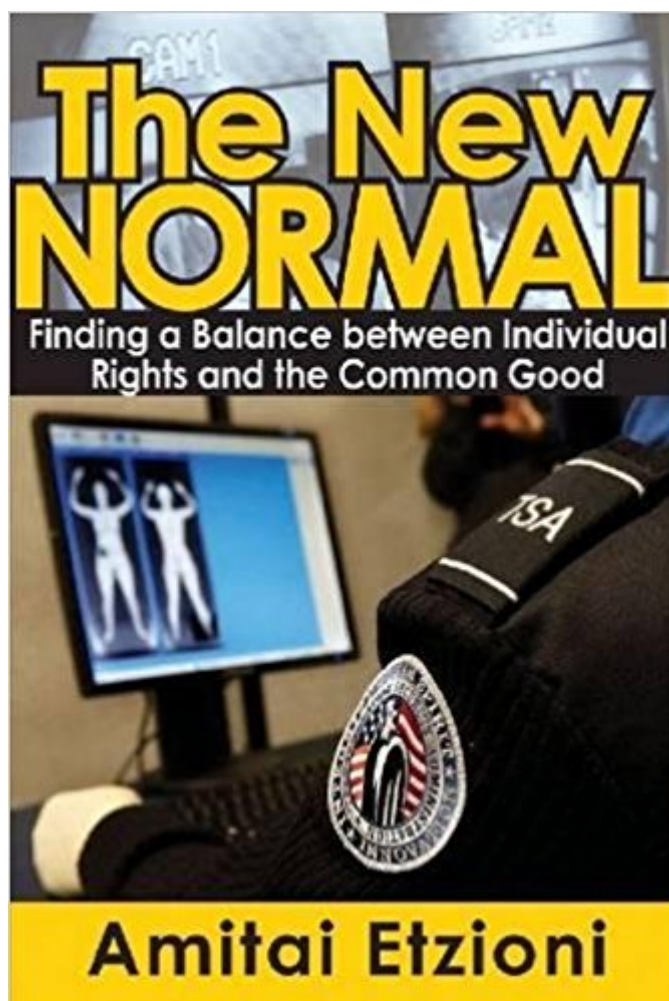


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The New Normal: Finding A Balance Between Individual Rights And The Common Good



Synopsis

Amitai Etzioni argues that societies must find a way to balance individual rights and the common good. This point of balance may change as new technologies develop, the natural and international environments change, and new social forces arise. Some believe the United States may be unduly short-changing individual rights that need to be better protected. Specifically, should the press be granted more protection? Or should its ability to publish state secrets be limited? Should surveillance of Americans and others be curtailed? Should American terrorists be treated differently from others? How one answers these questions, Etzioni shows, invites a larger fundamental question: Where is the proper point of balance between rights and security? Etzioni implements the social philosophy, "liberal communitarianism." Its key assumptions are that neither individual rights nor the common good should be privileged, that both are core values, and that a balance is necessary between them. Etzioni argues that we need to find a new balance between our desire for more goods, services, and affluence, particularly because economic growth may continue to be slow and jobs anemic. The key question is what makes a good life, especially for those whose basic needs are sated.

Book Information

Hardcover: 418 pages

Publisher: Routledge; 1 edition (November 30, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1412854776

ISBN-13: 978-1412854771

Product Dimensions: 1.2 x 6.5 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #2,126,090 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #92 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Privacy & Surveillance](#) #3938 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Elections & Political Process > General](#) #4098 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Security](#)

Customer Reviews

“Amitai Etzioni asks two questions that appear evermore to complement one another:

“What can we live without?” and “What should we not have to live

with?” Economic change, he argues, has offered opportunities to reconsider the American

habits and limits of consumption, and technological change poses profound challenges to establishing the limits to our protection from endless surveillance. The New Normal is a brilliant summation of Etzioni's long and productive efforts to offer a way to understand our common life and the imperatives of civil society.

—Jonathan B. Imber, Wellesley College, Editor-in-Chief, Society

“Nearly a half-century ago John Kenneth Galbraith famously argued that when changing economic conditions render the existing “conventional wisdom” no longer applicable, either new thinking comes to the fore or unfortunate consequences ensue. Amitai Etzioni, surely one of America's broadest social thinkers today, now makes a parallel case that we need to adapt to new technological developments and new social forces. The range of concrete implications Etzioni draws out is astonishing: foreign policy, cyber-security, medical entitlements, and more. Even readers who reject his recommendations—and I suspect few will agree with all of them, in every area—will come away informed and stimulated, with their conventional wisdom usefully challenged.”

—Benjamin M. Friedman, Harvard University

“In *The New Normal*, sociologist Amitai Etzioni continues to seek common ground between the political extremes, exploring questions about freedom of the press, democracy, and surveillance in today's world. His deep and lasting commitment to communitarianism and to the development of moral order in society show throughout his book, with ample references to current press dialogues, inviting all to serious discussion of these important issues.”

—Kathryn Goldman Schuyler, Author, *Inner Peace*

—Global Impact

“Ever since he founded communitarianism, Etzioni has been a tireless and astute investigator of the inner workings of civil society. Tackling some of the most challenging conundrums facing us today, and exposing the fatuousness of the binaries, liberal/conservative and public/private, *The New Normal* will make you question some things you were certain about, confirm your convictions about others, and make you aware of things you hadn't considered. In all cases, it will make you think.”

—Deborah Tannen, University Professor and Professor of Linguistics, Georgetown University, author of *You Just Don't Understand* and *The Argument Culture*

“Amitai Etzioni's collection of essays on “the new normal” in the economy, our politics, and national security is a testament to his unflagging interest and wide-ranging knowledge on a multitude of topics. Well-researched, accessible, and containing provocative new insights, it is a good book to put on your reading list in 2015.”

—Isabel Sawhill, Senior Fellow, the Brookings Institution and author of *Generation Unbound* (2014)

“Encyclopedic learning. Wide range. And uncommon wisdom. These are the qualities that pervade Amitai Etzioni's new book. He sheds penetrating light on issues

including the need to tame consumerism in times of economic scarcity and climate change; the case for judicious curbs on the media's ever more reckless exposure of national security secrets; how to prevent abuse of the strong surveillance powers that the government needs to protect us while protecting essential privacy against private as well as governmental actors; the real meaning of our much-lamented government gridlock; and much more.

•Stuart Taylor, Jr., is a leading journalistic commentator on legal and policy issues, is currently a freelance author and journalist. He is also a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution

“Amitai Etzioni's remarkable intellectual energy is on display in this panoramic analysis of American society. The New Normal is part shrewd, informed socio-political analysis, and part moral manifesto, making a convincing case for an austere, disciplined personal life and commitment to the flourishing of the larger community that helps constitute us. Both a tour d'horizon and a tour de force.

•Peter H. Schuck, Yale Law School and author of Why Government Fails So Often and How It Can Do Better

“Amitai Etzioni's The New Normal, lucidly captures the dilemmas and tradeoffs between security and privacy, freedom and order, and individual rights and the common good in an age of burgeoning technology and social media.

•Robert J. Lieber, Georgetown University, author, Power and Willpower in the American Future: Why the U.S. is not Destined to Decline

“Amitai Etzioni's extraordinary breadth is on display in The New Normal, which is an invaluable guide to thinking about domestic and foreign policy issues ranging from freedom of the press to drone strikes. Etzioni's analysis is consistently thorough and fair, as he lays out all sides of the moral, legal, and practical considerations that need to be addressed with some of the most difficult public policy issues today. This is the work of a leading social thinker dedicated to finding the best possible reconciliation of rights of the individual with needs of the community.

•Paul R. Pillar, Nonresident Senior Fellow, Center for Security Studies, Georgetown University

Amitai Etzioni is university professor and professor of international affairs at The George Washington University. He served as a senior advisor at the Carter White House; taught at Columbia University, Harvard, and the University of California at Berkeley; and served as the president of the American Sociological Association.

At first I found this book annoying but then I discovered that what troubled me is its unique contribution: it refuses to join those who view the government as endangering our rights in name of

security as well as those who argue that to face terrorists we must take tough new measures even if they dial back some of our rights. Instead Etzioni shows that we ought to start by assuming that we face two fully legitimate challenges: protecting our rights and our security. He then asks how to tell when we are erring by going overboard in one direction or the other. He answers this by studying the surveillance programs of the NSA (revealing the importance of proper oversight, including by civilians!); the freedom of the press (a chapter that includes some stunning cases in which newspapers published state secrets which causes great damage to national security, including the loss of ten submarines by the US); and by arguing that American terrorists do not deserve more rights than others. I was most surprised by his chapter on privacy merchants, those corporations that keep detailed dossiers on most Americans not only about what consumer goods they buy but also about their personal habits, mental health and much else. This is fairly widely known. What Etzioni though reveals is that these corporations sell this information to the FBI and IRS and other government agencies. This means that the government can in this way do all the spying the constitution prohibits! The rest of the book deals with the fact that the US is sliding toward a war with China, and what can be done to stop this looming catastrophe, and-- the secret behind the gridlock in Washington. These chapters alone, you will find, are well worth the high price the publisher set on the book.

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