by demanding that all members act and think in the same manner. Being pressured to think and act in the same way as others is something that Emerson takes direct conflict with. "All men have my blood, and I have all men's. Not for that will I adopt their petulance or folly, even to the extent of being ashamed of it" (Emerson, 273).

Emerson recognizes that the opinion of the masses is not always correct, and he holds strongly to his own ideas, but not to the extent of wanting to be completely separated from society. "But your isolation must not be mechanical, but spiritual, that is, must be elevation" (Emerson, 273). This is a very individualistic statement, but within it Emerson is arguing that despite the pressures of society to conform, people must hold to themselves, while continuing to interact with society. Even if Emerson does not like it this may mean paying taxes that would support the strength of the overall community. What Emerson identifies is an inherent problem in society, in that society pressures people to conform to one way of thinking and living, but at the same time he realizes that to live in isolation is not the answer to the problem.

Spiritual isolation for Emerson does mean that one holds true to their own personal set of standards and beliefs, but at the same time this does not mean that an individual has to be withdrawn from a community to flourish. In fact it is the

Communitarian community that could help that spiritually isolated individual grow and flourish by offering them many opportunities to explore their own personal talents and connect with others like themselves. As is in America where people are living on a grid system built to keep people on the roads and sidewalks moving constantly forward, not allowing them any time to pause and talk.

Where the community could come in and connect people is in the crossroads of any given neighborhood. For example at Share It Square, the birth site of the City Repair Organization in Portland Oregon, neighbors came together and painted the streets, built a free-to-all tea station, a play house, a communal library, and hand-built cobblestone benches. To do this they incorporated the many talents of their before estranged neighbors and created a place where now anyone can easily pause and stop and meet others. The City Repair Organization now works to build communities in the Communitarian sense, by inviting people out of their personal homes to work together, teaching one another and utilizing everyone's personal talents and creative ideals to create spaces that are not just public, like the sidewalk, but shared, like the painted crossroads of two streets in a neighborhood where everything is handmade by the people living there.

The solution Etzioni offers is his idea of an 'open community': "An open community is much more integrated than an aggregate of self-maximizing individuals, however, it is much less hierarchical and domineering than an authoritarian community" (Etzioni, 21). An open community in other words would provide opportunities for people to continuously work together to fulfill their shared needs, as well as leave room for personal rights. Moreover an open community would be adaptable to the flow of

naturally occurring change within society. Open communities would have an environment in which people are encouraged to develop their own individual strengths, and be provided the opportunity to form deeper relationships with others. “The individual and the community make each other and require each other” (Etzioni, 25). Whether or not Emerson was aware of it people cannot be truly independent of communities. People need communities in order to develop their sense of self, and it is arguable that it is only through a person’s interaction with society and community that they are able to become ‘self-reliant’.

Another important point Emerson and Etzioni share is that the individual self is not something that is present at birth. It is not something that is static but it is something that develops over time. “This one fact the world hates, that the soul *becomes*; for that for ever degrades the past, turns all riches to poverty, all reputation to a shame, confounds the saint with the rouse, shoves Jesus and Judas equally aside.” (Emerson, 271). If the soul is something that ‘becomes’ this means that it is not static, that riches will not last forever, that ultimately nothing anyone ever does will have eternal effect on the world, and that all the people living to achieve riches, will ultimately die and their empires will eventually fall. With this presumed truth, where is the line drawn? Let’s take it back to material possession. If people revert to finding comfort in owning things, instead of comfort in friendship, the community they are a part of will weaken and so will their sense of self.

Emerson would argue that society is out to make people into conformists, to teach them to be consistent and never changing, and this pressure disrupts their ability to be self-reliant. “The other terror that scares us from self-trust is our consistency; a

reverence for our past act or word, because the eyes of others have no other data for computing our orbit than our past acts, and we are loath to disappoint them” (Emerson, 265). People tend to like standards and not like change, unless that change directly benefits them personally. People do not tend to enjoy thinking about the fact that they will one day die and that all of their material possessions will be left behind, possibly to rot. The same can be said of their relationships with others, leaving loved ones behind is something feared by many. To be aware of change is to be aware of insecurity. The underlying current here is that Emerson could arguably want children to be raised to value other people over material goods, because there is more value in the company of those you would die for than in the company of all of the material things you have acquired.

Etzioni takes the development of an individual and puts it in a more social context. “...newborns are animals and will remain so, will crawl on all fours and bark, unless and until the community and its agents laboriously teach them to walk erect and talk, and introduce them to a set of values” (Etzioni, 28). People are, according to Etzioni, a product of their community, which can be agreed upon by Classical Liberals as well, but the difference, in regards to Nozick in particular, is the emphasis on people over material values. Etzioni would have these children raised to value people over material objects, just as Emerson would.

It can be said here that there are many Classical Liberals who hold this same view. Even Nozick to a certain extent, but in speaking of Utopia Nozick lays out a world in which communities do not have to follow their nations laws, but can decide amongst their members what is acceptable and unacceptable. In Nozick’s vision people would be

free to choose which community they wanted to join based upon the rules and values held by that community. Because people are so different from one another:

The conclusion to draw is that there will not be *one* kind of community existing and one kind of life led in utopia. Utopia will consist of utopias, of many different kinds of lives under different institutions. (Nozick, 311-312)

Nozick has one universal rule for these communities that could safeguard against things like slavery: no one person can impose their personal idea of a utopia on another person. Instead all people freely choose which community suits them best. This at first seems very much to mean that Nozick is placing the value of people over material things, but there again is a fault in his reasoning. Under Nozick's idea of utopia communities would have to be many, and they would be limited in number of members, some communities larger than others (Nozick, 325). By leaving people free from the national government to splinter the country's society into societies, Nozick is paving the way for the rich to gather together in their own tight knit communities (more so than they are now), where they can live in absolute excess while thousands, or even millions of other citizens, stripped of any kind of national support system would be left in poverty. So yes, there is value in Nozick's thought for the people, yet there is still a great amount of room left for the value of material goods, and riches to supersede and win out over valuing the rights of all people.

Once cultural values, morals, and rules are learned only then can a person move on to decide whether or not to follow those standards:

The populace think that your rejection of standards is a rejection of all standard, and mere antinomianism; and the bold sensualist will use the name of philosophy to gild his crimes. But the law of consciousness abides. (Emerson, 274)

As Emerson argued, the soul is something that must grow, so too is a person's consciousness. As a person grows and is exposed to different ideas about government, individuality, and living, they will be better enabled to think as an independent person. Through their exposure to different members of their society and community they will arguably be strengthened mentally and come to an age and time during which they may decide to stop following all of the standards that their society places upon them and create their own personal code to live by, or at least this is what Emerson seems to want.

Chances are that whatever personal code they come up with, it would not be so greatly different from that of all others around them, and like Emerson they will find a close few with which to share their life with. "Moreover, as I see it, a wholesome relationship between community and member-individuals is based on a creative tension and a continuous search for balance, not domination of one by the other" (Etzioni, 20). Again I point to Share It Square, where neighbors already living in the houses built on a grid system, were able to join together and change a public space in their neighborhood into a shared space for all that live there and pass through it. They did this by holding many meetings and sharing and debating their creative ideas, and finally by using their own hands, and talent to make the things that are now there. They worked in toughly won unison to utilize the strengths of many and build a space that still today cultivates creative community involvement, without alienating visitors. Share It Square became the poster child of the City Repair Organization that was born out of it, and the City Repair Organization perfectly emulates what a 'wholesome relationship' between community and individual would be. Although Emerson was not one of the masses, and felt that there were a great many people who were not self-reliant he too was a part of a

community, albeit just a small group of friends he would die for, and through it, society. He valued the individual but did not value total isolation.

Emerson felt that there needed to be a change in society, and that ‘self-reliance’ needed to enact that change:

It is easy to see that a greater self-reliance must work a revolution in all the offices and relations of men; in their religion; in their education; in their pursuits; their modes of living; their association; in their property; in their speculative views. (Emerson, 275)

Emerson has shown his deep wish for people to have more independent minds, and that people should not value their possessions over their own actions. He believed people should work for themselves and stop reaching for things that are not within their means. Emerson wanted more people to be independent enough to provide their own support without relying on help from the government, or waiting around to be told what to do. Etzioni sees the influence of large government as part of the reason so many people have become so passive and dependent, yet does not feel that the Classical Liberal option to minimize government is the correct solution. “Reducing the government does not by itself secure reconstruction of individuals” (Etzioni, 4). This is why Etzioni argues for the inclusion of open community with the restructuring of government.

With the influence of an open community people may be more able to get back some of their personal independence from the government, while also gaining essential close relationships with those living around them. Moreover: “Every true man is a cause, a country, and an age; requires infinite spaces and numbers and time fully to accomplish his design...” (Emerson, 267), but one cannot accomplish their individual cause or design separate from all others. People must work with one another in order to be able to create anything of substance. This does not necessitate that one cannot paint a painting by

themselves, but the fact that they are painting is related to the work of others. For example someone else may have stretched the canvas to the frame they are painting, or someone else may have made the paints. Even centuries ago where many artists were required to mix their own paints they still had to buy the supplies for making the paint from someone else, and often those supplies were imported.

For Emerson to see self-reliance acting as a catalyst of change in the society of men and women he must leave room for community. As Etzioni has argued jumping to a smaller form of government would not necessarily change all diminished individuals back into independent ones. One way to start creating the change from dependent and diminished individuals back into more self-reliant ones is with the incorporation of an open community in the government. Giving people more connection to one another, and shifting them away from ego-centered forms of individuality, creating a means for individuals who rely on the government to take care of their daily needs to rely instead more on themselves and their community members. It would create an avenue through which diminished individuals could grow into independent individuals, without cutting them off from necessary social connections.

Emerson's Individual

Let us start with the child who is born into the society Emerson sees. A society that dictates conformity, and the value of material objects over that of people. Even in this dark society Emerson sees children as innocent, and pure in their opinions:

He cumpers himself never about consequences, about interests: he gives an independent, genuine verdict. You must court him: he does not court you. But the man is, as it were, clapped into jail or spoken with *éclat*, he is a committed person, watched by the sympathy or the hatred of hundreds, whose affections must now enter into his account. (Emerson, 261)

Emerson sees children growing into spineless adults who must constantly fret and worry about the opinions of others. These children, although dependent on their parents, teachers, and peers for learning, are self-reliant in a way that many adults need to be. A man, on the other hand, must go out and buy the biggest flat screen TV he can find, because otherwise what has he achieved? What is his value if he does not own the newest form of technology? If he does not have that TV then he cannot possibly entertain his friends, or at least this is what American society would have us believe. People have a need to impress others, to connect with others, to be accepted by others. One way to do this is to follow the fashion and technology trends. In America today it is very common for people to bond with one another over movies, and this is made easier by owning your own home theater system. But what has become apparent is that materialism, at least in America, is going too far, in part because of the great influence corporations have had on the citizens. Through constant exposure to advertisements people in America are raised to think that to be accepted they need to conform, to conform they need to consume. If they can't make enough money to buy the latest fashion trends they may not be accepted by

those around them and often buying something new is deeply tied to feelings of accomplishment and through that greater self-value is achieved.

And how does society pass down these beliefs that the objects owned by a person are more important than the person's acts? A child does not grow to be a spineless man on their own. They are taught to be spineless by all those they are dependent on:

They fancy that I choose to see this or that thing. But perception is not whimsical, but fatal. If I see a trait, my children will see it after me, and in course of time, all mankind, ---although it may chance that no one has seen it before me. For my perception of it is as much a fact as the sun.
(Emerson, 269)

The 'They' is not just the society; it is the dysfunctional community. It is the community that has had its values undercut by the greed of a few corporate leaders who do not see people as important unless they are buyers. Emerson may not have lived in times when the influence of the corrupted corporation was so clear, but he certainly saw its affects. Children start out as self-reliant, but are gradually broken down and taught to view the world through the same lenses as their parents, teachers, and peers.

Counter to Emerson's view here is the important argument that children, and definitely teenagers today are in some ways being raised by corporations more than their parents. Corporations, as much as parents, are teaching children what to value. McDonalds, for example, rewards children who win the fight with their parents about what to buy for dinner with a little toy; moreover McDonalds toys are gendered, teaching children at very young ages what is proper for boys and for girls. Corporations are raising children in America to find their personal self-value in material goods. This is helping along the polarization between individuals, and creative and cohesive communities where an individual is valued for their strengths and talents over the things they own. The

difference between Emerson and society is that Emerson states he cannot see just any thing; he can only see what he does see. For Emerson, it is not up to society to dictate how he views the world. The irony is that for many, this is exactly what happens, precisely because people influence one another on a constant basis.

But here is the crucial point: Emerson's perception 'is much a fact as the sun' because he does not look outside himself for opinions as to how to view the world. His gaze is internal.

There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till. (Emerson, 259)

Whatever Emerson can make of himself he will make. He does not wish to be told how he should live, or what he should do, but this does not mean that he is not compatible with a community. It means that he needs to be recognized as an individual, with independent thoughts, and valued for his own personal talents instead of being broken down to fit inside a box. For someone own a plot of land does not necessitate that they need be separated from all others. They just need to be free to be creative. They need to be allowed to speak. The distortion is in Nozick's Classical Liberal view of 'community'. For Nozick the value is placed on personal possessions, ultimately basing a person's sense of self by their ownership of things. The Communitarian's 'community' through Etzioni's eyes would act to incorporate individual talents, and more, it would act to push people to better those talents what ever they maybe.

Let us look again at what Emerson says about society: “Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and the culture of the eater” (Emerson, 261). Look at the words Emerson is using: “joint-stock company” and “shareholder”. This is not a community; this is a corporation Emerson is seeing. Society, to Emerson, is the domination of the corporation over the needs and best interests of the individual. Through corporations the education of children is changing to teach them to rely not on friendships or personal creative natures, but on material things for the feeling of completion. And most importantly the last phrase: “to surrender the liberty and the culture of the eater” (261). The eaters are the masses. Their culture would be found in their communities. Their communities are disintegrating while pressure to be an independent individual through material consumption so vast that people are pushed by society, as Emerson views it, to build massive amounts of credit card debt today. No where in this description of society does Emerson speak directly against the value of community.

Maybe most important in Emerson’s self-reliant individual is that they have others like them, that they have *community*: “If you are true, but not in the same truth with me, cleave to your companions; I will seek my own. I do this not selfishly, but humbly and truly” (Emerson, 273). Self-reliant people are the truest form of an individual. They do not conform; they do not bend their principles to the rules of others. They are creative and aware of their talents and they work within society through those talents, and because of all this, not every self-reliant person is going to get along with every other self-reliant person. But even so these people see the value in having like

minded peers. They see the value in companionship over material things because they are in touch with their humanity. There is no room in these people's lives for a community that would be made of millionaires who are free to keep all of their excess goods, as Nozick would have it. Instead these people would live a life much more patterned after Etzioni's version of a community, where individuals collectively work to share their ideas and build stronger connections with one another.

Bibliography:

Emerson, R. W. (1996). *Essays & poems: Library of America College Editions*. New York: Library of America.

Etzioni, Amitai. (1983) *An Immodest Agenda: Rebuilding America Before the Twenty-First Century*. New York: New Press.

Nozick, Robert. (1974) *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. New Jersey: Basic Books.