RSA

# Do People Need Community Any More?

**Speakers:** **Amitai Etzioni**

**University Professor at The George Washington University, former President of the American Sociological Association, and founder of the Communitarian Network**

**Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP**

**Chief Secretary to the Treasury**

**Chaired by:** **Steve Broome**

**Director of Research, RSA**

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## NB

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**Steve Broome:** Good evening, I'm Steve Broome. I'm Director of Research here at RSA. I'm delighted to welcome you all here this evening to this prestigious event. This evening we're here to ask the question 'Do people need community any more?' Our assertion is that modern Britain is characterised by real advances in personal capability, greater heterogeneity in society. With this backdrop public services are being delivered more and more as personalised entitlements and people increasingly find connections in networks rather than neighbourhoods.

What, therefore, is the role of community in today's society, and does it have to be physical to count?

More broadly the RSA is exploring these questions as part of its Connected Communities programme. This is about understanding social networks, particularly the informal relationships within social networks that might be used to address a range of social and economic problems, so we're particularly pleased to have this event at the moment.

And we're equally pleased to have these two distinguished speakers here this evening to help us navigate our way through some of these questions.

Firstly we'll hear from Professor Amitai Etzioni. Professor Etzioni is Director of the Institute for Communitarian Policy Studies at the George Washington University and has previously held positions at Columbia and Harvard. He served as senior aide to the White House, is a former president of the American Sociological Association, and founder of the Communitarian Network. He's author of several acclaimed books, including the *Active Society*, *The Moral Dimension*, and *Security First for a Muscular, Moral Foreign Policy*.

So on that note please join me in welcoming Professor Amitai Etzioni to the lectern. Thank you.

**Professor Amitai Etzioni:** Thank you. I'm delighted to be back here and looking forward to the part of this evening when we can have a dialogue, which is what I much prefer to lecturing.

You will find in a moment that there are two reasons I'm particularly awkward. First Liam Byrne is here and he articulated what I'm supposed to talk about so much better in his communitarian speeches that there's just no way I can come close and really one reason I'm here on my way to the Continent is because I was kind of blown away by his speeches. This was before I spent a good part of the last two days with him and he is really a sterling public servant.

Now, I tried to convince the Chair to let Mr Byrne go first and for me to follow, which I think still is appropriate, but he told me in a way which reminded me of my German parents ´Nein´. And that was more or less the end of that!

I need one more brief introduction and the only way I can get there quickly is by telling you a not particularly funny joke, but a useful one. There were two economists who went to the White House and when they came out a beggar said, "Could you give me three dollars for a cup of coffee?" And the economist said, "Come on, a cup of coffee doesn't cost three dollars." And he said, "Oh, you didn't hear the news, there was a freeze in Brazil and the coffee futures are up." And the economists were very impressed and they said, "Why don't you come and study economics at our university?" And he said, "I'm a beggar, but I'm no fool."

So if you think I came here to talk to you about British public services, sorry, I'm a beggar but I'm not a fool! I don't know diddley squat about public services. What I will talk about is community and the role of community and the importance of new communities, and the tension between them and human rights and the tension between them and diversity.

And my starting point is a double one. First of all the time has come, and I choose my words carefully, the time is now to restore the democ part of democracy. We had strong, vibrant communities, and by community I just don't mean only local communities but also national communities. If you go to the 1950s, norms were clear, crime was very low, drug abuse was very low, people didn't have to lock their homes or their cars, people knew what was expected of them, people took responsibility, and it was a God awful society, because it discriminated against minorities, it discriminated against women, it discriminated against the handicapped, it discriminated against gay people; it was a very authoritarian society.

So what happened over the decades since then is that there were various liberation movements, women's movement, civil rights movement, gay rights, which attacked the old regime, and they destroyed the old fabric of society, as they ought to. I wish they did it earlier. And the progress of transition is not complete, but it went a long way in bringing down their authoritarian discriminatory society. In the process they broke down all the old social norms. And that is not our problem; I know very few people, very few people, even on the extreme right, who want to go back to the 1950 society.

But the question we have not fully confronted is what new norms we are going to share. What will replace the shared basis of good conduct? The reason we need to have this conversation is the moment you have to call in the accountants or the inspectors or the police you already have social failure. We talk a lot about market failure, but there is also such a thing as social failure, and in a good society most of the people most of the time do what's expected of them without being coerced or forced, because they believe it's the right thing to do. And if you look at those things which work well, they are where people do take care of their children. Look, I have children, I think those of you who have children know, most of what we do for them is not required by law. The law doesn't say I have to fuss about them, or get up in the middle of the night and see if they're breathing. You know what I'm talking about, eh? It doesn't say I have to support them while they're in college, it doesn't mean when they have their first divorce they come home with their children and I have to still help them. As you know, adolescence never stops any more. And so we do it because we feel obligated to our children.

When people get Alzheimer's 90% of the time their spouses stay with them, through thick and thin, you know that you're going to never be repaid in any shape or form, because they think that's what they ought to do. There is not enough supervisors, inspectors or accountants who could make people do such a challenging assignment if it wasn't that people believe it's the right thing to do.

In most places, at least in my part of the world, smoking in public is not an issue, it's just not done. And I have not seen one time where somebody would light up in public and somebody would say, "I'll call the police, or the inspector, or the bouncer." It's just not done.

I'm trying to give this sense, the feel, what a good society is based on. Not on policing, not on coercion, not on accountants. But where people came together, formed an understanding of what is right and wrong, and encourage each other to be better than they would be otherwise. They are each other's keeper in that sense. We reward each other for good behaviour and we chastise each other when we are not.

I'm not saying there's no room for law and no need for law. We need in the end some underpinnings so when people stray and we will not reach them we cannot allow the whole thing to unravel by letting people get away when they violently break the norms. But we are better off in social costs, in human costs, in human decency, if we can get together to form shared understandings.

And here I want to introduce… you know, sociologists live by creating funny words. I'm going to use as plain English as I can marshal. And I want to talk about something I want to call 'moral dialogues'. Moral dialogues are very different from scientific or factual or logical debates. What happens, and it's something I don't think we pay enough attention to, once in a while we in effect have a society-wide, national and increasingly trans-national, conversation about what's right and wrong. And that's almost an annual topic of the year, of what we are dialoguing about. And then there is a billion hour buzz. People talk about it in meetings like this, and at the water cooler and in the car and such. And when you are in the middle of those debates they look very contentious and conflicted. And if you come five years, sometimes longer, later you see something very interesting. Most times, not always, most times new shared understanding, new shared moral understanding, new norms arise. And second, because people participate in forming them they become self-enforcing.

So, for instance, I'll talk about the United States first because that's the society I'm most familiar with, we now a debate about gay marriages. It doesn't matter what position you take on it; all I'm saying is if you observe in the United States, we are changing as we are talking about it. We suddenly have six states which legalised gay marriages and there's nobody in doubt, I think, that a few years from now every place but Texas – I'm sorry, that's a kind of little silly joke – will have civil unions or gay marriages.

We have the beginning of a debate about the death penalty, which we are very behind you, we are kind of moving away from it. We had a very intense debate about the war in Iraq until we agreed that it was wrong. And so, to give you other examples of conversations which I know you had, for instance in the 1950s I don't think there was anyone who had a sense that we have a moral duty to the environment. It just wasn't on the map. People would throw things into the lakes or into the air and then it was… nobody thought about it, any more than you worry now about what's happening on the other side of the moon.

And then we… I don't have the time to go into how we came about it, but we started conversations about what we owe Mother Earth. And out of this two things came, a shared moral understanding that we have some duties to Mother Earth. We still differ exactly what it entails, but again I don't know anybody who wants to go back to the way we treated the environment in the 1950s. And it's largely self-implementing. People voluntarily recycle, use this funny paper and so on and so on.

We had a conversation about gender, the relationship between men and women. Anyhow, I think by now I've succeeded in illustrating what I mean, the way whole societies, local communities and increasingly actually trans-national communities, can have more conversation despite as huge as they are, and despite that they're often heated and emotional. At the end of the day very often they lead to new shared understanding and new voluntary enforcement.

So what we need now is we need a conversation, and let me close on that before somebody hits a gavel at me, to say we need a conversation about what is a good life. Because for too long we measured the good life by how much money we make and how many goods we buy. Now, I want to be very precise here. For people who are poor, who don't have the basic needs of life, they indeed very much need a home, food, security, health, education. But as people's income increases study upon study upon study show there is no additional gain in contentment when you ratchet up. The Japanese, in the period in which their GDP quadrupled, the percentage of Japanese who were happy increased by 2%. I have the same data for the United States.

Now this is not a call to enjoy poverty. This is a call to say once you are out of poverty that from then on it's time to ask 'what makes for a good life?' It's particularly important now as I believe our economic condition is that they will not be able to go back, even after this crisis, to what used to be called the good old life of – I'll use an American example, I feel safer – that we all need inflatable Santa Clauses and plastic pelicans on our front lawns.

And so the question which I think we need to talk about, and the time is ripe, is to ask 'what makes a good life once your basic creature comforts are secure?' And I think we'll find two answers: one, and again I turn to N P Burns' speeches, in community, in spending more time with others, with our children, with our friends, with our extended family, with our neighbours, as volunteers or just members with... of another. We'll find it richly rewarding when we have stable relationships with other people. And second, just to give the name to save time, they're called transcendental pursuits, reflection, reading, music, praying – for some of us it's okay – and all things which are not labour intensive and not capital intensive.

So I appreciate endlessly your tolerance and I hope that we can join this conversation here and in other places. Thank you.

**Steve Broome:** Well, thank you, and there'll certainly be a chance shortly to open up the dialogue with the audience.

But now it really is my great pleasure to welcome the Right Honourable Liam Byrne MP to respond to the Professor's address. Liam was made a Department of Health minister within nine months of becoming an MP for Birmingham Hodge Hill in 2004. While at the Department he pioneered individual budgets, oversaw the 2006 White Paper and put Dignity in Care centre stage.

Liam was made Minister of State for Police and Counter Terrorism in May 2006 before the Home Secretary asked him to lead the reorganisation of the immigration system and the Home Office.

In October 2008 Liam was made Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor to the Duchy of Lancaster, attending Cabinet where he led the charge for public sector change, helped coordinate the government's Real Help Now campaign and co-chaired the Council of Regional Ministers.

In June this year Liam was appointed Chief Secretary to the Treasury and he's written now widely about public service reform, economic development and shared values. So please join me in welcoming Liam to give his address. Thank you.

**Liam Byrne:** Thank you very much and I want to start by saying what a pleasure it is to share a stage with Professor Etzioni and I will explain how much of an inspiration he's been in much of my work in government, but most importantly also in my constituency.

And it's a great pleasure to be back here at the RSA. This was actually the room where I had my wedding reception some years ago, and I, you will be pleased to hear, have brought a different speech because the one I made then was pretty much unrepeatable.

I just want to say two or three things about why I agree with Professor Etzioni's central thesis that now really is the vital time to renew the democ in democracy. And I want to take a slightly different perspective ; I want to explain why I think it's important to British national politics right now, but I also want to just explain why, from a very personal point of view, it is important in addressing some of the biggest and stickiest challenges that I think we have in Britain today. And I want to conclude with some thoughts about some next steps.

But let me start by saying why this debate is so important now. Bill Clinton, who Professor Etzioni once advised, I think his best speech was a speech in which he said – it's *The Struggle for the Soul of the 21st Century* it was called – and he described the world that is unfolding around us right now as a world without walls. And I don't think that this has ever been starker than it has been this year. I mean probably everybody, almost everybody in this room, will have watched or watched the news reports of President Obama's inauguration. And probably none of us came away from that without thinking 'this is going to have profound consequences for me and my life and my country over the years to come'. Or over the last few weeks many of us will have read and heard about Tweets from the Street in Iran. And it's all, I think, emblematic, symbolic, of the kind of inter-dependence and integration that is just now part and parcel of everyday life. What Clinton called, President Clinton called, a World Without Walls. And the point for me is that in that world without walls there are great prizes of globalisation, but there are also great prices. And so I think that one of the biggest challenges for British politics over the decade to come is how do we collectively seize the prize, while keeping the price to an absolute minimum.

And I happen to think that Britain's done enormously well from globalisation over the last ten years and – I mean perhaps I would say this – I'm the grandson of Irish immigrants; I think immigration tremendously enriches both this capital and this country. Globalisation has transformed technology and trade all around us. It's had a huge impact on our economy and the quality of our everyday life. Our families now look different, we move around faster and faster. All of us, in other words, now have a completely different kind of freedom, to live a life that we have a reason to value. In other words we've enjoyed a great deal of the prize of globalisation, but with that prize has come a price and over the last year we have seen that price more clearly than perhaps we have seen over the last decade, because what we've seen with the global movement of capital, we've seen that it has helped camouflage the movement of this contagion of risk. And now there probably isn't any family in the country that doesn't understand just how interlinked we are, not just to opportunities in this world, but also to risks.

In my constituency in Hodge Hill we have been running a fight for the last three or four months to save a van maker called LDV. Its fortunes and the prospects of the 800 people who work for it have passed from Russian ownership to Malaysian ownership and now, we hope, to a new future. Everybody now understands the risks that come with globalisation, I think with a new force.

So the question for me is, over the next decade what is the political agenda for really seizing that prize of globalisation while keeping the price under control. And I guess my basic argument is that the only way in which we can master that challenge is through collective action. The only way that we could fight back against this downturn was through collective action. The kind of money that was put into the economy, the kind of programmes of help for those who are losing their jobs or who were worried about losing their home, only collective action could confront that kind of crisis.

But what is the political consensus behind collective action? It has got to be, it can only be, a shared sense of common purpose. So if we are, I think, to preserve this kind of collective action in the years to come when the moment of crisis has passed and we're into new challenges, I think we are going to have to think hard about how we draw together and consolidate new identities, new norms, in a new way.

And for progressives, by the way, I think there is an even more important demand for this kind of agenda, because as Linda Coley has recently written and talked about, if we are to try and mount a much more sustained and aggressive campaign against the kind of inequality that we know can come with globalisation then surely we must build a stronger sense of national solidarity, a shared sense that we are in this life, we are in this country, we are in this world, together. And I think that demands a stronger sense of shared identity in the years to come.

Now, my second point is that although much of that identity can be built and forged nationally on a national stage, I think that much of that job can be conducted locally too, and in so doing I think it can allow us to combat the kind of poverty in Britain's poorest places that drew me into politics and it's the work of Professor Etzioni that has shaped so much of the work that I've done in my constituency, and I just want to say a quick word about that if I may.

Tomorrow I celebrate my fifth anniversary of being a member of parliament, and if there is one thing that I've learnt over the last five years it is that you cannot begin to combat the kind of inequality and the kind of entrenched poverty that we have in a community like mine in east Birmingham without renewing and reknitting a shared sense of common purpose and a stronger sense of community. And it, in my very limited experience, can best be sort of summarised in three steps.

The first thing that we realised in our community is that respect is the ground floor of renewal. When I started looking round my community for community leaders to come forward and begin leading a kind of community led regeneration we didn't get very far; there weren't may people who had that kind of self confidence to actually come forward and say, "Yes, I will help lead this community forward." And frankly much of this came down to what was in parts of our community a pervasive sense of fear that had as its root cause a fear of crime, a fear of drugs, a fear of kids hanging out on the corner because they didn't have things to do. And it was that kind of, I guess, tension that actually made people feel safest by retreating into their homes, into their front rooms, into their bedrooms, not actually coming out to begin the job of actually recreating a local commonwealth.

Now, that's why we started our campaign for regeneration with a campaign for community policing. We've doubled the number of police now over the last two or three years. Crime's down 13% two years in a row. But from that we have found and brought forward a much stronger sense of confidence amongst community leaders who are now prepared and happy to step up to begin leading what I know will be a long job ahead of us.

But the second thing that we've learnt is that one of the most critical alliances that we need to knit together in this job, and in this challenge, as Professor Etzioni says, of creating new norms, shared standards, whatever you want to call it, is to embrace our young people into this challenge.

When I began doing youth conferences in Hodge Hill and I started asking our young people what were their top priorities for things to do in the future, what were their top priorities for investment? We said arts, media, drama, cricket, football, did they want a new swimming pool? You know what they said? Learning a new skill.

Now, we're in the bottom 5% of constituencies for sending kids to university. And as we started researching this, as we started talking to our young people, what we found is an absence of self confidence and self esteem, savoir faire, forward drive, that actually does come from some of the best schools in the country. And so what we are beginning to do now, in order to change this kind of dynamic, is begin educating children not just about the world around them but about what's inside them. And it's this sense, this programme of character education, that is now creating the space for our young people to begin having this debate, as Professor Etzioni puts it, of what is a good life? What is my moral compass? Where is it that I want to go? How is it that I want to have friends, have family, share and strengthen this community around me in the years to come?

Those young people are some of the most inspirational people that I have ever met in public life. But that's why this argument about character education and community service for young people I think will be one of the most important things that we can master over the years to come because it brings our young people centre stage into this task of rejuvenating, revitalising, shared norms in our society.

The final point that I would make, and this sort of touches on what we may do, what we may need to do together as a country around our public services in the years to come. I cannot but be struck by how much over the last ten years our frontline public service institutions have changed. You know, I can now look at Sure Starts and neighbourhood police teams and new primary schools and rebuilt secondary schools and new health centres. We have a fabric of community institutions in this country which over the next ten years I think we have to turn from being centres of local services into centres of local society.

Now let me just explain what I mean very quickly. Too often in the past our public services, they treat me and you and you and you as individuals, and they forget that actually you're members of families and communities and networks, and all of those things that you have may actually have something to give to the way public services are developed.

So we have one fantastic head, the head of Bordesley Green Primary School. She noticed last year Bangladeshi boys were coming bottom of the literacy results. So what they did is they found a way of directing their two community support workers based at the school into connecting with, talking with, teaching, Bangladeshi parents. And they found volunteers from within the community to teach English, improve literacy. The result? Last year Bangladeshi boys came top of the literacy results. Total cost of this programme? £40,000. 1.6% of the school budget. Just 1.6%. What that head teacher had found is that if she connected with the community around the service that she was providing, she could unlock a completely different kind of future for the community that she came into public life to serve.

All of these things, respect is the ground floor of renewal, the way we bring our children into this equation, the way in which we transform our community institutions, these are all local ways in which we can begin to take forward this argument about communitarianism and renew and revitalise the democ in democracy that Professor Etzioni talked about.

There is of course a national policy agenda that must emerge alongside it. I think there are at least two or three elements of it on which we'll make progress over the months to come, basically under the headings of truth and money and power.

When it comes to truth I think we need a much better level of insight into how strong our civic health is in this country, and so with John Denham I'm going to talk about how we replicate an idea from America, an index of civic health, that looks across our communities across this country and says 'how strong is civic health here in this country, in this community?' When they did this in America, California came bottom. That provoked Governor Schwarzenegger to go to his legislature and say, "My challenge to you is how we now come top." We don't have anything that really acts as the grit and the inspiration for that kind of conversation in our communities today, and we need one.

Second, when it comes to money, we need to look more radically at the way in which we give local frontline leaders the chance to put their budgets together, and so in 13 places now across the country we'll be running under Sir Michael Bichard's leadership a programme called Total Place, where we look at how we take away the walls that separate public servants from each other, and actually re-engage them in a shared mission to change communities.

And finally I think there is this question of power. And for me we have to look at how our community institutions become a renewed kind of power supply for the communities that they serve.

I think that the only way that they can do that is by developing a stronger third sector, civic sector, around them, that connects them more strongly with the communities that they serve, and so through the office of the third sector we're looking at how we might do exactly that over the months to come.

So in conclusion I want to make a political point. I don't think that there is such a thing as a new idea in politics, but I do think there are old ideas whose time has come. If you go back to the foundation of the Labour movement, it started in mutual societies and trade unions and self-help organisations. It was through that shared sense of solidarity and mutual self-help that we created a progressive force in this country. Well that's what we need to do again, and it's why political parties themselves cannot be outside this debate; they must be helping to lead it.

Thanks very much.

**Steve Broome:** Thank you very much. I'll open it straight up to the floor.

**Unidentified Speaker:** Just two brief points. The first was prompted by Liam Byrne talking about the need for collective action. The problem is at the moment – or the crisis is at the moment – that we have global problems and we're getting national responses, and particularly with the global economic crisis. I mean, you're finding leading economists like Paul Krugman, for example, being very critical of Germany and its lack of stimulus as he sees it. You see the Anglo-Saxon response to crisis, you see the Continental response and so on. That's the first point, that there doesn't seem to be a will to international action, and you saw it with the G8 and you've seen it over the last few years in terms of development aid.

The second point is, how do you, in a community, as it was said, we're moving faster and faster, how do you in a community like London, or a city like London, which is changing by the day let alone by the year, how do you establish this kind of civic responsibility and this civic sense, particularly when it's made up, as we all know, by so many immigrant communities?

**Susan Reed, Fellow of the Society:** My comments are really these, that you talk about your desire for democracy, the increasing force of democracy, but you're actually talking about a completely top down policy as I understood you. You're talking about leading other people to do what they do, and I believe that recent governments have absolutely destroyed the power of the people locally to look after their own affairs. There's more and more central planning, the powers of local government have been taken away and are subject to central government. And I am just facing at the moment a minor crisis in my own life, which you may laugh at, but I swore a long time ago that I would never again be a trustee of a charity or director of a company because of over-regulation. And I'm now faced with the fact that because I'm a member of my parish council, for which I'm voted onto that council, that I have to be a trustee and be subject to Charity Commission law, and I think that is totally… I cannot submit to that. I give my service freely as a member of my community and I think again this is government trying to completely regulate community affairs.

**Ellie Roberts**, I work for a prison education reform charity called Safeground. This is for Liam.

You talked about having a fabric of community institutions and I just wondered where you saw prisons in that, and if they had a role to play within communities?

**Liam Byrne:** Let me start with the question of global community. I mean, that is difficult. I think what gives us cause for hope this year is that we've actually seen people come together and agree to a greater extent than we've seen them agree on our response to the downturn than ever before. Now obviously what we've got to do is ensure delivery, and I suspect that's where things will start to become a little bit tenser. But getting to first base and getting that agreement that we had here in London I thought was an enormous achievement. And I think it's going to be the first of many such initiatives.

If you imagine the decade ahead, I think that kind of approach to security issues, aid issues, climate change issues, international development issues as well, I hope, I think it will become more common, and I think the global community will get better at it, because this is what gain theorists would call a multi shot gain. And the fact that we know that we can get these agreements in place will begin to give way to a debate about whether the deal gets implemented, and then when it gets to the next deal, the next bargain that we have to strike we will reflect on the experience that we've had trying to deliver the first one.

So I just think that the international community is beginning to learn how to do this in a new way and with new partners. The partnership with India and China and Brazil begins to change these kinds of relationships, and those countries will bring immeasurable new things to the kinds of agreements that will come in the years to come. But I think we're in the foothills of learning how to do this stuff.

The second question, I think, that you pose about… it's almost how do we spark this revolution in civic inventiveness? And there isn't a playbook for this. But we should be self confident about it. And I often tell the story of my city, Birmingham. Birmingham was a small place 120, 150 years ago. This year is the 100th anniversary of the decision to double the size of the city. If you go back 100 years you saw a whole load of people basically uprooted out of the countryside and put down in these new strange places called cities. And what's fascinating is that our response then, 100 years ago, was not to kind of recoil in horror and say, "Crikey, this is pretty scary. Let's go back to the farm." Actually we pioneered the movement for free schools. We invented the garden city movement in town planning. We created all of these incredible new industries. We created colleges and universities. Our response, in other words, was civic and it was defined by civic inventiveness.

Now, only us collectively can do that. But my argument, and my kind of criticism of political parties, my own included, is that too often at the moment political parties are trying to connect with the hard power of winning elections, getting councillors elected, getting MPs elected, electing governments. Constitutionally quite important stuff. But actually what political parties are doing insufficient of at the moment is connecting with soft power, or the passion power, that lives in streets, amongst people, who want to change passionately what's going on outside their front door but don't know what are the first steps to take.

And we have to go back a bit, I think, to the days when political parties were founded, because we used to be good at that stuff and that, I think, for all political parties, has to be part of their organisational ambitions for the years to come.

Susan, on your point about top down. I happen to agree with you about this, and I think that there was a certain approach taken over the last ten years that involved putting a lot, a lot, a lot of public money, public taxes, into renewing our public services. And we brought investment levels up to OECD averages in health and in education, and we now have a lot more police. And I think… it was arguable, I think on balance it was the right thing to do, was to set a lot of strong leadership from the centre.

But, look, you know, we're not going to drive improvement in public services in the decade ahead with that technique. The only way that I think we're going to drive big changes and big improvements in public services in the decade ahead, and, look, we all know the rate of public spending growth is going to be much slower than it was over the last ten years.

We've got to give public servants much more freedom and latitude and space to do the job that they came into the business to do, to exercise their professionalism, to use their creativity, to kind of unlock the innovation that is actually part and parcel of their motivation for going to work every day in what are often some quite demanding circumstances.

Now if we can couple that with a shift of power to citizens and individuals, then I think we'll have a recipe for some serious improvement over the decade ahead, and to kind of get the debate going on Thursday we're going to publish a report where we've surveyed the best public services from around the world and we've asked how have they changed the power relationship between state and citizens and the centre and the front line? And it's through that shift of power, I passionately believe, that progress will come and the example you give of over-regulation, I think, just sort of proves your point beautifully.

And Ellie, on your point about prisons, well I wouldn't take prisons out of this equation at all. Because I go back to my point. I didn't expect to learn this but I did. I did learn that respect and community safety is the ground floor of renewing our poorest places in this country. But we cannot master that challenge without tackling the rates of recidivism that still are too high in this country. And I don't believe that we can tackle those rates of recidivism without a different, more holistic, approach in the criminal justice system in the years ahead.

We need to get far better at helping people kick drugs when they're in prison. We need to get much better at teaching people to read and to write and to add up and to acquire skills, and to really acquire the self confidence and self esteem to go back out and make a contribution to the community that people have committed crimes against.

And I don't think that public services hold a monopoly of wisdom on how to do that. I think that the third sector, the charitable sector, social enterprises, will often do a faster job at connecting up the kinds of services that are needed in order to help individuals who are in prison, yes, repay their debt to society, but turn their lives around and give something back in the years to come.

**Caroline Mager** from the Learning and Skills Improvement Service. We do leadership and improvement for further education.

I agree absolutely the need for public servants, public service professionals, to be able to work together within the locality for efficiency reasons, but also to be able to address the difficult issues. And as you say, they absolutely need the headroom and the flexibility to be able to do that, and it's great to hear you talk about recognising that need.

And in my sector we talk about needing to be able to be more accountable, horizontally, towards the communities we serve, so in dialogue with the communities, and not, as is very much the pressure now, accountable to Whitehall. And it's how you make that shift really, because I think we're not talking just about changes in professional behaviour here. We're talking about the need for systems change, and I think that's a real difference in emphasis. We've been talking about improving the professionalism of public servants for decades now, and actually those very professional public servants are now hitting their heads against the systems that aren't allowing them to do what they need to do.

But my final point is that that doesn't require just change at the local level. It's how that changes in Whitehall, and that feels often the most difficult place to make things connect.

**Liam Byrne:** This I think is going to not be straightforward is the honest answer. But the observation I would have is that we need to change the culture in Whitehall in two or three different ways. The first thing we have to do is we have to signal how important innovation is. And we're going to do that now by – this sounds a bit sort of technocratic – but we will now mark Whitehall departments on how innovative they are, because we know that Whitehall departments, if they respond to anything they respond to their capability reviews. So we have now put innovation full square in their capability reviews, and Michael Bichard has helped us get that right.

Second, you have to support staff in Whitehall in understanding what innovation is, what delivery is, because for too long now we haven't equipped, I think, policy civil servants in Whitehall with that kind of understanding of delivery and innovation and we are now overhauling the curriculum of the National School for Government in order to help do that.

The third thing we have to do is we have to showcase what good looks like. And that was one of the reasons that I created the Innovators' Council in Whitehall. I wanted to call it something else. I originally wanted to call it the Heretics' Council, because, if you look back over the last 40, 50 years, change in public service comes from three places. It comes from political change, political momentum, that kind of political force of will. It comes from crisis, when there is a political crisis, something goes badly wrong. But third, it comes from people who just decided to break all of the rules and do things differently as they see fit, based on what they see in front of them.

And it's those kind of heretics who break the rules and do things differently from which we have a great deal to learn over the years to come, and so honouring the work that they do, actually putting them in charge of helping author some of the reforms that we want to put in hand over the next couple of years will just begin to sort of turn the culture around. And at that point…

**Steve Broome:** Okay, yes, on that note if we could briefly thank Liam Byrne for his response.

I'm **John Muldoon**, I'm a Fellow here and a Labour councillor in Lewisham, South London.

I wanted to endorse what the minister said about a new mutualism, because a group of people met in a room above a pub in Halifax in the 19th century and founded the Halifax Building Society, and that was out of aspiration to help people save regularly to buy their own homes. Look what happened to every single building society that demutualised. They didn't do very well. And John McFall, the Treasury Select Committee Chair, in May this year was talking about time for a new building society, rooted in communities. And I do think mutualism, a new mutualism, is the way to engage the public in control of their lives, in control of their environment.

Turning to another way, in my own borough we have local assemblies. Every ward has an assembly which gets 50 to 200 people, depending how well organised, how well managed they are. And they've got £50,000 each to spend. So we get lots of people engaged locally, meeting in their own ward, to decide how to spend £50,000, at the moment, could be more in the future, to develop and improve their own community.

Thank you. **Marilyn Mason**, Fellow of this Society.

I'm sorry that Liam Byrne's gone because this was something of a challenge to him, but maybe he'll listen to the podcast.

I'd like to thank Professor Etzioni for his wise words, much of which struck me as commonsense really. But it's not all that common and it's particularly not common, I think, in the world of politics. Surely the recession, looming environmental problems, climate change, peak oil, shortages of resources, growth of population, ought to be making us think about simplifying our lives, living more locally, stopping rushing about, stopping being so competitive, stopping being so materialistic. It all sounds a bit soppy but actually it is a route to happiness, but it's one that our politicians really don't seem to have latched onto. They're still talking in terms of going back to business as usual, economic growth seems to be the panacea for all problems. We can't go on growing like this. Resources are not infinite. Thank you.

**Steve Broome:** Thank you. Professor.

**Professor Etzioni:** Well if I may I'll deal with this second point first.

I very, very much agree with you that at the moment there is some kind of a pulling back and people ask themselves – in part because they're forced to – if it's so bad that we have more time for our children and more time for each other and more time for our community, or whatever else makes us truly happy, breaking out of this running ever faster to buy more things we really don't need.

I earlier used a little light line when I said I am relatively confident that we don't need inflatable Santa Clauses. But to be more serious here, you'd be surprised if you go and examine the shopping lists of people, or what's in the back of their cabinets, how many things they buy which they feel they absolutely have to have, and on close examination they don't need in any deeper sense of the term, in part because instead of necessities they engage in status goods and therefore last year's handbag is no longer current and they accumulate in the back of the cabinet.

Now, again, I want to emphasise, this is not my recipe for poor people or near poor people, but as people move up the economic ladder that's the point they have to ask themselves where they find a balance.

The reason, by the way, the hippies and the counter culture failed, because they went to the opposite extreme. They didn't want to work at all, they didn't want to save at all; they just wanted to lie on the beach and live off sunshine, cheap wine and sex. It's not all bad, but…! But this is not an agenda which the record shows you can get most people to join in. By the way, it also completely undermines the economy, which in the end pays for things like health services and such, for things we do want.

So the question is not to go to the opposite extreme, but cap things. The issue I'm pointing to is when the economy revives will these people go back to business as usual or will they remember the experience and build on it? That's, I think, the conversation.

In my judgement it in part depends on what we're kind of going to agree with each other. If we're going to hold that if you don't have last year's tie – to use a male example this time – then you're not with it, you know. Then we're going to encourage and pressure people to go back to the old rat-race places. And if you're going to slightly say, you know, do you really need that? Then I think we have a hope of establishing a new norm and a new culture.

So in that sense I go back, we are each other's keeper and we can encourage each other to be better than we would be otherwise, and I hope that we, once we're no long coerced to draw back, that we will see the merit in putting ceilings on what we do in terms of material goods and sacrifice.

You know, some of my colleagues – it's hard to believe but it's true – they turn off the internet and their BlackBerries on the weekend. Can you imagine how far you can go?

Now, about mutuality, I naturally of course agree with you because community is my middle name. I mean that's what I breathe, eat and sell. But I have some bad news, and I'm serious. Community is not always a good thing. Community means that people are bonding with each other, right? And they share a viewpoint, an identity, a history and a future. But there's no guarantee what they're going to unify around. So you can have a Nazi community, you have a community which burns books, you have a community which lynches anybody… 100% of them can agree that any person of colour who enters the community they're going to lynch him. So communities are not necessarily benign. And they have another attribute. By definition communities have members, and therefore they have non members. They exclude, by definition. There is no community without boundaries, then they're not a community.

So that's the reason, I couldn't go into it in the short time allowed to me but let me use it now. We want to box community into human rights, and individual rights. And this is our protector that communities will not get out of line. So we can tell a community, if you want to have big flowerpots or small flowerpots, if you want one way traffic or two way traffic, fine. But if you will start denying people the right to free speech or start to discriminate, or determine that people will pray your way, there is a *(inaudible)* that we will not accept it.

So here is what unfortunately makes social life complicated but better, juster, if we don't try to organise it all by one principle. So we have that tension, in effect, between constitutional or bye-laws, standards in which our rights are based. And the American phrase 'inalienable'; they're not contestable and they're to be protected by the full authority of our collective constitution or bye-laws or whatever you want to call them.

Within those boundaries we can allow communities to flourish and go in any direction they want as long as they stay within these boundaries. Frankly we could spend another six weeks discussing the smaller print here. But I think you see what I'm saying. Mutualism is beautiful as long as it is bounded.

**David Erdle:** My name is **David Erdle**, a Fellow also. I'd like to invite comment on my view on the employment contract, which is that it is very corrosive of community, that when we sign up to be an employee in a corporation, or in most places, we give away the right to information, we give away the right to influence, we give away the right to participate in the wealth that we help create. And we live in a dictatorship, a sort of top down hierarchy, in which power flows one direction only.

And I was much impressed by the study of the Algoma Steel buyout in Canada, which showed that, when it belonged to the employees, the employees became much more active participants as citizens outside the company.

**Sam Peters: Sam Peters**, Fellow. Is trust in any way integral to your views on leading a good life. And if it is, what does that mean for policy makers like Liam?

**Professor Etzioni:** Whoa! First of all I think you are basically correct, that corporations are hierarchical and when we set out to work for them we give up some degrees of freedom. And, like in most things in life, it becomes compared to what? Now, nobody… there have been large attempts to create different kinds of work organisations, like cooperatives, like what you mentioned, employee owned factories and so on. It's not they don't have problems of their own. So if you look, especially when they are larger in size, you very quickly get management, you can't have… Let's say United Airlines is owned by its employees, okay? It's a huge enterprise and you can't have 70,000 people meet every week to make managerial decisions. So they end up by having management and it soon acquires many of the attributes of the management in the other corporations.

So I think the secret is to find first of all opportunity for choice. So to make it easier for people who feel strongly that they don't want to be in a corporate hierarchy to be able to form a cooperative and such.

And there have been various ideas, I'm not an expert, to have pension funds or people buy stocks in the company they work for and so on and so on. To be honest with you none of them have worked on a large scale. So I think the next step, if you have this kind of concern you have, and I hear you, is to ask why don't we try to do it differently? It's often so difficult, not in order to belittle or deride these attempts but in order to see if we can do still better.

So criticising a corporation is as easy as shooting fish in a barrel. Coming up with a new barrel is a little more difficult.

But trust is absolutely essential to… well, I was going to say for everything. But then somebody would have said that's to simple, but it's true. But for almost everything. So for one on one relationships, if it's friends or family or a couple or children and parents, if there is no trust you have a very strained and painful relationship.

By the way, once it's broken it is very often very difficult to restore. Trust in institutions is essential. We have to take as a starting point that people who are our doctors, our lawyers, our elected officials, at least have our wellbeing at their heart. Now, I understand they want to make a living and they have other motives, but we have to be able to trust them that they will not abuse us and manipulate us. And by the way, very often we are in no position to judge because I mean if we were doctors and lawyers we wouldn't go to doctors and lawyers, which is actually not a bad idea!

And so how to ensure that trust is not abused, that's really the question. And there I would like to add one thing because it ties… It is the idea of regulation, or reregulation is very popular, as it ought to be, I want to emphasise this. I think from my viewpoint a number one reason we are in trouble is because the United States introduced extreme deregulation and allowed – greed always was there – but completely lose any kind of limits, and celebrate it. And so we clearly need… And by the way, earlier there was a question about global, we need global and local and national reregulation on a large scale.

And while I'm on that subject, I'm sorry, that's my new pet horse, which I share with quite a few others. If anybody tells you transparency will do it, don't buy that horse. The notion that you're going to put on a web page what's happening and then you can yourself check it and you don't need any more any government oversight, that's a wooden penny. And so you don't trust it. I can go on if you wish, if somebody asks me why. But the basic thing is there is no way you can check the information, personally, is valid. So we do need public authorities for this.

But in the end, and that's not a point to always easily come to terms with, we cannot have enough accountants and inspectors and police to make people decent. Supervisory accounting mechanism s can work for the outliers, for the exceptions, but we need most of the people most of the time to do what's right because they believe in it and because community encourages them and appreciates it.

It's very simple. First of all there are billions of transactions every day. So we just don't have enough police and accountants and customs offices to check them all. And today they are often international or internet, how can you keep on top of all of them?

And finally there is a problem which is as old as Play Doh, and that is who will guard the guardians? So I sometimes say we'll have to… we use the Canadians to supervise our accountants. But the question is who will supervise the Canadians? And so it goes.

And so in the end it comes back to the trust issue. We cannot, it's not a question of is it nice or not nice, good or bad, it is cannot rely on punitive, coercive government driven mechanisms for keeping people decent. They can use them for those… if most people do what's right and then some get out of line and they will not be reined in, it will make other people join them and they may ultimately unravel the whole social fabric. So we do need them for the outliers, but not as a mainstay of a good society.

**Unidentified Speaker:** Professor, you talked about moral dialogue, and I guess my question for you is how do we make, in the light of climate change and a need to reduce greenhouse gases by 80%, how do we make the moral dialogue big enough and fast enough to get us to where we need to be?

**Professor Etzioni:** I'm afraid I'm going to give you an answer which is not going to be very satisfying. But I would claim I'm not the source of bad news, it's the guys out there.

It is, I think the problem is so huge and so late, and politically so difficult, that we cannot get out of this problem through suppressing activity. And we will need to get out of it largely through technological innovation. So it doesn't mean we shouldn't do things, but the amount you will have to scale back on production and human activity and consumption is just, in a democratic society, I don't think it's politically feasible. And you can educate people till all the cows come home, and in the end it's just too many unemployed, too many taxes and such.

If you look historically often what happens in situations like this, somebody came up with a bacteria which eats $CO_2$ or whatever, actually I have a great hope for the oceans as absorbing some of the things. I'm not technically qualified. Obviously if we had it we wouldn't talking. But I think a better… I wish we didn't have to rely on that because it's unpredictable. But I think we're better off investing heavily in technologic innovation dedicated to this subject, kind of a Manhattan project dedicated to saving our climate, than hoping that we can make the Chinese, the

Indians, the Brazilians, all of them, stop their cars and paint their roofs white and I just think it's too taxing and I think it's unwise for us to rely on that we can fly in the face of human nature.

I wish I could bring you better news but I have to maintain your trust so I thought I'd better be honest with you!

**Unidentified Speaker:** I just wanted to follow up on the question about trust and make it a little bit more specific.

As I'm sure you're aware there's been a massive issue around trust in our politicians recently. It may at times have degenerated into a witch hunt but just talking to people on the street there's a sense of we can't trust our politicians, we can't trust the political process, and this reinforces a sense of therefore not wanting to engage with it. And I wondered if you've got any practical suggestions?

**Professor Etzioni:** If I may I'll take them in the opposite order. And again first, if you don't mind too much, I'll use a light line and then I'll try to give you a very serious answer.

You don't know how lucky you are until you see my politicians, because your politicians build doghouses, my people sell the law. And that's a… it's not a trivial difference. There is personal corruption abuse in charging a house when it's not really a house; it's one thing padding your expense account, but falsely filing, that's really a serious abuse of public trust and I don't take it lightly.

But by and large there are exceptions. Your politicians for various reasons cannot even, because so much of the voters go along party lines, sell laws. What's happening in the United States, and you really have to understand it if you want to understand for instance what's happened now to our health reform, is the politicians are individually beholden to money they get from special interests. Not for their pocket, but they cannot stay in business, in office, unless they raise millions of dollars for their re-election. So they cannot survive; the system's geared in such a way they cannot survive unless they sell out.

And it's very clear, there's a senator from Boyne, they call it, he serves… he's from Seattle and so on and so on. And I don't want to make light of your corruption and the need to rein it in, and I think it will be, but it's also useful to see it in a comparative perspective.

And I think we're going back, I'm afraid, to the same thing. You cannot have enough bye laws; there's always a way round. Actually, I can't resist, I'll tell you another little story to make my point. I'm sorry, that's the way my mind works, I don't have any other.

I was given an honorary degree by a small college and next to me there was a CEO of a very major corporation who also got honoured because he gave money to the college. And we were chatting as we were waiting, and I told him that I had a problem, I had to get to Washington very fast and time was running late. And he said, "It's no problem, I'll give you a ride in my aeroplane." He had a little private aeroplane waiting. So we were riding and we were chatting, and I asked him, "How much do you spend a year on entertainment and things like this?" "Oh," he said, "$300." I said, "Come on." "Oh," he said, "I have a special guy who goes behind me and he signs all the bills, you know, the nightclubs and all the hotels." So if you look at the books of the corporation he spends $300 a year. And I said, "Tell me, you are lucky, you could complain too much on this."

The point of my story is, if you've got to rely on regulation there's always a way around it. So we have to restore a sense of content and honour so that people will not dare do that. If you read Jimmy Stewart, who was an editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, and a book called *Den of Thieves*, you'll see that regulation, they just run around regulations like they were a hot knife through butter. It's just some corporations feel, we just don't do that stuff. And in the end you need some of that so regulation can work for the outliers. But you cannot build it around regulation.

**Andrea Stradis: Andrea Stradis** from Civitas. Professor, you mentioned limits and it's something that's actually stuck in my mind throughout the whole talk, specifically what this new age of globalisation has done to our idea of what limits are, and it seems to have blown them apart. We have unlimited interconnectedness supply and seemingly growth and one thing that hasn't grown with that is the notion that that can't go on for ever and that we need to foster somehow a notion of where our limits are going to actually fall.

And I think that's something that perhaps communities need to begin to begin instilling in people, this sense of limits and needs and satiety, and I was just wondering what your thoughts were on perhaps how we can begin to teach, I suppose, a sensitivity for where both individual and wider community limits should begin to be developed. So that, I suppose, is my question.

**Professor Etzioni:** Right, and you're from Civitas? More power to you.

Let me say, I would prefer, for actually a similar reason to what we just said, not to set limits on people but give them positive purposes.

Limits means, by definition, there's something I want to do and either my mother or my mother-in-law or the government, somebody comes to me, "No, no, no, don't do that. I won't allow you, I won't let you." And then we start a competition between my wanting to do that, what the *(inaudible)* would call my preference, and the regime you installed to prevent me from. And if I'm energetic and clever I'll find a way around it. Or at least there'll be a limit to how much you can limit me or I'll throw you out of power, one way or the other.

Now, on the other hand if I give you a new positive purpose which you buy into, I can spoon-feed you and say… Look, data shows that once you have your basic creature comforts buying ever more stuff really doesn't do much for you, if you're honest about it. And spending more time with people you love, you know, chess, if you play with plastic pieces or mahogany, it's the same chess, it's not more enjoyable if you play it with things which cost a fortune.

And there are many, many things you can do which are perfectly, inherently, fulfilling and enjoyable, which are not capital and not labour intensive.

So I'm now not punishing you or locking you in or restraining you, but I have a dialogue with you to show you how you can have a very fulfilling life which will be environmentally more friendly, more socially productive, and fully fulfilling. I prefer to use the positive. It doesn't mean we don't need to set any limits, but I prefer to go that way.

For those of you who… I did a little essay. Frankly, I spend a lot of time writing and not everything I do I'm completely enamoured with, you know. But this little article I did on this subject got extra legs, the Russians and Chinese have published it because they're going through this nouveau riche stage where they all sort of grab consumer goods like crazy, and they realise that may be not the good life. And the Germans and such. So if you go on Google and you look… the article was published initially in the *New Republic* and it's very easy to remember the name, it's called *Spent*. And so if you look for *Spent* and my name you'll see a few other words I have to say on the subject.

**Steve Broome**: Okay, thank you. I'll maybe just sneak in one question from the chair, if I may.

Do you feel there are opportunities from online communities, or digital technologies, to provide the kind of nourishing, informal relationships and the constructive social norms that you described, or do you see that as just creating or reinforcing a new or existing set of problems?

**Professor Etzioni:** I like that question. And I've been arguing with some of my colleagues for, I don't know, I don't know how old the internet is, but for a long time now. The answer is yes, yes and yes.

It works in several ways. My son is a professor of computer sciences so he publishes in science so it must be true. And so what happens is first of all people can have through the internet surprisingly strong inter-personal and group relationships. It's really some days very surprising because, you know, unfortunately there are a large number of women and men who run out on their mate because they met somebody on the internet and fell in love with them. So it's just a trivial but telling example of how deeply people can get involved with somebody they've never laid eyes on through the internet.

There are endless groups which meet regularly on the internet and dialogue each other. I can't resist telling you, if it were up to me there would be many more sites in which you cannot use aliases. Much of the garbage you have on the internet is because people can use anonymity. I would fight for the right to use anonymity for our *(inaudible)* and all kinds of other purposes, but I'd like to have more places you would have to show your face before you cast me out, and that would make for better relationships.

The other thing we don't think about and I think it's not an alternative. Many of the groups I belong to, we meet face to face and then we stay in touch with the internet and then we meet face to face again. So it's not a question that I should give up on face to face, so any way you look at it, purely, digitally, or using online and offline to reinforce each other. Look, I have children and grandchildren who live 10,000 miles apart, about as far as they can, and we regularly stay in touch digitally. And pictures fly on birthdays and everything. So God bless the internet!

**Steve Broome:** And on that note I'm going to have to bring it to a close. I'd just like to give a reminder that this event is part of a wider RSA ambitious annual programme of free public events, so the programme is made possible by the support of our Fellows, several have raised questions today, and if you are a Fellow in the audience, thank you for your continuing support.

If you're interested in receiving further information about our work, in particular the Connected Communities programme which closely relates to some of the issues we've discussed here today, please speak to any member of staff or visit the website. We'll be following up on this event on our blog tomorrow.

And finally, if you could join me in thanking some brilliant engaging answers from Professor Etzioni today. Thank you.