



Leading Communitarian Takes Shot At Technocrats

Amitai Etzioni is the modern academic father of Communitarianism, which elevates the 'common good' over individual rights. It stands diametrically opposed to liberalism and libertarianism.

Etzioni does not grasp that Technocracy also preaches the same common good, except that it is Technocrats who decide what is good for the majority of society. Communitarianism was first used in 1841 by John Goodwin Barmby who led the Chartist movement; it referred to utopian socialists and those who were experimenting with communal lifestyles. Communitarianism is also used to describe authoritarian societies like Malaysia, Singapore and China.

Just as Communism has been a natural enemy of Technocracy since the 1930s, Communitarianism likewise opposes Technocracy for the same reason, ie, how will the common good be determined and by whom? □
TN Editor

Speech is too important for technocrats to control. Elected officials and

the courts should be the main controllers—and they should control only when there is a clear and present danger to our security and to our democratic process.

Strong voices from both ends of the political spectrum have called on tech companies to be more responsible, to remove from their platforms any material that offends community mores and that manipulates elections. Actually, as I see it, over the last few years the tech corporations have blocked or deleted staggering amounts of messages and ads, including material which, if removed from offline publication, would lead even moderate defenders of free speech to go ballistic. Moreover, each tech corporation is making its own rules about which speech it allows and which it blocks. These are not subject to public review and often impossible to figure out. Protecting speech—and figuring out the rare occasions people should be denied voice, should be censored—is too important to leave to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and his fellow tech tycoons.

Some argue that because tech corporations are private companies, they cannot censor, only the government can. Some who are legally-minded hold that the First Amendment states that Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of the press, not that private companies cannot control messages. Also, given the differences in policies among the various companies, if one closes a door, there is likely another that leaves that door open. Only the government can prevent access to all mediums and thus truly censor.

One must note, though, that these companies control a very large amount of the communication space and that exercise control over many subjects. Hence, if they restrict someone's access, that person's speech is greatly limited. Anyone denied a voice by Google, Facebook, and Twitter will find it very difficult to reach the masses through social media.

For many years, the tech companies avoided responsibility for the content that people posted on their social media sites, claiming that they are merely platforms, not publishers. However, more and more public leaders have begun to argue that tech companies should control content.

These views reached a high point following the revelations about Russia's meddling in the 2016 U.S. elections and its drive to sow social discord through coordinated social media misinformation campaigns. The tech companies responded by hiring tens of thousands of moderators to review posts and remove material they consider too violent, lewd, hateful, or misleading. Typically, moderators have as little as ten seconds to review a post. They can hardly take much longer, given the astronomical number of posts that must be reviewed. No wonder their judgment is often highly arbitrary and always rushed. The companies are also increasingly using artificial intelligence algorithms to deny speech. Artificial Intelligence seems to incorporate the biases implicit in the mass media, for instance favoring men over women in gaining access to ads about high-paying jobs.

While conducting research on the misuse of social media platforms for a journal of the National Academy of Sciences, I was stunned at the sheer amounts and the wide range of grounds that the tech companies can use to justify removing social media posts. For example, in three months, between July and September of 2019, YouTube removed over 8.75 million videos. Of the videos removed, over 4.75 million were removed for being spam or misleading. Well, by this standard, I would block one news network and its followers would likely block the news network I am following. Over 1.35 million videos were removed for violent or graphic content and over 1.25 million were removed for nudity or sexual content, however, what is considered graphic and sexual varies a great deal from one community to another. Hence, the courts by and large have allowed such speech to be made offline. Why are tech companies being more pious?

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