



Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World

Zygmunt Bauman

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'Community' is one of those words that feels good: it is good 'to have a community', 'to be in a community'. And 'community' feels good because of the meanings which the word conveys, all of them promising pleasures, and more often than not the kind of pleasures which we would like to experience but seem to miss.

'Community' conveys the image of a warm and comfortable place, like a fireplace at which we warm our hands on a frosty day. Out there, in the street, all sorts of dangers lie in ambush; in here, in the community, we can relax and feel safe. 'Community' stands for the kind of world which we long to inhabit but which is not, regrettably, available to us. Today 'community' is another name for paradise lost - but for a paradise which we still hope to find, as we feverishly search for the roads that may lead us there.

But there is a price to be paid for the privilege of being in a community. Community promises security but seems to deprive us of freedom, of the right to be ourselves. Security and freedom are two equally precious and coveted values which could be balanced to some degree, but hardly ever fully reconciled. The tension between security and freedom, and between community and individuality, is unlikely ever to be resolved. We cannot escape the dilemma but we can take stock of the opportunities and the dangers, and at least try to avoid repeating past errors.

In this important new book, Zygmunt Bauman takes stock of these opportunities and dangers and, in his distinctive and brilliant fashion, offers a much-needed reappraisal of a concept that has become central to current debates about the nature and future of our societies.

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