

# Flashback

TO KNOW NOTHING OF WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE YOU WERE BORN  
IS TO REMAIN EVER A CHILD—*Cicero*

## Barry Goldwater: New Leftist?

“When the histories are written,” Barry Goldwater told his friend and speechwriter Karl Hess in 1968, “I’ll bet that the Old Right and the New Left are put down as having a lot in common and that the people in the middle will be the enemy.” Indeed, what self-respecting hippie wouldn’t prefer an quasi-libertarian like Goldwater to the soulless organization men of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations?

Observers marveled at the number of Goldwater kids who joined Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). If the liberals were going Clean for Gene, some conservatives got hairy after Barry. Carl Oglesby, former president of SDS, made the link explicit with his declaration that “the Old Right and the New Left are morally and politically coordinate.”

Karl Hess and the ebullient economist Murray Rothbard were jovial prophets of Left/Right convergence. As Rothbard put it in 1968, “Twenty years ago I was an extreme right-wing Republican, a young and lone ‘Neanderthal’ (as the liberals used to call us) who believed, as one friend pungently put it, that ‘Senator Taft had sold out to the socialists.’ Today, I am most likely to be called an extreme leftist, since I favor immediate withdrawal from Vietnam, denounce U.S. imperialism, advocate Black Power, and have just joined the new Peace and Freedom Party. And yet my basic political views have not changed by a single iota in these two decades!” (Rothbard soon soured on the New Left for its “arrogant self-isolation from Middle America.”)

The personification of this Left/Right agenda-bending was Karl Hess, a Republican ghostwriter who threw off his suit and tie and donned a workshirt, grew a beard, learned to use an acetylene torch, and took up welding and revolution. The

sunny Hess, who remained an ardent admirer of his old boss Goldwater even as he marched on Fort Dix, argued that the American Right had been “individualistic, isolationist, decentralist—even anarchistic” until the Cold War reconciled conservatives to the leviathan state.

Why, Hess asked, should the Right lead cheers for a war cooked up in the university labs of New Frontier-Great Society liberalism? With utter sincerity, he published in the New Left journal *Ramparts* an audacious “Open Letter to Barry Goldwater” in which he asked Mr. Conservative to join the New Left.

This was not as loony as it might sound. In his 1968 Senate campaign, Goldwater told University of Arizona students that he had “much in common with the anarchist wing of SDS,” notably opposition to the draft and hostility to overgrown institutions. What with the interminable war, talk of wage-and-price controls, and the Nixon administration creating new government agencies every week, might the independent Arizonan break ranks?

Karl Hess thought so. Because you are “the most essentially honest and potentially radical major American political figure,” he told the Senator, “you will find yourself on this side of the barricades.”

Hess’s pitch was a mixture of flattery and challenge. Hadn’t the Senator ever wondered why “the largest corporations... so strenuously opposed you and supported Johnson.... Could it have been that you might not have played ball quite so well as he?”

Hess even fit Goldwater for a dashiki: “Senator, if you had been born black, and



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poor, you would now be a Panther or I seriously misjudge the strength of your character and convictions.”

He concluded: “I will have to admit that there is not exactly a long line queued up on the New Left waiting to hear from you. But there’s a hell of a lot more room for you over here... than in a Republican Party which regards Everett Dirksen as a hero and you as a maverick.”

Goldwater stayed put.

But he also stayed Karl Hess’s friend. There is an enduring image of Karl at his shaggiest, protesting the war outside the Capitol. Word was that the demonstration might turn violent, so even the putatively antiwar members of Congress kept away. Only one politician showed up: Senator Barry Goldwater, who waded into the throng, parting the astonished crowd—“is that really Barry Goldwater?”—and asking the demonstrators, “Where’s Karl? Where’s Karl Hess?”

They met. They shook hands in the midst of the tumult—two old friends, divided by politics, but wise enough to know that politics are ephemeral, and that the real thing, the lasting thing, is friendship.

—Bill Kauffman

# BookTalk

## MUDDLE OF THE ROAD

By Doug Bandow

*The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society*  
By Amitai Etzioni,  
Basic Books, 314 pages, \$25

It is never easy to know what to make of sociologist Amitai Etzioni. He is the well-published advocate of a philosophy called communitarianism. At times he appears to be a quasi-libertarian; at other times he sounds like a mild social conservative. His latest book, *The New Golden Rule*, suggests that he falls always uneasily, and usually incoherently, in between.

The premise of Etzioni's book is that there is a conflict between liberty and virtue. Thus, he explains, he intends to dispute "a widely held notion in the West: that more freedom is better than less." In his view, there is "a wide array of reasons for preferring some measure of order, and hence some limits on one's choices."

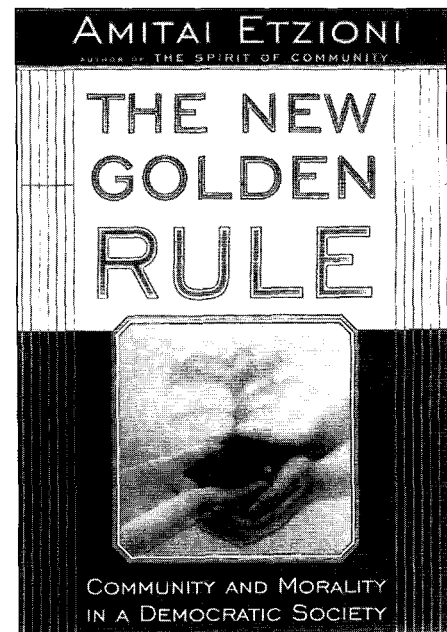
There is, of course, nothing new in this argument. Unfortunately, Etzioni never clarifies the kind of liberty he is talking about. The West has long been known for its dedication to political freedom, but the classical liberals who created the new nation on the American continent weren't opposed to order. They assumed the existence of a moral code formed and enforced by a range of social institutions.

Modern liberalism, in contrast, favors multitudinous legal restrictions over economic choice combined with minimal restraint, political or private, over sexual choice. The result is essentially libertinism, not libertarianism. Yet Etzioni often has trouble distinguishing between the two.

Such muddles distract from the worthwhile elements of *The New Golden Rule*. For instance, Etzioni seeks to discover the elements of a good society. It's an important question, but Etzioni seems skeptical that one can simultaneously believe in individual liberty and worry about the moral infrastructure of society. He treats classical and modern liberals as one, declaring that "many of these individualists reject the very notion of a good society" and "are much more likely to protest an unnecessary government regulation than face the moral issues raised by children having children."

The fact that classical liberals tend to view freedom as the highest political end doesn't indicate a lack of interest in a good society, however. A philosopher such as Lord Acton believed liberty should be exercised within a larger moral culture; he just thought coercion was a poor means of reaching that end. Alas, Etzioni, rather than plumbing the issue of a good society, simply claims the middle ground between liberty and order: communitarianism nourishes "both social virtues and individual rights" and "requires a carefully maximized equilibrium of order and autonomy, rather than the 'maximization' of either."

Well, yes, but Etzioni isn't the first person to think of this. Adam Smith was a moral philosopher as well as an economist—author of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* as well as *The Wealth of Nations*. The real challenge is to draw the proper balance, which Etzioni doesn't much help us do. Perhaps the greatest flaw in Etzioni's philosophy is that it appears to be rooted in nothing. He complains that for classical liberals "the quest to maximize liberty, to extend it all one can (as long as others are not harmed) is a universal principle and not one that is historically or socially bound."



He disagrees with such an approach, arguing that "it is futile to argue that people in general require more liberty or more order, more individual rights or more social responsibilities, more license or more moral duties. The answer is profoundly affected by the sociohistorical context."

Does Etzioni really believe freedom to be a relative value? Can't the government in Beijing and the one in Washington be judged by the same basic standards? If liberty is important, as Etzioni apparently believes, then it is important irrespective of the particular "sociohistorical context." The Holocaust was wrong for all societies and all times, something Etzioni implicitly acknowledges when he declares that individual rights reflect "a value that lays claims on all people." How he derives these rights when they conflict with a particular cultural community and sociohistorical context is unclear.

Similar confusions mar otherwise interesting discussions of the relationship between responsibilities and rights, the role of law in a communitarian society, the impact of human nature, and such issues as policing and privacy. Moreover, Etzioni always seems to end up in some unsatisfying middle position—advocating a little, not a lot, of regulation, for instance.

Perhaps the most important issue that Etzioni confronts is values formation. How do we choose "core values" for our society? He dismisses differences between conduct in the private and the public realms, ignoring, however, questions of who is